Scientific and Technological Community Major Group position paper

Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Executive summary

1. **Two years into the COVID-19 pandemic, the world finds itself at an inflection point greater than at any time since the end of World War II, threatened not only by dangerous systemic risks due to climate change and other related environmental crises, but also by the harrowing impacts of the Russia-Ukraine war**. At a time when international cooperation is essential to solve the most pressing problems of our interdependent societies, the ongoing conflict is threatening to derail all global efforts to tackle those problems and to achieve a resilient, just and sustainable world for everyone. The STC Major Group expresses its deep dismay and concerns regarding the military confrontation, which is something that no country and community in the world can afford.

2. **Despite the pandemic being a systemic event, responses by most governments are still largely focused on health measures and offer insufficient measures to remedy the broader impacts on societies**. While current policy measures are focused on addressing the immediate crisis and on the short-term consequences, decisions taken today will influence the long-term pandemic outcomes, and a longer-term perspective is crucial. The pandemic is first and foremost a global crisis, and well-thought-out national strategies to address COVID-19 must be accompanied by international collaboration and solidarity.

3. **Despite a growing and shared concern about the convergence of environmental tipping points, environmental degradation is accelerating.** The unprecedented mobilization of governments to respond to COVID-19 does not appear to have greatly served the cause of sustainability, despite repeated pledges on creating a green and sustainable recovery.

4. **The impact of the systemic risk of COVID-19 also highlights the urgent need to better understand systemic risks to our ocean, and to prepare responses to future crises which threaten the stability of our climate.** Major shifts in the state of the ocean will far exceed the social and economic consequences of the pandemic. In 2022 governments must urgently take significant, collective action to protect and revitalize the ocean.

5. **Long-term recovery from COVID-19 must include the restoration of ecosystems and a transformation of our relationship to nature in ways that are just and sustainable.** Scientific research on the dynamic and multi-faceted people-nature relationships should be placed at the centre of decision- and policy-making to inform restoration activities and alternative pathways for development in harmony with nature.

6. **COVID-19 sparked a global learning crisis as almost all countries severely restricted in-person access to education in the course of the pandemic. The detrimental impacts on education are an enduring legacy of the pandemic.** Successive entrants into the labour force will have an educational deficit which will, in turn, have significant negative impacts upon future productivity. Policies to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on education should therefore be very high on the agenda of policy-makers everywhere.

7. **With the pandemic still unfolding and extreme weather- and climate-related events increasing, a much stronger and more nimble partnership between science, policy and practitioners is required to address rapidly evolving situations with multiple drivers and varied impacts at national and local scales**. There is an urgent need to commit to support the development of scientific capacities in all parts of the world, to advocate open science policies and practices, and to increase international, interdisciplinary scientific collaboration if we are to achieve the SDGs by 2030.