The Sustainable Development Goals and the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) in the post-COVID-19 era
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Abstract
The universalization and full realization of the objectives and goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can be called into question by the significant drop in international funding available to support developing countries. This situation may be worsened by the effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent increase in nonregular cooperation programs, based on humanitarian and emergency actions. The promotion of horizontalization strategies for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), considering interventions with a transversal nature, in a 360° view, which encourages the promotion of strategic alliances, multisectoral and multidimensional partnerships as well as shared financing mechanisms, appears as a credible hypothesis to assure the commitment with sustainable development. The article addresses some perceptions of multilateral organizations, namely within the scope of the United Nations System and Bretton Woods institutions, and how the strategic development cooperation instruments created by Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries may contribute to boosting post-COVID-19 cooperation scenarios aligned with the accomplishment of the SDGs in this community.

Keywords: 2030 Agenda, COVID-19, Sustainable Development Goal, Sustainable Development and Cooperation

Introduction
About 5 years ago, at the United Nations headquarters in New York, the international community cheered the approval of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.1 The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)2 were stated on that occasion. As recognized, this theme comes from the lessons and lessons learned from the application of the Millennium Agenda and the Millennium Development Goals,3 in force between 2000 and 2015. This new agenda for sustainable development is presented as a universal, comprehensive, and interdependent instrument. It is the result of the debate and joint work of governments and civil society around the world, with the humanistic goal of creating a model that ends poverty, promotes prosperity and well-being on a global scale, protects the environment, and combats climate change. A total of 17 SDGs, 169 goals, and 232 indicators were identified. Of this set of indicators, 27 refer to the 9 goals that have connections with health, a sector established within the scope of SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing).

Methods
Our article is supported by a narrative review of literature on the accomplishment of the SDGs by the international community in face of the COVID-19 pandemic crises and how the strategic development cooperation instruments created by Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) may contribute to boosting post-COVID-19 cooperation scenarios aligned with international strategies and partnerships, using a “synthesis of best evidence” approach, in accordance with the proposal of Green et al.4 To reflect on the response to a pandemic that is anticipated to be prolonged and/or recurrent, we use the framework reference provided by the SDGs and the consultation of Websites of several multilateral international organizations, namely within the United Nations System and CPLP, and of some international relations specialized magazines.

Discussion
The 2030 Agenda in a global instability scenario and the advent of COVID-19
In September 2019, on the eve of the 74th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which evaluated the implementation and progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda,5 a report was released by an independent group of scientists indicating that the current development model has allowed hundreds of millions of people to reach increasing levels of prosperity. But this has been achieved at the expense of systematic and abusive exploitation of natural resources, enhancing and aggravating, situations of growing inequality, calling into question the economic growth as we know it. The “Global Report on Sustainable Development:
the future is now: science to achieve sustainable development,” points to the need to develop a plan to reduce global instability, pointing that this will only be possible by understanding the relationship between the SDGs and the “concrete systems that today define society.”6 The panel of scientists who prepared this report indicates that the scope of the SDGs requires that economic growth be separated from environmental degradation while reducing inequalities and avoiding further losses in “social cohesion and sustainable economic growth.” The document stresses that to maintain the current global consumption rate, it will be necessary to double the use of natural resources, which will result in increased levels of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other potentially irreversible damage to the environment. It is therefore sadly ironic that the current situation, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has had more virtuous effects in mitigating the impacts caused by pollution than concerted action by political powers on a global scale. This report also points out that there are several intervention measures that in the next decade can be adopted to accelerate progress toward various SDGs and respective targets. Among them is the improvement in the provision of basic services, which must be made universally available, highlighting the sectors of health, education, water and sanitation infrastructure, housing, and social protection, that is, all that is considered as a prerequisite to eliminating poverty and that underlie social inequities. The recommendations of this Report were presented during the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF),7 at the “SDG Summit,”8 on September 24 and 25, 2019 which, during the 74th UNGA, brought together heads of state and government at the United Nations headquarters in New York.

The May 2019 report by UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, on progress toward the SDGs, submitted to the July 2019 session of the HLPF,9 under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), already identified the urgent need to strengthen the political leadership and multisectoral action so that the world could follow a path compatible with the achievement of the SDGs up to 2030. Despite the developments that can be reported in the first 4 years of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, namely in the identification of universal responses in several SDGs, the report also supports that these advances were too slow. For example, in SDG 2 (Zero hunger), it points out that hunger had increased for the third consecutive year and that millions of children suffered from malnutrition. In SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation), it mentions that millions of people still lacked clean water, sanitation, and handwashing facilities. And SDGs 13 (Climate action), 14 (Life below water), and 15 (Life on land) consider that GHG emissions continued to increase, that biodiversity was being lost at an alarming rate, and that the effort to protect and restore ecosystems and species was compromised.

But time moved faster than history and the world was taken by surprise with the advent of a new and unknown global threat to health. If almost like the plot of an apocalyptic film on any television channel, but with the substantial difference that fear and panic do not pass when we turn off the receiver.

The identification, at the end of 2019, of a new coronavirus (SARS-Cov-2) and the consequent declaration by the WHO, in March 2020, of a pandemic situation, generated an emergency scenario that translated, and continues to translate, in an environment of exceptionality and with unpredictable contours. This situation resulted in new constraints to the 2030 Agenda implementation. This is attested in June 2020 study of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,10 indicating that, in March 2020, there was a significant drop in funding available to developing countries, with levels of capital withdrawal that almost doubled those recorded after the 2008 financial crisis. This situation is coupled with the expectation that the capacity of states to be able to finance themselves through tax collection will also suffer falls estimated at rates higher than the deceleration values of the respective economies. We will return to this question a little later. In another analysis, in April 2020, the World Food Program alerted us to the fact that the pandemic could double the number of hungry people in the world, pointing to the hypothesis that the number of people affected by hunger be able to rise to 265 million in 2020. An increase of 135 million compared to 2019,11 a perception that would be corroborated by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).12

The 2020 edition of the report on progress toward the achievement of the SDGs,13,14 submitted by the UN Secretary-General to the HLPF,15 would confirm these data, indicating, in a striking way, that progress previously registered have been stagnant or have been reversed, with the increase in the number of people going hungry, growing levels of inequality and accelerating impacts on climate change. As expected in this report, from May 2020, different impacts caused by the pandemic COVID-19 are also listed, considering that they jeopardize progress toward the SDGs. Not surprisingly the document notes that the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries, Small Island Developing States, and countries in situations of humanitarian or fragile emergencies are the most affected. This fragility results from weak health systems, social protection schemes with very low coverage rates, financial and other scarce resources, marked vulnerability to shocks or sudden changes in the economic environment and high levels of dependence on international trade. In this document, the UN Secretary-General urges that as far as possible recent gains are protected and that a truly transformative recovery of COVID-19 is promoted, by reducing the risk of future crises and bringing inclusive and sustainable development very close, to meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. This perception would be reiterated in the preface made by the Secretary-General for the 2019 Report of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, launched on August 21, 2020, in which it mentions that world leaders, to recover and alleviate the economic and social impacts caused by COVID-19, must project their action more sustainably and inclusively, facing climate change, protecting the environment, reversing the loss of biodiversity, and guaranteeing the health and safety of humanity in the long term.16

The World Bank, in a report known in June 2020, on guidance perspectives for 2050, in the context of the recovery of the economy in the post-COVID-19 period, takes up several of the above findings, directing its reflection on 4 approaches focused on meeting the goals of decarbonization and recommending the incorporation of priorities and long-term climate planning in the countries’ macroeconomic structures, so that they guide fiscal policy and major national investments in combating and mitigating climate risks to integrate and harmonize climate policies with economic and social inclusion.17

The reports of the United Nations and World Bank agencies formulate analyses that are consistent with the bold proposal presented by the Rome Group in 2019 and resumed in 2020. The Rome Group invited nations to declare a planetary emergency and to adopt a “Planetary Emergency Plan,” anchored in the urgent need to at least halve GHG emissions by 2030, in the logic of protecting global common goods and human health.18 This
claim is echoed in the calculations of the Global Footprint Network, which indicated that in 2020, the “Earth Overshoot Day (EOD),” the day after which Humanity starts using an “environmental credit card,” arrived on August 22.19

As Manuel Ennes Ferreira says,

“in the last few decades, particularly since the end of the last century, the international cooperation system has become increasingly tested, if not challenged. One of the main reasons lies in the consequences that unbridled globalization has introduced in international relations, shaking a corresponding status quo.”20

In fact, the serious economic and social crisis caused by the advent of this coronavirus constitutes, in fact, a huge test of the feasibility of the “benefits” of globalization as we know it. For example, promoting a globally interconnected economy and the interdependence between countries and nations, also allowed the rapid spread of contagious diseases, leading nations to discover how fragile and vulnerable they are to unexpected shocks and cyclical changes caused by disruptive phenomena in the field of public health.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in a review made in June 2020 to the April edition of its “World Economic Outlook,” considers that the impact of the pandemic COVID-19 in the first half of 2020, had an effect on economic activity more negative than expected and that the recovery will be slower than anticipated. In that document, the Fund projects that global growth will be −4.9%, that is, 1.9% below April forecasts. For 2021, the fund projects global growth of 5.4%. Overall, this would leave the 2021 GDP about 6.5% points less than the pre-COVID-19 projections made in January 2020. The IMF also indicates that the adverse impact on low-income households is increasingly tested, if not challenged. One of the main reasons lies in the consequences that unbridled globalization has introduced in international relations, shaking a corresponding status quo.”21

This information was corroborated by the United Nations at the end of May.22

In the coming years, the macroeconomic scenario will be of great demand, with impacts that are not yet fully anticipated, and that the levels of international financing to achieve the SDGs are in stake. But this hard reality should not omit that the approval of the 2030 Agenda offered an opportunity for further reflection on the need to make the world more just and inclusive. The entire collection and debate of the past 5 years cannot be discarded. On the contrary, today there is clear evidence of the benefits that could result in the adoption of new models, for example, in terms of the circular and regenerative economy, which could be driven by (a) reductions in consumption and production; (b) the closure or dismantling of inefficient industries, value chains, and production processes; (c) by internalizing externalities, and (d) by improving and regenerating land use and transforming the energy system.

As the UN Secretary-General warned on 18 July, on the “Mandela Day” celebrations,23

“( . . . ) the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic puts us all in danger, everywhere and especially the most vulnerable. Faced with these challenges, world leaders need to recognize the vital importance of unity and solidarity ... / ... we need to combat this pandemic of inequality through a new social contract for a new era (...) “.

The formulation of this longing is in stark contrast with the statements of Peter Marks, a senior official at the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) who, during a panel discussion in June 2020, made a shameful statement in which he compared the global supply of vaccines against COVID-19 with the fall of oxygen masks on a depressurized plane. He said: “You put the mask on yourself first and then you try to help others as soon as possible.” The main difference is, of course, as it was immediately recognized by different analysts, that oxygen masks, on airplanes in depressurization processes, do not just fall into the business class, which could be what will happen when the vaccines are eventually available and governments regulate their access to predefined groups or negotiate their dissemination to other countries.

The impact of COVID-19 in the SDGs. What about the CPLP?

How will it be possible to continue implementing the 2030 Agenda in a post-COVID-19 scenario? To this end, it is important to analyze and debate perceptions on the global impacts of COVID-19 in reaching the SDGs. This urgency was responsible for the initiative “Financing for Development in the Age of COVID-19 and beyond,” convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, together with the Prime Ministers of Canada and Jamaica, held on May 28, 2020.22 At this event, which brought together member states of the United Nations and several international institutions, working groups were created on the following topics: (a) external financing and remittances, jobs, and inclusive growth; (b) recovering better for sustainability; (c) global liquidity and financial stability; (d) debt vulnerabilities; (e) private sector creditors engagement; and (f) illicit financial flows. The results of the work of these groups were planned to be available at a meeting of Ministers of Finance, which was scheduled to take place on September 8, 2020. The product of this ministerial conference would be submitted to a summit meeting in the frame of the 75th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, in September 2020.

Meanwhile, the multilateral system was prompted to provide answers. Regarding health and in the case of the United Nations System, there was a timely reaction. Between January and May 2020, some guiding instruments on the topic COVID-19 were put forward. And they proved to be very relevant in supporting the definition of different policies and guidelines that have been adopted internationally. For their relevance we will focus on just 2: (a) the “WHO Strategic Plan for COVID-19” (COVID-19 strategy), approved in February 2020, with the primary objective of mobilizing all sectors and communities to ensure a joint and articulated response to the epidemic and (b) the resolution “Response to COVID-19,” approved in May 2020, in the frame of the 73rd World Health Assembly. While expressing the deep concern of countries for the morbidity and mortality caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, its negative effects on physical and mental health and social well-being, the negative repercussions on the economy and society, with the consequent exacerbation of inequalities within and between countries, the document also stresses government’s primary responsibility in the adoption and implementation of responses to the pandemic.
And why is this framework so significant for the achievement of the SDGs by the countries comprising the CPLP? Firstly, for the expression of the role that must be played by governments and for the horizontal framing of the problem. This finding entails several issues and structural difficulties that characterize the countries that make up this community. For example, those that are rooted in their delicate economic competitiveness, often exacerbated by the burden of debt, in the appreciable degree of external dependence to comply with the subscribed international goals, and in the difficulty of integrating the challenges facing their development processes in public policies. These issues may be magnified by complementary factors such as volatility and difficulty in ensuring continuity in the decision-making and political action process, persistence of considerable economic and social asymmetries, and poor civil society voice. Of course, these challenges are not exclusive to the member states of the CPLP. To achieve the SDGs agenda, international cooperation is still very much needed to foster ambitions and mitigate structural weaknesses. Expanding partnerships and international coalitions may prove to be sensitive in the pursuit of the SDG in a new post-COVID-19 international order. Some of these challenges may be considered by health diplomacy and will be relevant not only for the context of the CPLP, but also for the world.

In a context in which, since the beginning of the pandemic, the relations between 2 of the greatest powers—USA and China—have become increasingly tense (a situation that has been growing in the pre-electoral context experienced in the USA and particularly due to the repeated statements of Donald Trump and Mike Pence), questions are raised as to the role that will be reserved for multilateralism, namely in the context of a situation in which there is an exponential growth of nationalism and isolationist positions in international relations. This finding results in several suspicions regarding the role that may be played by international agencies and organizations and the respective degree of connection with the recommendations and resolutions issued by them. In the specific case of SDG 3, the growth of isolationism, the disregard for universal human rights principles, and the weakening of the social role of the state, new citizenships, and civil society, may create difficulties in considering the inputs for quality health as “Global public goods,” which is offered as relevant, for example, as already mentioned, in the context of the production and distribution of vaccines for SARS-Cov-2. This perception has been abundantly called for by public interventions of the Director-General of WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, and reiterated in his weekly press briefings on the evolution of the fight against the pandemic.

According to information from the “Vaccine Centre” of the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, on August 24, 2020, there were 234 vaccine candidates under development, although none had completed clinical trials to prove their safety and effectiveness. Of this aggregate, 197 were in the preclinical stage. Of this list, 36 vaccines had already been announced or were undergoing clinical trials. From those, 7 had started Phase III and 30 were still in Phase I or II. The fact is that, while it is still some time before one or more of these candidates prove to be safe and effective and ready for delivery, countries that manufacture vaccines (and the rich countries that do not) have accelerated international tendering competition to ensure successful access. This perception seems to be confirmed by the conclusions of the “fourth meeting of the COVID-19 Emergency Committee,” convened by the Director-General of WHO, under the International Health Regulations (IHR) which, at the end of July, highlighted “the expected long duration” for the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the “importance of implementing sustained response efforts at community, national, regional, and global levels.” However, the ongoing investments for the production and popularization of a vaccine do not appear to consider sociodemographic issues and the progression of the disease in the most disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, where there are greater social inequities, with the prospect of continuing to widen the development asymmetries. On the contrary, in a context in which the spread of the virus seems to accelerate on a global scale, in a scenario that some already consider as a “second wave,” it will also be worth asking what reflections have been produced on the need to also continue to look at communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, hepatitis, malaria, diseases preventable by vaccination, and neglected tropical diseases, among others, as well as for noncommunicable diseases such as cardiovascular diseases, neoplasms, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes.

In a scenario of potential weakening of WHO or inability to accomplish its role (or even in addition to its action), it would be relevant to think of an innovative strategy, which could involve replicating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization model for the health sector. In this potential new paradigm, all signatories should interpret a health threat to a member as a global threat to the whole and should commit to integrating joint efforts to tackle the issue. This strategy could contribute to align and harmonize the levels of readiness and the operational resources of the signatories, greater efficiency and speed in responding to emergencies, a broader geographical performance, better rationalization, and management of operating costs and greater sustainability of results. From the above, important questions arise regarding the intellectual property of vaccines, treatments, calculation models, etc., for which it would be necessary to seek to guarantee universal, timely, fair, equitable, safe, and effective access. The same is true for all essential products, including their components and precursors, needed to respond to this pandemic and those to come. These principles and concerns were taken up with the launch, on July 2, 2020, of the “Movement for Sustainable Equity in Health,” which brings together networks and people from all regions, cultures, and professions around the ethical principle of the universal right to health. The issue of intellectual property will also be relevant to the growing need to expand the use of information and communication technologies and digital connection tools (SDG 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and SDG 17, Partnerships for the goals) as well as for the definition of new business and functioning models of the economy. In contrast, these themes will identify the need to boost cyber security and data protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a unique and generational threat to the world population. It is an event that generated disruptive and high-impact situations. Although this is not the first disease outbreak to spread worldwide, it is the first where governments have used economic resources on a scale rarely seen before. However, the most effective responses have not been of a medical, but of a behavioral nature (physical and social distance, hand hygiene, and use of a mask and respiratory etiquette) and within the scope of restrictions on mobility and circulation (lockdown, quarantine, and confinement). Considering the different visions and strategies that countries have been adopting for these purposes, with inevitable consequences and impacts at the level of the economy, one considers the crucial role that diplomacy will play in the definition of possible health corridors (already proven important for the tourism industry) and in the mediation of resulting conflicts. Linked to this issue is also the
need to define shorter value chains with programs to replace imports and increase national production models, restricting the circulation of goods. All of these may jeopardize agreements already signed.

**Connecting the SDGs at the CPLP**

In the specific case of the CPLP and despite the difficulties listed, in a logic of mitigating the impacts caused by COVID-19, the available natural and human resources allow the ambition of a distinction that could be positive in a better attendance of the implementation of the 2030 agenda and its SDGs. For this to materialize, one could consider promoting a transversal logic of intervention—a 360° overlook—in which political efforts encourage the functional links that can be established between different SDGs. This would lead to a strategy of complementarity, sustainability, and more efficient use of partnerships and financing opportunities. In short, a horizontal model that contributes decisively to the elimination of poverty and the reduction of social inequities. Within the scope of the CPLP the success of this strategy will depend on the strengthening of networking between the public sector, civil society, third sector institutions, academia, and the private sector. This would help institutions to become stronger, more effective, and inclusive, guaranteeing social peace, justice, education, and quality health care.

Here are some hints about some SDGs that, in the CPLP cooperation framework, may contribute to better achievement of the general objective of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs: the promotion of the different dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic, environmental protection), the promotion of peace, justice, and effective institutions.

We begin by identifying the potential of food systems. Somewhat strangely, macroeconomists have long ignored them, in the belief that the global agri-food industry, now highly mechanized, subsidized, and concentrated, offers everything we could want when it comes to food. Recent images of panicked consumers, empty supermarket shelves, and long lines at food banks, have reminded us of how important food systems are in our lives and how they can quickly break down and become unbalanced. Within the scope of SDG 2 (zero hunger), the CPLP should definitely consolidate its “Food Security and Nutrition Strategy—ESAN-CPLP,” promoting mechanisms to support the consolidation of the CPLP’s food systems, particularly those that originate in family farming and rural communities as sources of sustainable food production. These systems should be considered as public goods to be protected and promoted, by building networks for the exchange of knowledge and the enhancement of this food and cultural heritage. This alignment should be done through the creation of institutional and legal frameworks that could work for support, for example, from the FAO’s “Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems” initiative, with the purpose to promote the dynamic preservation of agrobiodiversity and the enhancement of traditional knowledge. The integration of national, regional, and international actions for the conservation of biological diversity in the agricultural sectors of the CPLP would contribute to the protection and promotion of biodiversity and associated traditional knowledge and the creation of resilient and environmentally responsible agriculture. These assets could be complemented with programs to encourage the practice of adequate, nutritious, and sustainable food and the promotion of balanced diets, based on local food and production regimes. It will also be necessary to consider the enormous potential existing in the CPLP for the production of food based on the resources of the ocean, not only for fish but also for the production and exploration of “new” foods, based on various plants and seaweed, as well as the production of insects and larvae for human and animal consumption. On the contrary, when we think about the impact caused by the pandemic, particularly among small farmers, due to factors such as the interruption of agricultural inputs, access to markets, and delays in harvesting and planting, we cannot fail to reiterate the importance and the potential for cooperation existing in this sector, particularly considering the advances already known in the CPLP in this matter. But such cooperation is also desirable when analyzing the efficiency losses of operations along the global food supply chain, highly centralized and operating on a “just-in-time” supply base, clearly ineffective to respond to shocks or crises of agri-food. And this perception is consistent with the urgency already identified by FAO and World Food Program that, in developing countries, unless urgent measures are taken, the number of hungry people will double up soon and eclipse the impact of the coronavirus. This information reinforces the concern expressed by FAO in 2019, in its report “State of Food and Agriculture in the World,” which indicated that, in 2018, about 820 million people suffered from hunger. This shocking contingent stands in striking contrast to the 600 million people classified as obese and the 2 billion overweight. This vast contingent originates from the practice of unbalanced diets that can be associated with the emergence of diseases such as obesity, diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. Today, immunocompromised and malnourished people around the world suffer disproportionately from the lethal consequences of COVID-19, with the enormous economic and social burdens associated: overload on public health services, unemployment, loss of income, and increased public debt. All these examples show the clear horizontality of SDG 2 and its impact along the SDG chain (SDG 3, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, and 16).

Regarding SDG 3, the CPLP has a “Strategic Health Cooperation Plan 2018–2021—PECS-CPLP.” This plan considers that, in line with

“Intersectionality between all the SDGs, it is necessary to have a structured dialogue with the other SDGs, particularly those that most influence health, so that the SDG 3 statement is fully achieved.”

In fact, this recognition was reiterated and politically resumed in the conclusions of the V Meeting of Ministers of Health of the CPLP, held in Lisbon, on December 13, 2019, which stressed that it is

“fundamental to achieve SDG 3 and the goals related to Health in other SDGs, particularly with the reduction of inequalities, the promotion of just, peaceful and inclusive societies and the building of partnerships, thus promoting healthy lives and well-being throughout life (CPLP).”

This meeting also identified that “the member States of the CPLP have good models for organizing Primary Health Care (PHC) and that the definition of strategies for prioritizing and exchanging experiences on this topic is an objective and structuring element in the pursuit of the SDGs.” This position taken by the CPLP is, moreover, in line with the adoption by UNGA, on October 10, 2019, of resolution 74/2, which endorses the political declaration of the “High-level meeting on universal health coverage.” The pursuit of SDG 3 at CPLP thus presents
multilevel, community, and multilateral cooperation opportu-
nities in subjects such as primary health care, response to urgent 
and emergencies, equity in health, and the consideration of health 
as a global public good. Aspects, moreover, enshrined in the 
purposes of PECS-CPLP 2018–2021 and aligned with the 
tensioning of cooperation post-COVID-19.

SDGs 4, 5, and 8 (Quality Education, Gender Equality, and 
Decent Work and Economic growth) should be seen by CPLP not 
only as challenges but above all as opportunities for creating an 
environment conducive to sustainable development. Investing in 
education and guaranteeing free, equitable, and equal access to 
basic, technical, professional, and higher-quality education will 
contribute to the increase of technical and professional 
competences and skills that will promote access to productive 
employment, decent work and foster entrepreneurship. In 
accordance with the United Nations Educational, Scientific 
and Cultural Organization, these are essential conditions to 
increase and ensure equal opportunities between men and women 
and to guarantee their full and effective participation at all levels 
of decision making in political, economic, and public life.44 The 
link between this dimension of SDGs and the others is also 
obvious and conducive to different cooperation initiatives. And if 
this is clear in a normal scenario, it is even more pressing in the 
post-COVID-19 scenario. Education will be the basis for a fairer 
society in the post-COVID-19 world. At a time when so many 
people around the world need to maintain physical and social 
distancing and stay at home, making it impossible for a large 
number of children to attend school, maintaining education must 
be ensured, in a logic of equal opportunities and access between 
boys and girls. The power of culture and knowledge to strengthen 
the human fabric and solidarity are also essential assets and 
values of the CPLP that can be reinforced by new policies for 
distance learning, open science, and knowledge sharing. CPLP 
has strategic visions of cooperation for the Education and Gender 
sectors and robust partnership work with the International 
Labour Organization in matters such as social protection, 
combating child labor, decent work, tripartite social dialogue, 
and informal economy. This cooperation already promotes 
harmonized work and cross-sharing of challenges.45

Considering the existence in the CPLP of a rich expression of 
biodiversity, there is an unusual opportunity to be able to work in 
an integrated manner on the interception of SDGs 6, 7, 13, 14, 
and 15 (Clean water and sanitation, Affordable and clean energy, 
Climate Action, Life Below Water, and Life on land) and its 
potential connection to SDGs 2 and 3, previously discussed. 
Science is objective and there have been several contributions that 
point to a very clear, integrated, and interdependent link between 
climate, biodiversity, and public health. Issues such as the 
sustainable management of water resources, sustainable energy 
transition, decarbonization of the economy, combating desertifi-
cation, mitigating climate change, creating biosphere reserve 
spaces, combating marine litter, blue economy and sustainable 
use of marine resources, conservation of ecosystems, and curbing 
of biodiversity loss and its valorization, are subjects already 
framed in CPLP's strategic cooperation plans, such as the “CPLP 
Environment Strategic Cooperation Plan (PECA),” “CPLP 
Strategy for the Ocean,” “CPLP Charter for Marine Litter,” 
“CPLP Energy Strategic Cooperation Plan (PECE)” as well as in 
the projects already carried out and underway in the area of water 
resources and sanitation. The importance of speeding up 
cooperation on all these topics is highlighted in the reports 
mentioned at the beginning of this text, remarkably regarding 
decarbonization targets and long-term climate planning. The 
decisive importance of these matters for the sustainability of development is stressed in different articles and reports made 
public in recent months showing that in countries at lockdown, 
with the paralysis of industrial activity and the reduction of 
displacements, global pollution levels have been reduced.19 But 
the coronavirus, in addition to being a threat to public health, is 
also becoming a real threat to the environment, with the 
uncontrolled and ethically irresponsible disposal of masks, 
gloves, gels, and so on. On the contrary, recent studies from 
various water institutes and national health institutes demon-
strate the clear importance of monitoring water resources, a 
procedure that can contribute to early identification and warning 
of the presence of disease-inducing agents in aquifers and residual 
waters.46 This work is also essential to ensure a supply of 
drinking and quality water. More than obvious reasons for the 
CPLP to reinforce the cooperation that it has already successfully 
carried out in these sectors.

As the last example and within the scope of SDG 17 
(partnerships for the goals), it will be necessary to identify the 
potential inherent to the development of various cooperation 
activities in the frame of CPLP in a post-COVID-19 scenario, 
once there is a unique opportunity to accelerate investment in 
science and technology for development. The increase in scientific 
knowledge through the development of research and technology 
transfer capacities, taking advantage of synergies of initiatives 
already underway in different research, science, and knowledge 
hubs of the CPLP (universities, institutes, centers, laboratories, 
etc.) is something quite possible. For that CPLP must continue to 
encourage solidarity, ethical, and equitable sharing of science and 
technology knowledge and resources. This could be achieved 
through the acceleration of North-South, South-South, and 
triangular cooperation mechanisms, already carried out by CPLP 
cooperation. This approach should be followed to spread access 
to science, technology, and innovation and increase knowledge 
sharing, on mutually agreed terms, through better coordination 
between existing and future mechanisms. The “Strategic Plan for 
Multilateral Cooperation in the field of Higher Education, 
Science, and Technology of the CPLP (2014–2020)” and the most 
recent decisions of the Meeting of Ministers of Higher Education, 
Science and Technology of the CPLP47 frame this vision, 
encouraging increased training in science, technology, and 
innovation and increased use of training technologies, in 
particular information and communication technologies. The 
digital transformation of CPLP is a challenge that is framed by a 
strategic vision, explained in the “Digital Agenda of CPLP,” 
which addresses the strategic potential of this sector for the 
community and illustrates the idea of the wide transversality and 
application of these technologies to practically all cooperation 
and development sectors of the CPLP.48

The future of the development agenda

If the above setting embodies an interesting context for a virtuous 
alignment between the proposals on the international agenda and 
the priorities for the sustainable development of the CPLP 
member states, what the near reality conveys is that it is very 
challenging to project any type of planning in the post-COVID-
19, either in the medium or long term. From the international 
cooperation perspective, the COVID-19 situation brought some 
uncertainties regarding the availability of inputs for sustainable 
development and whether this situation will imply (or not) a 
reinforcement of emergency and humanitarian aid activities, 
fading the programming regular models of development
cooperation. Although the advanced economies have implemented an unprecedented fiscal and monetary policy response to deal with the crisis, the political response in developing countries has been more fragile, as the need to continue to meet the payment of foreign debt service persists. To this, it must be added the decrease in the inflow of foreign exchange. In this context, developing countries face the dual challenge of financing the response to the pandemic and avoiding a major debt crisis, which could delay progress toward the SDGs for many years. Issues such as debt forgiveness and credit default arranges for developing countries were debated during the high-level virtual ministerial conference “Facing the Covid-19 crisis: restoring sustainable capital flows and robust financing for development,” held on July 8, 2020, in a joint initiative of the Paris Forum and the Saudi presidency of the G20.59 This conference was convened following the conclusions of a G20 meeting in April 2020, at which finance ministers and Central Bank officials from the world’s largest economies decided to suspend the payment of the poorest countries’ debt until the end of 2020.50 During this virtual conference, IMF Director-General Kristalina Georgieva and World Bank Group President David Malpass resumed earlier calls about the need to ease the mechanisms in place for debt service recovery or forgiveness, recalling the implications of this scenario for the economies of developing countries. This reveals a posture that is unusual for the traditional interventions of representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions.51 David Malpass would reiterate this tone in an interview with the France Press Agency, on August 20, 2020, in which he stressed that between 70 and 100 million people may be in extreme poverty. A number that may increase if the pandemic worsens or lasts for a long time. In that review, Malpass resumed previous proposals in which he urged creditors to reduce the debt of poor countries and to extend, until 2021, the moratorium on debt payment, approved by the G20 group in April 2020.52 These understandings are, moreover, reflected in reports that, since May 2020, have been made public by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, Olivier De Schutter, who has warned of the potential increase in the number of people living in poverty (with an income below 2.7 Euros/day) in a post-COVID-19 scenario, which could reach 176 million people.53

When writing these lines, it is very difficult to anticipate whether this context of uncertainty will result in the identification of new models of cooperation that translate new partnerships and opportunities for sustainable development. In the case of CPLP, all of these strategies seem to offer valid avenues for reflection, since they allow for the consideration of a wide range of cooperation hypotheses, both at the Community level and with a vast and different number of development partners. This perception is anchored in the potential resident, still to be explored, for the development of joint and shared initiatives, which can bring together, through cooperation initiatives: (a) States and international organizations that formalized partnership mechanisms with the CPLP, gaining the associate observer status,54 (b) the different panel of entities that benefit from consultative observer status,55 and (c) the numerous multilevel thematic networks and multisectoral cooperation platforms established within the community. In addition to this, the singular number of agreements, protocols, and memoranda signed by CPLP with different entities and organizations, including several UN organizations, other multilateral organizations and various civil society structures,56 must be added. Finally, it will also be necessary to consider the population growth projected for the CPLP until 2050.57 Contrary to global trends for the aging of the population and problems associated with this phenomenon, the rising of a large contingent of young people, particularly in Angola and Mozambique, will enable a very significant population reserve to anchor sustainable development efforts in the coming decades.

In the July–August issue of “Foreign Affairs,” in a text in which there are a very skeptical tone and strong disapproval of authoritarian leaders, Francis Fukuyama, takes a very critical look at the performance of governments, both democratic and authoritarian, namely the way they adopted extraordinary measures to contain the pandemic increasing its control and exercise overpower. Fukuyama, however, does reserve some space for optimism, pointing out that, ultimately, the current situation may be conducive to renewing multilateral international cooperation to promote common interests. To put his message into practice, he points out, as an example, the deepening that took place in the collaborative networks between scientists and public health officials around the world. But for this positive movement to intensify, he says that, in addition to the identification of adequate and sufficient resources, it will be necessary to crystallize social learning processes (combating the democratization of authority and the social cleavage promoted through social networks), the generation of broad social consensus and the emergence of competent and confidence-inspiring leaders.58 A similar perception is conveyed in an article published in “The Lancet,” on August 19, 2020, which alludes to the resurgence of nationalism and the resulting challenges for the functions of government, to respect, protect, and fulfill the ideal of human rights for the realization of advances in public health. This finding comes from the indication that, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, some governments have violated human rights and undermined global governance, adopting isolationist positions at a time when global solidarity is necessary.59

This allusion comes about the challenges that are posed to the full achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the coming years, now densified by the need to meet the conjuncture caused by the advent of COVID-19. We believe that the international community has not only the instruments but also the degree of maturity necessary to overcome one of the greatest constraints that have been placed on the development and to the rule of law. For that, it will be necessary to frame a path for the refoundation of the multilateral system, promoting the renewal of leaders and better coordination among themselves, encouraging the emergence of new human rights authorities and creating moments of dialogue for the emergence and strengthening of new global citizenships, increasingly committed to the public space and trained to participate in decision-making processes, thus fulfilling the purpose of SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions). As the Lancet article quoted above warns us, in preparing the next generation of leaders, human rights education provides the necessary basis for a commitment to public health. To do so, it will be necessary for the next generation of leaders to reinvigorate their devotion to human rights through the practice of public health and advocate rights-based policies guaranteeing accountability for governments.59

Conclusion

The space of cooperation that is offered to consolidate “true” sustainable development is broad and constitutes a clear opportunity for the new normal to be a better normal. The CPLP has the potential to foster leadership in this transformative
process, presenting itself as an agent of international relations that can be increasingly sought after for the formalization of partnerships, strategic alliances, and the joint and coordinated realization of different cooperation activities for sustainable development. To quote the UN Secretary-General, in the report on the progress of the SDGs in 2020, “Everything we do during and after the crisis caused by COVID-19, must be with a strong focus on building more equal and sustainable societies and economies, that are more resilient in the face of pandemics, climate change, and many other global challenges we face” (United Nations, 2020f). And in the year that celebrates the 75th anniversary of the United Nations, it would be encouraging to be able to mark the beginning of a new cycle for sustainable development, creating conditions so that, in short, it is possible to ensure the philosophical commitment underlying the 2030 agenda that no one should be left behind.

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Conflicts of interest
The author declares no competing interests.

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