



How accelerating action today can create a ripple effect for the future

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There is an old riddle about a single water lily growing in a pond. Each day, the number of lily pads doubles, so that by the second day, there are two, by the third day, there are four, and so on until, on the 30th day, the pond is completely overgrown. Can you guess on which day the lilies cover half of the pond?

The correct answer – on the 29th day – is far from intuitive. As late as the day before it becomes entirely coated with lilies, the pond is still half-empty, tricking our common sense into believing that change is moving very slow. But what do flowers in ponds have to do with the Sustainable Development Goals? It is all about change, the kind we can see and measure today and the kind that will only bear fruit in the future.

This month, the world will come together for the annual [High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#), the HLPF, a truly unique event by today's standards, where policymakers from around the world, activists, local governments, youth, businesses and everyone with a stake in the SDGs take a collective look at how we are doing on achieving the Goals and where we can improve.

For the last four years, UN DESA has been leading these efforts and tracking the world's progress on the SDGs. Despite encouraging success stories on eradicating poverty, fighting deadly diseases and reducing child mortality, the world is still off track on many critical targets, with hunger on the rise, biodiversity loss and climate change going into a tailspin and gender inequalities stubbornly persisting.

But these sobering statistics only tell one side of the story. Underneath the raw data, is an entire ecosystem of SDG action, gaining momentum each day to, eventually, become unstoppable, just like those lilies in the pond. From country governments to small town officials and from big international

organizations to local NGOs and schools, the global movement to bring prosperity to all on a healthy planet is well on its way, even if official statistics do not reveal its entire extent.

For example, at this month's HLPF, 47 countries will step in front of their peers to present their progress on the SDGs, bringing the total number of countries that have conducted their Voluntary National Reviews to 142. In their reports, countries have shared best practices, challenges and lessons learned from implementing national plans, strategies or roadmaps to achieve the Goals, and creating new institutions with an SDG focus.

And governments are far from being the only ones taking action. [UN DESA's database of good practices for the SDGs](#) has collected over 600 examples of inspiring projects from every corner of the world. From a university in Brazil that improves the surrounding community to a small village in Turkey switching to organic farming, to the European Commission's circular economy strategy, SDG action is sprouting new shoots at every level.

Even with all this vigorous activity we still have not reached the kind of lily-like exponential growth we need to transform our world and to leave no one behind. But science tells us that both the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris climate targets are still within our reach if we drastically accelerate our actions. This year is a crucial opportunity to do just that.

This September, world leaders gather in New York for [a week of five summits](#), including the SDG Summit and the Climate Action Summit. If countries follow the call of Secretary-General António Guterres to come prepared with ambitious plans, their [acceleration actions](#) could trigger further commitments, stronger partnerships and faster action, snowballing into an unstoppable movement towards sustainable development.

Humanity set out on the ambitious 2030 Agenda and the Paris climate accord knowing that they were committing an entire generation to sustained action. We will not change the world in one day or during one week of summits. But if we sow the right seeds of change and work hard over the next 10 years to help them flourish, then by 2030,