



ACCELERATING ACTION ON THE SDGs AT THE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Photo credit: UN Photo / Manuel Elías

... to deliver on the promises of the 2030 Agenda.

In 2022-2023, UN DESA continued to support Member States and other stakeholders in addressing the multiple crises and formulating a global response to get the world back on track to achieve the SDGs. The Department supported SDG implementation across various intergovernmental and multistakeholder platforms, to ensure commitments lead to transformative actions at all levels.

UN DESA ...

- Provided data, analysis, policy recommendations and expert guidance to support a successful HLPF and SDG Summit in 2023, including supporting the intergovernmental consultations on its Political Declaration.
- Strengthened science-policy interface at intergovernmental policy debates, including support to the preparation of the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report by the Independent Group of Scientists.
- Supported Member States in conducting Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF through global preparatory workshops and webinars and facilitated relevant peer learning through VNR Labs.
- Followed up on means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda through its support to the ECOSOC forums on financing, science, technology and innovation (STI) and partnerships.
- Created opportunities for broad stakeholder engagement in intergovernmental processes, particularly the private sector, local authorities, higher education institutions and youth.
- Supported SDG implementation at the regional, and national levels, in collaboration with Regional Commissions, with special attention to countries in special situations.
- Mobilized efforts to advance SDG localization, including collaboration with local networks and on-demand support to conduct Voluntary Local Reviews.

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At the half-way point to 2030, the world is faced with complex and interconnected challenges that hamper the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. However, these challenges also present opportunities for integrated recovery strategies and systemic progress. In 2022-2023, UN DESA continued to support Member States in accelerating the recovery from the pandemic and getting back on track to achieve full implementation of the SDGs by 2030. The Department explored innovative ways to strengthen the leadership and effectiveness of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) as the central UN platform for the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda.

Conducting in-depth review of the implementation of the SDGs

In July 2023, the HLPF brought more than 110 Heads of State and Government, Deputy Prime Ministers, and Ministers along with other actors back to the UN Headquarters in New York to reflect on accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and achieving the 2030 Agenda. The Forum addressed the theme “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels,” and also reviewed in-depth SDG 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure,

11 on sustainable cities and communities, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The Forum served as the “pre-Summit” moment to conduct mid-term review of SDG implementation and drive the momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit in September.

To inform in-depth reviews of the five SDGs in focus, as well as the mid-point review of the 2030 Agenda both at the HLPF and the SDG Summit, UN DESA also carried out a series of Expert Group Meetings (EGMs). The EGMs helped assess overall progress and challenges to achieving the 2030 Agenda in the context of COVID-19 recovery and identified areas of concern as well as opportunities for transformation since each in-focus SDG was last

HLPF IN NUMBERS:

2023 HLPF and High-level Segment of ECOSOC

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

9

Days

5

SDGs under review

38

VNRs

1

EU Voluntary Review

Who was there?

More than 110

Heads of State or Government, Ministers, Vice Ministers and Ministerial Level Officials

134

Key note speakers, panelists, lead discussants, respondents, moderators and youth speakers in townhall, panels and fireside chats

181

Statements in general debate

to talk about



More than **800** MGoS & NGOs accredited to ECOSOC

12

Special Events

16

VNR Labs

204

Side Events
141 in person
& 63 virtual

19

Exhibitions
at UNHQ



Sherwin Bryce-Pease (centre at podium), Bureau Chief and Correspondent of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, moderates a panel discussion during the high-level political forum on sustainable development – Photo credit: UN Photo/Manuel Elias

reviewed at the HLPF. The meetings also looked to the future and suggested ways to mitigate trade-offs, harness synergies, and leave no one behind, including women and girls. The meetings were held in Bilbao, Spain; Vienna, Austria; and in New York, bringing together a diversity of experts and stakeholders from the UN System, government, the private sector, academia, and civil society.

Strengthening science-policy interface at national and international levels

UN DESA supported the Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General to draft the quadrennial Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), to strengthen the science-policy interface at the national and international levels. The Department organized five expert regional consultations and gathered widespread input to inform the report preparations.

As an assessment of assessments from the scientific community, the 2023 GSDR is one of the key inputs into the deliberations at the quadrennial SDG Summit where Heads of State and Government meet to take stock of progress on the 2030 Agenda. An advance unedited version of the report was made available to Member States and other stakeholders in March 2023 to inform preparations for the SDG Summit, including the intergovernmental consultations on the Political Declaration.

Facilitating peer-learning for effective review of SDG implementation

To help prepare the stage for Member States in presenting the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF in July 2023, UN DESA organized two global preparatory workshops in December 2022 in Turin, Italy, and in March 2023 in Sofia, Bulgaria. These workshops provided opportunities for



Participants at the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and its interlinkages with other SDGs, held in March 2023, in Vienna, Austria – Photo credit: UN DESA

Member States to conduct peer-to-peer learning and exchange of experiences on the VNRs, including good practices, lessons learned, and issues faced by the VNR countries. The second workshop in May 2023 also featured “VNR Clinics”, where VNR countries provided case studies on their preparations.

The Department, in partnership with various UN and other entities, also organized 16 VNR Labs during the HLPF in July 2023. The VNR Labs served as an informal platform for experience-sharing and reflection on the VNR process, covering a range of topics related to SDG implementation.



UN DESA staff and participants discuss at the GSDR 2023 Regional Consultation Workshop for East Asia and the Pacific in November 2022 in Manila, Philippines – Photo credit: UN DESA



Nyovani Madise, member of the Independent Group of Scientists for the GSDR 2023, discusses with Shantanu Mukherjee, Director of the Economic Analysis and Policy Division of UN DESA at the Regional Consultation Workshop for Africa in December 2022 in Lilongwe, Malawi. - Photo credit: UN DESA

Accelerating localization of the SDGs

In November 2022, together with partners, UN DESA supported the production of a Voluntary Local Review (VLR) by the local government of Filadelfia in Paraguay, the first of its kind in the country. Based on the value of this experience, the SDG Commission and the Technical Secretariat for Economic and Social Development Planning of Paraguay, with support from UN DESA, began introducing the practice to local governments in other regions of the country, starting with a capacity building workshop in June 2023. The Department is further providing capacity building support on VLRs to local governments including from Argentina, Bolivia, the Gambia, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

To further support the local and regional implementation of the SDGs, the UN Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) and the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) of UN DESA co-convened the International Mayors Forum in April 2023 in Dakar, Senegal. The forum supported local authorities and communities in achieving a better understanding of successes, lessons learned and good practices to the implementation of the SDGs, particularly those in focus of the 2023 HLPF.

In addition, UN DESA in collaboration with partners convened the Sixth Local and Regional Governments Forums (LRGF) as one of the key special events during the 2023 HLPF. The forum illustrated the



Voluntary Local Reviews

In 2022, UN DESA launched a demand-driven programme of work to support local governments to prepare Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) of the implementation of the SDGs. While VLRs are not mandated by the 2030 Agenda, the process of preparing them provides multiple benefits to the entities engaging in them and to SDG implementation at large, including:

- Contributing to the collection and analysis of timely, accurate and disaggregated data on SDG implementation and on the furthest behind at the local level;
- Bringing stakeholders closer to decision-making processes;
- Strengthening multilevel governance; and
- Fostering integration of the SDGs into local planning.

The practice of preparing VLRs is being taken up not only by capital and large cities, but also by a growing number of smaller cities, provinces, and districts, including in rural areas. Since 2018, more than 200 VLRs have been provided from all regions of the world to advance SDG localization.



Participants discuss at the International Mayors Forum in April 2023 in Dakar, Senegal - Photo credit: UNOSD/UN DESA

interconnected importance and breadth of SDG11 to the whole 2030 Agenda, as well as how local and regional governments are localizing the SDGs through high-impact localization policies.

Integrating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the AU Agenda 2063

UN DESA, in close collaboration with the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), continued to support regional and national efforts in integrating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and African Union (AU) Agenda 2063. The collaborative work strengthens the AU-UN Cooperation Framework signed by the Secretary-General in 2018, by delivering joint activities and programmes for the implementation, tracking, monitoring and reporting of the two Agendas.

For example, in March 2023, UN DESA and APRM held the second joint continental workshop on VNRs and Domestication of Agenda 2063 in

Durban, South Africa. The workshop, attended by 48 government officials from 25 countries, provided a regional platform for peer-learning on good practices, aimed at integrating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063. The workshop strengthened capacities of African countries to present progress on the implementation of the two agendas through the VNR process, including on effective national-to-local implementation of the SDGs through Voluntary Local Reviews. It also supported countries to build strong institutional and governance frameworks in line with the Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development, which were developed by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration.

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We share our experiences and learn from each other and when we leave a workshop like this, we have something to carry back home. It is a very good learning session, and it provides us with a wider range of issues that we can be able to accommodate as we contextualise them to our own situation.

by **Malefu Delinah Khanyapa**
Director for Monitoring and Evaluation, Ministry of
Finance and Development Planning, Lesotho

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Participants discuss at the APRM-UNDESA Continental Capacity Building Workshop, Durban, South Africa 2023 - Photo credit: APRM/UN DESA

Supporting Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs in Africa

In 2022-2023, UN DESA continued to serve as the secretariat for the eighth ECOSOC Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum), held in May 2023, and supported the work of the UN interagency task team on STI for the SDGs (IATT) and the 10-Member group.

To strengthen science, technology and innovation ecosystems in Africa to accelerate SDG implementation, UN DESA, together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), also supported the convening of the first STI in Africa Day on the margins of the 2023 STI Forum. It culminated in the launch of the STI for Africa Coalition, which presented a major step forward in mobilizing resources and support for STI globally for Africa's development. Co-led by Ethiopia, Ghana, Morocco, and South Africa and supported by UN DESA and ECA, the Coalition will focus on mobilizing talent and investment in the diaspora, promoting awareness of science, technology, and innovation opportunities in Africa, and act as a vehicle to advance Africa's STI interests within the various processes taking place at the United Nations and in Africa to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs.

Harnessing the power of partnerships to accelerate SDG implementation

In 2022-2023, UN DESA continued to serve as the secretariat for the ECOSOC Partnership Forum and organized a Partnership Exchange on the margins of the Partnership Forum to provide additional space for Member States and other stakeholders

to share knowledge and expertise in the design and implementation of partnerships that will contribute to SDG implementation."

Through its Partnership Accelerator Initiative, UN DESA also established regional networks of partnership champions in the Caribbean and the Pacific regions, and strengthened multi-stakeholder partnerships at the national level in the Bahamas, Maldives, Mexico and Sri Lanka. Additionally, the Department launched an online Partnership Learning Centre with resources on how to build and manage effective multi-stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs.

Since its launch in 2019 in connection with the first SDG Summit, the Partnership Accelerator Initiative supported development and dissemination of freely available partnership guidebooks and research papers to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships, as well as organization of virtual and in-person trainings and events. The initiative has worked with a range of partners, including 18 countries and Resident Coordinators, regional UN entities and others, totaling more than 1,000 stakeholders from various sectors.

In collaboration with the Asia-Europe Foundation, UN DESA also convened the 2022 Sustainable Development Transformation Forum (SDTF) to facilitate transformative actions and maximize synergies towards SDG implementation for countries in both conflict and post-conflict situations. Held in Incheon, Republic of Korea in October 2022, the Forum gathered over 100 participants from developing countries as well as experts and practitioners from international organizations,

NGOs, the public sector and academia. It resulted in the Incheon Communique, which addressed issues related to the current geopolitical context and the impact of COVID-19, and highlighted the need for accelerated action for sustainable development governance, as well as transformative actions to account for interlinkages among the SDGs.

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The Partnership Accelerator generated a catalytic change, and reinvigorated the UN team on the ground in its efforts to convene and engage holistically in the Maldives for the 2030 Agenda.

by **Catherine Haswell**
UN Resident Coordinator for the Republic of Maldives

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Supporting sustainable development in Small Island Developing States

Throughout the year, UN DESA continued to support the implementation of the SAMOA Pathway to advance sustainable development in Small Island Developing States that face unique social, economic and environmental vulnerabilities. UN DESA supported the work of the High-Level Panel of the Multidimensional Vulnerability Index (MVI) as well as the SIDS Partnership Framework. Ahead of the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States in 2024, in July and August 2023, the Department supported the regional preparatory meetings for the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Seas (AIS) region in Mauritius, for the Caribbean region in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, for the Pacific Region in Tonga, and the inter-regional preparatory meeting in Cabo Verde.

Enhancing national implementation of SDGs in Africa through capacity building and peer learning

Throughout the year, UN DESA helped government officials and relevant stakeholders to enhance their capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. For example, during August – September 2022, the Department organized a peer learning workshop for officials from the Governments of Namibia and Zimbabwe on “Rwanda’s experience integrating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and AU Agenda 2063 into its national development plans and strategies” in Kigali, Rwanda. The workshop provided an opportunity for policymakers from Namibia and Zimbabwe to study good practices and lessons learned in Rwanda, which can be reflected into their own national development plans, strategies

and policy frameworks. Following an intense five-day programme that combined presentations by senior government officials from various Rwandan ministries, departments and agencies, as well as field visits, participants were able to receive a deep appreciation of the inclusive development journey that Rwanda has travelled since the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsis, to becoming one of the best performing countries implementing the 2030 Agenda and AU Agenda 2063.

Informing progress of UN development system’s offering to countries

To support ECOSOC in its role as an oversight mechanism for accelerating system-wide performance and results in relation to the 2030 Agenda, UN DESA conducted a comprehensive set of



Collaboration and Innovation took center stage at the Sri Lanka Partnership Week 2023 – Photo credit: UN DESA



Participants at the regional meeting for islands in the Atlantic, Indian Ocean and South China Sea meet in July 2023 in Port Louis, Mauritius – Photo credit: UN-OHRLLS

surveys, which received feedback from 179 countries as well as from the UN system, including the Resident Coordinators, UN development entities and UN country team members. The results of the surveys informed the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of UN system operational activities (QCPR), which was presented at the ECOSOC Operational Activities for Development Segment in May 2023. The report identified the improved alignment of the UN development system to the needs and priorities of countries in special situations. In 2022, all Least Developed Countries and Landlocked Developing Countries responding to

the UN DESA survey considered that development system activities were closely aligned with their needs and priorities. 95 per cent of African countries and 94 per cent of Small Island Developing States perceived likewise.

Building a Haiti free of hunger

In 2022-2023, UN DESA continued to address the complex and multi-faceted crisis in Haiti, through its support to the ECOSOC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Haiti (AHAGH). In June 2023, the Department supported the organization of an ECOSOC Special Meeting on the issue of food security in Haiti, which



Government officials attending opening session of the peer learning workshop in Kigali, Rwanda - Photo credit: UN DESA

resulted in mobilization of action and resources to help create a more productive and resilient food system in the country. Haiti's food insecurity is anchored in deep-rooted structural problems and is exacerbated by the ongoing high levels of violence and insecurity perpetrated by armed gangs, which is further threatened by climate-related events. The meeting underscored the urgency for both emergency food assistance and livelihoods assistance to build resilience for food security, especially for the most vulnerable. Young Haitians shared their hopes, vision and solutions and called on the international community to act. Strong calls were made to current donors to demonstrate solidarity with Haitian people and to substantially increase their contributions, and to other donors to contribute to the urgent funding appeal to ensure the full operationalization of the humanitarian response plan.



Jose Milltrete Montacy calls for Haiti free of hunger through a video message at the ECOSOC Special Meeting on the issue of food security in Haiti - Video credit: Observatoire de la Jeunesse Haitienne

Harnessing the power of SDGs to link peace and development on the ground

ECOSOC and the Peacebuilding Commission enhanced its collaboration through joint meetings

in December 2022 and June 2023, to promote coherence and impact for peacebuilding, sustaining peace and sustainable development efforts on the ground. The importance of a nexus approach for peace, humanitarian action and development, as well as the need for greater emphasis on prevention and enhanced coherence on the ground were underscored. The HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC, the SDG Summit and the Ministerial Meeting in September 2023 to prepare for the 2024 Summit of the Future were considered as key milestones to deepen the linkages between peace and development.

Bringing business voices and impacts closer to intergovernmental deliberations

Building on collaborative relationships with major private sector umbrella organizations, UN DESA continued to bring business voices and impacts closer to sustainable development debates at the global level, building a global community of sustainability leaders from the business sector and beyond to co-create solutions to accelerate SDG implementation. For example, UN DESA, in collaboration with the UN Global Compact, International Organisation of Employers and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, organized the 2023 SDG Global Business Forum in July 2023. This brought together a global multi-stakeholder community of movers and shakers, problem solvers and innovators on the margins of 2023 HLPF to review trends, discuss priorities, build alliances and co-create high-impact business solutions to turbocharge the SDGs in the remaining seven years before 2030. In collaboration with Resident Coordinators, UN Global Compact

Local Networks, and Employer Federations, the Forum also featured an hour-long virtual session highlighting local impact stories from around the world.

Highlighting the critical role of higher education in achieving sustainable development

UN DESA, as the co-chair of the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), continued to serve its role in building a strong interface between higher education, science, and policy making. In collaboration with other UN partners including UNESCO, the initiative supported raising the profile of higher education sector in supporting sustainable development. It also convened multi-stakeholder discussions to drive actions, share best practices and provide accessible education that effectively integrates sustainability at its core.

For example, in July 2023, UN DESA worked with partners to convene an evolving and action-oriented conversation on the critical role of higher education in achieving sustainable development at the 2023 HESI Global Forum, on the margins of 2023 HLPF. It was attended by 500 participants in-person and approximately 800 virtual, including student groups from Montclair State University and United Nations University.

Enhancing the capacity of public servants for the SDGs

As part of the Global Initiative on Building Capacities of Public Servants for the implementation of the SDGs, UN DESA's Presidential Summit of national schools and institutes of public administration resulted in commitments from around the world to mainstream the SDGs in their curricula. The

commitments and key recommendations from the Presidential Summit will be presented as an input to the SDG Summit in September 2023. The Presidential Summit also resulted in enhanced awareness of the Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development, developed by the Committee of Experts on Public Administration and endorsed by ECOSOC. It also helped strengthen the capacities to mainstream the SDGs in the curricula of their member schools by exchanging knowledge on challenges, opportunities and innovative practices.

Combating corruption and inclusive governance for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda

In May 2023, UN DESA supported the organization of the ECOSOC Special Meeting on Unleashing the transformative power of SDG16: Improving governance and reducing corruption. This demonstrated the need to further accelerate action to combat corruption to build peoples' trust in governments and ensure public funds and spending are allocated in support of sustainable development. To this end, Member States expressed the need for concerted efforts to leverage the existing international and regional legal instruments, increase international collaboration, intensify national anti-corruption measures and harness digital technologies, while fully engaging the civil society, media and the private sector in these efforts. Furthermore, particular attention was paid to the need to prevent and combat illicit financial flows and strengthen international cooperation and good practices on assets return and recovery.

Transformation is possible, coordination is key

The ECOSOC Coordination Segment brought together the ECOSOC system to address ways to respond to the impacts of the multiple crises on the SDGs, through risk-informed integrated transformative policies and actions in the areas of food security, clean water and sanitation, energy and digital transformation. The discussions gave a clear understanding that the global challenges are interlinked, but so are the solutions. There was emphasis on the need to take decisive action to resolve critical bottlenecks around key enabling areas, including data and digital technologies, effective institutions and financing for sustainable development, which have great potential to multiply efforts to advance SDG implementation. The Segment highlighted that the global, collaborative partnership that brought about the 2030 Agenda is the key to push forward and build up the momentum for bolder and transformative actions to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path and create peace and prosperity for people and planet.



Participants discussing just transition to net zero and a nature positive world at the SDG Global Business Forum in July 2023 - Photo credit: UN Global Compact