

STRENGTHENING
THE
HIGH-LEVEL
POLITICAL
FORUM
ON
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

Global Climate Action

United Nations Climate Change

Climate Activist Greta Thunberg Arrives in New York by Sailboat
- Photo Credit: UN Photo/Mark Garte

Every year since 2015, countries come together in New York to evaluate their efforts to achieve the SDGs. UN DESA has been supporting them in this critical task, not only by leading the preparations and conduct of the annual United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), but also by constantly exploring innovative ways of improving the meeting and its usefulness for countries.

UN DESA...

- Provided subject-matter expertise, policy recommendations and other substantive support to a successful SDG Summit in 2019 and the 2020 HLPF
- Led the preparations for the HLPF thematic reviews on SDG implementation
- Supported Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and organized VNR preparatory workshops and webinars
- Conducted 17 VNR Labs for experience sharing and reflection on the VNR process
- Organized special events, side events and exhibitions on the margins of the HLPF

Strengthening the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development



IN FOCUS



10 priority action areas for achieving the SDGs:

- a. Leaving no one behind
- b. Mobilizing adequate and well-directed financing
- c. Enhancing national implementation
- d. Strengthening institutions for more integrated solutions
- e. Bolstering local action to accelerate implementation
- f. Reducing disaster risk and building resilience
- g. Solving challenges through international cooperation and enhancing the global partnership
- h. Harnessing science, technology and innovation with a greater focus on digital transformation for sustainable development
- i. Investing in data and statistics for the Sustainable Development Goals
- j. Strengthening the High-level Political Forum

Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

On 24 and 25 September 2019, Heads of State and Government gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to review overall progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDG Summit 2019 – the first meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the auspices of the General Assembly - was the first UN summit on the SDGs since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in September 2015.

The Summit adopted the political declaration, *Gearing up for a decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*, which included 10 priority action areas for accelerating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and realizing the SDGs. World leaders expressed concern that the world was not on track for realizing the SDGs by 2030. They called for a decade of action to deliver the SDGs by 2030 and announced actions they are taking to advance the agenda.

As Secretariat to the HLPF and co-chair, with UNDP, of the HLPF interagency task team, UN DESA made significant contributions to the success of the Summit. The Department supported preparation of the 2019 edition of the **Global Sustainable Development Report** (GSDR), prepared by a group of independent scientists, which helped inform Member State dialogues. A special edition of the **Report of the Secretary-General on SDG Progress 2019** was also prepared, proposing cross-cutting actions to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, several of which inspired the Summit's declaration.

Ensuring an effective and forward-looking HLPF

The annual meeting of the HLPF, convened under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, was held in a virtual format from 7 to 16



Authors of the Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 speak during the SDG Summit in September 2019. – Photo Credit: UN Photo/Kim Haughton

July 2020, including a three-day ministerial meeting of the forum from 14 to 16 July 2020. Discussions focused on the theme *Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development*. The meeting attracted more than 125,000 live online viewers on UN WebTV.

The 2020 HLPF examined closely the impacts of COVID-19 on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. It provided an opportunity to mobilize global cooperation, solidarity and actions for a sustainable recovery from the pandemic. The discussions emphasized the need to respond to the socioeconomic impacts of

COVID-19 within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, so that the world preserves the gains made on the SDGs, builds back better and gets back on track for the decade of action and delivery for realizing the SDGs. UN DESA's analysis in the **Sustainable Development Goals Report** and **Sustainable Development Outlook** informed deliberations.

As in the past years, UN DESA also led the preparations for the HLPF thematic reviews. Adapting in the face of the COVID-19 crisis, the Department carried out virtual consultations to answer a set of targeted questions for each of the thematic sessions included in the HLPF programme. The consultations explored the common theme, *Building back better after COVID-19 and acting where we will have the greatest impact on the SDGs*. Issues

addressed included: Protecting and advancing human well-being and ending poverty (SDGs 1,3, 4, 6, 16, 17); Ending hunger and achieving food security (SDGs 2, 3, 17); Protecting the planet and building resilience (SDGs 12, 13, 14, 15, 17); Sustaining efforts to ensure access to sustainable energy (SDGs 7, 12, 13, 17); Responding to the economic shock, relaunching growth and sharing economic benefits and addressing developing countries' financing challenges (SDGs 5, 7, 8, 10, 17); and Bolstering local action to control the pandemic and accelerate implementation (SDGs 9, 11, 17).

The consultations were each co-convened with other UN

entities and engaged experts from across more than 40 entities within the UN system, as well as from academia, civil society and other relevant institutions, more than 180 in total.

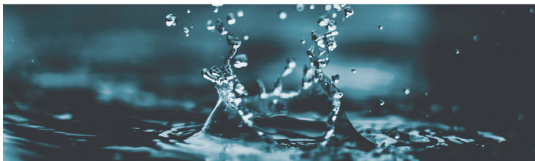
UN DESA also prepared background papers based on the consultations, which took stock of SDG progress, assessed the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and strategies for recovery within the context of the respective themes, and reflected on policies, actions and means of implementation to drive the needed transformation in the Decade of Action. These outcomes help to inform Member States' discussions and actions on SDG implementation.

Special Events co-led by UN DESA during HLPF 2020

SDG 6 GLOBAL ACCELERATION FRAMEWORK LAUNCH



LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS FORUM



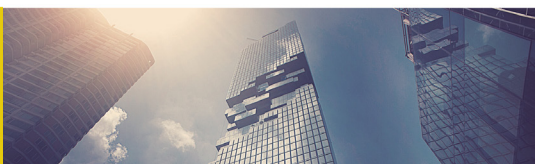
SDG LEARNING, TRAINING AND PRACTICE CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOPS



CHIEF SUSTAINABILITY OFFICERS FOR SDG



Build back better: navigating business risks and opportunities in a post-COVID world



SDG ACCELERATION ACTIONS TO BUILD BACK BETTER



UN DESA’s support to the HLPF also included the organization of a number of high-profile special events, engaging hundreds of practitioners from key sectors of society around SDG implementation. These events were undertaken together with UN system partners and other entities.

UN DESA also moved the VNR Labs online in 2020. The 17 Labs attracted hundreds of participants, allowing for detailed discussion and interaction on lessons learned on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the national level. Participants also discussed challenges and good practices in reporting, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic in ways that support a sustainable recovery and SDG achievement and the Decade of Action.

The HLPF communications strategy, designed jointly by UN DESA and the UN Department of Global

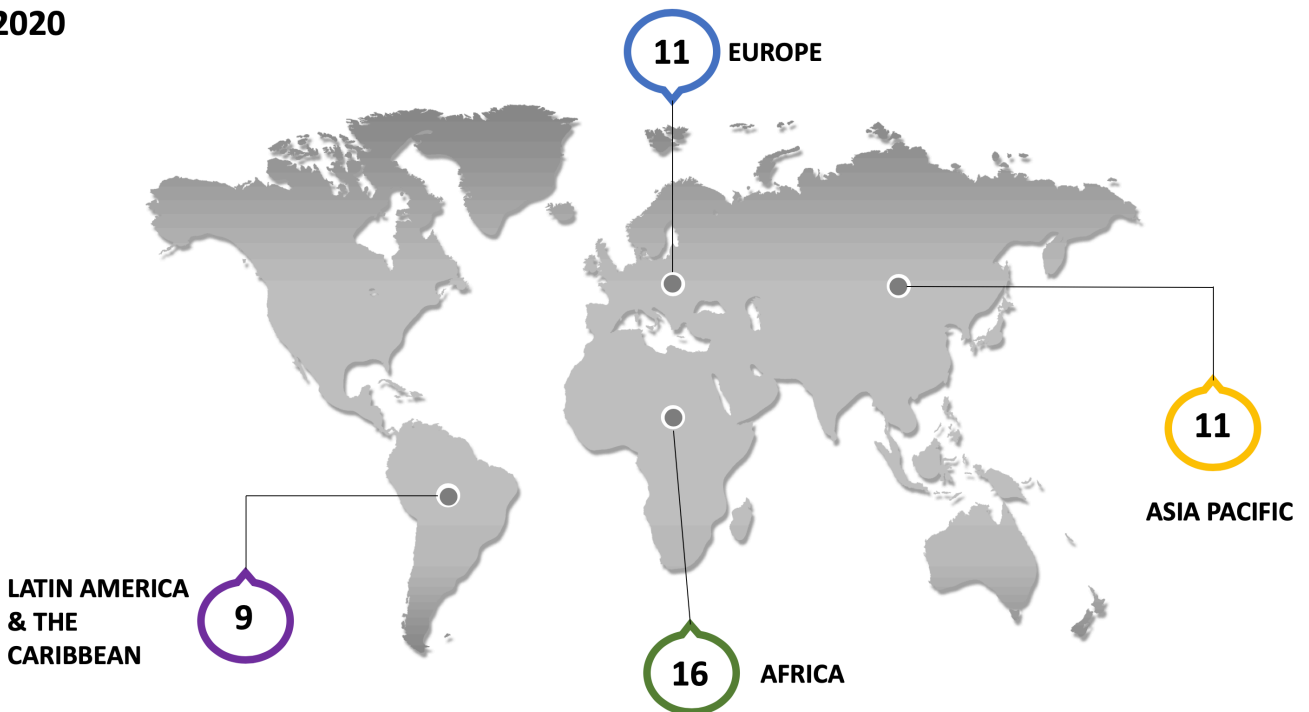
Communications, resulted in a heightened media interest and a lively online conversation. More than 3,200 articles were published by news outlets worldwide, including in such prestigious titles as El País, Al Jazeera, La Repubblica, RIA Novosti, People’s Daily, NDTV, La Nación, EFE and Nature.

Supporting VNR preparation

In 2020, UN DESA continued to provide support to countries presenting their Voluntary National Reviews of the 2030 Agenda. 47 countries presented their national voluntary reviews to the HLPF, including 26 first time presenters.

To support the 2020 VNR countries in their preparations, UN DESA organized three global VNR preparatory workshops and webinars. The First Global Workshop, organized with the support of the Government of Norway,

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 2020





“Very useful workshop – it has provided an opportunity to appreciate the VNR process and the critical issues that we need to look out for...

~ Participant from the First Global Workshop for 2020 VNR Countries

Resource material prepared by UN DESA to support VNR countries:

- Handbook for VNR countries
- Secretary-General's Voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the HLPF
- Q&A for VNR countries
- Database of all VNRs: UN DESA maintains a database of all VNRs so far including a separate page for each VNR country (searchable by year or keywords) and a webcast of presentations

was held in November 2019 in Oslo. The second and third global workshops were held virtually as webinars in March and June 2020 respectively and convened participants from the VNR countries, Regional Commissions and Resident Coordinator Offices. Approximately 80 participants from the 2020 VNR countries joined each of the webinars.

The workshops and webinars focused on peer-learning and facilitated an exchange of views amongst 2020 VNR countries on progress and challenges encountered in conducting their VNRs, and on transformative actions, policies and strategies. UN DESA and representatives from the Regional Commissions served as resource persons, providing clarifications on the expectations and process for the VNRs and assisted the VNR countries in identifying the necessary steps, policies and institutions for national implementation of the SDGs.

In collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions, UN DESA also organized regional VNR preparatory workshops, aimed at strengthening peer-learning from a regional exchange of experience and lessons learned among the VNR countries.

UN DESA provided direct support to countries in the preparation and finalization of the VNR reports. The Department also partnered with the UN Development Coordination Office (DCO) and the UN Resident Coordinator Offices in VNR countries, in order to extend further technical and substantive support, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

UN DESA also continues to work together with the VNR Task Group of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) Coordination Mechanism to facilitate the dialogue between MGoS and the VNR countries in the VNR preparatory process. This has occurred through the organization of webinars and the coordination of the inputs and contributions by MGoS to the HLPF.

"5 x 10" – five key themes with three cross cutting areas to achieve sustainable development in the next ten years

For the Decade of Action, UN DESA is mobilizing to overcome COVID-19 and other global crises, and preparing for future challenges to help Member States realize the 2030 Agenda.



1 Equality and inclusive growth

Draw on the Department's convening power and analytical capacity to ensure that the global dialogue focuses on human well-being, inclusive economic growth, and considers the voices of all peoples, everywhere.



2 Data

Support countries in every corner of the world to bolster their national statistical capacities and evidence-based decision-making.



3 Science and Technology

Help countries to steer developments in science, technology and innovation to serve sustainable development, and analyze the impacts of frontier technologies on the way we work, produce and co-exist.



4 Climate Action

Advocate urgent efforts for sustainable development that go hand-in-hand with driving climate action and supporting a healthy planet.



5 Demographic Change

Support countries to incorporate demographic trends into development policies and planning, including population growth, changes in age structure, migration, and urbanization.

3 key cross cutting areas:



Gender

Promote the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women across all areas, at all levels.



Financing

Support Member States close the financing gap for sustainable development, by mobilizing and aligning financing from all sources.



Effective Governance and Strong Institutions

Strengthen public institutions' capacities to deliver essential services and measures that require effective action, in collaboration with all stakeholders.

2020

2030

HLPF ECOSOC (July 2020)

SDG Moment (Sept 2020)

HLPF ECOSOC (July 2021)

GA HL Dialogue on Energy-related Goals (2021)

Global Sustainable Transport Conference (TBD)

Ocean Conference (TBD)

HLPF ECOSOC (July 2022)

4th Review of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (2023)

UN Conference on Mid-Term Review of the Water Action Decade (2023)

HLPF ECOSOC (July 2023)

Global Sustainable Development Report (2023)

HLPF GA (Sept 2023)