



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
INCHEON, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

CONCEPT NOTE

2016 Sustainable Development Transition Forum

SDG Mainstreaming and Means of Implementation: A Retrospective and Prospective View

25-27 October 2016, Incheon, Republic of Korea

1. Rationale

The UN Office for Sustainable Development contributes to building, exchanging and facilitating the use of knowledge in support of transitions to sustainability. UNOSD specialises on mapping, assessing and improving exchange of knowledge resources, providing advises to Member States and the broader policy communities on sharing and applying such resources, and conducting research and capacity development in areas of sustainability transition.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by UN Member States in September 2015. Included in the Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets, described as “integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.” Furthermore, through the Agenda Member States noted the following: “We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, *we pledge that no one will be left behind.*”

In 2015 the UNOSD’s Sustainable Development Transition Forum (SDTF) convened 163 participants from governments, UN Agencies, Think Tanks, Development Banks and Academic institutions from around the world to discuss experiences, approaches and challenges in mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs into national and sub-national development plans. The [2015 Incheon Communiqué](#) summarized the insights from the Forum’s three parallel workshops including an acknowledgement from the participants of the importance of enhanced and ongoing collaboration among and within governments, the UN system, international and regional organizations, development banks, the private sector, and other experts and stakeholders in mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda and SDGs into existing national and sub-national strategies and plans.

2. Forum Objectives and Format

The 2016 SDTF will be convened in October 2016 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, hosted by the UNOSD in partnership with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). Not only will the forum build on its 2015 outcomes and insights, it will help create a bridge between the 2016 and 2017 thematic foci of the high level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF): “Leaving no one behind” and “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world”, respectively. Attention will also be given to the HLPF’s focus on SDGs for 2017, including SDG1 (End Poverty), SDG2 (End Hunger), SDG3 (Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Wellbeing), SDG5 (Achieve Gender Equality), SDG9 (Build Resilient Infrastructure and Foster Innovation), SDG14 (Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans), and SDG17 (Strengthening the Means of Implementation and Global Partnerships).

The event will be designed to accommodate approximately 100 participants from governments, UN Agencies, Think Tanks, Development Banks and Academic institutions from around the world.

The objective of the Forum is to achieve better understanding of the successes and lessons in mainstreaming and implementing the 2030 Agenda at the national level within the specific context of ensuring that no one is left behind in the eradication of poverty and promotion of prosperity. Within this framing, the 2016 SDTF will take a retrospective look at the following areas:

Adapting SDGs to national contexts. The [Report of the 2015 SDTF](#) revealed that many countries have already begun a process of mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs into national development plans. For example, an exercise was conducted in several regions of Senegal to take the 17 SDGs and match them with the most relevant issues. In this instance, a Sustainability Grid Analysis Tool developed at the University of Quebec was used to facilitate the multi-stakeholder exercise and prioritize SDGs. Also, in July 2016 the UN released the publication, [‘The SDGs Are Coming to Life’](#) featuring 16 stories of country implementation and UN support. One key observations was that “some of the most innovative examples of early action to mainstream the SDGs came from countries in complex situations”, such as Sierra Leone amidst the Ebola crisis, and Somalia “where governance infrastructure suffered greatly from three decades of internal struggle.” These countries managed debilitating risk factors while keeping a longer-term vision in mind, serving as motivation to all countries as we journey toward 2030. The 2016 HLPF heard presentations from 22 volunteering countries whereby their national reviews showed impressive ownership of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs as further elaborated below. It was, however, also concluded that creating ownership of the SDGs and their inter-linkages will require building on national and local contexts, values and cultures, avoiding the use of blueprints. ([Draft Report of the 2016 HLPF](#))

This session of the SDTF will feature speakers from country governments in each region of the world sharing their experiences in mainstreaming the SDGs. A Special Poster Session will also be held each day to provide the opportunity for all Forum participants to share and discuss their country efforts toward mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda. Concluding this session will be a plenary discussion to engage participants in addressing the following question: *How is the world changing and how does this impact our ability to eradicate poverty and promote prosperity at the national level?* This discussion is designed to help provide a better understanding at the Forum of the context of the 2017 HLPF thematic focus, ‘eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.’

Multi-stakeholder approaches and partnerships. This aspect is so important for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda that Member States created a specific SDG for it. In particular, SDG Target 17.17 challenges us all to “Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.” Multi-stakeholder approaches and partnerships have grown considerably over the years since the 1992 Earth Summit, yet they have also contracted in some instances. The new Agenda however, has seemingly reinvigorated engagement processes and partnerships among governments, civil society and the private sector. Thus, [Partnerships for SDGs](#) managed by DSD/DESA is an online platform created to encourage global engagement around multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments in support of the implementation of the SDGs and for linking progress of those initiatives to various follow-up mechanisms of the 2030 Agenda, in particular to HLPF. It functions as a tool to inform stakeholders on initiatives carried out by multi-stakeholder partnerships around

the world in support of the sustainable development goals, track progress, and share innovative ideas. The platform is free and open to the public.

The SDTF's 2015 Report captured such efforts, for example, in Jordan where a primary school was teaching the 17 SDGs, in Malaysia where town halls and existing forums were used to discuss the SDGs, in Mozambique where the legal principle for the national plan is decentralization with a provision for local government to organize the participation of citizens in identifying and defining their priorities, in Cambodia where efforts were underway to create a new National Council for Sustainable Development, and in Germany where its National Council for Sustainable Development was asked by the government to assess how a national implementation of the SDGs will impact the structures and institutions of Germany's sustainability policy. Other examples can be seen in Colombia where the high-level Commission for preparedness and effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, which was established in February 2015, gathers stakeholders from all levels of government and outside government to advance the implementation of the SDGs. And in Finland, the National Commission on Sustainable Development is a Prime Minister led partnership forum that integrates sustainable development into Finnish policies, measures and everyday practices and gathers all stakeholders from government and civil society and private sector.

The 2016 SDTF will continue this critical sharing of experiences for multi-stakeholder approaches and partnerships in a session featuring presentations from government, civil society and the private sector and a plenary discussion to hear perspectives on the following question: *What is the role of partnerships within and among communities, government, and the private sector in helping leave no one behind? Should partnerships for the 2030 Agenda deliver better and different results than many of the existing public-private partnerships and how can civil society become an equal partner?*

SDG inter-linkages and policy coherence. The integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs gives emphasis to the importance of both deliberation and analysis in understanding the key inter-linkages among the SDGs in a national context, and to the imperative of coordinating across sectors and among levels of government to achieve policy coherence. Presentations and discussion at the 2015 SDTF revealed a trend whereby governments focus on only a subset of the SDGs, owing to resource and capacity constraints. While this certainly does reflect contextual reality within most countries, it does not leverage the full benefit of the systems view that the SDG package provides (i.e., see UNDESA's opening presentation at the 2015 SDTF). Given the integrated and indivisible nature of the SDGs, it is quite likely that even if a country only focuses on four or five SDGs, it will find itself running into the other SDGs in the course of trying to achieve their priorities.

At the HLPF 2016 it was concluded that strong commitment and leadership is required to incorporate the SDGs and their inter-linkages into policies, programmes and institutions at the different levels of government. All available governance tools should be used, including legal instruments, market instruments, or network solutions (partnerships). Many countries have already established institutional mechanisms for implementing the SDGs. Attention has to be paid to avoiding creating unnecessary new layers of institutions for sustainable development on the one hand, and to the risk of loss of accountability when existing institutions are broken up (in [Teaching Silos to Dance](#)). Enhancing policy coherence across sectors will be paramount. Dialogue will have to occur among line ministries, among scientists and experts, among civil society, and most importantly with the people on the ground.

This year's SDTF takes this discussion of inter-linkages and policy coherence to a practical level by featuring expert presentations on specific institutional and analytical approaches and tools that are currently being used, or can be used, to understand SDG inter-linkages and to help coordinate the efforts of stakeholders in achieving the SDGs in a national context. Plenary discussion will be dedicated to addressing the following questions: *(i) are institutional mechanisms for achieving coordination and policy coherence evolving fast enough to support achievement of the 2030 Agenda, and what improvements and advances are needed to make them compatible with national and local contexts, values and cultures, whilst avoiding the use of blueprints? And (ii) what types of policy tools are needed now to accelerate implementation of the 2030 Agenda?*

SDG Implementation follow-up and review. The 2016 HLPF in New York saw the first round of [Voluntary National Reviews](#) (VNRs) whereby 22 countries took part. The VNRs “aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, with a view to accelerating the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The VNRs also seek to strengthen policies and institutions of governments and to mobilize multi-stakeholder support and partnerships for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.” The summary of the President states that “less than one year after the adoption of the Agenda, these [volunteering] countries have devoted considerable time and resources in analysing the implications of the 2030 Agenda and the relation between the sustainable development goals and targets and their national priorities; in putting in place consultation and coordination processes around the SDGs; in integrating the SDGs in their national strategies, plans and budget processes; and in setting up monitoring and evaluation systems. While the set of reviews presented showed many similarities in terms of visions, goals and priorities, it also reflected differences in priority areas stemming from varying national contexts”. Reaction to the VNRs was mixed. The [Earth Negotiations Bulletin](#) reported both positive and negative reactions from satisfaction with the universal nature of the VNRs including both developed and developing countries to perceived lack of common format and scrutiny.

This session of the 2016 SDTF will hear a summary of the VNRs presented at the 2016 HLPF in New York, along with perspectives from some of the countries that participated in the review. The session will also provide an opportunity to learn about other approaches and tools for reviewing progress toward the SDGs, such as the new [SDG Index](#) prepared by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network and Bertelsmann Stiftung.

This session of the Forum will conclude with a plenary discussion to engage participants and speakers on their perspectives relating to the following question: *How can follow-up and review processes be improved to better inform development actions in ‘a changing world’?*

Prospective View of the 2030 Agenda. The 2016 SDTF will also feature a prospective discussion session on Day 3 to explore desired future scenarios for the above areas and articulate pathways for leaving no one behind in the context of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world. Breakout group and plenary sessions will be convened at the end of Day 1 and 2 to explore what it means to “leave no one behind” in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in the context of the six focal SDGs of the 2017 HLPF. The results of these discussions, along with the plenary discussions emanating from the four topic sessions described above, will provide the foundation for a rapid foresight exercise designed to address the following three questions:

- A. *What does a future look like in 2030 in which no one is left behind, including the most vulnerable, in eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity?*
- B. *In contrast, what does a future look like in 2030 in which vulnerable groups are left behind?*

C. What can we do to ensure that no one is left behind whilst eradicating poverty, promoting prosperity and preserving the planet?

3. Forum Agenda

The preliminary agenda for the 2016 SDTF can be viewed on the Forum website at: <http://www.unosd.org/index.php?page=view&type=13&nr=52&menu=177>.

4. Outputs

The Forum will produce three primary outputs, some that will prepare and guide discussions during the event, and others resulting from its deliberations. They include:

- Discussion paper (this document) to guide the preparation, proceedings and reporting of the respective sessions;
- Forum report documenting the presentations and discussions of the successes, lessons, and key mechanism for ensuring that no one is left behind; and
- 2016 Incheon Communiqué summarizing the successes, lessons, and key mechanism for leaving no one behind in the context of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.

5. Schedule and Venue

The SDTF will be held at the Orakai Songdo Park Hotel in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The event will last for 3 days, scheduled from 25-27 October 2016. English will be the language of the Workshop.

6. Participants and Organisers

The 2016 SDTF will bring together an international audience of approximately 100 national government officials and experts who have responsibility for and interest in national development planning.

The Forum is organized by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) of UNDESA in partnership with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).