

VOICE

— UN DESA —

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, VOL. 25, NO. 10 – OCTOBER 2021



Shifting gears for sustainable transport

A farmer carrying her produce to the local market, a ship being loaded with medical supplies, a child seated on a school bus – the movement of people and goods from point A to point B, whether going from a village to a town or across a continent or ocean, shapes sustainable development.

Sustainable transport – with its objectives of universal access, enhanced safety, reduced environmental and climate impact, improved resilience, and greater efficiency – is the focus of the 2nd Global Sustainable Transport Conference to be held in Beijing, China from 14 to 16 October.

The Conference will shine a light on the critical role of transport as more than just a provider of services and infrastructure for the mobility of people and goods. Think of sustainable transport as an accelerator pedal. Pushing it can trigger much faster progress across the (dash)board of many other Sustainable Development Goals, such as eradicating poverty in all its dimensions, reducing inequality, empowering women, and combatting climate change.

On a global level, sustainable transport can take us from A to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. And on a human level, it can connect those who currently face the largest difficulties in accessing and benefitting from mobility services.

All of these are well-known facts and yet we are not moving fast enough on sustainable transport. Over a billion people still lack access to an all-weather road, only about half the world's urban population have convenient access to public transport, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death among young people aged 15 to 29, and transport systems and infrastructure are not resilient enough to face the more frequent and more intense extreme weather events brought by climate change. On the flip side, transport is also responsible for about a quarter of direct carbon dioxide emissions from fossil fuel combustion.

Over the last eighteen months, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the uneven patterns of recovery, have thrown into sharp focus the many ways in which transport and sustainable development are intertwined. At the same time, government and business commitments towards carbon neutrality, the falling prices of renewables, and pandemic-induced behaviour changes such as increased telecommuting or a greater reliance on walking and cycling, have all helped to bring closer the prospect of a massive transformation towards sustainability.

Efforts to improve the energy efficiency of all modes of transport and to increase the use of low-carbon fuels must shift into a higher gear over the next decade, as waiting to act would noticeably increase the cost of reaching climate targets. At the same time we have to make sure that in our race with time on climate, we do not leave anyone behind and that these transitions are accompanied by the expansion of access to transport services for all.

We have an opportunity now, a chance for all actors to supercharge the transition to sustainable transport and to leverage the lessons learned during the pandemic. Sustainable transport is achievable, but it requires stakeholders collaborating at all levels to overcome the historical fragmentation within the sector.



EXPERT VOICES



Big business means business on sustainable investment

You know something is shifting in the markets when global business heavyweights move to issue standards, industry-specific metrics and even ready-to-invest financial vehicles, all aligned with one trend. That "new" hot investment opportunity is sustainable development and we talk about it with the Co-Chairs of the

Global Investors for Sustainable Development (GISD) Alliance, the CEO of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange Leila Fourie and the CEO of Allianz Oliver Bäte.

The Global Investors for Sustainable Development (GISD) Alliance is celebrating its two-year birthday. What has it been up to since 2019?

Leila Fourie: “Within its first year, the Alliance developed a common definition of sustainable development investing, which enables investors and asset managers to apply reasonable standards in their decision making for investments to qualify as aligned with sustainable development. With this, financial players and authorities can frame their sustainable investment products such as green bonds, sustainable funds, and exchange traded funds (ETFs) around the 17 SDGs, which helps build trust in the investment products.”

Oliver Bäte: “Also in our first year, we released a report for the financial ecosystem with over 60 concrete recommendations and actions to accelerate funding for the SDGs. For example, one of the most crucial levers is making sustainability reporting mandatory for financial and non-financial institutions.

During the pandemic, GISD focused on immediate solutions. The members issued a Call to Action on COVID Bonds to address the urgent need for billions of dollars for COVID response. This guide helps issuers link their use of proceeds to the SDGs quickly and easily. We held an extraordinary meeting on COVID-19 response and recovery and launched the GISD Navigator, which provides a structured overview of sustainable development finance initiatives.”

Leila Fourie: “And this year, we launched the SDG Investor Platform together with the UN Development Programme. The digital platform brings together capital providers and capital seekers for SDG-related investment projects. It merges economic, demographic, financial and project data into a comprehensive portal, helping both investors and project managers to identify opportunities in developing and frontier markets.”

As the world slowly recovers from COVID-19, has there been increased awareness or consideration of SDG-related investment criteria?

Oliver Bäte: “The market for sustainable finance is growing steadily, even more so in the past year. To date, global capital has clearly been steered toward net-zero emissions; we expect societal and other challenges to be added to investors’ priorities over time. The efforts of GISD and outreach campaigns by partners such as UN Global Compact and Principles for Responsible Investing have won over thousands of companies to gradually align their business practices with the SDGs.”

How is the GISD Alliance promoting the tools and platforms it is creating?

Leila Fourie: “In addition to our work on investment platforms, we are engaging with international policy making and standard setting bodies to bring our recommendations to the table. We are working with the G20 Sustainable Finance Working Group, COP 26 and G7, as well as engaging with the multilateral development banks on ways to scale up private investment for sustainable development. We have also directly engaged with the EU Commission on its Green Finance Roadmap.”

Can we expect any further outcomes this year?

Oliver Bäte: “Absolutely. We plan to officially launch a net-zero climate ETF in collaboration with UNCDF shortly after the Annual Meeting in October. This will be an exciting new product that will provide the opportunity to invest in efforts to combat climate change.”

Leila Fourie: “The Alliance will also introduce a set of SDG-related sector-specific metrics, a project that has involved consultations with standard-setters, industry associations, and businesses. The metrics will initially cover eight industries defined under MSCI’s Global Industry Classification Standard, providing investors with key insights to help them decide whether to invest.”

Oliver Bäte: “We’re also releasing a new model mandate in collaboration with the International Corporate Governance Network (ICGN). This new, updated document will seek to define the relationship between asset owners and asset managers with a view to advancing a long-term sustainable perspective. This will provide a foundation for making future investment decisions that are aligned with the SDGs.”

Learn more about the Global Investors for Sustainable Development (GISD) Alliance [here](#).



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



4 things you need to know about data for people and planet

As the world continues to recover from COVID-19, we need quality data more than ever to support the decisions we make to improve people’s lives. Understanding the

data that surrounds us is understanding how to use data to get back on track to achieve the global goals. Ahead of the UN World Data Forum this month, here are four things you need know about data:

1. Better data helps us recover better from COVID-19

The pandemic showed the world that data can mean the difference between life and death. Many countries struggled to deliver the real number of COVID-19 losses and the data needed to mitigate the impact and plan for the recovery. But these challenges also resulted in new ideas to fill the gap in data collection, including innovative methods such as online and telephone-based surveys, and the use of administrative data sources, credit card and scanner data.

2. Data protects the most vulnerable

The lack of data has a direct impact on people’s lives and can affect the progress of the most vulnerable. For instance, data gaps on children and their families can severely limit the ability of a country to ensure the delivery of the services they need. Only with data that shows areas at risk of for example high child mortality, can a government take measures to prevent deaths.

3. Better data supports good policies and effective governments

Data driven decision-making is critical to ensure that the outcomes meet the needs of the people. Good policies rely on quality data to determine the best solutions to some of our greatest challenges including climate change, poverty and inequalities. Quality data also helps us understand global trends and monitor progress.

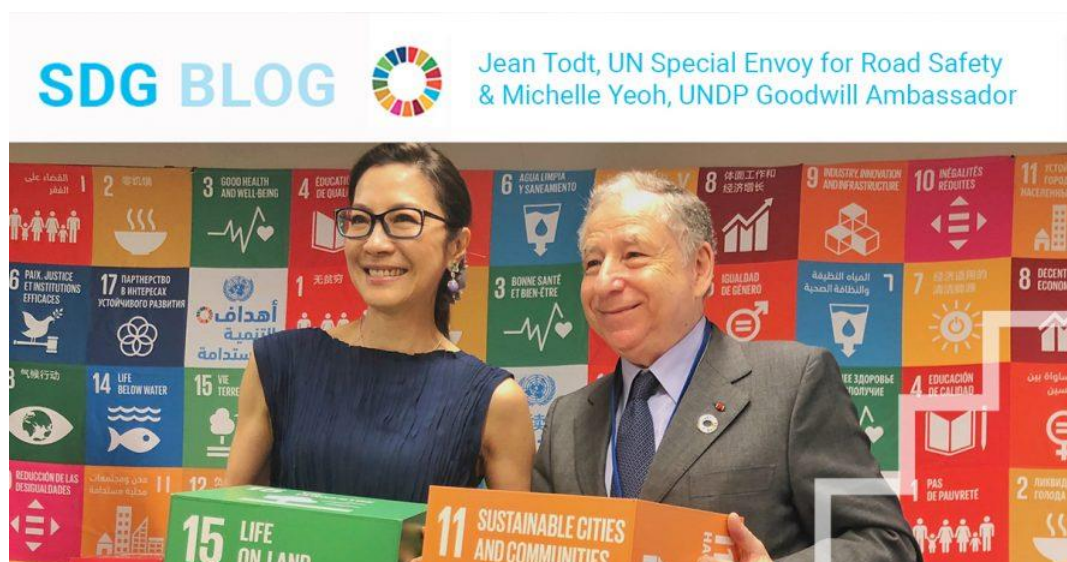
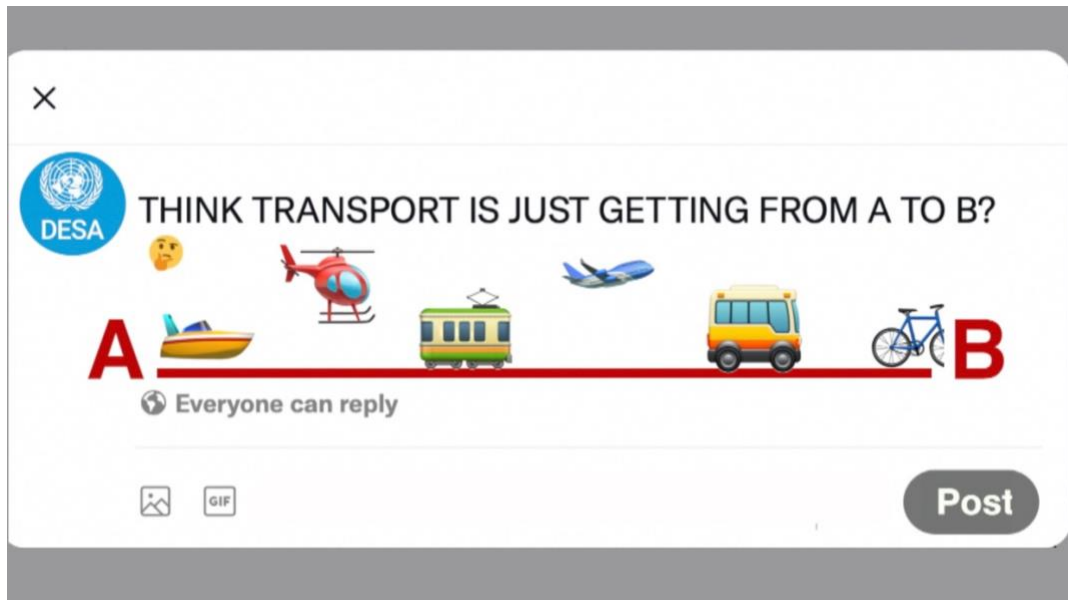
4. UN World Data Forum advances data for the SDGs

On 3-6 October, the UN World Data Forum will showcase progress made to implement the data revolution and the Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data. It will examine ways to improve data capabilities; to innovative methods and partnerships for new data solutions; review data privacy and security; and assess if the

data community has been able to improve data to leave no one behind. Bringing together hundreds of data experts, user and producers, the Forum will advance data to benefit people and planet.

Browse [this page](#) to learn more about the UN World Data Forum in Bern, Switzerland.

Photo: UNICEF/UN0390428/Vishwanathan



Moving the world in the right direction

By Jean Todt, UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Road Safety and Michelle Yeoh, UNDP Goodwill Ambassador and Actor share their aspirations for achieving sustainable transport globally

With the second [United Nations Sustainable Transport Conference](#) taking place in Beijing this month, we, as partners in life and mission, want to share our thoughts on sustainable transport's critical role in driving sustainable development, climate action and road safety.

Join us on a journey across six areas of transport that are essential to move the world in the right direction.

Combining sustainability and safety

Jean Todt: I believe that sustainability and safety are the two most important issues facing transportation globally; and fortunately, they contribute to each other. For example, with greater inspection and regulations on second-hand cars exported to Africa, we can ensure vehicles meet the minimum safety and environment standards. Another example are the roads themselves, managing the mixed traffic/mixed speed road environments, enabling swift communications systems following accidents and aligning road signs. Not only do these solutions improve road safety, but they also reduce global greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution and congestion. If we set the right policies and build the right infrastructure, we can move quicker, safer and greener.

Solving the inequalities of mobility

Michelle Yeoh: As the UN Development Programme Goodwill Ambassador, and someone from Asia, a region that faces many of these problems, and also as a woman, this resonates deeply with me. More than 90 per cent of the 1.35 million people who die annually in traffic crashes are in low- and middle-income countries, even though these countries have only around 60 per cent of the world's vehicles. In fact, while many parts of the world reap the benefits of great progress in road safety, fatalities in developing countries continue to rise. Road crashes are the leading killer of young people between the ages of 5 – 29. Each day, some 500 children die in road-related crashes, many as they simply go to school! But the inequalities are everywhere. Studies have shown that women feel more insecure and unsafe taking public transport. We need to work together to address these problems.

More financing to bring bigger returns

Jean Todt: I completely agree with you, Michelle, and not least of the problems in those countries involves financing. Whenever we speak of infrastructure, education and changing people's habits, we are also speaking of financing. Throughout my career in motorsport, I have been closely involved in both extensive and efficient financing. And I think that the reason why financing road safety and sustainability has faltered in the past is the failure to bring – or to demonstrate – a return on investment. However, we know that safety and sustainability do improve the prosperity and well-being of people across the board. Clean, safe cars driving on ordered, safe and congestion-free highways reduce both pollution and crashes that impose costs on a country's health system and workforce.

Safe and sustainable transport systems are important for all the SDGs

Michelle Yeoh: This is absolutely correct. We must invest in sustainable transport because it will pay off across all of the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite increasing efforts in recent years, the SDG target to stabilize and then halve road fatalities and injuries by 2020 was not met. Even worse, the world is not on track to meet the road safety targets even by 2030. In fact, road crashes jeopardize the whole sustainable development agenda, and as Jean said, they hurt developing countries economically, preventing vital investment in education, hospitals, access to water and sanitation, climate action and many other areas. Furthermore, well over half of the 17 SDGs can be served through a safe and sustainable mobility. For example, Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities; Goal 13: Climate action, Goal 15: Life on land, etc.

The UN Road Safety Fund, the upcoming High-Level Meeting on Road Safety in July 2022, and the Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety (2021-2030)

Jean Todt: Indeed Michelle. In 2018, I helped to create the UN Road Safety Fund as the first specific funding instrument of the United Nations for global road safety programmes. Each \$100 million generated by the fund could support the leveraging of \$3.4 billion of country and city road safety investment to save 64,000 lives and prevent 640,000 serious injuries. We need to create such instruments to achieve sustainable transport directly with dedicated systems. This Beijing conference, in fact, is a good time to prepare for the High-

level meeting on Road Safety in New York in July 2022, which will bring together officials of public and private sector to commit to our Global Plan for the Decade of Action for Road Safety (to be launched on 28 October) and ensure that this time around we do meet our road safety related SDG targets.

The benefit of thinking outside of the box

Michelle Yeoh: As an actress, I am often faced with huge personal challenges about how a character should react in a certain situation. Sometimes, that calls for thinking way outside of the box. The same is necessary when thinking about sustainable transport and road safety. Clearly, we need new solutions as the challenges grow. For instance, some of the work being done in Smart Cities initiatives where private industry is challenged to come up with innovative ways to create a better environment. In short, achieving sustainable transport must be the collective responsibility of all the actors and requires a big shift in transport solutions and mindsets.

** The views expressed in this blog are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of UN DESA.*



SDG 9 IN NUMBERS



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