VOICE
UN DESA

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This is how we can turbocharge the global goals

This month, government representatives, businesses, civil society organizations, young people and other international actors will gather for the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, taking place on 10-19 July 2023 at UN Headquarters in New York. They all come together with one purpose: to review and assess progress to achieve the global goals.

This year's Forum will be critical. Many goals are currently off track or even reversing in progress. But there is no need for despair. The time is now to turbocharge their implementation and the HLPF will provide a unique opportunity to make this happen in the lead up to the SDG Summit in September.

Bringing together close to 1000 participants, the Forum will feature 39 countries and the European Union presenting their plans for advancing the SDGs as part of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Goals 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, will be in focus. In addition, the Forum will feature 200 side events, 18 VNR labs and 12 special events.

At the opening day of the Forum on 10 July, The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023: Special Edition, will be launched at the noon press briefing and also presented at a special high-level event taking place that same day.

The report will present the latest data on how the world is fairing on the goals. It will also feature policy recommendations, revealed earlier in the UN Secretary-General's report "Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet." Here are the five main solutions to get the world back on track:

- Governments must strongly commit to **seven years of sustained action** to deliver on the promise of the SDGs.
- Governments must **create policies to leave to no one behind, end the war on nature, and protect the most vulnerable**.
- Governments must **strengthen their own public institutions**, building capacity and ensuring transparency and accountability.
- **The international community must invest in low- and middle-income countries to help them accelerate progress towards the goals**. The SDG Stimulus is a perfect tool for this.
- The world needs **to strengthen the UN development system to boost the capacity to tackle emerging challenges and create an enabling environment for the SDGs**.

We can still deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, but it will require a renewed sense of common purpose and a fundamental shift – in commitment, solidarity, financing and action.

As UN DESA's Under-Secretary-General Li Junhua said, "this is our chance to make a meaningful breakthrough and to deliver on our promise."

EXPERT VOICES

Seeking synergies: How can action on climate and the SDGs work together?

How can the world effectively address the climate emergency and the challenges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) simultaneously, in order to maximize their impact? We spoke with Luis Gomez Echeverri, co-lead of the Expert Group on Climate and SDG Synergies convened by UN DESA and UNFCCC secretariat in May 2023, to shed light on this question.

How does climate action relate to the SDGs?

“The relationship between climate action and the SDGs is absolutely critical. If we fail to address climate change, accomplishing all other SDGs will remain elusive. Climate change exerts a tremendous impact on marine and land ecosystems (SDGs 14 and 15), human health (SDG 3), food systems (SDG 2), water management (SDG 6), and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), among other aspects. Conversely, efforts to make our communities and the world more livable by achieving the SDGs must also consider how they can contribute to mitigating climate change. Strengthening evidence on climate change and the SDGs synergies and trade-offs can help raise ambitions and accelerate progress on these deeply interconnected agendas.”

Could you provide examples of actions that aim to harness these synergies?

“There are many inspiring examples of initiatives attempting to capitalize on these synergies. In China, for instance, efforts are being made to reduce the use of coal, which not only addresses air pollution and its detrimental impact on health but also contributes to meeting climate emissions targets. In Sweden, the greening of iron and steel production is not only reducing emissions but also generating jobs and fostering economic growth. In Colombia, the implementation of low emission buses in dedicated lanes has resulted in reduced travel times, costs, accidents, and emissions. In Rwanda, reforestation efforts support biodiversity conservation, climate action and provide rural communities with economic benefits like wood and fruit. The Expert Group on Climate and SDG Synergies is conducting further research on these synergies and will release a report this September, which will inform both the SDG Summit and the Climate Ambition Summit.”

How will the upcoming Fourth UN Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda contribute to progress in the right direction? What outcomes can we anticipate?

“By building upon the discussions and ideas shared during the Conference, we hope to highlight further evidence supporting the effectiveness of a synergistic approach. We seek to dismantle the institutional silos that currently separate climate action and sustainable development, despite their inherent interconnectedness. The Conference follows in the footsteps of three previous conferences, with the most recent one taking place in Tokyo in 2022. Together, these events have set the stage for breaking down the barriers between these areas of work and promoting collaboration for greater impact.

You can register for the Conference on 16 July by going to: https://shorturl.at/ikAL7

Participants can join in person at UN Headquarters in New York, or also online. “

5 things you should know about the SDG Stimulus to deliver the 2030 Agenda

Without sufficient financing, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will remain distant. Raising these resources has become even more urgent following successive global crises. Amid difficult economic and financial conditions, and without mitigating actions, further backsliding of the SDGs is highly likely. Commitment to the SDG Stimulus can jumpstart investment at scale to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Here are 5 things you need to know:

1. The SDGs are backsliding

The global economy is facing multiple shocks that are reversing progress on the SDGs. A "great finance divide" has sharply curtailed the ability of many developing countries to respond to shocks and to invest in sustainable development and climate action.

2. SDG Stimulus calls for $500 billion in additional SDG investments annually

The UN's SDG Stimulus Plan aims to offset the challenging market conditions that many developing countries face. It calls for scaling up financing and investment in the SDGs by at least $500 billion per year. It includes three areas for immediate action: tackle the high cost of debt and rising risks of debt distress; massively scale up affordable long-term financing; and expanding contingency financing to countries in need.

3. Tackling debt and the risk of debt distress

To tackle the high cost of debt and rising risks of debt distress, the SDG Stimulus calls on the G20 to develop an improved multilateral debt relief initiative that supports debt payment suspensions, debt exchanges, and/or debt reductions, with a clear mechanism to include private creditors. It asks donors to scale up debt for climate and SDG swaps, and for all creditors to include majority voting provisions in contracts and make greater use of risk-sharing debt instruments. The international community must also work towards structural solutions.

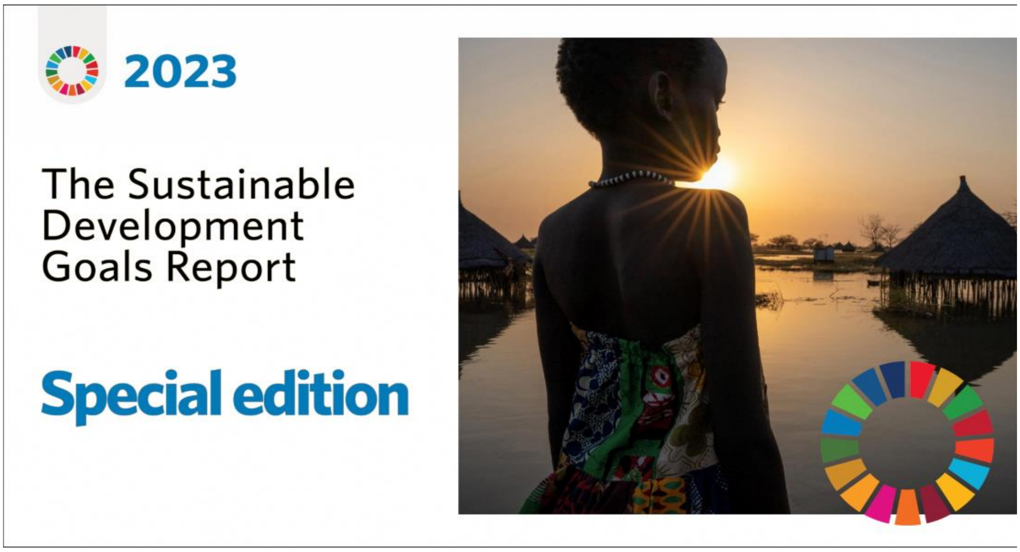
4. Scaling up affordable long-term financing

The SDG Stimulus calls for a massive boost in investment in developing countries. Public development banks, including multilateral development banks (MDBs), are uniquely positioned to accelerate this investment. MDBs can raise lending to $500 billion per year through a variety of measures. MDBs and their shareholders should sizably increase MDB capital bases; more efficiently use their balance sheets; and re-channel SDRs through MDBs. MDBs should also improve lending terms, including through longer terms, lower interest rates, use of state-contingent clauses, and increased lending in local currencies.

5. Expanding contingency financing

To address countries' liquidity needs, the SDG Stimulus calls on the international community to significantly expand contingency financing. Countries with unused Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) should re-channel unused SDRs, including through MDBs or a new trust to finance climate mitigation projects in developing countries. As shocks become more frequent and interconnected, IFI shareholders should explore new quick-disbursing financing instruments, increase access limits to emergency lending windows, and more automatic issuance of SDRs.

For more information: SDG Stimulus



SDG BLOG

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Recommitting to finance the Sustainable Development Goals

By the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

This article was first published by IISD SDG Knowledge Hub as part of a special guest article series, a collaboration between UN DESA and IISD.

The recently released 'Report of the Secretary-General on Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals' reminds us that it will take exceptional efforts and commitments to deliver a "rescue plan for people and planet." At a time when many countries are grappling with climate change related disasters and conflict, recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the inflation and cost of living crises, we must accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

This requires a two-pronged approach. The first is to secure a surge in SDG financing. The second is to reform the international financial architecture to make it resilient, equitable, and accessible for all. The existing architecture, designed by industrialized countries in the post-war period, has not kept pace with the ambition of the SDGs. Its structural inequities and inefficiencies stand in the way of international goals and objectives and have resulted in inadequate responses to a variety of crises. World leaders recently met in Paris to try to reorient the international financial architecture towards climate finance and finance for sustainable development.

The SDG Stimulus

To enable developing countries to deliver on the SDGs, the Secretary-General has called for an SDG Stimulus: an additional USD 500 billion per year to be delivered through a combination of concessional and non-concessional finance. The plan calls for the international community to significantly scale up funding for global public goods, and for countries to align all forms of finance with the SDGs, including by utilizing Integrated National Financing Frameworks (INFFs).

Public development banks and multilateral development banks (MDBs) need to update their business models to ensure their lending has the greatest possible sustainable development impact, and their financial instruments reflect today's vulnerabilities, such as from climate disasters. Approaches that are making an impact, including debt for sustainability swaps, should be scaled up.

Many developing countries, especially small island developing States (SIDS), still face significant obstacles in accessing critically needed climate financing. In emergency situations, when they most need funds, they end up falling even deeper in debt that they can scarcely afford. The climate funds under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement on climate change, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), must be fully capitalized and better coordinated. The Loss and Damage Fund should be able to provide financing that is automatically triggered by climate change-related events, such as heat waves or storms, and helps build resilience.

Reforming the international financial architecture

The international financial architecture must also be reformed to better support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. As a starting point, this means delivering on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) and other relevant international frameworks.

Developing countries need to invest in the SDGs but face unreasonably high borrowing costs in financial markets. Many governments spend most public revenues servicing debt payments, at the expense of investments in health, education, climate adaptation, and social protection. But debt markets can be reoriented to support SDG financing. This could be through more transparent debt sustainability analysis and credit ratings, distinguishing between liquidity crises and solvency crises, and improving debt contracts by incorporating state contingent clauses that automate debt relief when countries face disasters.

Concurrent global shocks, high interest rates, and a strong US dollar have pushed many countries to the edge, and 40% of developing countries face severe debt problems. While they account for 2.5% of the global economy, they are home to 15% of the world's population and 40% of those living in extreme poverty globally. To have a chance to turn things around for the SDGs, mechanisms for fair and effective resolution of debt crises, as called for in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, need to be in place.

Multilateral development banks must adapt to better support the SDGs. This means greater representation for developing countries in their governance structures, massively increasing development lending, and improving the terms of lending. It also means phasing out fossil fuel financing and substantially increasing the quality and quantity of finance for climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilient infrastructure in developing countries.

The international financial architecture also sets the tone for global private finance. With a conducive regulatory and operating environment, it could "crowd in" private sector financing for the SDGs without saddling governments with even more debt. But this will need de-risking mechanisms, guarantees, and transparency around key risk markers. Urgent action is also needed to prevent tax evasion and avoidance, address illicit financial flows, bolster national fiscal capacities to strengthen domestic resource mobilization, and boost international tax cooperation. Globally agreed concepts and tested methods now exist and can be used by all countries to curb illicit finance. Combined, all these steps can help realign incentives for both public and private actors to deliver on the SDGs.

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This article is the fourth in a five-part series by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), published in partnership with IISD. Focusing on the SDG Progress Report special edition themed, 'Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet,' the series puts forth areas of collective action necessary to turn things around so we can deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

ALL SDGs IN NUMBERS

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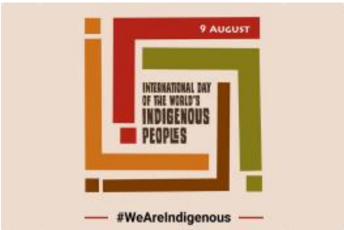

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