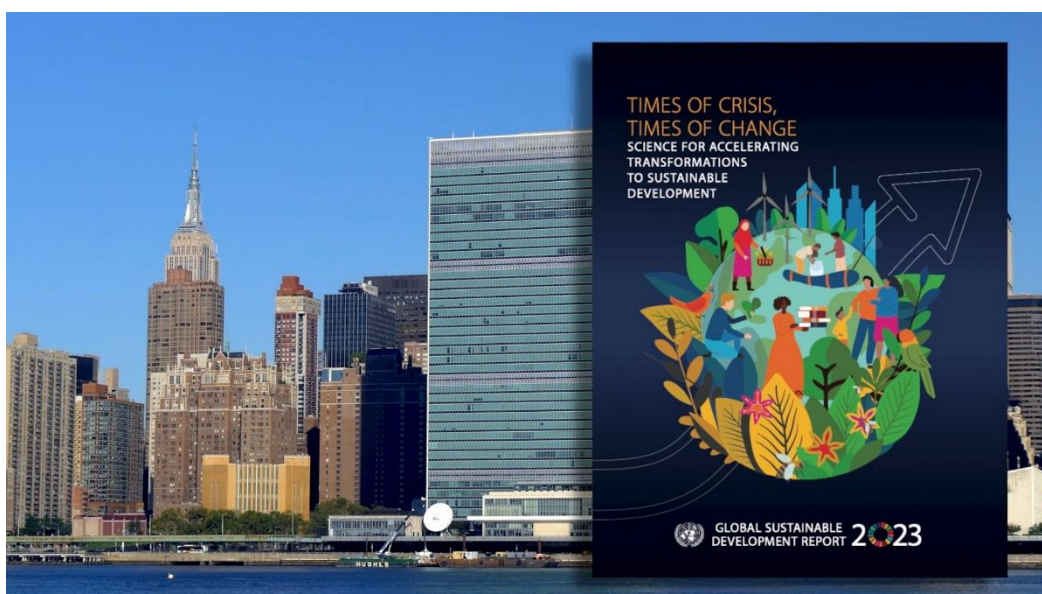


VOICE

— UN DESA —

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER, VOL. 27 – OCTOBER 2023



Whole-of-society transformation pivotal to SDGs acceleration, say scientists in new UN report

A recent United Nations report by an independent group of scientists calls for transformational shifts rooted in science that would urgently reverse course and turbocharge the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on the latest data and scientific insights, the [Global Sustainable Development Report 2023](#), entitled “Times of crisis, times of change: Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development,” offers practical solutions to accelerate SDG implementation.

The report, written by 15 academics and scientists appointed by the UN Secretary-General, is the result of four years of research and global consultations. It provides policymakers with a concrete pathway for approaching the achievement of the SDGs at the “halftime” of the 2030 Agenda, making clear that incremental and fragmented change is insufficient to achieve all 17 goals in the remaining seven years, or even by 2050. Instead, strategic,

whole-of-society transformations that leave no country, society or person behind are needed.

“The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report helps to shine new light on transformative processes and practices that can help move the world from commitment to action, and from declaration to delivery,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

The report, mandated by the UN General Assembly, served as a major input to the [SDG Summit](#) held in September.

Speaking at the Summit, GSDR Co-chair Imme Scholz, Co-president of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, said: “Transformations as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda are possible, if guided by bold, ambitious and coherent actions by all stakeholders, governments at all levels, citizens, civil society and the private sector.”

Other authors of the report participated in the [SDG Media Zone](#) and the UN DESA Global Policy Dialogue on “[Time for Transformation](#)” on the margins of the UN General Assembly High-level Week, each noting that science must play a major role in advancing sustainable development.

Overall, the report calls on universities, policymakers and research funders to increase support to research guided by the 2030 Agenda, especially in the Global South. To be meaningful, science needs to be transparent, inclusive, and transdisciplinary – produced in diverse contexts by heterogeneous and multidisciplinary groups engaging all possible actors, including youth.

“One of the things we have learned is that when we are designing programmes or interventions, we do need to have different disciplines, groups of people in that space designing,” said one of the GSDR authors, Nyovani Madise, Director of Development Policy and Head of the Malawi office of the African Institute for Development Policy, in the SDG Media Zone.

An interconnected and systemic approach will be key

The report shows new evidence that understanding the interconnections between individual goals will be essential. Decision-makers must devise policies that manage difficult trade-offs and avoid international spillovers—for example, rising carbon emissions in one country due to the production of goods consumed in another.

The scientists have found that there are more synergies than trade-offs between the SDGs, especially when investments are made in poverty reduction, health, education, gender equality, water and sanitation, clean energy and partnerships.

For example, there is evidence that investments in photovoltaics not only directly support access to affordable and clean energy (SDG 7), they also indirectly support progress on education (SDG 4) by enabling students to spend more time on their studies with access to better quality light while reducing indoor air pollution.

Promising interventions for transformations need to be accelerated and stabilized

The report provides detailed guidance on how different societal actors can shape transformations for sustainable development and actively accelerate progress, noting that interventions in certain areas – such as sustainable food systems, human well-being or energy decarbonisation with universal access – can have systemic effects.

The scientists advise policymakers to target such entry points, applying levers like governance, science and technology, business and finance, individual and collective action, and capacity-building toward transformation.



EXPERT VOICES



With concerted, ambitious action, we can reduce poverty drastically by 2030

Around the world, some 670 million people live in extreme poverty. Unless progress picks up pace, the international community is nowhere near ending this plight before 2030. Ahead of the

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October, UN DESA's Hantamalala Rafalimanana describes the dire situation and what it takes to end poverty once and for all.

Can you provide information on the current state of poverty worldwide?

"The progress in poverty reduction made by the world before 2020 was reversed by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The slow and uneven recovery from the pandemic, compounded with the effects of the war in Ukraine, is such that poverty remains high at the world level. In 2022, 8.4 per cent of the world's population – as many as 670 million people – were estimated to still be living in extreme poverty.

Poverty is and will continue to be concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. While most of the world's regions are expected to eradicate poverty by 2030, sub-Saharan Africa will probably still have 30 per cent of its population living in extreme poverty in 2030.

The world is not on track to end poverty by 2030. If current trends continue, 7 per cent of the world's population – roughly 574 million people – will still live in extreme poverty in 2030. However, with ambitious and concerted action towards the most vulnerable, we can reduce poverty drastically by lifting 124 additional million people out of extreme poverty by 2030.

Let us be reminded that poverty is not simply about not having enough money. It is also the condition of struggling to fulfill the most basic needs like food, education, health, water and sanitation, decent work and housing, to name a few. The multidimensional poverty index, which takes these different dimensions into account, shows that even more people live in multidimensional poverty than in monetary poverty – 1.1 billion people, or 18 per cent of the population, in 2023."

The 2023 SDG Summit recently concluded, with world leaders agreeing to increase their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). What does the political declaration say about accelerating actions to end poverty? Have any international actors made new commitments to ending poverty?

"The decisive, action-oriented Political Declaration adopted at the SDG Summit emphasized that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

World leaders were conscious that without an immediate course correction and acceleration of progress toward achieving the SDGs, our world is destined to face continued poverty, prolonged periods of crisis and growing uncertainty. To this end, the Declaration focuses on the means of implementation, and in particular, on financing for development.

World leaders agreed to take immediate action to unlock more and better financing for developing countries, including by ensuring significant mobilization of resources from a variety of sources to finance sustainable development, and strengthening the capacity to mobilize domestic resources and private sector investment to provide adequate and predictable means for developing countries, in particular least developed countries.

The Declaration also urges immediate action to deliver the SDG Stimulus, launched earlier this year by the UN Secretary-General, which calls for a massive increase in financing for the achievement of the SDGs to the tune of \$500 billion each year, primarily by scaling up affordable long-term financing by the multilateral development banks.

Finally, the Declaration conveys strong support from all countries for a much-needed reform of the international financial architecture to better reflect today's global economy and benefit developing countries better."

We will be observing the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October . Can you tell us about this year's commemoration event and how it will bring attention to the urgent issues faced by people living in poverty?

"People living in extreme poverty are often exploited in the labour market. Most of them work in the informal economy where they are underpaid and face difficult and dangerous conditions without any protection.

For people experiencing persistent poverty, the lack of decent working conditions and adequate social protection creates insecurity. This denies them the ability to take charge of their lives and exposes them to exploitation, humiliation and feelings of futility preventing them from participating fully in their communities. They are denied a life in dignity.

This year's International Day for the Eradication of Poverty will highlight in practice the intimately linked roles played by "decent work" and "social protection" in eradicating poverty. It will show how we can fulfill the promise of the right to work and a life of dignity enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to end poverty in all its forms everywhere."

For more information: [International Day for the Eradication of Poverty](#)





8 topics that will bring us closer to the Internet we want

Surfing the Internet for work, school or to get the latest news. Today, more and more people have access to the world wide web. How can we further improve connectivity and create an online space which empowers people? This is the mission of [the Internet Governance Forum \(IGF\)](#) taking place from 8 to 12 October. Here are the 8 main topics on IGF's agenda:

1. AI & Emerging Technologies: AI is fast-moving but we have been living with it for longer than we think

While the rise of generative AI in early 2023 was dizzying, AI has long been integral to our digital experience and is responsible for everything from sorting our inboxes to giving us shopping recommendations.

2. Avoiding Internet Fragmentation: Internet fragmentation can mean different things and have several causes

'Internet fragmentation' makes us think of 'walled gardens' and 'firewalls', but a wide range of political, economic, and technical factors can drive fragmentation.

3. Cybersecurity, Cybercrime & Online Safety: Cybersecurity isn't just an issue for collective or individual security, it's important for sustainable development

Standards that enable cybersecurity are essential for an open, secure and resilient Internet that supports sustainable development. Cybercrime affects all countries and costs are steep.

4. Data Governance & Trust: We've all heard of data privacy, but what about 'data poverty'?

The populations of least developed countries often don't have access to the data sets needed for development.

5. Digital Divides & Inclusion: There are multiple digital divides and they aren't linked to coverage

With just 5% of the world out of reach of a mobile broadband signal, lack of connectivity is due to 'usage' not 'coverage'. Digital divides along income, gender, generational and educational lines persist.

6. Global Digital Governance & Cooperation: Key opportunities are around the corner

The Secretary-General is proposing a 'Global Digital Compact' as part of the Summit of the Future in 2024; in 2025, governments will review the results of the UN World Summit on the Information Society.

7. Human Rights & Freedoms: Rights to education and health can be transformed by technology

The global pandemic showed that expanded resources for digital education and telehealth can help fill existing gaps. Attention is needed to ensure that human rights are respected online as well as offline.

8. Sustainability & Environment: Both risks and possible benefits for the environment and climate urgently need to be addressed

Extraction of resources critical for digitalisation is associated with about 90% of total biodiversity loss and water stress. However, advanced digital technologies have the potential for mitigating climate risk.

The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) is taking place from 8 to 12 October 2023 in Kyoto, Japan under the theme "The Internet We Want – Empowering All People". The event is accessible to all [onsite](#), [online](#) and [via livestream](#).

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Using the GSDR to guide a credible and effective second half of the 2030 Agenda

By Åsa Persson, Research Director and Deputy Director of Stockholm Environment Institute and member of the Independent Group of Scientists that prepared the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report

Transformation is possible, and inevitable.

This was the key message of the [2023 Global Sustainable Development Report \(GSDR\)](#) that we in the Independent Group of Scientists presented to Member States gathering at the United Nations for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Summit in New York last month. Did it resonate? It remains to be seen. World leaders did agree to take transformative action in the [SDG Summit political declaration](#) – “We commit to bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative actions, anchored in international solidarity and effective cooperation at all levels” – but, as with any international summit, words must be put into action. And that only happens after summits – in government budget negotiations on fuel tax rates, in corporate board rooms adopting supply chain sustainability standards, in city halls deciding to invest in girls’ education programmes, in community meetings consulting on sanitation facilities, and so on.

As scientists, we landed on this simple, yet complex key message after careful review of evidence, substantial discussion in our group and many consultations with diverse stakeholders. Numerous scientific synthesis reports over the last decade have concluded that transformation is needed to adequately respond to the sustainability challenges we now face. For this report, we sought to advance the synthesis: Is transformation not only needed, but can we also say it is possible?

From scientific evidence and historical examples, we now know that large-scale transformations can be actively triggered and shaped, and we have a good idea which tools and levers can be used at what stage of the process. At the same time, evidence also suggests that change is inevitable – whether it relates to the near-term climate change impacts we unfortunately can anticipate with current emission trends or to benefitting from the global renewables race. The key question is really whether societies are passively transforming, likely away from the SDGs, or are they actively managing their own transformation pathways, moving closer to the SDGs?

To help countries move towards this second option, the GSDR provides concrete advice on how they can be proactive about these transformation pathways. First, in the report, we document what shifts and interventions are required to transform our energy and food systems, ensure human well-being, and so on. Through science and policy experience, we have a good idea what they are, for example, carbon pricing, universal

health coverage, increased investment in agricultural R&D. However, some management of expectations is needed here. Our group of 15 scholars has no magical quick fix or any simple game-changing intervention to offer. Reforms of this kind instead require structured, persistent analytical work, the building of broad coalitions and the design of robust policy mixes, to ensure a supportive political economy and to avoid backlash.

Second, our report identifies distinct capacities for steering transformations. Governments, institutions and networks need to upskill on strategic planning: What sequencing and mixes of interventions are needed, to scale and accelerate action and to overcome foreseeable impediments? Enhanced foresight can help us think beyond immediate challenges. In a changing world, how can decision-makers effectively pool intelligence and think beyond the term in office and beyond 2030? Another key capacity of likely growing demand is to constructively negotiate and resolve goal conflicts. New methods for public engagement, developed in research and policy practice, are available.

Third, the wide scope of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs required the GSDR to engage with a corresponding breadth of science. It was particularly encouraging to see how the SDG framework has inspired new distinct research fields that have developed fast. Reviewing the scientific literature on SDG interlinkages, we could establish that there appear to be more synergies than trade-offs between the goals. Moreover, there are several [practical tools](#) available for Member States and other actors to use themselves or in partnership with researchers to identify and quantify positive and negative interlinkages, in order to manage them. Another emerging research field relates to the international spillovers from SDG action.

Overall, it was an absolute privilege to be part of the Independent Group of Scientists and develop the GSDR in consultation with so many experts, stakeholders, and peer reviewers. It is rare for us scientists to have such a direct communication channel to the UN General Assembly and it will be even more exciting to contribute to regional and national dissemination of the report, to work with others as we inspire action, road-test and learn.

As much as we need to cherish the unparalleled uniting force and common language that the SDGs uniquely offer in a fragmented world, I believe we also need to approach the second half of the 2030 Agenda in a clear-eyed, honest and credible way. This means drilling deep into why we are off-track on specific targets, before jumping to solutions. This means being honest with people about trade-offs and goal conflicts – many of which are short-term, rather than long-term – and involve them in the resolution. And this means evolving from static snapshots of SDG progress and action in our reporting practices, to be more thoughtful of the [temporal perspective](#): What kind of society do we want, by when, and how can the SDG framework help us get there? Let's aim high. After all, like Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible until it's done."

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



SDG 7 IN NUMBERS



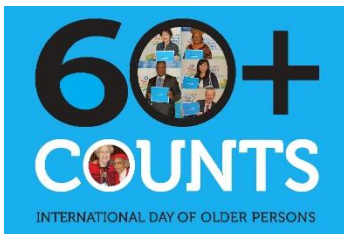
675 MILLION PEOPLE
STILL **LIVE IN THE DARK,**
WITH
4 OUT OF 5
LIVING IN **SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**



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