



No trade-off between economic growth and environmental protection

Responding to the challenges facing the global economy; ensuring enough financial means to fund the Sustainable Development Goals; exploring the digital economy and other frontier issues of sustainable development; and a moment of epiphany. The topics were many as cameras were rolling for the first UN DESA Voice interview with the UN's Chief Economist Elliott Harris in a sun-drenched Rose Garden at UN Headquarters.

UN DESA's new Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development, Elliott Harris, is a veteran when it comes to the international economy and sustainable development. His extensive portfolio spanning 25 years, also reveals a focus on macroeconomic policies, which align well with the three pillars that make up the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Since Mr. Harris took office on 2 April 2018, his schedule has been quite busy with many back-to-back events organized by UN DESA. One of these events featured the launch of the midyear update of one of the department's flagship reports, the World Economic Situation and Prospects (WESP).

Economy is growing, but so are the risks

Given Mr. Harris' position as the very first UN Chief Economist, our team took the opportunity to discuss some of the latest economic trends, the risks presented in the WESP and how to avoid them. "I think it's less a question of avoiding these risks, than it is a question of recognizing them and dealing with them," Mr. Harris said.

“If we take the question of rising carbon dioxide emissions, we know that in part, that is due to the fact that the overall economy is doing better,” he explained. “It [the economy] is performing even more robustly than we had anticipated six months ago. It draws our attention to the fact that we need to spend more time decoupling economic growth from carbon emissions.”

When asked the rather provoking question, if it is possible to grow the economy without harming the environment, Mr. Harris responded swiftly and reassuringly: “Absolutely. We do have a lot of solutions that are potentially there that could be deployed through the right kind of investments,” he explained.

But it is not only the environment that we have to consider when the economy is growing, underlined Mr. Harris. We also have to ensure that the gains we make are distributed equally.

“The economic prosperity that we have managed to generate has not been evenly shared,” he said. “We have seen the widening of inequalities at the national level, within countries, and between countries. And clearly that is just as unsustainable as environmental degradation is.”

“Private financing will make or break the sustainable development agenda”

Recently, the ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum in New York examined international efforts to fund the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“I think there has been good progress, but its not enough. We see for example that the official development assistance has strengthened, but official development assistance is really small, by comparison to the requirements or the investments that we need,” said Mr. Harris.

He explained that there is progress when it comes to strengthening domestic resource mobilization, as well as an acceptance among UN Member States that we need to collaborate on tax matters to avoid tax evasion and elicit financial flows, and instead direct these resources where they are needed.

“On the private side, and here I have to emphasize, it is private financing that will make or break the sustainable development agenda, we see very positive signs,” Mr. Harris said. “We see that on the one hand, the private financial industry is paying attention to the fact that unsustainable practices are also not good for their business.”

“We also see a lot of understanding that the sustainable development agenda presents a lot of very large, very profitable opportunities,” Mr. Harris said, noting that sustainable development is starting to become a part of business models. “It is exactly what we need to see happening!”

However, we’re not quite there yet, cautioned Mr. Harris. “It is still unfortunately possible to make profits doing things that are not sustainable. That has to change,” he said.

The next frontiers of sustainable development

UN DESA is leading the preparations for the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July, where our global efforts to achieve the SDGs will be evaluated.

“There is progress being made, but we need to step up the pace of that progress, and we need to try to make it as uniform as we can across the entire sustainable development agenda, because we can’t succeed if we only succeed in certain areas,” Mr. Harris said, commenting on these joint endeavors.

We also discussed the department's research on the frontiers of sustainable development and on issues which has the potential to reshape our future.

Digitalization of the economy and solving the transportation challenge for an urbanized future, were some of the issues that Mr. Harris anticipated for UN DESA to examine closer.

“Environmental protection must be part of any economic planning”

As our interview was about to wrap up, Mr. Harris shared his personal story of how his awareness and interest in the environment began back in the 1980s, as he was studying in Germany. At that time, there was a growing public concern about the prevalence of acid rain, decimating forest areas in the country.

Many years later, during the financial crisis in 2008-2009, when Mr. Harris was working for the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he joined an event hosted by the UN Environment Programme, which focused on the macroeconomic chapter of the green economy report. This led to a moment of epiphany.

“For the first time, it became clear to me how one could have economic prosperity without damaging the environment in the process,” Mr. Harris said, describing this moment as the one that sparked his professional interest in environmental work.

“It was that recognition that it's not a trade-off between good economic performance and environmental protection,” he said. “Environmental protection can and must be part of any economic planning.”

For more information:

Biography of Elliott Harris on UN DESA's website
World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2018
High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development



Science and technology – engines to spur action for the Sustainable Development Goals

The power of science, technology and innovation to improve the lives of people and to help protect the planet is evident. But in order to drive progress towards the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its vision of leaving no one behind, innovative

solutions will need to be pro-poor, equitable, and scalable. How can the potential of innovation be unlocked for the benefit of all?

With this question in mind, the annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum) will convene a diverse range of innovators, researchers and policy makers in New York on 5 and 6 June to explore advances in science and technology that can help achieve sustainable development that leaves no one behind. Participants at the Forum will discuss how to disseminate and share such solutions.

10 young innovators from around the world, selected from more than 300 applicants, will present their cutting-edge solutions at a dedicated exhibition of Innovative Technology Solutions for the SDGs in the UN Visitor's Centre in New York on 5 and 6 June.

As a global mechanism that serves both developed and developing countries, the STI Forum allows pragmatic, in-depth discussions of technology issues. It aims to improve coherence of science, technology and innovation support and capacity building across the UN system and beyond.

Convened by the President of the Economic and Social Council, the Forum's conclusions will serve as input to the meeting of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development 2018. Its theme will be "Science, Technology and Innovation for sustainable and resilient societies" and, as the HLPF, it will focus on SDG 6 on water and sanitation, SDG 7 on sustainable energy, SDG 11 on sustainable cities, SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns, and SDG 15 on terrestrial ecosystems.

Two special events will be organized before and after the Forum itself: The Global Solutions Summit (GSS) 2018: "From Lab to the Last Mile: Technology Deployment Business Models for the SDGs" on 4 June, and a Special G-STIC (Global Science Technology and Innovation Conference) event "Accelerating technological transition towards the SDGs" on 7 June.

Photo by Thomas Griesbeck on Unsplash

For more information:

Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals (STI Forum)



Living life in the city: UN DESA announces latest urbanization trends

In today's increasingly global and interconnected world, more and more people decide to live their lives in cities. In 2018, 55 per cent of the world's population is residing in urban areas and by 2050, 68 per cent is projected to be urban. In the coming decades, further increases are expected both in the size of the world's urban population and in its share of the total.

The widespread growth of urban areas described in the 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects, launched by UN DESA's Population Division on 16 May 2018, highlights the importance of building sustainable cities, where growth is planned and well managed.

This latest revision includes updated information on the size of the urban and rural populations of 233 countries or areas from 1950 to 2018, with projections to 2050. In addition, it presents the trend in population size for close to 1,900 urban settlements having 300,000 inhabitants or more in 2018.

In 2018, close to half of the world's urban dwellers reside in settlements with fewer than half a million inhabitants, while around one in eight live in 33 megacities with more than 10 million inhabitants each. By 2030, the world is projected to have 43 such megacities, most of them in developing regions. Some of the fastest-growing urban areas are cities in Asia or Africa with fewer than one million inhabitants.

Tokyo, currently the world's largest city, is part of an urban agglomeration with 37 million inhabitants. Next in size is Delhi with 29 million, then Shanghai with 26 million, and São Paulo and Mexico City, each with around 22 million inhabitants. Cairo, Mumbai, Beijing and Dhaka today have close to 20 million inhabitants each. By 2020, Tokyo's population is projected to begin to decline, while Delhi is projected to continue growing and to become the most populous city in the world around 2028.

In the coming decades, many countries will face challenges in meeting the needs of their growing urban populations, including for housing, transportation, energy systems and other infrastructure, as well as for employment and basic services such as education and health care. Integrated policies to improve the lives of both urban and rural dwellers are needed, strengthening the linkages between urban and rural areas and building on their existing economic, social and environmental ties.



Although most cities are growing, some have experienced population decline in recent years. Most of these are in the low-fertility countries of Asia and Europe, where the overall population size is stagnant or declining. Economic contraction and natural disasters have contributed to population losses in some cities as well.

Understanding the diversity of trends affecting urban and rural populations and the implications of those trends for urban and rural development will be essential for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For more information: 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects

GET INVOLVED



How can you help persons with disabilities assert their rights?

More than one billion people, or 15 per cent of the world's entire population, live with some kind of disability. Despite forming such a large part of our societies, people with disabilities continue to face discrimination, barriers to inclusion and even denial of their basic human rights.

In 2006, the world's countries recognized that the situation of people with disabilities was so precarious, it called for a stand-alone international agreement to guarantee their rights are respected everywhere and by everyone. That document – the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities – came into force almost exactly ten years ago, but despite the significant progress it helped to trigger, discrimination, exclusion and rights violations are still a familiar reality for too many persons with disabilities.

Between 12 and 14 June, countries will come together once again to discuss how implementing the disability convention fully can help achieve the ambition of leaving no one behind. This, the 11th Conference of States Parties to the Convention, will be held at the UN Headquarters in New York.

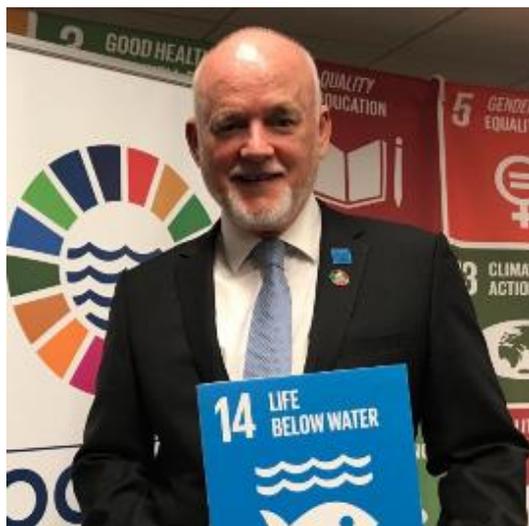
Even if you cannot participate in this meeting in person, it does not mean there is nothing you can do. Wherever you are, you have the power to help persons with disabilities assert their human rights and realize their full potential. Here are just some ways you can take action:

- If your country has not already done so, advocate for your country to ratify the convention and its optional protocol, which allows individuals to petition an international expert body with grievances. Check what your country's status is [here](#).
- Support full implementation of the convention in your country – through organizing public discussions on the rights of persons with disabilities, engaging local government officials, mayors and community leaders, launching awareness-raising campaigns and highlighting the important contributions of persons with disabilities to society.
- Join or support an NGO accredited to the Conference of State Parties of the disability convention. You can find the full list [here](#). If you are already a member of an NGO, you can [apply for consultative status](#) for your organization.

- Follow [@UN_Enable](#) on Twitter and spread the word on social media and through your networks of friends, schoolmates or acquaintances. Every voice matters!
- Support persons with disabilities in your daily life: Whether you're a teacher or a student helping through tutoring, an employer offering a post, a volunteer at a non-profit or simply a friend to a person with disabilities, you are part of the solution.

For more information: 11th session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD

EXPERT VOICES



The Ocean Conference one year on – are we keeping our promise?

Interview with UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for the Ocean

Almost exactly one year ago, countries gathered at the first-ever Ocean Conference, unanimously committed to a set of ambitious measures to start reversing the decline of our ocean's health. The conference also attracted over 1,400 voluntary commitments of ocean action by states, international organizations, civil society and others.

"In most probability this conference represents the best opportunity we will ever have to reverse the cycle of decline that human activity has brought upon the ocean," said Peter Thomson, then President of the UN General Assembly. One year on, we talk to Mr. Thomson, now the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy for the Ocean, about the legacy of the Ocean Conference – have we grasped its opportunity and fulfilled its promise?

How does a healthy ocean contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

"A healthy ocean is vital to the achievement of sustainable development, as demonstrated by the close interlinkages between SDG 14 – the ocean goal, and the other SDGs.

The ocean currently provides livelihoods for hundreds of millions of people and through the sustainable blue economy will create many new job fields in the future. One billion people depend on seafood for sustenance and all of us can thank the ocean for every second breath we take.

The ocean is an integral part of the planet's climate and serves as a massive carbon sink, with a quarter of the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere being absorbed by the ocean. A healthy ocean equals a healthy planet equals healthy people."

Since the landmark Ocean Conference last year, you have been following up on its outcomes. Could you share some success stories inspired by the Conference?

“Perhaps the greatest success of the Ocean Conference was the raising of global consciousness on the need for universal remedial action to halt the decline of ocean health. Over the last year, we have witnessed ocean action measures taking hold around the globe, from governments to local communities, from G7 to the Commonwealth, from IMO [International Maritime Organization] to the UN itself, a massive wave of ocean action is underway.

The Conference attracted across-the-board participation, resulting in a strong, consensual call to action, new partnerships, and the registration of over 1,400 voluntary commitments in support of SDG 14 implementation. I’m happy to report that good progress is being seen in the delivery of these commitments.

A good example of a voluntary commitment achieved is one on “Coastal Risk Resilience and Insurance”. In March this year, The Nature Conservancy and the Government of Quintana Roo announced the creation of the “Coastal Zone Management Trust,” for the Mesoamerican Reef along Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula. It will promote conservation of coastal areas in the Mexican Caribbean and will finance what will become the first-ever parametric insurance policy for a coral reef.”

The UN has launched nine Communities of Ocean Action. Can you share with us some examples of concrete actions these Communities are taking to protect the Ocean?

“The Communities of Ocean Action were created to help drive forward the voluntary commitments. They are grouped into areas of common interest: ocean science, coastal ecosystems, fisheries, sustainable blue economy and so on. They allow members to share best practices, identify synergies and build partnerships and networks for mutual advancement.

The Communities’ focal points have begun the assessment of existing voluntary commitments to identify gaps and enhance their Community’s contribution to achievement of the SDG 14 targets.

The Communities are collaborating with other important Ocean-related initiatives, including the Friends of Ocean Action, and initiatives arising from the recently adopted Commonwealth Blue Charter.”

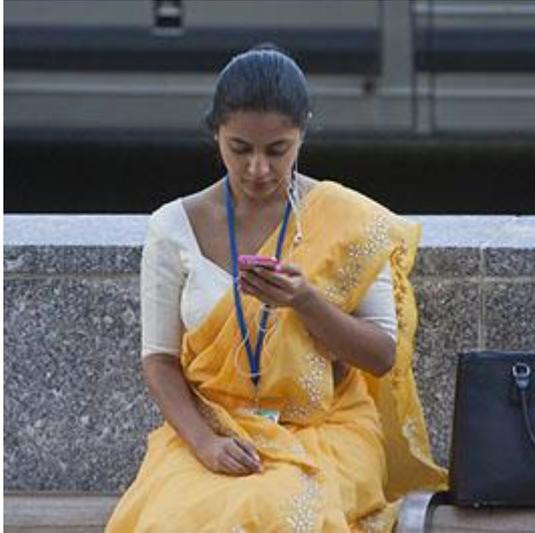
The Ocean Conference urged everyone to work together to save the ocean. What can we do in our everyday lives to support a healthier ocean?

“From ocean acidification to declining fish-stocks, from marine pollution to deoxygenation, the ocean is in trouble and needs our help. Everyone has the opportunity and responsibility to be part of the necessary solutions.

As consumers, we must insist that the fish we consume has been legally and sustainably caught. We can move away from single-use plastic and reward producers and retailers who provide us with environmentally responsible products. As citizens, we can support leaders who are working to put in place the right measures to safeguard the ocean for the benefit of our children and those who come after them.”

For more information:

Communities of Ocean Action
Sustainable Development Goal 14
The Ocean Conference



How to tax a cloud? Experts discuss taxation in a digitized economy

With the advancement of information technologies, such as cloud computing and blockchain, an increasing portion of the global economic activity is moving online. Along with immense opportunities, the digital economy also brings serious challenges, including to tax systems, which may particularly affect the developing countries. How to tax digital activities conducted by businesses located in different countries? Who should collect the taxes for income generated by online products and services? A recent UN meeting of tax experts considered these and other issues.

The UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) special meeting on international cooperation in tax matters, held on 18 May 2018, discussed how international tax cooperation can help countries mobilize more domestic resources for sustainable development. It also considered what institutional arrangements are needed to promote such cooperation.

A wide range of tax experts from national tax authorities, international organizations, the business sector and civil society took part in the meeting, including the new members of the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters.

Building on the deliberations at the 2018 ECOSOC Financing for Development Forum, the speakers focused on the need to adapt the tax rules to the new business realities created by digital technologies. Several countries have already implemented important changes to their tax systems, but there is currently no consensus on which way the international community should be heading. Participants therefore welcomed that the Tax Committee had taken the topic on its agenda.

The meeting also discussed the tax treatment of projects funded with official development assistance (ODA). Some donor governments and international organizations request wide tax exemptions for such projects. According to some estimates, these exemptions can represent as much as three per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in certain countries.

In addition to lost tax revenue, tax exemptions could also lead to higher transaction costs, potential for abuses and an increased burden for tax administrations, the experts noted. The Tax Committee has already developed draft guidelines on the issue in 2007 and is now considering updating them.

In addition to the thematic discussions, the special meeting also received an update on the work of the UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters and the Inter-agency Platform for Collaboration on Tax, which had held its first global conference on “Taxation and the Sustainable Development Goals” at the UN Headquarters in February this year.

For more information:

MORE FROM UNDESA

Reporting on the progress of the SDGs



Three years into the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; where do we stand in our efforts to achieve this ambitious agenda for a better future for all people, everywhere? Two annual SDG progress reports will provide a global snapshot of the progress made and the remaining gaps ahead to achieve the SDGs.

The Report of the Secretary-General: Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals is intended for policy makers at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development and The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018 is aimed at a wider audience with charts, infographics and analysis on selected indicators.

Are fewer people living in extreme poverty? Are we progressing in our fight to end hunger and child malnutrition? If not, where should we target our efforts? Which parts of the world are making the most progress in providing access to electricity to their residents, and which regions provide good examples of protecting their biodiversity? How do we stand as a society in extracting and consuming natural resources and what type of resources are we using the fastest? These are some of the questions that this report aims to shed light on.

Both reports are prepared by UN DESA's Statistics Division in cooperation with the United Nations system and are based on the global indicator framework developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators.

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018 will be launched on 20 June 2018 — a few weeks before the High-Level Political Forum. The Secretary-General's report on the SDGs is also available to Member States as they prepare for their deliberations at the HLPF in July. The two reports are accompanied by a comprehensive Statistical Annex and the Global SDG Indicator Database with country and regional data.

The reports will be presented in an interactive platform on the Statistics Division website on SDG indicators at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs>.

The future of public service is here



To transform the world and realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we need to rethink the role of government and the way it interacts with civil society and the private sector. At the 2018 UN Public Service Forum this month, countries will present some of the cutting-edge innovations they have introduced to ensure their public administrations deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda.

From building inclusive services and partnerships, to making institutions accountable, to promoting gender-responsive public services, countries across the world are changing the ways they function to achieve the SDGs. The UN Public Service Forum, hosted by Morocco, with the theme “Transforming Governance to Realize the Sustainable Development Goals,” will be an occasion for countries to benefit from each other’s experiences and share their groundbreaking innovations.

“Governments have a lead role in implementing the SDGs,” said UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Liu Zhenmin. “It is crucial to ensure that public services improve the lives of all people to leave no one behind.”

The scale and ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires new governance models with new approaches to leadership, geared towards consultations, engagement and responding to people’s needs. “More important than ever, we need innovation to drive implementation of the Goals, including through public-private partnerships and multi-stakeholder partnerships,” added Mr. Liu.

More efforts are needed to improve effectiveness, inclusiveness and accountability. The Forum aims to inspire participants to develop their own solutions and pathways to realizing the SDGs. Partnerships and peer-to-peer learning can help in driving change that supports people and planet.

Honoring public servants

The UN Public Service Awards ceremony, honoring innovation and excellence in public service, will take place on 23 June – the UN Public Service Day and the last day of the Forum. Winners of the 2018 Awards will be presented at the ceremony.

For more information:

UN Public Service Forum
UN Public Service Awards

UPCOMING EVENTS

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| 5-6 June, New York | Third annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs |
| 11 June, New York | UNGA High-level Event on SDG Financing |
| 12-14 June, New York | 11th session of the Conference of States Parties to the CRPD |
| 20 June, New York | Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018 |
| 23 June, New York | United Nations Public Service Day |

FIND US ALSO ON:



© United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
[Unsubscribe](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Copyright](#)