



Statisticians come together with a shared vision to secure trusted data

“Data are critically important for everyone,” says Stefan Schweinfest, Director of UN DESA’s Statistics Division. “All the decisions that you take in your life, you’re basing them on data,” he stressed, as we spoke on the important work of the UN Statistical Commission. On 4-7 March 2025, some 600 statisticians from across the world will come together at UN Headquarters in New York to ensure better data, better lives.

From everyday choices – what clothes to wear based on temperature data; or what route to take when commuting; to informing decisions that matter for improving peoples’ lives – it is all based on data. “You need to know how many people you have in your country and what groups you have to take particular care of,” Mr. Schweinfest said, explaining the importance of data in managing services like health care and education.

Commission to focus on two big topics this year

A veteran in the statistical community, we met Mr. Schweinfest on the eve of the Commission’s 56th session. He shared that two big topics will be addressed this year -

the 2025 Systems of National Accounts, and the 2030 World Population and Housing Census Programme.

“We will adopt a new system of national accounts,” he explained, describing its most recognized element, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). “The system of national accounts is the guidebook to measure your economy the same way, whether you are in Mongolia or in Paraguay,” he said, noting that using the same statistical language enables countries to successfully exchange information and experiences.

“Every decade, the United Nations calls and declares a census round,” Mr. Schweinfest continued, describing the process of countries committing to counting their people. The census will help the international community better understand where people live and what their living conditions are, which later forms the basis for policy advice and decisions. “At the end, we will have good numbers for all of the countries and the whole world,” he explained.

Combining census data with economic trends

Mr. Schweinfest also outlined the possibilities when pairing census data with economic trends.

“With the system of national accounts, you understand where income is generated, which activities generate income and how the income is distributed in your population,” he said. He also described how this process can help countries intervene when needed to make sure that the well-being of people as well as the environment are protected.

Mr. Schweinfest also emphasized that the work on going beyond GDP to make nature count, is part of ongoing efforts in the statistical community, integrating economic and environmental accounting.

How data helps advance sustainable development

“I’m very proud of the statistical community,” Mr. Schweinfest said, as we discussed the role the statistical community plays in advancing sustainable development and the [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs).

“I think the deliberate decision in 2015 was to make the development agenda an accountability framework. That’s why it was structured in goals, targets and indicators. And whilst the goals and targets obviously come from the political sphere, the indicators were really managed in this room,” he said, describing how these [240 indicators](#) help the international community measure and assess SDG progress every year.

A professional community of solidarity, with a shared vision

As the UN Statistical Commission comes together this month, it will also discuss other important matters including the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, SDG indicators, environment and climate change statistics, environmental-economic accounting, household surveys, economic statistics, and many more topics.

Mr. Schweinfest described the privilege he feels, being part of the Commission’s work. “To look at this room full of people who’ve come to [...] discuss these topics, that is always a fantastic feeling,” he said. “I look at us as a community of solidarity, a professional community with a shared vision,” he continued, stressing that it is all about ensuring data quality and reliability.

He also looked back at some major developments of the Commission’s work over the past 36 years. “It is a much bigger Commission,” he explained, sharing how there are many more countries participating. “Nowadays we have sessions with 120 and 140 countries [...]. It has also become much bigger and broader in terms of topics,” he said,

highlighting integrated economic and environmental statistics, as well as human rights and governance statistics, as some of the new areas covered by the Commission.

Mr. Schweinfest also highlighted that there are more interesting data sources these days, including private sector data, big data, citizen reported data, geographical and geospatial data.

As we wrapped up our interview in Conference Room 4 at UN Headquarters, or the Commission's "natural habitat", as Mr. Schweinfest described it, he concluded, "I've always considered that this is the best job in the universe."

Be sure to follow Mr. Schweinfest and the action at the [56th Session of the UN Statistical Commission](#) by tuning in to [UN Web TV](#) on 4-7 March 2025.



EXPERT VOICES



How the Development Cooperation Forum delivers SDG impact

This month, the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF) will come together to discuss global financial architecture reforms and financing the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ahead of the event, we spoke with Shari Spiegel, Director of UN DESA Financing for Sustainable Development Office, who highlighted the Forum's significance in shaping international development cooperation and accelerating progress toward the goals.

What role does the Forum play in supporting other significant milestones for 2025?

"The DCF is particularly crucial this year as it will inform the [4th International Conference on Financing for Development](#) and the [2025 High-Level Political Forum](#)—especially discussions on strengthening global financial architecture reforms and enhancing the means of implementations of the SDGs. More than just a policy dialogue, the 2025 DCF presents a key opportunity to ensure development cooperation delivers real, measurable results in line with country needs and priorities."

What key issues will the Forum address this year?

"The 2025 Forum comes at a pivotal moment amid a lively global discourse on the importance of international development cooperation. With 600 million people still projected to live in extreme poverty by 2030 and an SDG financing gap of up to \$4 trillion annually, discussions at the Forum will focus on making development cooperation more effective, inclusive, and responsive to country needs and priorities.

On day one, the Forum will explore how development cooperation can better respond to today's challenges, balancing crisis response with long-term sustainable development. Discussions will also examine how development finance tools and instruments—such as grants, loans, and blended finance—can be adapted to better serve national development

strategies. Strengthening country leadership and ownership in directing development efforts will also be a major theme.

On day two, the focus will shift to enhancing coordination among development partners, ensuring that cooperation is driven by national needs and priorities. The Forum will also explore ways to strengthen global and regional cooperation, making development efforts more cohesive and impactful.”

How does the Forum help advance the SDGs?

“A key discussion in the Forum will be how to ensure we advance all of the SDGs not just a select few, especially by balancing humanitarian aid with long-term development and climate adaptation. Experts will also address the growing fragmentation of development finance and strategies to ensure stronger collaboration across all actors.”

Learn more about the Development Cooperation Forum 2025, taking place on 12-13 March under the theme “Transforming International Development Cooperation: From Global Dialogue to Action,” [here](#).



THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW



5 reasons why the International Day of Forests matters

This year’s International Day of Forests highlights the vital role of forests in food security, nutrition, and sustainable livelihoods. This year’s theme, “Forests and Foods,” connects forests to global efforts to combat hunger, protect

biodiversity, and address climate change. Here are 5 reasons why this year’s theme is so important.

1. Forests feed the world

Forests provide a variety of edible resources, from fruits, nuts, and seeds to wild game and mushrooms. More than five billion people depend on forests and non-timber products for food, medicine, and income.

2. Forests are key to achieving [zero hunger](#)

By sustaining pollinators, improving soil fertility, and regulating water cycles, forests enhance agricultural productivity. Agroforestry—a farming method that integrates trees and crops—can boost food security while preserving ecosystems.

3. Forest conservation is [climate action](#)

Forests act as carbon sinks, absorbing billions of metric tonnes of CO₂ annually. Sustainable forest management helps mitigate climate change, protecting food systems from climate-related disasters like droughts and floods.

4. Forests maintain biodiversity and [life on land](#)

Forests host 80% of terrestrial species, supporting ecosystems that sustain healthy, resilient food systems. Protecting forests is crucial for maintaining biodiversity, preventing land degradation, and securing food sources.

5. Forests support [livelihoods and local economies](#)

Millions, especially Indigenous Peoples and rural communities, rely on forests for employment and income. Strengthening sustainable forest-based value chains—like non-timber forest products—improves economic resilience.

The [International Day of Forests](#), observed annually on 21 March is led by the [UN Forum on Forests Secretariat](#), UN DESA, and [FAO](#) to raise awareness and promote sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all forests and trees for present and future generations. This year's International Day of Forests reminds us that forests and food are deeply interconnected.

Join the conversation using [#ForestDay](#) and help advocate for sustainable forest management and food security for all! You can also join the [event at UN Headquarters](#) in-person or through [UN WebTV](#).





Our best, and perhaps last, chance to secure financing for a sustainable future

By José Antonio Ocampo, Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, and Chair of the Independent Group of Experts for the fourth UN Conference on Financing for Development

The preparations for the [4th International Conference on Financing for Development](#) are in full swing with the two major background documents already launched: the [Zero Draft](#), which serves as the basis for the negotiations, and the proposals of the [International Commission of Experts on Financing for Development](#) which I had the opportunity to coordinate. Both reflect a high level of ambition and build on the landmark [Addis Ababa Action Agenda](#) agreed 10 years ago.

The goal is to support the transformative role of the State in the developing countries – a key driver of their structural transformation. It also requires prioritizing not only the quantity but also the quality and impact of resources. This means removing barriers that currently limit countries' policy choices. It means replacing a short-term project-focused agenda with an approach that aligns resources with collectively-defined long-term priorities. It is essential to strengthen the currently weakened multilateral system and create regional platforms.

Perhaps the most urgent issue is to handle the over-indebtedness of the public sector that affect about a third of developing countries, and the high level of debt and debt service that affect many others. This is the result of the large fiscal imbalances during the COVID-19 pandemic and the high levels of interest rates that the world has experienced in recent years.

To manage this problem there is a need for an ambitious short-term renegotiation instrument, which can build upon the Common Framework for Debt Treatment launched by the G20 in 2020. It must be based on faster renegotiations processes and include middle-income countries. There is a need for a permanent institutional mechanism for sovereign debt restructuring, which could be housed in the UN or in the IMF, providing in the latter case that its decisions are independent of the IMF Board.

It is also essential to reinvigorate development financing, given the 4 trillion-dollar-gap in the resources need to finance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This requires, first of all, reinforcing commitments of Official Development Assistance made half a century ago (0.7% of the gross national income of high-income countries) and the special target for the Least Developed Countries (0.2%).

A second element in this area is to significantly increase financing by the Multilateral

Development Banks (MDBs) and support the activities of National Development Banks (NDBs) in developing countries – or their creation in countries that lack them. This must be accompanied by increasing MDBs' financing in countries' local currencies, to reduce the risks that their debts will increase if they need to depreciate their currencies, and to support the development of their domestic bond markets.

Going beyond the traditional forms of lending, MDBs should sponsor developing countries' programmes to finance the provision of international public goods – both global and regional. This includes preventing and combating pandemics, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and protection of biodiversity.

Environmentally sustainable financing is indeed a crucial issue. The recent Conferences of the Parties on Climate Change and Biodiversity agreed to increase financing in both areas, but the funds that were accepted are insufficient. They will not be enough to address temperatures of 1.5°C above preindustrial levels that the world is already experiencing, to reverse massive biodiversity losses, or to slow the rate of severe natural disasters worldwide. In these areas, and in development financing in general, greater private-sector involvement should be mobilized with the help of credits for environmental investments or complementary mechanisms such as loan guarantees from development banks.

Guaranteeing adequate and progressive tax bases are essential to finance the development agenda. This requires avoiding profit shifting by multinational firms to low-tax jurisdictions and tax havens and to guarantee adequate tax payments by the richest of the world. The first of these objectives require the adoption of the principle of "significant economic presence", according to which multinationals pay a fair share of taxes in all countries where they operate, including by providing services from abroad.

For rich individuals, it would be essential to create a global asset registry based on beneficial ownership of all assets. For stronger international cooperation, the essential instrument is the UN Tax Convention currently being negotiated. It also requires the creation of an institution in charge of such cooperation: the best alternative in this regard is the transformation of the [UN Committee of Experts on International Cooperation in Tax Matters](#) into an intergovernmental organ.

In the international monetary system, the credit facilities should continue to be improved, and their conditionality revised. Two new IMF instruments must be created: an international swap facility and an Emerging Markets Fund that could allow the Fund to intervene in the international bond markets of emerging and developing countries during downswings. This must be complemented by more frequent issuance and, more importantly, the active use of the IMF's Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), since they represent the most underutilized global financial instrument, which now exceeds 900 billion dollars. These funds could be channeled into various mechanisms, including those established in the MDBs to finance development or environmental goals.

In trade and investment, the crucial issues are the need to uphold existing tariff commitments made at the WTO, and an agreement on the limits of industrial policies with room for maneuver for developing countries (special and differential treatment). Exceptions to intellectual property rights for health and environmental technologies should be adopted. To have fairer commodity markets for developing countries, international and national buffer stocks must be more amply used, as well as an increasing participation of those countries in the relevant value chains.

International financial regulation has not been the subject of the past financing for development conferences. Still, several important issues should be on the agenda, notably the appropriate regulation for digital financial assets (sometimes called "currencies"), the regulation of credit rating agencies, and more robust regulation of international commodity futures markets. In the area of private investment, a new global investment agreement is desirable, particularly to avoid demands on countries' provision to protect social or environmental goals.

Finally, several institutional reforms should be on the agenda. The first should be the longstanding call for greater "voice and participation" of developing countries in the Bretton Woods institutions – the IMF and the World Bank. This requires establishing a

fair allocation of capital shares, increasing these countries' basic votes, and creating open processes for selecting each body's leadership in which citizens of all Member States can participate. The second involves establishing adequate institutions, ideally within the United Nations, to effectively manage international tax cooperation and sovereign debt renegotiations. The third priority is strengthening the network of global and regional institutions in all areas of international financial cooperation, particularly in the monetary and tax areas, replicating in these areas the experience of the system of MDBs.

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

*** This blog draws from an op-ed published by Project Syndicate:*

<https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/global-financing-for-development-agenda-2025-by-jose-antonio-ocampo-2025-02>



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