

Strengthening science-policy-society interface and putting science, technology and innovation to the service of the SDGs

Recognizing the centrality of science to sustainable development, UN DESA continued to support the UN Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) as the Secretariat for the UN Inter-Agency Task Team on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (IATT). The Department also played a key role in the Secretary-General's Group of Ten High-level Representatives of Civil Society, Private Sector, and Scientific Community to Promote Science, Technology, and Innovation for the SDGs (10-Member-Group). With the support of UN DESA, the 10-Member-Group has already advanced proposals for initiatives, policy, partnerships and innovative solutions related to emerging science and technology for the SDGs. The group has emphasized both formidable challenges and unprecedented opportunities in the face of accelerating climate change and the burgeoning capabilities of artificial intelligence (AI).

One critical capacity-building component of the TFM is Science, Technology and Innovation for SDGs (STI4SDGs) Roadmaps. As a follow-up to the 2023 Multistakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum), UN DESA, together with the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the European Commission on Building Capacity and Scaling Up Adoption of STI4SDGs Roadmaps in Africa, co-organized a workshop in October 2023 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It served to enhance STI capacity, facilitate peer learning and partnership, and support governments in assessing and advancing the implementation of STI roadmaps.

The Department supported STI-driven solutions to SDG challenges, focusing on climate action and harnessing AI for the SDGs, at the 9th STI Forum held in May 2024. In partnership with Engineering for Change, UN DESA brought selected young innovators to the STI Forum for lightning talks and showcases, spotlighting those innovations from and for Small Island Developing States. The Forum was held around the theme "Science, technology and innovation for reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions".

Harnessing artificial intelligence for the SDGs

Member States recognized the importance of accelerating action to regulate AI globally and ensure the potential of AI is utilized in support of sustainable development at the ECOSOC Special Meeting on Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for the SDGs in May 2024. Supported by UN DESA, the meeting underscored the need to address the risk of AI exacerbating existing inequalities due to the widening global digital divide. The discussions also emphasized the significant challenges in regulating AI globally, balancing innovation and regulation, keeping up with the rapid pace of technological advancement, emphasizing ethical and societal implications, and overcoming technical expertise and capacity gaps. Presenters also highlighted specific applications of AI for the SDGs. In support of the meeting, UN DESA together with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Slalom Element Lab, organized a special hands-on AI for Good Lab, demonstrating how AI is being deployed to advance the SDGs. Member States were urged to invest in responsible AI development and governance that leaves no one behind.

Using innovative data solutions to tackle local sustainable development challenges

Following the success of the past three Hackathons, UN DESA hosted the UN Datathon 2023 in November, in which participants used data to tackle local sustainable development challenges. Held synchronously online and in Uruguay alongside satellite venues in the United Arab Emirates, China, Rwanda, Australia, and Switzerland, the event attracted significant global interest, with registrations from more than 500 teams worldwide. Nearly 2,000 participants from 110 countries signed up to take part. More than 50 online and on-site mentors from all over the world guided the participants during the Datathon journey. Under the theme "SDG localization – the need for local responses and



The Ghana Statistical Service wins the 2023 UN Datathon. | JOYNEWS

monitoring to achieve the SDGs", Datathon participants unveiled hundreds of innovative solutions, including data models, interactive dashboards, algorithms, data maps, and other inventive data solutions. The Ghana Statistical Service Data Science Team won the event with an entry that suggested localizing SDG indicators by leveraging both census data and non-traditional data sources. The event was organized in partnership with the United Nations Committee of Experts on Big Data and Data Science for Official Statistics, partnered with the UN Major Group for Children and Youth, Uruguay's National Institute of Statistics, and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data.

Changing mindsets, digital government transformation and innovation in public institutions to accelerate SDG progress


UN DESA showcased FutureGov – one of 12 High Impact Initiatives (HIIs) aimed at scaling up SDG solutions – during the 2023 SDG Action Weekend. A

partnership between UN DESA, UNDP, a coalition of eight countries including Ecuador, Georgia, Italy, Panama, Romania, Rwanda, Singapore, and the UAE, along with the World Bank and the European Commission, FutureGov aims to support Member States to transform their public sectors. It focuses on building public sector skillsets to create adaptable and resilient institutions using a shared toolbox; shifting mindsets towards systems thinking and foresight to enhance governance and inclusive service delivery; leveraging digital and data tools; and enabling broader innovation within public sectors by fostering a supportive environment for impactful change. A follow-up dialogue between the Group of Friends of FutureGov and CEPA took place on 16 April 2024 to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and drive public sector innovation towards SDG progress.

UN DESA also supported the digital transformation of public services in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Guatemala by training municipal and national officials. In Bolivia, over 45 officials were trained to analyse institutional

arrangements and design transformation roadmaps using specialized toolkits. The training included examples from UNICEF to localize the SDGs. In Ecuador, more than 50 officials were trained at the request of the President's Office and the Ministry of Telecommunications, focusing on digital transformation and collaboration among 17 government agencies. This included a six-month online Training of Trainers (ToT) programme and hybrid sessions. In Guatemala, a six-month ToT programme was conducted in collaboration with the National Institute of Public Administration, leading to the integration of innovative public service delivery methods into the national curriculum. Across all three countries, trainings emphasized inclusiveness, expert presentations, interactive dialogues, and the development of concrete action plans.

government, disaster risk reduction, and social inclusion, the available UN DESA courses address diverse and critical areas of public sector innovation and governance. The e-learning courses are designed either to supplement traditional, in-person training sessions or to function as standalone educational offerings. UN DESA monitors best practices, scales innovative approaches, and fosters a user-friendly experience. To date, over 5,700 individuals from 185 Member States have taken advantage of the learning opportunities offered by the hub, collectively earning more than 2,400 certificates across 47 different courses.



Empowering capacity-development programmes

UN DESA expanded its digital learning hub to further provide client-focused, adaptable, and effective e-learning opportunities for Member States and other stakeholders, driving transformative change and supporting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This initiative continues the commitment outlined in the Secretary-General's Strategy on New Technologies, reinforcing UN support for governmental capacity building, and aligns with the UN 2.0 framework and the "Quintet of Change".

The Digital Learning Centre hub serves as a substantial adjunct to UN DESA's capacity development work. Covering a wide array of topics such as tax treaties, digital



Enhancing data-driven intergovernmental support

In the past year, UN DESA has enhanced its data-driven intergovernmental support. A newly established Information Management Task Force aims to optimize work processes, improve information sharing and integration, and enhance collaboration for greater impact. The initiative emphasizes the use of data visualization and storytelling as effective communication and outreach tools for Member States and key partners. The Task Force's objectives include developing an online collaborative space to facilitate informed decision-making, providing upskilling opportunities through workshops and creating a supportive environment for digital skill development, and identifying methods to streamline visual elements in UN DESA's work. This comprehensive approach seeks to eliminate inefficiencies and boost the Department's overall effectiveness in supporting intergovernmental processes.