

SDG Moment Briefing Note

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

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Summary of the SDG Moment: Monday, 19 September 2022

“I only ask that you care before it is too late, that you live aware and awake. That you lead with love in hours of hate. I challenge you to heed this call. I dare you to shape our fate. Above all, I dare you to do good so that the world might be great.” Amanda Gorman, “An Ode We Owe”

The completion of one’s to-do list is often an ambition imperfectly fulfilled regardless of initial intentions. But a to-do list paired with resources and a strategy stands a fighting chance. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has both, and the UN holds a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Moment each year to remind leaders that the world is expecting significant Goals and targets to be checked off the to-do list by 2030.

A day ahead of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) high-level General Debate, delegates filed into the UNGA Hall at 8:30 am for the first fully in-person annual temperature check of the SDGs, with the knowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic can only explain inaction and missed opportunities up to a point.

The 2022 edition of the SDG Moment focused on inclusion, equality, and climate as themes linking the many outstanding “to do’s” in the years leading to 2030. But while previous editions of the SDG Moment put solutions at their center and spotlighted successful government actions, the 2022 event combined abbreviated references to action alongside familiar descriptions of the complex interplay of multiple global crises, packaged as a plea to leaders and citizens to rescue the Goals.

Civil society and other observers were quick to note that last year’s full-day event was reduced to a mere 90 minutes this year. They also wondered if the talk show-like format—sprinkled with celebrity appearances—only underlined a growing gap between the world’s commitment to the Goals and its acquaintance with the “depths of death, despair and disparity,” as Amanda Gorman wrote in her poem for the SDG Moment.

Some shed a critical light on the event’s supposed focus on “inclusion,” noting that “civil society and Major Groups are watching from outside while celebrities are given the mic” and the private sector also takes the stage. The rhetoric of the “to-do list” was challenged as an inadequate, perhaps revealing political message, that falls far short of the transformations long called for by science and civil society alike. And some questioned if a 90-minute “Moment” was enough to inspire anyone and “rescue” the floundering SDGs by 2030.

A Brief History of the SDG Moment

In September 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Summit adopted “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development” (2030 Agenda)—a global commitment that includes 17 SDGs, 169 targets, and a framework for follow-up and review of implementation. As part of this follow-up and review framework, the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) meets to review progress every July under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), and quadrennially at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the UN General Assembly (UNGA)—also called the SDG Summit.

2019 SDG Summit: The first SDG Summit took place on 24-25 September 2019. The Summit provided a “wake-up call” that efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda were not reaching the needed scale to transform the world. In their outcome document, world leaders called on the UN Secretary-General to organize an “annual moment to highlight inspiring action on the Goals” as part of every high-level week of the UNGA.

The UN Secretariat then developed plans for an “annual temperature check” of the SDGs throughout the Decade of Action to 2030, which would highlight successes and identify where more action is needed through a snapshot of progress. The event would also showcase SDG solutions that have been adopted by governments and other stakeholders. Finally, the annual moment would serve to keep the SDGs at the top of the political agenda, complementing the work of the HLPF.

2020 SDG Moment: The first SDG Moment took place on 18 September 2020 as part of the UN’s 75th anniversary commemorations. It was a three-hour virtual meeting that enabled a limited number of Heads of State and Government to speak. The Secretariat employed criteria for participation, requiring that speaking slots go to Heads of State and Government from countries that had completed a Voluntary National Review (VNR) and committed to discuss their country’s implementation gaps as well as plans to fill the gaps. The method was intended to ensure that all Member States could address the SDG Moment at least once within the remaining years to 2030, at the rate of a couple dozen per year.

2021 HLPF Review: According to an agreement reached through the UNGA’s review of the HLPF in mid-2021, the UN Secretary-General is encouraged to “use the annual SDG Moment to highlight inspiring action on the Goals.” The resolution also specifies that the SDG Moment only convenes in the years between the quadrennial SDG Summits.

2021 SDG Moment: The second SDG Moment also convened virtually, with a day-long event on 20 September 2021. In addition to its other objectives, the event focused on elements of an equitable and inclusive COVID-19 recovery, and reinforced the relevance of the 2030 Agenda for forthcoming high-level events on related issues, including the UN Food Systems Summit, the UN High-level Dialogue on Energy, the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, and the Biodiversity Conference.

SDG Moment Report

The 2022 SDG Moment consisted of six segments within a 90-minute schedule. It featured high-level officials alongside performing artists and representatives of stakeholder groups.

Segment 1: Opening

The SDG Moment opened in a darkened UNGA hall with the sound of a clock ticking. A film projection depicted underwater life while messages on the screen said “We have everything to lose. We have no time to waste. The answers are all around us.” Images hinted that nature’s ideas have inspired human innovations—like satellite dishes that mimic sunflowers, both feeding themselves out of light and air. The ticking clock resumed as each SDG appeared as a spoke of a wheel circling the earth. “Tomorrow is at risk.”

Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Goodwill Ambassador, UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF), introduced the event. She said the crises we face did not happen by chance and can be fixed with a plan—the SDGs. She said we are nearly halfway to the 2030 deadline for achieving the Goals. The leaders gathered in the UNGA Hall can make them a reality, she concluded.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres expressed sadness at the passing of Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, noting her lifetime of service. He said this year’s SDG Moment occurs at a moment of great peril for the world, including a lack of access to finance for countries to recover from the current crises (conflict, climate catastrophes, rising food and energy costs, discrimination and displacement, and more). In the face of such perils, he acknowledged that it is tempting to leave development priorities for another time, “a sunny day,” but he said these goals cannot wait.

Guterres urged everyone to rescue the SDGs and make progress on the world’s to-do list, which includes reforming the financial architecture, investing in health and education for refugees and migrants, boosting social protection to face shocks, supporting the global biodiversity framework, and moving away from a suicidal dependence on fossil fuels.

Segment 2: SDG Stocktake

Introducing the SDG stocktaking session, Csaba Kőrösi, President of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly, said it was more necessary than ever for leaders to re-dedicate themselves to the transformative vision of the SDGs, one that remains true and soundly based on science. Calling for regaining the speed of progress towards the SDGs that had been lost due to the pandemic and inaction, he described COVID-19 as a postcard from a bleak future that must be avoided. Kőrösi highlighted the need for: a renewable, carbon-free energy future; green and inclusive circular economies including food systems; multilateral commitments to build a science base for decision-making; and political momentum to move beyond gross domestic product (GDP).

Noting a series of upcoming international meetings, Kőrösi highlighted the UN 2023 Water Conference (22-24 March) and its preparatory conference at UN Headquarters in New York on 25 October 2022. He also recalled that every four years a high-level conference on financing for development takes place alongside the SDG Summit.

The segment host, Nomzamo Mbatha, Goodwill Ambassador, UN Refugee Agency, spoke of a cascading toll of climate and conflict emergencies on the most marginalized human beings. She called on world leaders to lift the lid of invisibility over gaps and opportunities for effective action, and invited them to check off the world’s “to-do” list of SDGs in pursuit of a more peaceful and prosperous future with no one left behind.

A short video produced with support from Deloitte recalled that just eight years remain until 2030 and the goal of achieving the SDGs. The presentation noted rising levels of global poverty

in the wake of conflict and climate breakdown. It called for a new paradigm built on the SDGs, a paradigm marked by flipping orthodoxies and rethinking conventional wisdom.

Segment 3: SDG To-Do List

Mia Mottley, Prime Minister of Barbados and Co-Chair of the UN Secretary-General’s SDG Advocates, explained the importance of each of the 17 SDGs and how they lay the foundations for a sustainable future. For example, if we change how we deal with waste (SDG 12), she said SDG 14 (life below water) and SDG 15 (life on land) become easier to achieve. On SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), Mottley said people of color are the victims of double jeopardy “because our blood, sweat and tears brought about the Industrial Revolution, but we are now on the front lines of the climate crisis.”

Mottley said leaders always have choices, no matter how great their financing needs. She asked the world’s children to help hold leaders accountable for making the world a better place to live.

Segment 4: Inequalities Solutions

A panel on inequalities was moderated by Sherwin Bryce-Pease, South African Broadcasting Corporation. It focused on investment to solve inequalities experienced by women and girls.

Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General, UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), highlighted the UN Secretary-General’s Global Crisis Response Group and actions to address the impact of the cascading crises that affect women and children the most. She highlighted the need for liquidity for social protection programmes to protect those facing a cost-of-living crisis that could translate into an availability crisis for small farmers.

Agnes Kalibata, President, Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, also highlighted vulnerabilities in the food system.

Melinda French Gates, Co-Chair, Gates Foundation, called for investment in women’s lives and an end to talk of empowerment. Instead, she noted, it was time to talk about the liberating impact of women’s decision-making power alongside their financial and bodily autonomy. French Gates also made a plea to lift the burden of unpaid care work from women.

The poet and activist Amanda Gorman reflected a number of the 2022 SDG Moment’s themes in her [performance of a new poem](#), “An Ode We Owe,” a rallying cry on behalf of “Lives lost, climactic costs” and those exhausted, angered and endangered not because of their numbers but because of their numbness. In a direct challenge to leaders, Gorman asked that they care before it is too late, that they live aware and awake, that they lead with love in hours of hate, and dare to do good so that the world might be great. Like Mottley’s remarks, Gorman’s poem questioned the reasons given for not having achieved more: “although poverty is a poor existence, complicity is a poorer excuse.”

A [video message](#) to the SDG Moment from the South Korean pop band Black Pink called on their peers to educate themselves about climate change and use their spending power to bring about a more sustainable world.

Segment 5: Climate Solutions

Bryce-Pease moderated the panel on climate solutions. Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), said only eight meetings of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COPs) are left in the Decade of Action, by which point we must have cut emissions in half. Therefore, it is critical for every COP to make sufficient progress. He said climate discussions have entered a new era, shifting from negotiating “how should we do it” to knowing “this is how.” He said COP 27 in November 2022 must demonstrate that governments understand the urgency and recognize the scale of response required.

Chido Cleopatra Mpemba, African Union Special Envoy for Youth, said a major message from young people in Africa—the largest vulnerable demographic—is that climate change is happening right now. She stressed that the goal of halving emissions by 2030 does not mean we have eight years left before we have to act, but that we have to start acting right now, while also building resilience.

Ingrid Reumert, Ørsted, said in the past year political leaders have stepped up for the renewables revolution, but it is still not occurring fast enough. She called for: speeding up the allocation of land and seabed for renewable energy; speeding up the permitting process, which currently takes longer than building a windfarm; involving youth and communities; and working with local supply chains to build jobs and skills.

Speakers highlighted key opportunities to drive progress on the SDGs. Stiell said getting climate action right is our best chance to achieve the SDGs, noting that otherwise 200 million people could be displaced by climate change by 2030.

Mpemba stressed the importance of predictable weather patterns to ensure adequate food production for Africa's agriculture sector.

Reumert called for three actions by companies: set climate targets and have them validated by the Science Based Targets Initiative (SBTi); act immediately to achieve long-term targets, noting governments should ask companies to document, deliver, and disclose; and ensure sustainability is at the core of every CEO's agenda and part of every boardroom's discourse.

Segment 6: Call to Action

Hosting the concluding call to action, Chopra Jonas said the world has the commitments, resources, tools, and a plan to challenge all that is destructive, disrespectful, and dangerous.

After a [performance](#) by Judith Hill of Bob Dylan's "Blowing in the Wind," Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada and Co-Chair of the UNSG's SDG Advocates, noted in a pre-recorded message that solutions are more complex than ever in the wake of the pandemic, the climate emergency, and conflict. He called for an acceleration of progress, reported that poverty levels in 2022 are no lower than in 2015, and said Canada had invested USD 827 million in agricultural systems to facilitate climate action and resilience.

Chopra Jonas described the SDG Moment as a "reality check" and a call to deliver on promises. She underlined the recurring theme of the 2022 SDG Moment: women need power, not empowerment, and the key to freedom for women and girls is access to education. Transitioning to the Transforming Education Summit, she quoted Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Upcoming Meetings

Partnering for Action: Implementation of the Global Accelerator on Jobs and Social Protection for Just Transitions:

This high-level meeting will address the global job crisis and ways to support the billions of people excluded from social protection. **date:** 23 September 2022 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** un.org/en/coronavirus/financing-development/global-accelerator

Preparatory Conference for UN 2023 Water Conference: This one-day meeting aims to finalize the themes of the interactive dialogues and other organizational matters of the UN 2023 Water Conference. **date:** 25 October 2022 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2023/meetings

UN Climate Change Conference: The 27th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 27) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP 17), and the fourth meeting of the Conference of the

Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA 4) will begin work on the Global Stocktake, among other matters. **dates:** 6-18 November 2022 **location:** Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt **www:** unfccc.int/cop27

Plastics INC-1: The first meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, will begin its work. **dates:** 28 November – 2 December 2022 **location:** Punta del Este, Uruguay **www:** unep.org/events/conference/inter-governmental-negotiating-committee-meeting-inc-1

CBD COP 15: This Conference comprises the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the tenth Meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the fourth Meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing. The meetings will be preceded by the fifth meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework from 3-5 December 2022. The meetings will review the achievement and delivery of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and take a final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, among other matters. **dates:** 7-19 December 2022 **location:** Montreal, Canada **www:** cbd.int/meetings

UN 2023 Water Conference: The UN 2023 Water Conference—formally the 2023 Conference for the Midterm Comprehensive Review of Implementation of the UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation (2018-2028)—will be co-hosted by Tajikistan and the Netherlands. **dates:** 22-24 March 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York **www:** sdgs.un.org/conferences/water2023

UN World Data Forum: This multi-stakeholder event takes place each year to spur data innovation, nurture partnerships, mobilize high-level political and financial support for data, and build a pathway to better data for sustainable development. **date:** 24-27 April 2023 **location:** Hangzhou, China **www:** unstats.un.org/unsd/undataforum

UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: The 2023 session of the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC will take place on the theme "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels." It will include in-depth review of SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (affordable and clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and 17 (partnership for the Goals). **dates:** 10-19 July 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York, US **www:** hlpf.un.org/2023

Preparatory Ministerial Meeting for the Summit of the Future: UN Member States have agreed (A/RES/76/307) that the Summit of the Future will convene in September 2024, preceded by a preparatory ministerial meeting in 2023. The Summit aims to forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like and how to secure it. **dates:** 18 September 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York, US **www:** sdg.iisd.org/events/summit-of-the-future/

SDG Summit: The SDG Summit is the quadrennial meeting of the HLPF under the auspices of the UNGA. The 2023 Summit will be the second since the Goals' adoption, and take place at the midpoint of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Leaders are expected to comprehensively review progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, provide political guidance for the way forward, and consider new science-based solutions for accelerating the full implementation of the SDGs in the remaining years towards 2030. **dates:** September 2023 **location:** UN Headquarters, New York, US **www:** hlpf.un.org/

For additional upcoming events, see sdg.iisd.org/