

HLPF 2023 Highlights: Monday, 10 July 2023

The 2023 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) opened with macro views on the state of efforts to realize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and then focused on SDG 17 on partnerships, particularly through the lenses of finance and of science, technology and innovation.

In her role as HLPF Chair, Lachezara Stoeva (Bulgaria), President, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), opened HLPF 2023. Delegates adopted the agenda (E/HLPF/2023/1).

UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs Li Jinhua, China, conveyed the main messages from the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). He noted some progress and persistent challenges such as data gaps and limited finance, but also several innovative strategies, policies and partnerships adopted to overcome the challenges. Li urged all to learn from the valuable insights provided by the VNRs.

ECOSOC Vice President Arrmanatha Christiawan Nasir, Indonesia, summarized messages from the ECOSOC system. He urged focusing on: stressing interlinkages among the SDGs, breaking down silos; conducting an honest review of gaps at this midpoint toward 2030; and scaling up concrete, transformative action going forward.

Delegates watched videos on the SDGs and “Voices for Change” featuring calls for action from across the globe.

Edward Ndopu, SDG Advocate and youth representative, South Africa, stressed the importance of meaningfully integrating youth in decision-making processes. Recalling the 2030 Agenda call to “leave no one behind,” he highlighted the need for inclusion and strengthened equal opportunity toward achieving the SDGs. He called for an accessible, equitable and sustainable global financial system.

Li presented the Secretary-General’s report on SDG progress (A/78/80-E/2023/64) noting some progress but also some regression due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasized the need for countries to:

- advance policies that leave no one behind;
- strengthen national and subnational public sector capacity and accountability;
- use effective regulatory frameworks for public-private sector alignment;
- mobilize resources and investment;
- bolster multilateralism;
- reform international financial architecture; and
- have accessible, timely and disaggregated data.

Overcoming the Crises, Driving Transformation for the SDGs, and Leaving No One Behind

Chair Stoeva opened the Townhall. Moderator Sherwin Bryce-Pease, South African Broadcasting Corporation, asked panelists to highlight some transformations needed to catalyze action on the 2030 Agenda.

Qu Dongyu, Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN, stressed the need for more efficient, resilient, inclusive and sustainable food production systems.

Catherine Mary Russell, Executive Director, UNICEF, urged putting children at the heart of SDG efforts, measuring children-

related data on SDGs, and mobilizing financing aimed at creating a world fit for children.

Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, pointed out that disasters are on the rise. She urged for decisions to be risk-informed, shifting the paradigm from managing to prevention, and called for capacity-building to leave no one behind.

Ovide Mercredi, International Longevity Centre, Canada, cautioned against prescriptive measures by governments. He noted the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples and the need for governments to support local initiatives.

Subsequent discussion included interventions from LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES, the US, FRANCE, the STAKEHOLDER GROUP ON AGEING, CHINA, SPAIN, INDONESIA, the LGBTI STAKEHOLDER GROUP, and BURKINA FASO. Among the points made:

- “SDG stimulus” is needed, as is a significant increase in financing, technology transfer and debt relief;
- the SDG Summit should deliver a “shock of public and private financing”;
- ageism should be combatted;
- data is crucial for informed decision-making;
- include the most excluded organizations and individuals in consultative processes; and
- more concerted global efforts are needed to tackle food insecurity and education.

In response, panelists noted the need to, among other issues: galvanize country leadership to leverage international partnerships; recognize the indivisibility of the SDGs in national and global responses; and incorporate risk prevention strategies for the most excluded groups.

Filippo Grandi, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, highlighted the challenges of rising displacement within and across borders, especially in poor and middle-income countries, calling for efforts to transform crisis into opportunity.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, emphasized: the widened financing gap; geopolitical conflicts, climate change and worsening food insecurity are leaving vulnerable groups even further behind; and achieving the 2030 Agenda requires more holistic action.

Steve Macfeeley, Co-Chair, Committee for the Chief Statisticians of the UN System, urged countries to stop thinking of data as a cost and burden, but as an investment where every dollar invested yields USD 32 in returns.

Elham Youseffian, International Disability Alliance, on behalf of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS), stressed four factors inhibiting achievement of the 2030 Agenda:

- the attitude of policy makers and implementers, which needs to change to recognize that inclusion is a responsibility, not an act of charity;
- lack of cohesion among actors;
- lack of an intersectional approach; and
- resources are both financial and technical and must all be directed towards promoting inclusion.

In subsequent discussion, KENYA, the INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAW ORGANIZATION, and BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY stressed, among other things, the importance of SDG 16 (peace, justice, strong institutions) as an important

standalone Goal and facilitator to the others, and that systemic transformation requires the right policies, investment and data.

In closing, panelists reflected on:

- best practices regarding the refugee crisis;
- the need for deliberate investment for data; and
- the lack of cohesion and intersectionality in approaches seen thus far.

SDGs in Focus: SDG 17 and Interlinkages with Other SDGs – Partnerships for the Goals

Financing Our Crisis Response and Investing in the SDGs:

Maurizio Massari (Italy), Vice President, ECOSOC, chaired this panel. Yongyi Min, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), reviewed highlights of the Secretary-General's report on progress towards the SDGs, with emphasis on SDG 17.

Jason Rosario Braganza, African Forum and Network on Debt and Development, highlighted increased public debt and growing poverty because debt servicing is prioritized above addressing crises or improving socioeconomic conditions. He stressed the importance of the Global Tax Agreement championed by the African Group and the need to prioritize people over profit.

Jay Collins, Vice Chairman, Citi, highlighted the need for massive private capital mobilization that should manifest through at least a four-five times co-financing multiplier. He called for both scaling and speeding up of blended financing and for the incorporation of vulnerability in addition to fragility.

Carola Mejia, Latindadd, on behalf of the Civil Society Financing for Development Group, noted a shift in financing priorities towards military and fossil fuels due to the current conflict in Europe. She called for debt cancellation for countries in need, and increased financing for climate solutions through financial mechanisms that are not debt-generating.

Mayada Adil, Co-Founder, La Loupe Creative, decried the tendency to view the most vulnerable and marginalized as a liability, rather than agents of change with capacity-building needs.

In subsequent discussion, SWITZERLAND, NIGERIA, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, FRANCE, NIGERIA, QATAR, INDONESIA, NEPAL, SWEDEN, the WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME, ALGERIA, the US, EU, HONDURAS, BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY, and KIRIBATI intervened. Among the points discussed were:

- the need for reform of multilateral financial institutions;
- how to secure additional pledges beyond the USD 100 billion climate finance target;
- the need for new ideas on how to stem “financial leakages” from developing countries and/or a “Marshall Plan for Africa”;
- investments in frontline communities;
- exploring alternative funding options such as Islamic banking;
- the importance of reforming data governance;
- early warning and anticipatory action, social protection, and climate adaptation in fragile settings as examples of smart investing; and
- how to address the equitability, accessibility and adaptability of financial resources.

Moderator Sarah Cliffe invited the panelists to share their take-aways: Rosario Braganza stressed that borrowing is not a viable solution to the crisis and lamented the increased number of developing countries since the term's coining; Collins noted that private capital mobilization does not necessarily mean increased debt burdens on vulnerable countries; and Mejia urged delegates to fulfil their Official Development Assistance commitments using principles of accountability and reparative justice.

Science, Technology and Innovation: Triggering Transformation and Sustaining a Science-driven Recovery:

Paula Narváez (Chile), Vice President, ECOSOC, chaired this session, while Mathu Joyini (South Africa), Co-Chair, 2023 Multistakeholder Forum on Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI Forum), moderated the panel. Thomas Woodroffe, Co-Chair, STI Forum, delivered messages from the Forum ([E/HLPF/2023/6](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/dest/2023/06/06/STI-Forum-2023-06-06)) mentioning strengthened trust in science and technology, generative artificial intelligence (AI), and increase in women and girls' participation among the topics addressed.

Citing a successful pilot case in Mexico, José Ramón López-Portillo Romano, Chairman, Q Element Ltd. and Member, Secretary-General's 10 Member Group for the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, called for a global network of linked “idea banks” supported by the UN, suggesting that rising connectivity and utilization of technology, including generative AI, would allow developing countries to leapfrog in their SDG achievement.

Ana Cristina Amoroso das Neves, Chair, UN Commission on Science and Technology for Development, pointed out that closing the digital divide is imperative to ensure equal access to the opportunities STI provide.

Peter Gluckman, President, International Science Council, stressed the importance of pluralistic input from both natural and social sciences, citing a lack of discussion on the social implications of digitalization. He lamented the peripheral role of science in multilateral processes, and called for better engagement between science, policymakers, and communities.

Carolina Rojas, E4C Fellowship Program Coordinator, highlighted the role of localization, consultation, and active participation. Stressing that youth is not a monolithic group, she urged for engagement on a local level and for amplifying voices of African youth; also calling for the establishment of a Youth in STI Day.

Pamela Matson, Stanford University, US, highlighted lessons from transdisciplinary, “boundary setting,” scientific research, that aim to jointly explore solutions to complex challenges where they are most needed. She noted successful approaches exhibit, among other traits, trust, genuine collaboration, and integrating “other ways of knowing,” and have potential to scale.

In subsequent discussion, NORWAY, the US, KENYA, WOMEN, CHINA, POLAND, FRANCE, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY, SWEDEN, VIET NAM and NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS intervened. They called for, among other things:

- closing loopholes through which significant financial resources are siphoned from development priorities;
- the fourth Financing for Development Conference in 2025 to adopt an ambitious agenda to align development financing with SDGs;
- STI for SDGs roadmaps;
- access to quality education for all to achieve gender transformation;
- efforts to counter science skepticism;
- the reorganization of STI infrastructure around major societal challenges;
- the possible contribution of nuclear power and neutron fusion energy to net-zero transitions; and
- new technology-driven initiatives to connect youth globally and give them a voice in accelerating SDG implementation.

In a closing round by panelists, Gluckman, citing Bertolt Brecht, stressed using science wisely, “or everyone will die.” Das Neves underscored the role of scientific collaboration at all levels in fostering peaceful and inclusive societies. Romano quipped that we are witnessing “the spaghettification of the world,” calling for collaboration that truly triggers scientific and private actors to contribute to STI.

In The Corridors

Sporting analogies were abundantly passed around over the course of the day, with delegates cautioning that we're lagging behind at half-time, some providing encouragement that matches are often won in the second half, and others calling for a fairer game where the referees are not the same actors as those playing on the field. During the final stretch of the afternoon's panel sessions delegates raced to make their interventions within the allocated two-and-a-half minutes at the risk of their microphones being cut off, with interpreters scrambling to match their speed as the thirty-second warning sounded.

The difficulty in achieving much called for “walking the talk” on inclusivity was perhaps best personified by one female delegate's efforts to calm her crying baby in the General Assembly Hall, as staffers tried to “encourage” her to move to a less public place to breastfeed.