

## **Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 Regional Dissemination Workshop for Asia and the Pacific: 22-24 October 2024**

Scientists tell us that we need multiple transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and establish a more just and sustainable future, however the science and practice of transformation science are not yet well known. The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) seeks to address this gap. The report compiles scientific and other evidence on transformations and provides a framework for assessing, managing, and accelerating transformations that can inform the development of national plans for integrated SDG implementation and monitoring.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Launch and Dissemination Workshop of the 2023 GSDR, which convened from 22-24 October 2024, in New Delhi, India, aimed to raise awareness of the GSDR in the Asia and Pacific region and deepen knowledge of the GSDR framework and its applicability in a national and regional context. The event also provided a platform for reflection on how the GSDR can support policy making and Voluntary National Review (VNR) reporting and provide inputs and feedback-loops into national sustainability processes.

Participants discussed how the GSDR framework can be operationalized, what types of capacity building and support are needed, and how the GSDR can inform more action-oriented and forward looking VNRs. In panel discussions and working sessions, representatives from governments, civil society, and academia shared experiences and discussed practical applications to support SDG transformations.

The workshop was co-organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) within the framework of the International Climate Initiative (IKI), and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. It was the third in a series of regional 2023 GSDR dissemination workshops following workshops on Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

### ***A Brief History of the Global Sustainable Development Report***

The SDGs can only be achieved through transformation – fundamental, systemic changes that move societies from unsustainable systems and behaviors towards sustainable approaches that address the root causes of crises we face and provide a foundation for a more just, equitable and sustainable

future. While transformations have been observed in the past, there is a need to better understand how they can be managed and accelerated to address the urgent need for change required to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The GSDR was first mandated by UN member states in the 2012 Rio+20 (UN Conference on Sustainable Development) Outcome Document titled, *The Future We Want*. Paragraph 85 indicates the High-Level Political Forum could “Strengthen the science-policy interface through review of documentation bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments.” The report format was revised following the adoption of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in 2015, when the UN established an Independent Group of 15 Scientists (IGS) and moved to a schedule to produce a GSDR every four years ahead of each session of the SDG Summit in 2019, 2023, and 2027.

The first GSDR (2019), “*The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*,” produced by an IGS outlined six knowledge-based entry points for sustainable transformations to achieve the SDGs and levers that can be used to activate these entry points. The second such GSDR (2023), “*Times of Crisis, Times of Change Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development*,” provides dynamic perspective that can help understand how transformations unfold over time and added an in-depth discussion of capacity as a fundamental lever to accelerate transformations. Together, the two reports provide a framework that can be used to understand the state and progress of transformations and inform nationally adapted and dynamic strategies for integrated SDG implementation.

The six entry points describe areas for action where transformative shifts can have impacts on multiple SDGs:

- Human well-being and capabilities;
- Sustainable and just economies;
- Food systems and healthy nutrition;
- Energy decarbonization with universal access;
- Urban and peri-urban development; and
- Global environmental commons.

The 2019 report identified four levers that can be utilized to initiate and support transformations at each entry point. The 2023 report added a fifth lever (capacity building):

- Governance;
- Economy and finance;
- Science and technology;
- Individual and collective action; and

- Capacity building.

The entry points and levers are embedded in a framework (S-curve) that describes the replacement of an existing unsustainable system by a sustainable one in three phases: the emergence/destabilization phase, during which new technologies and practices emerge in niches through experimentation and learning; the breakdown/acceleration phase during which the use of new technologies and practices expands towards a tipping point enabling wider application; and the phase out/stabilization phase, during which new technologies and practices become the new normal in all aspects of daily life.

### **GSDR Dissemination Workshop Report**

Astra Bonini, Chief, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, UNDESA, welcomed participants and outlined the GSDR's purpose to strengthen the role of science and evidence on SDG implementation. She said this workshop provides an opportunity to bring the report's findings to life in a regional context. Abhijith Mathew, Major Group for Youth and Children, said while the lack of progress towards the SDGs is alarming, there are opportunities to harness the creativity and energy of young people to inspire smarter decisions.

The full agenda can be found [here](#).

### ***Understanding the GSDR Framework in a National and Regional Context***

**Key Messages from the 2023 GSDR:** Ambuj Sagar, IGS Member (India), said the GSDR shows that transformations are both possible and inevitable and they must be managed. He explained the report shows how SDG interlinkages can be harnessed for concrete, effective and accelerated action and provide a framework for how governments can manage interacting transformations in diverse national contexts. He added that the report calls on countries to use the five levers – governance, economy and finance, individual and collective action, science and technology and capacity building – to steer and accelerate national transformations.

**Status and Integration of the SDGs:** In a video message, Li Junhua, UN Under Secretary-General, UNDESA, said getting the world back on track towards SDG implementation requires deeper commitment to a more science-based approach towards developing the right policy mixes for transformation; a whole of society approach; and a global enabling environment. Georg Enzweiler, Deputy Head of Mission, German Embassy to India, outlined Indo-Germanic collaboration, including the Green and Sustainable Development Partnership and regular consultations to review and strengthen joint action.

Shombi Sharp, UN Resident Coordinator for India, said recent crises have triggered stronger commitment to the SDGs including at the 2024 Summit of the Future. He outlined India's progress in access to clean energy and water, health, financial inclusion and digital solutions to prevent disasters and food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. On international action, he highlighted India's support for South-South and triangular cooperation.

**High-level Panel on Integrated SDG Implementation in Asia and the Pacific:** Sashi Kiran, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection of Fiji, said her country is using budget tagging and SDG financing diagnostics to ensure public spending supports SDG implementation. She explained that

Fiji's national development is guided by the SDG framework and outlined inclusive social protection programs supporting elderly citizens and people with disabilities.

Saurabh Garg, Secretary, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, India, described an "aspirational statistics" program that identifies gaps for targeted interventions at national and state levels, a regional SDG program by India's North-Eastern states, and an urban SDG index focusing on India's 56 major cities. He explained that India's strategy to become a developed country by 2047 focuses on areas like the SDGs and includes a monitoring framework that includes data from alternative sources.

Sharmila Mohamed Salleh, Acting CEO, Yayasan Inovasi Malaysia, outlined initiatives focusing on grassroots social innovation that promote locally driven action for economic development and improved wellbeing through education, training, and access to technology, finance, and legal support.

Shailly Kedia, Associate Director, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), stressed the need for vertical integration across levels of decision-making and horizontal integration across silos and sectors. Noting progress on vertical integration, she said horizontal integration is hindered by policy conflicts, for example between climate and food security objectives. She suggested SDG budget tagging to support long-term planning and promote horizontal integration.

Endah Murniningtyas, Deputy Minister for National Resources and Environment (BAPPENAS) and former IGS Co-Chair for the 2019 GSDR (Indonesia), said her country is integrating the SDGs in national budgets and development plans and described Indonesia's SDG Secretariat that supports SDG mainstreaming and international, national and sub-national policy coordination, promotes scientific analysis in SDG decision making, and coordinates bi-annual VNR reporting.

**Key Messages from the IGS:** Shirin Malekpour, IGS Member (Australia), said the entry points and levers identified by the first GSDR (2019) constitute the "What" of transformation, whereas the second GSDR (2023) shows "How" transformations evolve in three stages: emergence, acceleration, and stabilization. She added that policy levers can accelerate a transformation, cautioning that the required mix of measures changes over time.

Sagar added that new technologies alone do not create transformations as incumbent technologies "do not give up without a fight." He stressed that science must become more inclusive and dynamic to be socially robust, calling on scientists to engage more actively with policy makers to prevent mis- and disinformation.

Jaime Montoya, IGS Member (Philippines), outlined the GSDR's calls to action, including for: national transformation frameworks; capacities for training, foresight, engagement and negotiation skills; managing interlinkages; removing barriers; and establishing a strong science-policy interface.

Responding to a question on ensuring benefits for marginalized communities while protecting them from trade-offs, Malekpour highlighted the need for strong governance and public policy, especially during a transformation's acceleration phase. On engaging grassroots initiatives and ensuring responsible and accountable technology use, panelists stressed building national consensus with active engagement of disenfranchised groups to

avoid policy capture by elites. On monitoring the performance of national SDG frameworks, panelists recommended using evidence-based assessments of areas where a country is lagging to develop targeted strategies, levers, and tools, and including horizontal and vertical data, data collected at the grassroots level and success stories in monitoring reports.

**Applying the Transformation Framework for Accelerated Action:** Via video call, Friedrich Soltau, UNDESA, previewed the upcoming UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) to be held in July 2025, noting this session will review progress on SDG 3 (good health and well-being), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 14 (life below water), and SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals). He added that 39 countries are expected to present VNRs, including four countries presenting their fourth report and 24 countries presenting for the third time.

Chamindry Saparamadu, Sustainable Development Council, Sri Lanka, described her country's SDG coordination mechanism for vertical and horizontal integration, which has developed integrated solutions for water management and Sri Lanka's decarbonization roadmap. She said many countries were not prepared for the institutional restructuring required for integrated SDG implementation.

Maresh Bhattarai, Ministry of Finance, Nepal, described his country's approach to align policies and programs with the SDGs, including through decentralized governance, and added that they delivered better outcomes than expected. Noting remaining barriers like climate change and lack of market integration, he highlighted targeted investments in early warning systems and infrastructure as entry points for further transformation.

Manish Agarwal, Nodal Officer for SDGs the Indian state Odisha, said his state achieved transformations in disaster management, malaria prevention, and urban waste management. He emphasized the need to change people's mindsets and ensure marginalized groups are included.

Subhash Nepali, UN Resident Coordinator's Office, Nepal, said Nepal included a national strategic vision of SDG acceleration in its 2023 VNR, based on seven priority themes identified by comparing monitoring data with an anticipated progress index to show where the country is off track.

### ***Working Groups on Key Shifts to Accelerate Progress***

In breakout sessions, participants explored GSDR entry points from an Asia and Pacific regional perspective, focusing on three entry points.

**Global Environmental Commons:** Hosted by Jaime Montoya and Astra Bonini, this group focused on national transformations that affect global environmental issues such as plastic waste management, climate action, air pollution, fisheries, and marine ecosystem protection.

On levers that can support these transformations, participants discussed cross-sectoral collaboration to sustain technology adoption, behavioral change to alter consumption patterns, and creating better uses of recycled plastic waste.

Participants discussed national experiences that demonstrate how trade offs often occur during the stabilization phase

requiring balancing the need to accelerate transformations with the legitimate interests of people depending on the existing unsustainable system.

**Urban and Peri-Urban Development:** Hosted by Shirin Malekpour and Alice Siragusa, UNESCAP, this group highlighted that urban waste management is a key challenge for many countries in the region and that capacity building and financial support are key to empower countries to act. Other examples focused on the introduction of new technologies such as electric vehicles that showed the need for coordinated implementation of support infrastructure such as charging stations and repair networks.

Participants emphasized that policy levers in urban and peri-urban development are interconnected, especially science, technology, and capacity building, and that awareness of these overlaps is needed to address difficult trade-offs.

**Energy Decarbonization with Universal Access:** This session was hosted by Ambuj Sagar and Shivani Nayyar, UNDESA. Sagar said energy transformations involve many actors, are driven by multiple levers, and require partnerships with energy companies. He explained that energy transformations require just transition strategies because they face opposition from people depending on the current energy system. He also noted some transformation pathways, for example switching from biomass to liquid petroleum gas (LPG) for household cooking, may have to be abandoned because they provide only partial solutions.

On levers, participants said energy pathways must be appropriate in the national context, noting, for example, a transition to hydroelectricity in Nepal requires different support than a transition to solar energy in India. They also cautioned that focusing on partial solutions, such as LPG, leads to unsustainable transformation pathways from a climate change perspective.

### ***Capacity Building***

**Capacities in Sub-National, Integrated SDG-Implementation – Spotlights from India's SDG Localization Approach:** Rajib Kumar Sen, NITI Aayog, said SDG localization must focus on actions in the local context, noting that several Indian states have created SDG acceleration centers. Ashutosh Ojha, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, said India's SDG index promotes competition among states by including some state-level indicators. Annie Namala, Centre for Social Equity and Inclusion, outlined the 100 Hotspots initiative, which empowers marginalized communities to collect citizen-generated data for advocacy to ensure they are not left behind. She highlighted the need to identify marginalized groups along all dimensions and combine data and narratives to reflect their concerns.

Responding to questions, panelists stressed VNRs should be inclusive and consider various types of evidence beyond data to ensure concerns of civil society and marginalized groups are reflected. On data describing lower income groups and marginalized populations, panelists recommended using complementary data from sub-national sources and citizen-



generated data, noting challenges to create adequate baselines for such data.

### **Capacity Building – an Essential Lever to Transformation**

**Processes:** Moderator Astra Bonini, UNDESA, explained that capacity building was introduced as a fifth lever in the second GSDR to highlight its potential to support transformation. Ambuj Sagar outlined a systematic approach including: defining capacity agendas in a national context; creating space for experiments, assessment and course correction; engaging stakeholders of unsustainable systems; identifying actors and institutions holding capacity; and coordinating relevant actors. On overcoming resistance by unsustainable systems, he suggested developing the capacity of social movements that can lead discussions on socially desired futures.

Participants discussed, among other issues: the need for multi-stakeholder capacity-building platforms; empowering marginalized groups to influence discussions and share their knowledge; awareness that dominant systems and transitions are often imposed by the North; and considering ways to achieve behaviour change.

### **Working Groups on Capacity Building**

These sessions focused on approaches and strategies to build the capacity of various stakeholder groups.

**Strategic Direction and Foresight:** Hosted by Jaime Montoya and Astra Bonini, this session discussed how strategic foresight can inform long-term strategies for integrated SDG implementation. Participants noted challenges in using foresight, including lack of funding and capacity, insufficient citizen involvement, difficulties to communicate foresight results that are not specific and conflicts with real events, disruptions through leadership changes, and difficulties in focusing on longer term questions as current crises absorb capacities. The group agreed that foresight is important for long-term planning and should be better supported.

### **The Role of Capacity Building in Different Transformation**

**Phases:** Hosted by Shirin Malekpour and Shivani Nayyar, this session focused on the challenges of sustaining capacity building through all transformation phases. Participants raised concerns that funding for capacity building often ends before the stabilization phase is reached and capacities are often lost because of changes in institutions supporting transformations. They also highlighted the high bureaucratic burden of development support, the need to retain individuals that have received training, and the risk of stagnation as decision-makers and stakeholders settle into a “new normal” before a transformation is complete.

To prevent capacity loss, participants suggested creating networks, conserving the skills that sustain capacity, and recognizing civil society leaders as holders of valuable knowledge about the national context and history.

**Building Capacity of Key Stakeholders:** Hosted by Ambuj Sagar and Sudip Ranjan Basu, UNESCAP, this group focused on identifying key stakeholders and their specific roles and capacity building needs, including:

- National governments set the capacity building agenda and support and monitor implementation;

- NGO and independent think tanks provide input to agenda setting and function as watchdogs for accountability;
- The private sector training its workforce and raising awareness;
- Universities and other knowledge institutions that conduct socially relevant research aligned with changing priorities, needs, and technologies; and
- Media communicating complex issues to the broader public, especially about scientific content.

Participants also discussed key considerations for capacity building programs, including to: confirm actors understand the problem; ensure all stakeholders can contribute their perspective to the problem definition; guarantee all stakeholders affected by solutions can participate; and consider traditional knowledge and sustainable systems that existed in Indigenous societies.

### **National Application and VNR Reporting**

#### **United for the Future: Integrated Approaches to SDG**

**Implementation in Germany:** Sophia Engel, Policy Officer, BMUV, outlined Germany’s approach to integrated SDG implementation including two high-level commissions on coal phase out and transforming agriculture and food systems that developed societal consensus on replacing dominant unsustainable systems. She said transformation teams have been established for each GSDR entry point that engage stakeholders and support inter-departmental coordination. The teams report to the State Secretaries Committee for Sustainable Development – Germany’s highest forum for SDG implementation – to inform the national sustainable development strategy and VNR reporting.

Responding to questions, Engel explained that cities complement national efforts through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLR) reporting, transformation teams also develop key measures that can complement the SDG Strategy, and the German government plans peer learning events in the context of its next VNR.

### **Working Groups on Applying the Transformation Framework to National Action Plans and VNRs**

In two sub-regional groups, participants discussed how the VNR process can support national plans for transformative accelerated actions based on the GSDR’s recommendations.

**SIDS and Southeast Asia:** The first group comprising representatives from SIDS and Southeast Asian countries highlighted challenges such as lack of political will, limits to stakeholder participation in government-led VNR processes, disruptions caused by changes in government, and data challenges, especially regarding data describing marginalized groups.

Several participants noted VNR processes often limit stakeholder input to written comments on draft VNRs. One participant questioned the practice of including only positive messages, noting the GSDR framework conflicts with existing national frameworks. Several stressed the importance of a coordinating body or platform to review progress and ensure accountability.

**South and East Asia:** The second group included representatives from countries in South and East Asia. This group noted difficulties in data collection, especially local data, and problems in integrating all stakeholders. A participant from Bangladesh said the SDGs are not a priority for several ministries, resulting the VNR containing only political statements.

On current VNR practices, a participant from Nepal reported on the use of multi-stakeholder workshops and shadow VNRs produced by NGOs and youth. A participant from India described a whole of society approach, noting NGOs had limited influence and civil society organizations (CSOs) submitted a shadow report. A participant from the Republic of Korea noted progress in developing national statistics but lamented a remaining gap between VNR reporting and national action.

On using GSDR messages to support integrated VNRs, participants said VNRs should include CSO views, be transparent about failures, explain not only why progress is made but also analyze whether it is transformative, and be more forward looking.

### ***SDG Implementation in Practice***

**Maritime Transport in the Marshall Islands:** Mark Stege, Pacific Islands Private Sector Organisation (PIPSO), presented the Pacific Blue Shipping Partnership, which develops clean shipping technologies, including a modern sail cargo ship, to reduce marine transport emissions in Pacific Island States by 40% by 2030 and 100% by 2050. He said low carbon marine shipping can be a lever to support the managed decline and phase out of an unsustainable system, as it avoids future mitigation costs.

**Application of Integrated Policymaking at all Levels:** Via video message, Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, UNESCAP, said the GSDR framework provides new directions for policy making and called for: enhanced capacity building, engaging stakeholders to develop actionable plans, and empowering marginalized groups and youth. Noting UNESCAP's regional knowledge hub, she highlighted the organization's capacity building program for VNR reporting.

Shashi Kiran, Assistant Minister for Women, Children and Social Protection, Fiji, reiterated that capacity needs vary across nations and regions, noting that, in the Pacific region, the capacity of the private sector, media, civil society and the financial sector must be considered. Noting the GSDRs' potential in a regional context, she called for increased support to regional organizations like PIPSO and the Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

Chamindry Saparamadu, Director General/CEO, Sustainable Development Council, Sri Lanka, highlighted challenges to phase out of unsustainable practices as their stakeholders can mobilize against transformations, noting the need to sequence transformations appropriately. She reported that Sri Lanka's Sustainable Development Council has proposed policies that directly contribute to 108 SDG targets.

Eva Kracht, Director-General, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Germany, commended participants for "doing the real work" of integrating trade-offs and synergies in SDG implementation at national and regional levels. She described how European

countries used emergency support spending during the COVID-19 pandemic to also green the economy and emphasized climate action should not come at the cost of biodiversity protection. Noting the value of sharing experiences in bridging silos and engaging stakeholders, she said Germany will continue exchanging ideas as it develops its next VNR.

### ***Reflecting on Key Learnings and Ways of Application to the National Context***

In a fishbowl setting led by IGS members Shirin Malekpour and Jaime Montoya, participants shared key insights and reflections from the workshop. Stressing the need to prioritize groups that are lagging, Malekpour said the GSDR framework can be used to prioritize actions without "cherry picking" among the SDGs. Montoya highlighted the potential to apply the GSDR framework to national planning across the SDGs and tackle interlinked crises.

Participants highlighted how the GSDR framework consisting of the six entry points for transformation, five policy levers, and transformation curve can support integrated SDG implementation. The GSDR can help to:

- Comprehensively structure SDG implementation;
- Align SDG implementation with development justice, showing the need for political commitment from duty bearers to tackle inequalities;
- Look forward and identify opportunities to accelerate progress;
- Use data for foresight to look at SDG indicators as a challenge rather than a source of frustration;
- Identify where capacity building is needed;
- Support working towards the stabilization of transformations;
- Strengthen Innovation and Technology; and
- Promote better integration, inclusion and accountability.

Participants also pointed out what actions are required to mobilize the GSDR Framework's potential, including: learning at all levels; considering traditional knowledge especially in disaster preparedness; long-term political commitment for sustainable finance; equitable access to technology; inclusive accountability mechanisms; strategic approaches to leaving no one behind; and refocusing official development assistance towards country-led objectives and needs.

Sudip Ranjan Basu, UNESCAP, encouraged workshop participants to see themselves as ambassadors of a movement that thinks differently about development and impact to consider vulnerability across all populations in the Pacific Region. Sara Libera Zanetti, UNESCAP, commended the diversity of stakeholders at the workshop, noting the need for more inclusive science-policy interfaces and VNR processes.

Summarizing the discussion, Montoya highlighted the need to include marginalized and underserved populations, support collaboration between scientists and government planners, and think about the SDGs beyond 2030. Malekpour stressed the role of public policy and governance in driving multiple transformations, noting they must work faster and be more inclusive.

Closing the workshop, Astra Bonini asked participants to submit ideas for the next GSDR to be released in 2027.