

## HLPF 2025 Highlights: Tuesday, 22 July 2025

On the second day of the High-level Segment, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) continued discussions on two parallel tracks. Following two special panels on, respectively, messages from the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), and updates from the UN Regional Forums for sustainable development, delegates continued to hear Voluntary National Review (VNR) presentations for the rest of the day. The General Debate continued through the afternoon.

### *Messages from the UN Environment Assembly*

Abdullah Bin Ali Al-Amri (Oman), President of the seventh session of the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA-7), presented key messages from the Assembly touching on the deep interlinkages between environmental action and the other pillars of sustainable development, including:

- the One Health approach as an integrated response to the environment-health nexus;
- the role of circular economy approaches in decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation;
- the disproportionate impact of environmental challenges on women, who, at the same time, lead the way in developing sustainable and innovative solutions; and
- direct impacts of conflict on environmental degradation, such as is manifested in Gaza where 85% of water sources are inaccessible, and 90% of land is degraded.

He encouraged all countries to seize the opportunity offered by the upcoming UNEA-7 session to build political momentum towards science-based policymaking at scale.

### *Regional perspectives on SDG implementation*

Chair Krzysztof Szczerski, Vice-President, ECOSOC, opened the session. Moderator Keisha McGuire, President and CEO, Present and Future Institute, invited heads of the UN Regional Commissions to share their key findings and strategies in advancing the implementation of the SDGs.

Robinah Nabbanja (Uganda), Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, discussed how African countries are aligning national and global frameworks and promoting evidence-based policy implementation to translate global commitments into local realities. She underscored key regional priorities including: leadership and governance, focusing on strengthening local institutions; sustainable finance and partnerships; digital transformation; health and social protection, advocating that governments allocate at least 15% of their national budget to health; economic transformation, through the creation of inclusive

jobs; and blue economy, focusing on actions against Ocean pollution.

Muhammad Ali Tamim (Iraq), Arab Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, stressed the need for a fundamental shift in mindset, noting conflicts and institutional fragilities that are prevalent in the region. He underscored: innovative financial mechanisms; fighting illicit financial flows; economic inclusion for women and other marginalized groups; and creating a clear framework for ethical use of AI, including the creation of a regional data center.

Suman Bery (India), Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, emphasized the importance of deeper regional cooperation and the development of inclusive, evidence-based VNRs with strong stakeholder engagement to facilitate progress, identify gaps and enable data-driven decision-making processes.

Umud Abidkhadjaev (Uzbekistan), and Ioannis Ghikas (Greece), reported on the Economic

Commission for Europe (UNECE) Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. Abidkhadjaev said that 21 SDG targets are on track in the region. He drew attention to the role of the private sector and the green transition in achieving the 2030 Agenda. Ghikas shared solutions for policy action, including on the key roles of technology, AI and digitalization, as well as the need to address their associated risks.

Jorge Felix Rubio (Peru), Latin America and Caribbean Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (Peru), mentioned a regional study prepared by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) that underscores regional challenges to achieving the 2030 Agenda, including slow economic growth, inequality, weak institutional capacities, and ineffective governance. Among core interventions, he urged: fostering spaces for dialogue with key stakeholders; addressing reforms and creating coalitions to overcome resistance to change; and reforming the global financial architecture.

Lead discussant Faisal Alfadl, Secretary-General, Saudi Green Building Forum (SGBF), stressed that the true challenge is not a lack of solutions but the absence of trusted frameworks to recognize, document, certify, and scale proven practices on the ground. He said the SGBF responds by aligning local solutions with international standards.

In the interactive discussion, BULGARIA outlined their strategic priorities as incoming Chair of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. BELARUS noted strong SDG momentum in the Eurasian region.

SERBIA identified AI, biotechnology, connectivity, and labor migration, as priority issues for their 2025 Presidency of the Central European Initiative.

BANGLADESH highlighted efforts to counter the lack of disaggregated data on “left behind groups,” mentioning a recent workshop co-organized with UN Women and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) to strengthen national data ecosystems through improved use of big data, machine learning and other AI tools.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION expressed concern that none of the 30 best-performing countries in the [2025 SDG Progress Report](#) were from the Global South. They called for moving away from “abstract declarations” towards actionable targets that extend the time horizon to 2050, with clear key performance indicators and funding streams.

Chile, for the GROUP OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES, applauded ECLAC’s efforts in addressing institutional gaps and fostering cooperation. The STAKEHOLDER GROUP OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES emphasized the importance of disaggregated data to inform inclusion policies. SAUDI ARABIA stated that there is “a lack of clarity, not a lack of ambition,” emphasizing the need for innovation and partnership in resource mobilization. MEXICO highlighted the vital role of cities in achieving the 2030 Agenda, while POLAND stressed the role of the EU in harmonizing actions and called for investments in technology and innovation for long-term benefits.

**Responses by the Executive Secretaries of the Regional Commissions:** Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa, and Coordinator, UN Regional Commissions, stressed five priorities for the region: strengthening regional platforms through collaboration with other stakeholders such as the African Union and the African Development Bank; regional framework alignment with global priorities to avoid fragmentation; innovative financial solutions; evidence-based solutions for decision making; and regional and national coherence.

Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, UNECE, highlighted key enablers to achieve the 2030 Agenda, including: technology and innovation; innovative finance, bringing together the public and private sectors; dynamic partnerships, especially at the city level; and the critical role of civil society and youth.

Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, stressed that instability and high debt levels are the primary challenges to achieving the SDGs in the region. He stressed the importance of leveraging AI, tailored and collaborative finance, equitable taxation, and highlighted the need for reforming the global finance architecture.

Arminda Salsiah Alisjahbana, ESCAPF, underscored key regional initiatives, including facilitating regional dialogue, fostering capacity-building, promoting green technology, ensuring young people are equipped for future challenges, and promoting digital inclusion.

José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Secretary, ECLAC, said only 23% of the SDGs targets are on track in the region, attributing this to the “second lost decade” – the period of economic stagnation that coincided with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. He affirmed the Commission’s commitment to supporting member countries’ SDG aspirations.

### **Voluntary National Reviews**

**FINLAND:** Petteri Orpo, Prime Minister, Finland, presented the country’s third VNR, saying the UN’s value is existential for small countries. He said going from a poor post-war country

80 years ago to high rankings on happiness and sustainable development required high trust, democracy, rule of law, security, education, and universal healthcare, noting progress toward gender equality and clean energy. He said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine forced resource reallocation to security. A private sector representative urged businesses to develop scalable solutions on clean technologies and circular economy. A youth representative asked everyone to request youths’ input and listen to their critiques.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from DENMARK, SWITZERLAND, MALAYSIA, and NIGERIA, Orpo noted Finland’s whole-of-society approach, including working with scientists and the private sector on negative and positive international spillovers. He noted models for measuring impacts of value chains and goods and services, for a “positive handprint” in developing countries. He said Finland still accepts asylum seekers and vulnerable people but closed the eastern border for security reasons. The private sector representative noted her company’s steel is 95% recycled content. The youth representative said youth independently discuss unethical supply chains, global justice, and climate action with Finnish companies.

**THE PHILIPPINES:** Rosemarie Edillon, Undersecretary, Department of Economy, Planning and Development, the Philippines, presented her country’s fourth VNR, noting significant progress using a whole-of-nation approach. She presented a graph with most SDGs showing progress, noting only SDGs 3 (good health and wellbeing) and 11 (sustainable cities) had regressed. She said two new acts, on ecosystem accountability and producer responsibility, were now addressing SDG 12 (consumption and production). She said since the first VNR in 2016 progress had been made on SDG platforms, accelerating pace, monitoring, convergence budgeting for SDG financing, and partnerships driving impact across regions and sectors.

**Discussion:** Responding to SIERRA LEONE, INDONESIA, ANGOLA, POLAND, WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS, PALESTINE, CZECHIA, and EQUATORIAL GUINEA, Edillon noted her country acts on: economy; climate action; peace, security, and governance; and implementation and monitoring. She gave examples, including: a comprehensive labor market strategy; education and school-to-work transition; mitigation and adaptation intersectionality, including a resilience fund; investments in renewable energy; an action plan for long-term sustainable production and consumption; regional councils with 25% civil society representation; and an SDG budget funded by “sin taxes.” She highlighted data collection and community monitoring every two years.

**GERMANY:** Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, presented the country’s third VNR, stressing it identifies six transformation areas and policy levers, outlining circular economy as one example. Bärbel Kofler, Federal Ministry for Economic, Cooperation and Development described Germany’s feminist international assistance strategy as key instrument for advancing SDG implementation abroad, focusing on equal rights, equal access to resources and equal representation. Marie-Luise Abshagen, German Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, said Germany is failing to fully integrate the SDGs in its domestic policies, citing the country’s low ranking on SDG spillover effects and a lag in adopting a new law on supply chain

management to protect labor rights, gender equality and prevent child labor.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from CROATIA, the UNECE REGIONAL CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM, THAILAND, NAMIBIA, and NIGERIA, Kofler outlined efforts to promote a One Health approach and pandemic preparedness and to improve access to decent work in line with relevant rules of the International Labor Organization, especially for women. She explained that the law on supply chain management is awaiting an EU decision to avoid discrepancy between EU and national legislation. On monitoring and data, Schwarzelühr-Sutter added that data is updated in accordance with policy cycles and openly accessible through a central dashboard allowing stakeholders to hold the government accountable.

**KAZAKHSTAN:** Presenting his country's third VNR, Assan Darbayev, Vice-Minister of National Economy, Kazakhstan, stressed progress in poverty reduction, GDP growth, institutionalizing the SDGs, and localization, listing legal and policy measures taken to improve gender equality, labor rights, the rights of children and disabled people, and the rule of law. He explained that since 2023, a parliamentary commission has been coordinating SDG implementation and that more than 5,000 people participated in the development of the VNR using digital tools. He outlined future priorities including enhancing public awareness and understanding of the SDGs, budget planning, and accelerated localization.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from CROATIA, AUSTRIA, PARAGUAY, WOMEN, TUNISIA, and SWITZERLAND, Darbayev listed measures taken to improve gender equality and labor rights for people with disabilities and other marginalized groups. He described a scheme of subsidized jobs to improve employment, especially for young people, and outlined a plan to prepare for the demographic transition and provide health services to older people. On Kazakhstan's engagement with the Global Methane Pledge, he described ambitions for a green energy transition.

**SEYCHELLES:** Laura Elisabeth Bertha Agathine, Ministry of Finance, National Planning and Trade, Seychelles, presented her country's second VNR. She outlined areas of progress, including higher rankings in regional indices on good governance and low corruption, improved maternal and infant health, renewable energy, and protection of close to 30% of the Seychelles' exclusive economic zone and 50% of its land territory. Noting persistent vulnerabilities, she outlined measures to diversify the economy, addressing the mismatch between skills and the labor market, and digitalizing social service delivery. On climate adaptation, she called for better access to concessional funding for high income Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from the UK, VIETNAM, and TOGETHER 2030, Agathine stated that development partners should amplify their solidarity with SIDS as they transition towards a diversified service economy that must be resilient to climate impacts, adding that partners should also advance climate justice and effective use of climate financing. On SDG alignment, she explained that 78% of the national development strategies' targets are aligned with the SDGs, noting other tools like SDG-aligned budgeting and an SDG investment map. She also outlined measures to improve youth employment and preserve civic space for NGO engagement.

**THE GAMBIA:** Seedy Keita, Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, The Gambia, presented The Gambia's third

VNR, emphasizing its participatory approach involving local governments, women, youth, and the private sector. Despite improvements in maternal health, he noted neonatal mortality is considered high. He mentioned a robust legal framework supporting gender equality, with laws against domestic violence and discrimination, and highlighted recent efforts to maintain the ban on female genital mutilation, despite efforts to overturn it. He underscored efforts to provide finance for women and small and medium-sized enterprises, and to improve revenue collection by simplifying and expanding the tax base. He noted obstacles remain, including high public debt, fiscal vulnerability, a narrow economic base, and the need for disaggregated data to inform policy and implementation.

**Discussion:** Delegates from SENEGAL, CROATIA, FINLAND, and the STAKEHOLDER GROUP FOR COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT, posed questions. Keita and other speakers highlighted The Gambia's efforts in promoting gender equality through financial support for victims of violence, a hotline for reporting violence cases, providing legal assistance, and the existence of a robust legal framework. They noted reducing child mortality is critical, mentioning government initiatives including provision of community ambulances, expansion of emergency neonatal centers, training, and revitalization of primary health care.

**JAPAN:** Takuma Miyaji, State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan, presented Japan's third VNR, highlighting the importance of multistakeholder engagement to address challenges such as an ageing population and disaster risk reduction. He noted progress in increasing life expectancy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but acknowledged further efforts are needed in achieving gender equality. On technical innovations, Miyaji cited the next-generation solar cells initiative and the development of a barrier-free map application to create accessibility for wheelchair users. Other speakers focused on Japan's vision of "happy economics" to realize a sustainable society, emphasizing health, inclusive growth, and deep personal connection. Miyaji highlighted Japan's commitment beyond the 2030 Agenda, with a focus on expanding dialogue to Asia and other regions.

**Discussion:** Delegates from BULGARIA, THAILAND, CHILDREN AND YOUTH, the UK, and POLAND asked for further clarification. Speakers emphasized a cross-cutting approach to disaster management, with a national plan that includes infrastructure development and education programmes, and engaging multiple stakeholders, including the private sector and civil society to strengthen collaboration. They highlighted Japan's commitment to a stable economic growth and decarbonization, continuing efforts towards net-zero emissions, with international community support deemed essential. Regarding reducing plastic waste, they mentioned Japan's 2022 Act on Promotion of Resource Circulation for Plastics, emphasizing the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement.

**INDONESIA:** Febrian Alphyanto Ruddyard, Vice Minister of National Development Planning, Indonesia, presented his country's fourth VNR, stressing that 60% of nationally defined SDG indicators are on track, including disease control, health coverage, reduced child marriage, and support for small scale fisheries. He described key strategies to accelerate implementation, such as SDG mainstreaming in national and sub-national development planning, local ownership, transparency and accountability, inclusive growth and sustainable development finance. A second speaker outlined the engagement of Indonesia's

parliament in SDG implementation through legislation, budget review, and a dedicated oversight group.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from INDIA, ETHIOPIA, NGO MAJOR GROUP, SAINT LUCIA, and PALESTINE, Ruddyard described steps taken to digitalize the health system, including the use of Geographic Information System mapping to identify underserved areas. He also outlined measures to address disproportionate impacts on women during disasters, including gender-responsive support, targeting female-led households, and engaging women in disaster prevention and early warning using digital tools.

**SURINAME:** Elizabeth Bradley, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Suriname, presented her country's second VNR, focusing on the challenge to sustainably develop Suriname's oil and gas reserves while maintaining the country's net carbon negative status. She outlined activities for SDG implementation including educational reform, training for climate-smart agriculture, legal protection of the rights of women and Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, providing access to clean water in rural areas, and social protection. She underscored the need for more investment in renewable energy, a rights-based approach to support LGBTIQ communities, and better data.

**Discussion:** Responding to questions from MOROCCO, BHUTAN, EL SALVADOR, LGBTIQ STAKEHOLDER GROUP, and PALESTINE, Bradley provided more details on her country's strategy to sustainably develop their oil and gas reserves, including strict enforcement of environmental standards, independent oversight, and an economic strategy to diversify the economy into agriculture, renewable energy, and tourism, including a social protection scheme to ensure sustainable job creation. Acknowledging gaps in gender equality and protecting LGBTIQ rights, she pointed to efforts to strengthen enforcement of legal protection through the Bureau of Gender Affairs.

### General Debate

Resuming in the afternoon, the Ministerial segment heard statements from more than 40 high-level speakers.

MOROCCO, UKRAINE, THE NETHERLANDS, SRI LANKA, JAMAICA, IRAN, ARMENIA, and MALAYSIA, among others, expressed their commitment to 2030 Agenda implementation. LIECHTENSTEIN, CHILE, and DENMARK acknowledged regression on some SDGs below their 2017 baselines.

TANZANIA and SENEGAL highlighted the extension of their SDG planning frameworks to 2050, with SENEGAL noting efforts to tap innovative financing following its recent graduation from the Least Developing Countries group.

Numerous countries reported on progress on health and wellbeing indicators and gender equality. ANDORRA and LITHUANIA highlighted their focus on mental health monitoring. KIRIBATI said health in remote islands is still a challenge. MONGOLIA announced its first diagnosis and prevention system and its goal of universal health coverage.

Among many references to gender equality targets, LICHTENSTEIN mentioned their first female head of government, expressing hope that this will inspire women and girls to run for public office. Other countries, including ESTONIA, MALTA, OMAN, the MALDIVES, LITHUANIA, MALAYSIA, FRANCE, ANDORRA, and BOTSWANA, highlighted advances in digital transformation.

On the overall theme of the debate, many underscored the importance of multilateralism and the ongoing UN80 process. The UAE stressed that multilateralism is the only way to build a more sustainable and inclusive future for all. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA expressed hope that UN80 will enhance UN's efficiency in the final sprint to 2030. Numerous countries, including SRI LANKA, JAMAICA, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, KIRIBATI, MONGOLIA, and CHILE, aligned with Iraq's statement on behalf of the G77/China, on the need to consider whether the UN is fit for purpose and is living up to the ideals enshrined in its Charter. Several countries referred to negotiations on the HLPF Ministerial Declaration, with BRAZIL and VENEZUELA regretting the omission of agreed language on women's reproductive rights.

Another common theme was the need to reform the international financing architecture to galvanize the SDGs, as set out in the [Sevilla Commitment](#). VIETNAM, among others, noted potential to leverage funding from the private sector. Describing themselves as the largest provider of official development assistance (ODA) globally, the EU reaffirmed their commitment to narrowing the financing gap in the spirit of the Sevilla Commitment. DENMARK emphasized they have met the 0.7% ODA target for over four decades.

On the link between sustainable development and peace, YEMEN noted the reduction of the country's GDP by more than 50% as a result of conflict, with 80% of their population living below poverty line. GREECE and LITHUANIA called for full respect of international law for resolving disputes. A speaker from MYANMAR decried "serious regression" since the military coup, describing a rise in gender-based violence, forced labor, illicit economies, trafficking of women and online scams, forced labor, and calling for international support to end to the "horror and bloodshed." THAILAND decried the rise of transnational crimes such as online scams and human trafficking. ISRAEL noted that the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023 had severely impacted its ability to pursue the SDGs.

### In The Corridors

On the penultimate day of the HLPF, some participants' attention turned to what comes next. In the corridors, several observers remarked on the lack of substantive discussion of post-2030 scenarios, especially in light of grim statistics about the bulk of SDG targets being off track or regressing, with just five years to go.

One delegate pointed to Japan's offer to lead discussions on alternative futures, stemming from their experience of aligning their net-zero carbon targets to efforts to tackle trends such as an aging population and economic stagnation as a concrete initiative. In plenary, Russia raised similar sentiments, suggesting an extension of the SDG deadline to 2050, and expressing its preference for Global South leadership such as the China-led Global Development Initiative.

We're hearing too little about the [Pact for the Future](#), complained one young delegate, who wanted to see more continuity from last year's [Declaration on Future Generations](#).

The *Earth Negotiation Bulletin's* summary and analysis of the HLPF 2025 will be available on Saturday, 26 July 2025 at [enb.iisd.org/high-level-political-forum-hlpf-2025](http://enb.iisd.org/high-level-political-forum-hlpf-2025)