

A lush green forest landscape with a grid overlay and floating squares. The background is a dense, vibrant green forest with various tree species. A light green grid is overlaid on the entire image. Numerous semi-transparent squares of various sizes and shades of green and white are scattered across the scene, some appearing to float or move. The overall aesthetic is modern and digital, suggesting a connection between nature and technology.

HARNESSING SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE AND DECISION-MAKING TO ACCELERATE THE SDGS

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Ahead of the SDG Summit, scientists meeting in a new forum issued a call to leverage scientific knowledge to gain headway for the 2030 Agenda and other key global aims that are failing to progress.
- They offered recommendations to strengthen the science-policy interface – among them, taking new scientific approaches and deploying scientific tools and methods to enhance policymaking and overcome resistance to change.
- They urged the creation of a “global transformation road map” that embraces scientific knowledge to address intertwined global crises.

The following joint statement summarizes insights from the first-ever Science Day held to accelerate progress on the SDGs. The statement was co-authored by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the International Science Council (ISC), and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), on behalf of participants in the event.

At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with progress largely stalled and even backsliding in many countries, the world must adopt a new approach and focus to move forward. This necessitates centering the role of science to identify and act on key transformation points and pathways to accelerate SDG progress. It also requires strengthening the science-policy interface to translate existing scientific evidence into actionable knowledge and insights, inform policymaking, and steer action towards desired outcomes.

With this in mind, nearly 150 experts from academia, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the scientific community, and the UN system met in an unprecedented forum held at the UN Headquarters in parallel with this year's High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). This first-ever Science Day was established with two aims: to help ensure that the acceleration of SDG implementation over the next seven years is as evidence-based, strategic, and effective as possible; and to produce insights that will inform the upcoming SDG Summit (-18 19 September) and 2024 Summit of the Future.

The SDG Summit Political Declaration (July 2023) highlights that Member States intend to increase the use of science and scientific evidence in policymaking. To ensure that science is central to decision-making processes, Member States should incorporate concrete commitments that leverage scientific expertise to accelerate implementation of the SDGs through, for example, building their capacity in knowledge generation, evidence synthesis, and translation of science into actionable knowledge for policymakers.

To guide these efforts, we present the following recommendations and a call to action – informed by the Science Day participants and members of the Independent Group of Scientists of the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) who participated in the event – to support Member States and decision makers in using science to accelerate sustainable development.

DRAW ON SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE TO SET PRIORITIES

- **Generate and use the data needed for evidence-based policies.** Governments should draw together evidence-based, universal practices for data management and analysis, and they should integrate this information into policymaking decisions. They should focus on projections and road maps that support scalable and replicable best practices. Gathering data at the household level will strengthen knowledge on the social dimensions of sustainability.
- **Draw on local knowledge.** Knowledge derived from real-life experiences and community-based action provides crucial context needed to meet SDG targets and measure progress. Drawing on such knowledge will enable local governments to implement interventions that are context specific, culturally appropriate, and aligned with local priorities. Local civil society and research organizations can inform such bottom-up efforts and help ensure that solutions benefit marginalized groups.
- **Open access to science.** Most scientific research on sustainable development and climate change remains behind paywalls. Research organizations should advocate for open-access publishing models that enable a diversity of researchers and the public to evaluate and build on scientific evidence.
- **Adopt a new approach to science to support the SDGs.** There is an urgent need to supplement and rebalance our current scientific model, by incentivizing collaboration, both between scientists and of scientists with other stakeholders, especially civil society, on large-scale sustainability challenges. Governments and funders must prioritize transdisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and mission-oriented research for sustainability in all science and engineering disciplines. This requires stepping out of business-as-usual (BAU) approaches to funding science, and creating supportive institutional arrangements for nurturing inclusive and impactful sustainability science.

USE SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE AND TOOLS TO NAVIGATE MULTIPLE CRISES SIMULTANEOUSLY

- **Understand the interconnected nature of crises.** Governments must not only navigate crises but understand how to leverage them for action. Science can help illuminate connections and inform interventions that address multiple crises simultaneously. Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are a prime example of this. Research organizations should develop a framework to assess how interventions positively and negatively impact other SDGs and other global aims. They should support policymakers in using this framework to make decisions that address root causes more systematically and support co-benefits.
- **Use tools to overcome resistance to change.** Scenario-analysis tools can help decision makers assess the long-term impacts of interventions within countries. Tools to analyze the interactions between the SDGs can help ensure coherent, climate-smart development. Providing opportunities for collaboration will also help break down silos and help efforts converge across sectors.

EXPLOIT SYNERGIES IDENTIFIED IN THE 2023 GSDR

- **Use systemic framing.** The SDGs must be framed systemically as a vehicle for transformation across society. Governments should employ systems approaches to identify and mitigate potential bottlenecks and spillover effects. It also requires educating people about the interconnectedness of the Goals and ensuring that social dimensions are integrated into discussions and policies on environmental sustainability. Consistent, positive messaging that highlights science as a crucial leverage point is key.
- **Go beyond conventional capacity building.** Capacity building needed to capitalize on synergies must address the local context and cover many sectors. Science has an important role to play in building capacity to help actors understand and navigate trade-offs and enable policymakers to make difficult choices.
- **Make participation in relevant processes more inclusive.** Enhanced mechanisms for consultation with Member States can improve the inclusivity of the GSDR process. UN University (UNU) and other youth stakeholders should recruit and engage more early-career scientists.

EXPAND PARTICIPATION TO ACHIEVE ON-THE-GROUND OUTCOMES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- **Focus on outcomes.** Governments must shift focus from setting goals and targets to driving the realization of outcomes on the ground by effectively tackling root causes that inevitably cut across silos. This requires moving from rhetoric to meaningful changes in: policies; regulations; standard setting; funding allocation and conditionalities; and monitoring, reviewing, and reporting of outcomes.
- **Take an all-hands-on-deck approach.** Acceleration of SDG implementation demands the participation of everyone at all levels of public and private sectors. Actors in the policy, financial, and business ecosystems, together with civil society, must prioritize solutions that increase environmental, social, and economic resilience.
- **Establish partnerships to draw road maps for achieving shared objectives.** Meaningful and accountable partnerships must be created to focus on developing context-specific and evidence-based solutions that promote and harness the co-production of knowledge for effective policy outcomes for people and the planet. These partnerships need to take into account that not all actors have the same agency and capacity for action.
- **Encourage independent evaluation.** Civil society and research organizations should hold national and local governments accountable for their SDG commitments. One way to do this is by undertaking systematic reviews of the impacts of interventions now underway, such as the [Voluntary Peoples Review](#) in Sri Lanka, and embed mechanisms for learning and adjusting in decision making and policy planning.

PROMOTE COHERENCE

- **Recognize the politics of incoherence.** Promoting coherence among the SDGs is both a technical and a political challenge. Vested interests, conflicting ideologies, and poor coordination can inhibit coherent implementation. Political solutions are required to overcome these barriers.
- **Focus on trade-offs.** Most dialogue within the UN focuses on identifying and maximizing synergies, especially between climate and development goals. It is equally important to acknowledge and mitigate the potential trade-offs. This is where global cooperation and solidarity are especially needed.
- **Recommit to the principle that no one should be left behind.** Policy coherence itself does not necessarily help reduce inequality. When addressing policy coherence, governments should seek to minimize the burdens on marginalized groups.

We welcome all actors to join the organizers of Science Day in this effort to encourage Member States to strengthen the use of science in decision making for the acceleration of SDG implementation. The course taken from now on is crucial for the future of our people and planet.

ACT ON SCIENTISTS' CALL FOR "A GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION ROAD MAP"

The lack of progress on all major global aims – including the Paris Agreement on climate change and the UNFCCC, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), the New Urban Agenda (NUA), and the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs – collectively underscores the urgent need for a change of tack. The UN must provide a clear signal and framework for greater integration that mobilizes Member States to adopt multilateral approaches that address bottlenecks and embrace the knowledge created by the scientific community.

We therefore call for the adoption of a **global transformation road map** to change course. Such a road map could be created from transformative pathways in the 2019 and 2023 GSDR reports. It should identify key synergies, trade-offs, interventions, and funding and monitoring requirements. Member States should be asked to collaborate to follow this road map and to report their progress.



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