

Working Toward the SDG Summit, 2023

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In 2015 we launched the Sustainable Development Goals with great global enthusiasm. Now, as we near the halfway point, global progress is being hampered by conflict, environmental shocks driven by climate change, and the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic. Compounding the on-the-ground realities, we have seen challenges, including limited timely, quality and disaggregated data and statistics on SDGs, that make it difficult to understand where progress has been made or where our efforts should be focused.

In Uganda, where I am from, we are more than 50% on track, according to the 2021 SDG Report. While Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production and Goal 13 Climate Action are on track, major challenges remain in 12 Goals and four have significant challenges. Additionally, we are missing critical information about the state of our own development. Of the 232 indicators assigned to the 17 Goals, Uganda is only reporting on 119 indicators. We only have information on one indicator for Goal 14 Life Below Water; two indicators for Goal 15 Life on Land; and five of the twenty-five indicators for Goal 17 Partnerships for the Goals. Uganda is not alone in this challenge. Many Member States are not fully tracking their progress, a trend that must be addressed as we progress toward 2030.

The 2023 SDG Summit is a much-needed opportunity to rally the world and reinvigorate our commitments to creating a world that works for everyone.

Summit Participation & Engagement

In preparation for the Summit, it's crucial to note the SDG principles of leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind first. The only way to ensure no one is left behind is to ensure that everyone has a collective voice! Deliberate actions should be taken to ensure participation of smallholder farmers, grassroot food system actors, children, girls and women, people with disabilities and indigenous people. Meaningful participation from these groups can be attained by conducting consultation with non-state actors, such as the civil society, especially civil society networks, women-serving and women-led organizations, youth-serving and youth-led organizations, cultural and religious intuitions.

The space for civil society is threatened in many areas, both in voice and agency. We in civil society are eager to partner with UN agencies to strengthen community-based organizations everywhere. This Summit can be a turning point in revitalizing the ability of every person to bring their creativity and energies towards achieving the SDGs.

While the world has become more adept at working remotely and engaging online, we must remember that 40% of the global population does not have access to the internet, according to the World Bank. The vast majority of people not covered by a broadband-capable network live in rural areas and often struggle with the very issues that the SDGs are trying to address. Summit organizers

should be creative and pioneer new ways for people to engage. This could include allocating funds so that rural people can virtually attend at UN offices in their country, partnering with broad-reaching agencies (like agriculture extension offices) to gather input or provide opportunities for people to engage and strengthening partnerships with development partners and non-state actors who can carry the experiences and opinions of marginalized groups to the UN.

Summit Outcomes

As the Secretariat outlined, “the preparations for the SDG Summit should aim to recreate the sense of ownership, hope and enthusiasm that characterized the elaboration and adoption of the SDGs.” To achieve this, there should be clear and tangible outcomes from the Summit that restore people’s excitement about the Goals. This could include initiatives that have a clear focus on accelerating the SDG implementation and overcoming our new reality. This could include increased investments in girls’ and women’s empowerment actions to respond to challenges of teenage pregnancy and child marriage that have increased during the COVID-19 pandemic; CSOs and DESA could mobilize and encourage governments to increase investments and commitments in actions that promote multi-sectoral responses to address malnutrition within the context of the food security and WASH nexus. But we also need to appreciate that increased investment will only happen if we successfully restore hope. It could also include efforts to create an enabling policy and legal environment and investments in inclusive food systems and sustainable agriculture.

The Summit should create a collaborative and learning environment so that all participants come away reinvigorated and with new ideas. Member States should share their progress reports in delivering the new SDG Roadmap (2021-2025). New policies or initiatives that provide catalytic and strategic interventions for acceleration of SDG implementation should be mapped out to promote cross-learning among countries.

The evidence in the 2023 Global Sustainable Development report should provide state parties an opportunity to reflect and identify accelerators that will spur achievements across the 17 SDGs. Their development plans and investment should align with the six major societal transformations recommended in the 2022 Global SDG Report: Education and skills, Health and well-being, Clean energy and industry, Sustainable land use, Sustainable cities and Digital technologies.

Finally, as for the role of the private sector as CSOs our focus should be on the local level, SMEs that shift more power and resources and unlock productivity in marginalized communities. This should be recognized during the Summit. Governments should be encouraged to mobilize and support SMEs businesses to scale their impact and commitment to the national development agenda. They should create an enabling policy and legal environment conducive for SME investment growth. The mobile Health services in Uganda has shown some great examples not only of innovation for development through mobile services and the use of mobile technology to advance health and education. It has

also created partnerships with governments to widen the scale of these efforts. We need many more companies to accelerate their investments and business activities to deliver on the global goals.

Key Messages

- To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, we must ensure that the people most affected by the world's greatest challenges—including hunger and extreme poverty, and especially women and youth—are at the table and their voices are heard in negotiations at the community, national, regional and global levels.
- Civil society must mobilize the people to take charge of advocating for policy change; facilitating associations among communities; and influencing national governments to decentralize resources, budget appropriately, ensure policies/laws are implemented appropriately, ensure access to services, and be responsive to community needs.
- The Summit organizers should engage with networks of grassroots organizations, such as The Movement for Community-led Development and many others, to ensure that there is active input from their member organizations and the stakeholders they serve to local, national and global policies and recommendations.
- The Summit organizers can allocate funds so that rural people can virtually attend at UN offices in their country.
- A new roadmap has to be created to provide a catalytic and strategic interventions for the acceleration of SDGs implementation

A Path Forward

While many will emphasize the challenges, it is vital to rekindle the spirit of optimism that accompanied the launch of the SDGs. There are many, many examples of grassroots people making great strides to achieve the SDGs, and these must be highlighted and celebrated. An inclusive Summit with tangible outcomes that every person can engage with can celebrate the progress we have made while charting a path for the future.