

## Working Toward the SDG Summit, 2023

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In 2015 we launched the Sustainable Development Goals with great global enthusiasm. We have now had seven years of discussions on the importance of sustainable development but still ambition is far too limited. Poverty and inequality are now on the rise again, particularly as many countries and individuals are hit by much higher cost of living, so people are once again struggling with hunger and loss of livelihoods, as prices soar and the major energy companies take home record profits. There must be proper taxation of these profits to ensure that money is reinvested to support the poorest in our societies. This is on top of the challenges created by COVID-19 and climate change. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been devastating for so many communities and the lack of access to vaccines for many in the global South has been a symbol of the shameful lack of solidarity in these challenging times.

In Uganda, where I am from, we are only about 50% on track, according to the 2021 SDG Report. However, of the 232 indicators assigned to the 17 Goals, Uganda is only reporting on 119 indicators. Even then major challenges remain in 12 Goals and four have significant challenges. Uganda is not alone in this challenge. The reality is that many key indicators have been going the wrong way. In addition, many Member States are not fully tracking their progress, a trend that must be addressed as we progress toward 2030

In this context, the 2023 SDG Summit must be a significant moment for transformative change. After such a challenging time for the world, now is the time to truly build a new approach to people and planet; to build for peace, climate and justice and reinvigorate our commitments to a world that works for all - A world that supports all people of all generations, backgrounds, gender and ethnicity to live a holistic and enriching life in harmony with the natural world. As Nelson Mandela said: - “We can be that great generation!”

Here are some suggestions for how to harness 2023 as a moment for transformation:

### 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. The Summit should host a series of meetings in each region of the world to hear priorities from grassroots communities ahead of the 2023 Summit. These could be linked to the Regional Forums and could build a broader ownership towards September.

Enable real inputs via a truly participatory online process. This HLPF has demonstrated how challenging it has become to host a fully in-person event but there are real lessons to be learned in building

inclusivity online, including broad survey inputs, crowd-sourcing ideas beforehand and enabling diverse voices to be heard via video link. That being said, 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. 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.

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.

### 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 new initiatives that have a clear focus on accelerating the SDG implementation and overcoming our new reality, with prioritized funding for grassroots communities, ensuring that those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic are the ones who are given the first access to any additional funds that may be delivered. The Summit should also examine opportunities to support dynamic partnerships and innovative approaches to connect youth leaders with the support they need to catalyze change. We must appreciate that increased investment will only happen if we successfully restore hope.

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 Summit should also host a global “stock-taking” of progress on the 2030 Agenda, which should include the inputs from diverse stakeholders alongside official data and expert insights.

To support Member States and other stakeholders, the Summit should ensure stronger links between the SDG framework, and other key UN processes on climate (UNFCCC) and nature (UNEP) review mechanisms. Additionally, 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.

### 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.