



SDG Action Weekend
September 2023

Catalyzing Transformative Change: Science, Academia, and the Journey to 2030

**12:00 – 2:00 PM, 16 September 2023, Trusteeship
Council Chamber, UNHQ**

**Part of the SDG Mobilization Day during the SDG Action
Weekend of the SDG Summit**

Concept Note

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stands as a groundbreaking global roadmap for addressing the most pressing challenges facing humanity. At the half-way point to 2030, science, technology and innovation hold enormous promise for enabling the kinds of transformations needed to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – in energy systems, food systems, education, digital infrastructure, just economies, nature and the global commons and other crucial areas as indicated in the SDG Report: Special Edition and the Global Sustainable Development Report. Addressing institutional and other barriers to knowledge and technology sharing and revolutionizing STI for sustainability can support a global enabling environment for the SDGs complementing financial reforms and a surge in SDG financing.

The current generation is equipped with unparalleled knowledge, technologies, and resources that can pave the way for transformative change. To achieve extraordinary breakthroughs, and to enable developing countries to deliver on the SDGs, it is vital to forge strong partnerships, both within and across countries, where knowledge flows freely and efficiently. Building trust and partnerships among scientific communities and with other actors whether in government, civil society, or the private sector is crucial for strengthening the science-policy interface and ensuring that the STI lever for transformation works cohesively with other levers, including effective governance, adequate financing, individual and collective action, and capacity-building. This culture of collaboration enhances the plausibility of realizing the ambitious vision set forth by the 2030 Agenda.

Academia plays a pivotal role in shaping the future of sustainable development. As centers of knowledge, research, and learning, universities and higher education institutions harbor a wealth of expertise across diverse disciplines. These institutions act as incubators for cutting-edge research, innovations, and breakthroughs that can be directly applied to the SDGs. Additionally, academia serves as a hub for nurturing future leaders, researchers, and problem solvers. By equipping students in all regions with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to tackle global challenges, higher education institutions play a critical role in cultivating a new generation of changemakers committed to the SDGs.

Objective

The objective of the event is to identify and promote concrete opportunities and partnerships for science and academia to accelerate transformations in high impact areas for implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By bringing together policymakers, researchers, academics, and other stakeholders, the event will foster dialogue, share best practices, and identify actionable strategies to advance the implementation of the SDGs. The event will also aim to help advance commitments in the SDG Summit Political Declaration for bridging the science, technology and innovation divides and supporting the responsible use of science, technology, and innovation as drivers of sustainable development.

Output

Key messages (3-4 bullet points) and summary of proceedings (1.5 pages max).

Organizing partners

Organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), International Science Council (ISC), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Programme

Opening

12:00 – 12:15 PM

Welcome remarks – Mr. Courtenay Rattray, Chef de Cabinet, Executive office of the United Nations Secretary-General

Keynote address - Ms. Mariana Mazzucato, Professor in the Economics of Innovation and Public Value, University College London

Introduced by Mr. Patrick Paul Walsh, Full Professor at University College Dublin, on secondment to SDSN as Vice President of Education and Director of the SDG Academy

Session 1

12:15 – 1:10 PM

Enhancing the science-policy interface

Moderator: Mr. Nikhil Seth, United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, Executive Director, UNITAR

Panelists:

- Dr. Tawfik Jelassi, Assistant Director-General for Communication and Information, UNESCO
- Ms. Melody Burkins, Director of the Institute of Arctic Studies, Dartmouth College, Member of the ISC Governing Board
- Ms. Åsa Persson, Research Director and Deputy Director of the Stockholm Environment Institute
- Mr. José Ramón López-Portillo Romano, Chairman, Q Element Ltd, Member of the 10 Member Group for the Technology Facilitation Mechanism
- Mr. Elmar Kriegler, Head of Research Department, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research

Guiding questions:

- How has the increased emphasis on multi-stakeholder engagement in the 2030 Agenda created new opportunities for scientists and academia to influence and inform UN processes and global policy making for sustainable development?
- How can academia and scientific advisory groups best support global policymakers in anticipating, adapting to, and leveraging the latest scientific advancements for sustainable development? What are some of the success stories, and what have been the main obstacles?
- What UN platforms or initiatives prioritize the integration of scientific knowledge into policymaking, and how can these be further strengthened?
- What SDGs and areas require further intergovernmental focus to fully utilize the scientific breakthroughs of the day? What topics should be addressed at the next 2024 Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals?

Programme (continued)

Session 2

1:10 PM – 2:00 PM

Accelerating progress – where can scientific and technological breakthroughs currently make the biggest impact?

Moderator: Ms. Shinobu Yamaguchi, Director, United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability

Panelists:

- Ms. Lauren Stuart, Scientific Officer, World Meteorological Organization
- Ms. Nyovani Madise, Director of Development Policy and Head of the Malawi office of the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP)
- Dr. Ángel Cabrera, President, Georgia Institute of Technology
- Ms. Laurel Patterson, Director of the Sustainable Development Goals, UNDP's Global Policy Network

Guiding questions:

- How can we enhance the capacity of scientists, researchers, and academic institutions in developing countries to actively contribute to sustainable development efforts?
- How can we foster interdisciplinary research and collaboration among scientific disciplines and academic institutions to address complex sustainability challenges?
- What strategies can be employed to promote partnerships between academia, governments, private sector, civil society, and local communities to accelerate the transformation process?
- How can the international community, through effective science-policy collaboration, facilitate the equitable transfer of technology and knowledge to developing countries, ensuring their meaningful participation in global sustainable development efforts?
- What role can open access to research findings and data play in facilitating collaborative efforts for sustainable development?
- How can we foster a global enabling environment that empowers scientists, academia, and policymakers to effectively bridge the gap between scientific insights and actionable policy decisions for sustainable development?