



Inputs of the United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2020:

“Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development”.

Introduction

The United Nations System Staff College (UNSSC) has been committed to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals since their adoption, by focusing on the knowledge, skills and competencies needed within and beyond the United Nations system to support governments' efforts to advance human well-being in an equitable and just manner, ensuring that no one is left behind, while the limits of the planet are respected.

In 2015, UNSSC responded to the requirements of the Agenda by creating a dedicated Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development in Bonn, Germany. Additionally, all Staff College learning and training activities have been geared towards enabling the UN system and its partners to address the demands of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. UNSSC has also mainstreamed the UN System Leadership Framework into its learning offerings and is playing a lead role in fostering innovation across the system by managing the UN Innovation Toolkit under the leadership of its Knowledge Centre for Leadership and Management.

As a centre of excellence for learning and knowledge management within the UN system, the Staff College hosts a number of programmes ranging from leadership and management development to fostering the sectoral and functional competencies that are needed to effectively serve as an international civil servant. The College provides learning to increase the technical and substantive knowledge and skills spanning the three pillars of the UN: peace and security, human rights and development.

The UNSSC Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021 focuses the Staff College's efforts to support the UN system in its expanding function as facilitator and broker of multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral efforts towards sustainable development at national, regional and global level. These efforts have opened access to a number of UNSSC learning offerings to participants from outside the UN system. Overall, the College offers learning initiatives that reach over 25,000 beneficiaries each year, with a majority of learning offerings delivered away from its campuses in Turin and Bonn.



The College's work is fully in line with the 2020 Theme of the high-level political forum "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development." In fact, the notion of transformative pathways has evolved over the first five years of implementation, underlining the need to move away from isolated sector-by-sector efforts and has culminated in the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), which stresses that "the true transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda can [only] be realised through a systemic approach that helps identify and manage trade-offs, while maximising co-benefits."

1. Key policies and measures to ensure "accelerated action and transformative pathways" for realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development

a. Critical gaps

While many UN entities have embraced UN reform and taken concrete steps towards compliance with the revised management and accountability arrangements required of the UN development system, over the past five years of implementation the pace of change beyond 'business as usual' remains slow among UN staff and servants globally. Truly transformative approaches that shake the siloed expertise of technical experts and call for massive efforts towards better integration of perspectives from other sectors and other actors, have not yet been fully explored with the urgency required under the Decade of Action. Moving beyond 'business as usual' will also require further exploring physical and virtual spaces for multi-stakeholder discussion, joint action and knowledge sharing. Support is required from a learning perspective in order to strengthen the knowledge about how to foster integrated approaches and systems thinking, the related leadership efforts required, as well as the substantive knowledge needed to better understand the concepts and mechanisms of the various influences and factors at work. As the GSDR posits "the present state of imbalance across the three dimensions of sustainable development arises from not having fully appreciated the interlinkages across them or having unduly prioritized the short term, it is those same interlinkages that will lead to the desired transformative change."

b. Priority measures

To address the identified gaps, UNSSC is increasing its efforts in the areas of leadership and innovation in order to foster a UN culture that focuses on impact, fosters co-creation and systems thinking and drives transformational change. Moreover, UNSSC is strengthening its efforts to provide substantive knowledge in key areas that have been neglected by many development practitioners, who have focused on social development, such as economic transformation and financing, or climate change. Furthermore, it offers learning formats that



provide guidance for policy choices and/or engage with the systems that connect people and nature, such as policy coherence, design thinking, political economy, circular economy and social protection. UNSSC also focuses on the 'meta' dimensions of the agenda such as peace and partnerships, which are either underlying any effort towards sustainable development or are indispensable to advance such efforts.

A solutions-oriented approach to learning is crucial. Sustainable development learning offered by UNSSC is contextual and aligned to regional and country-specific challenges. In terms of formats, the College is increasingly developing blended and tailored formats that allow learners to address the specific long-term needs of UN entities or government counterparts.

Finally, a qualitative shift cannot happen if sustainable development knowledge and skills are only provided to a few selected groups of stakeholders that drive policies and report on the progress. To 'leave no one behind', learning and training in sustainable development should reach all stakeholders at all levels. To achieve these objectives, UNSSC offers various learning and training modalities, starting from online open courses to moderated online courses for advanced users, to trainings of trainers to ensure impact at scale, and to face-to-face trainings for senior executives.

2. Contribution of UNSSC to accelerated action and transformative pathways and realizing the decade of action and delivery for achieving the 2030 Agenda within its area of responsibility

Beyond such offerings, UNSSC has also played a key role in developing the SDG Primer on the 2030 Agenda, which was the product of a joint effort as part of a wider inter-agency Learning Advisory Council convened by the Deputy Secretary-General in 2019. The Primer offers an opportunity for UN Resident Coordinators to acquire a common threshold knowledge on the Agenda, followed by a certification process, requiring them to think through specific responses to be provided in the countries they serve.

True to its inter-agency mandate, UNSSC explicitly offers its support to the Development Coordination Office (DCO), as it rolls out guidance for country programming processes. UNSSC works with individual UN country teams to strengthen their commitment to an engagement compact among the UN entities serving in a country.

Beyond its ongoing collaboration with a wide range of UN entities, UNSSC has increased its collaboration with a number of intergovernmental bodies including with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), who are sending a group of national Policy Coherence focal points to the UNSSC online course on Policy Coherence for Sustainable



Development in 2020. The UNSSC has also enhanced its collaboration with the Commonwealth and other intergovernmental bodies.

In addition, UNSSC has strengthened its collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions and in particular with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), with which it signed a Memorandum of Understanding to explore joint learning approaches for UN staff and civil servants the region. UNSSC has also strengthened its collaboration with think tanks and schools of public administration, namely through a collaboration with the German Development Institute and its network of six schools of government in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa.

3. Selected recommendations for accelerating progress and moving on transformative pathways for realizing the Decade of Action, for possible use in drafting the HLPF declaration.

UNSSC has identified the following Action Points which the HLPF could address in its ministerial declaration.

1. In light of the recognition of the urgent need to accelerate action on all levels and by all stakeholders to fulfil the vision and Goals of the 2030 Agenda, we underline the importance of learning, training and knowledge sharing on topics and approaches crucial for the achievement of well-being of all within planetary boundaries. To this end, we commend the work of the UN System learning and training institutions.
2. In view of strengthening the knowledge required to advance the decisive decade for the 2030 Agenda, we request the Secretary-General to further engage UN entities and Governments in strengthening their contributions to UN learning and training institutions in areas directly contributing to addressing systemic gaps in implementation.
3. We commend efforts already undertaken by UN entities to fill the knowledge gaps and strengthen the approaches required to accelerate their support to countries as they implement the Agenda. We call on UN entities to strengthen such efforts by increasing learning and training regarding integrated approaches and systems thinking, as well as the substantive knowledge required for UN staff to engage with all dimensions of sustainable development. To this end, we particularly commend the learning offerings of the UN System Staff College in the abovementioned areas.