



ECOSOC

High Level Political Forum

July 12th– 14th, 2023

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Introduction

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is an annual event hosted under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) from July 10th-19th.

The High-Level Political Forum is a pulse check for nations around the world to check their progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and re-establish priorities to accelerate this achievement.

The theme of HLPF this year was "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels."

Important events for SDG Cities included:

- Local and Regional Governments Forum
- Local 2030 Coalition Event
- Voluntary National Review presentations
- VLR/VSR Day Launch
- SDG Learning Sessions

The forum created a space for national, regional, and local governments to discuss the innovative ways they are localizing the SDGs and the strategic partnerships they have cultivated to bolster that progress.

The forum consisted of several high-level events with participation from mayors and ministers around the world. This was accompanied by thematic side events which were conversational sessions, allowing the audience to dive more deeply into factors impacting sustainable development, including:

- Climate change
- Forced displacement
- Measuring quality of life
- Financing SDG impact
- Partnerships for SDG achievement
- Building resilience

This report summarizes the various events and the knowledge relevant to SDG Cities-

Local and Regional Governments Forum

July 12th, 2023

“Harnessing high impact localization policies to accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals through SDG 11 and towards the 2023 SDG Summit”

This event looked at the current status of the SDGs and the potential catalyzers for more effective SDG localization. The high-level speakers included:

- **Amina Mohammed**, Deputy Secretary-General, UN
- **Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat
- **Mr. Achim Steiner**, Administrator, UNDP
- **Maria-Francesca Spatolisano**, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UN DESA
- **Fatimetou Abdel Malick**, President of Nouakchott Region (Mauritania)

Following the high-level speakers were three dialogue sessions from a variety of member state representatives including **Mafra, Canada, Ecuador, and Kenya**.

The world is clearly struggling to meet the targets set out by the Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development. There is a need for local change spurred by leadership and diverse stakeholders. The session underscored the need to approach the SDGs from a human rights perspective and strengthen basic service delivery especially in the places most left behind. The SDGs require a whole of society engagement and renewed commitment from all stakeholders

STATS

165 million more slum dwellers have emerged globally over 20 years, reaching almost 1.1 billion in 2020

Globally, 2.8 billion people are estimated to be affected by different form of housing inadequacy, including at least 318 million people who are homeless



The Impact of Internal Displacement on Cities

July 12th, 2023

Of the VNRs submitted, only 39% mentioned local governments

We must change the way we look at local action in high-level meetings and stop thinking of things as "pilots" - we must actually act and implement.

Problem Facing Adequate Crisis Response

We are constantly responding and reacting to crises instead of planning for them and taking steps to avoid crisis.

4 Priorities

- The global community must transition from ambition to action
- Global financing efforts for the SDGs should have a strong urban anchor with an emphasis on the important role of cities
- Digitalization can create better delivery for basic services and highlight needs in a way that's closer to the local population
- Partnerships and multi-stakeholder engagement is essential for responding to crises

A New Approach

It is becoming increasingly difficult to ensure the rights of citizens- for example adequate house and safe drinking water- because those commodities are privatized and much of the time, local government can't do anything about it.

Therefore, there is a need for a new financial architecture with a framework that invites investments and improves projects.

Local 2030 Coalition Special Event

July 12th, 2023

The Local 2030 Coalition included participation from high-level officials such as:

- Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif
- Mayor Helder Souza Silva- Mafra, Portugal
- Norliza Hashem- Urbanice, Malaysia
- Pablo Lopez- CAF Development Bank, Latin America

The meeting underscored the importance of multi-level governance for an increased effort toward the achievement of the SDGs. We must re-prioritize our efforts and partnerships to approach the SDGs in a new and innovative way.



MAJOR THEMES

Multi-level
governance

"Multilevel doesn't mean we have multiple levels but that we have integrated levels that work together"

Partnerships

"Youth and children should be empowered to be part of this whole of society approach."

Interconnected
SDG achievement

"It is easy to get individual SDGs, but we need to achieve several at once since they are interconnected."

Financing

"We must create spaces and conversations around financing the SDGs."

Data

"We must follow the data and allow that to drive where we put the resources."

Urban Regeneration

International Perspectives Towards Achieving the SDGs

July 12th, 2023

DED **Michael Mlynar** began the discussion by underscoring the importance of SDG 11's targets and indicators for sustainable urbanization and their essential link to the achievement of other SDGs. He said that wise people learn from other people's mistakes and do not repeat them, so we must look for new ideas to solve the problems facing urbanization and partner with diverse entities. The DED also recommended that we utilize upcoming events such as the G7, G20, SDG Summit, and the Summit of the Future to engage with member states – using these events to catalyze new projects and partnerships for sustainable development.

UN-Habitat's **Javier Torner** presented on the *Inclusive Communities, Thriving Cities* flagship initiative which employs the urban regeneration tool to reduce spatial inequalities and poverty. He emphasized a need for:

- Addressing social inequality
- Bringing partners together
- Providing technical assistance in cities
- Including a participatory process
- Increasing visibility
- Creating a global network of donors
- Looking at financial mechanism to ensure that social well-being is always considered in project development

75%

of cities today provide citizens less access to basic services compared to two decades ago

Dr. Iris Frankel Cohen and Mr. David Roter from the Ministry of Construction and Housing (MoCH) of the State of Israel and the Governmental Urban Renewal Authority (URA) provided a case study on urban regeneration in Israel. Due to the fact that Israel saw huge levels of immigration in the mid 20th century, the government needed to build fast, but did not create lasting, adequate housing. On top of that, Israel is on a fault line which frequently experiences earthquake. Thus, over the last few decades, Israel has had to renovate its housing units and now offers best practices for communities around the world dealing with urban regeneration and densification.

Accelerating Resilient Recovery

Role of Infrastructure Sector and Entrepreneurship

July 13th, 2023

In this session, experts from the UN-Habitat, UNCTAD, the International Anti-Corruption Academy, and Think Tank AlterContacts explored the paths for resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic through harnessing the potential of the SDG Cities Global Initiative, transparent infrastructure development, and urban entrepreneurship. The session aimed to promote institutional synergies and uncover their potential for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in today's ever-changing situation.

During the panel discussion, participants became acquainted with the unique and innovative digital tools of the SDG Cities Global Initiative; good practices of the CoST Infrastructure Transparency Initiative; preventive and corrective tools to tackle corruption; and key findings of UNCTAD's paper "Urban expansion, an entrepreneur's playground". Participants had a chance to take part in an interactive Q&A.

Dyfed Aubrey, UN-Habitat, participated in the first section of the event hosted by UN-Habitat and IACA focused on transparency and accountability specifically in the infrastructure sector, outlining tools for SDG alignment, and examining mechanisms to combat corruption.

- SDG Cities empowers cities to localize the SDGs by utilizing local data to inform strategic plans, strengthen local institutions, and attract investments.
- It examined urban governance in a post-COVID city, also emphasizing the need for preventive and corrective tools to address corruption risks.
- The topic of socially inclusive and sustainable infrastructure focused on mapping and better understanding of the underlying drivers of corruption risks in infrastructure projects.

SDG CITIES PROCESS



SDGs In Focus:

SDG 11 and Interlinkages with Other SDGs

July 13th, 2023



This session recognized the importance of SDG 11 and brought together various stakeholders to share their innovative efforts in sustainable urbanization. Several of the presenters would be good partners for SDG Cities and could provide important best practices.

Mansueto Institute for Urban Innovation – University of Chicago

The Mansueto Institute recognizes the difficulty of collecting data for SDG 11. Of the data collected, we know there are enormous inequalities between cities and also within cities.

So, the Manueto Institute has created the "Million Neighborhoods" map which uses OpenSource Data and citizen generated data to map a city's access to mobility disaggregated by block.

Other examples included...

U.S. Agency for International Development which is working to strengthen local partnerships in this new era of localization – moving away from big-name implementing partners and rather investing in local human capital to role out projects.

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is working on revitalizing current housing units without displacing current tenants or "gentrifying" the areas.

HUD has a **Choice Neighborhoods** program leveraging significant public and private dollars to support locally driven strategies that address struggling neighborhoods with distressed public or HUD-assisted housing through a comprehensive approach to neighborhood transformation.

Local Governments Towards SDG 11

Hosted by Argentina

July 13th, 2023

This intimate session hosted by the governments of Cordoba and Buenos Aires, Argentina brought together important stakeholders to have a candid discussion what is and is not working in their cities.



Ms. Ana Ciuti- Buenos Aires

We must bring together actors from different sectors and build trust in the relationships we make. National governments should be drivers for the SDGs.



Ms. Melisa Gorondy Novak, Cordoba

There is internal growth that needs to be shared with the smaller, less developed neighbors. As they build more homes, they are thinking of it holistic community building.



Mr. Zulkifli Datuk- Malaysia

We must be proactive in implementing measures and initiatives. Creative urban planning includes mixed use development, green spaces, and reusing historical buildings



Mr. Puvendra Akkiah- South Africa

All levels of government need to be at the negotiation table. The fiscal architecture of how impact projects are funded needs to change to facilitate SDG implementation.



Pablo Lopez- CAF Latin America

We must close the funding gap on the local level- providing institutional capacity building to better finance local projects and transcend local government instability.



VLR/VSR Day Launch

Transformative Partnerships to Accelerate Achievement of the Global Goals at Local Level

July 13th, 2023

The VLR/VSR Day Launch aimed to shed light on how equally important local and sub regional governments are for the advancement of the SDGs.

ED Maimunah Mohd Sharif gave the introductory speech and highlighted the effort by La Paz, Bolivia to be the first city to use the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) in the VLR. She then set a goal for the world to achieve 1,000 new VLRs before 2030.

Ms. Emilia Saiz, the Secretary General of UCLG, then added that local governments need technical capacity and should have a clear vision for the transformation they want to see in their cities.

Shipra Nurang underscored there are still cities that don't know about the VLRs so we must increase visibility and not let national governments off the hook in their responsibilities to support.

Panelists from local governments in **Ecuador, Kenya, Finland, Italy, Buenos Aires, and Belgium** discussed issues such as:

- Reacting to the climate change crisis
- Poverty, violence, and inequality
- Multi-level collaboration
- Contextualizing the SDGs
- Deepening impact

It was agreed that a little healthy competition is good for incentivizing action for the SDGs.



The Quality of Life Initiative

At the heart of the SDG Rescue Plan for People and Planet

July 14th, 2023



AMBASSADOR GIOVANNA (CR):

"IT IS VITAL THAT WE UNDERSTAND WE ARE ALL FROM THIS CONNECTED, GLOBAL ECOSYSTEM AND THEREFORE WE MUST THINK OF EVERY SINGLE PERSON'S WELL BEING AS INTEGRAL FOR THE OVERALL HEALTH OF THE PLANET."

This event aimed to define *quality of life* and brought into question how we measure quality of life given the cultural and contextual diversity of our global community.

Ms. Norah Alyusuf stated that liveability is dependent on basic services and that we must put humans at the centre of development. She also mentioned that data is essential to making informed interventions and Saudi Arabia is currently trying to solve the data gap.

Mihir Prakash is diving into how to measure quality of life when that looks different from person to person and region to region. He said that it is important to understand what the commonalities are for values and priorities.

Therefore, he is completing a consultation process right now to understand this and put indicators to these values and priorities.

The previous **Mayor of Quito** intervened and asserted that cities are at the forefront of these issues because they don't have access to things like comprehensive economic/financial systems that are up to date with urbanization.

Dr. Sukaina Abdul Llah Al-Nasrawi from ESCWA summed up the discussion, reiterating there is no standard definition for quality of life and there are different challenges facing people everywhere. He underscored the importance of tech and that we cannot deliver basic services if everyone doesn't have access to technology.

Building Urban Resilience and Responding to Crises

July 14th, 2023

ECLAC

ESCAP

UNECA

ESCWA

Climate Change

The world is facing the devastating effects of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss. We see a degradation of lives and livelihoods accompanied by mass displacement and instability.

COVID-19

COVID-19 widened economic gaps and increased stress and depression.

Local Impact

Local civil society is trying to confront these challenges and spur local economic growth and encourage policy makers to create change.

Resilience

We must implement a resilient and systematic approach when dealing with complex disasters and tap into the expertise of diverse stakeholders.

Gender Equality

The big question of gender, gender specific vulnerabilities, and gender specific harms has yet to be addressed and are further exacerbated by instability.

Political Stability

We need to foster political agility so that citizens are not constantly jolted by changing administrations and crisis.

VLRs

Voluntary Local Reviews are the opportunity to get sustainable urbanization right. Economic commissions should be working with UN-Habitat on the Voluntary Local Reviews to foster localization efforts.

Final Thoughts

It was made clear by the high-level interventions throughout the forum that we are falling behind in the achievement of the SDGs. We need a new approach to implementing sustainable practices that includes all of society and integrates innovative ideas. Main themes that emerged were:

- Multi-level governance
- Multi-stakeholder partnerships
- Data informed decision making
- Capacity building for local governments
- Financing local projects
- Including private sector

Why is this important for SDG Cities?

SDG Cities is a mechanism for accelerated achievement of the SDGs and places cities at the center of this effort. Recognizing the need for strong data skills and technical capacity, SDG Cities can incentivize local governments to join the initiative by providing the tools and backstopping that is clearly needed. SDG Cities can harness its position in the UN system and its global connections to drive investments for local projects and create vehicles for financing. It was reiterated throughout the HLPF that action for the SDGs is stunted by lack of investment for impact projects. The financial architecture must be rewritten and SDG Cities can spearhead that effort. Overall, there is work to be done but SDG Cities remains to be a roadmap for SDG excellence.