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SDGs DIGEST

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LIFE ON LAND: PATHWAYS TO A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

IsDB stands ready to work alongside its member countries, international organizations, and civil society to accelerate efforts towards drought resilience and sustainable land management.

Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser - Chairman, IsDB Group

- Empowering Actions on Land for SDG 15
- Building a Sustainable Future: The Saudi Fund for Development's Role in Advancing Global Sustainable Development
- Land Degradation Neutrality Targets are a Critical Tool in the Fight to Save Land
- Addressing Land Degradation and Drought: Opportunities and Actions Ahead of Riyadh COP16
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Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure that we present the latest edition of the SDGs Digest, released on the sidelines of the 16th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in Riyadh. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group is honored to support the UNCCD and Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's COP-16 Presidency. Among various measures of support, we are pleased to be co-leading Finance Thematic Day.

This edition documents the empowering actions taken by our partners in preserving and enhancing our land for future generations. It serves as a testament to our collective commitment to reversing land degradation and fostering hope for millions whose livelihoods depend on healthy ecosystems. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the authors who have contributed their insightful essays and thought pieces to this publication. The Digest features contributions from High-level Dignitaries, Eminent Personalities, and IsDB's Strategic Partners, offering a

rich tapestry of perspectives on sustainable development.

The cover story by H.E. The President of IsDB calls for the use of appropriate financial instruments, robust governance frameworks, and international cooperation to reverse land degradation trends and improve livelihoods and security for millions.

H.E. Dr. Osama Faqeema, Deputy Minister for Environment at the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA), emphasizes the importance of maximizing Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets. He highlights Saudi Arabia's leading role in the Saudi Green and Middle East Green Initiatives, underscoring the need for time-bound action and enhanced global cooperation to transform voluntary pledges into a binding legacy of land stewardship.

Mr. Ibrahim Thaw, Executive Secretary of the UNCCD, shares valuable insights into the socio-economic and environmental opportunities presented by addressing land degradation and drought. He emphasizes how these efforts can create green jobs, improve public health, reduce resource related conflicts, and promote sustainable development.

While we could highlight only a select few, this edition brings together thought pieces from leaders in the development sector across International Financial Institutions (IFIs), UN Institutions, Impact Investors, and IsDB Staff. These contributions call for collective action and present forward-thinking solutions to navigate the complexities of global development challenges.

We are pleased to share that this year, the IsDBG SDGs CoP has successfully transformed Digest into an effective advocacy tool, providing a platform for both external leaders and internal staff to showcase their work in advancing the 2030 Agenda. Our social media presence has tripled, with over 60 external authors choosing Digest to present their work.

However, we acknowledge that more work remains to be done. Not all SDGs are on track, and as one of the articles points out, SDG 15 - Life on Land - has been somewhat overlooked. By launching this edition with a special focus on SDG 15, we aim to draw global attention to the critical issues of Land Degradation, Drought, and Management.

We sincerely hope that reading this edition will enrich your understanding of the circumstances surrounding these pressing issues. On behalf of SDGs CoP, we extend our profound thanks to all the authors for their valuable contributions. Let us continue this vital discourse on addressing development challenges, always striving for a better tomorrow.

Best wishes,

Members of the IsDBG SDGs Community of Practice

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Empowering Actions on Land for SDG 15



Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser
Chairman, Islamic Development Bank Group
(IsDB Group)

The threat of desertification in the IsDB member countries, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), is acute. Over 1.5 billion people worldwide are affected by land degradation, with the majority residing in these very regions.

The stakes are high. In MENA alone, nearly 89% of the land is arid, semi-arid, or dry sub-humid, leaving vast populations vulnerable to the creeping threat of desertification. The African Union estimates that two-thirds of the continent's land is degraded, with desertification threatening to displace over 135 million people by 2030 if no significant action is taken. The impacts of climate change are exacerbating this already dire situation as droughts become more frequent and severe. According to the World Bank, droughts in SSA cost the region up to US\$9 billion annually.

Despite these grim realities, there is reason for cautious optimism. With decisive, well-coordinated action—particularly in the areas of finance and policy—these challenges could be mitigated.

This month, the world will come together for a critical event in the beautiful city of Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The 16th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), slated for 2-13 December 2024, will be the largest gathering of the UNCCD's 197 parties and the first held in the Middle East region. Under the theme "Our Land. Our Future," COP16 supports efforts to promote drought resilience and tackle land degradation and desertification.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group is honored to support the UNCCD and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's COP16 Presidency. As a manifestation of this support, we are pleased to co-lead the Finance Thematic Day. IsDB stands ready to work alongside its member countries, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society to accelerate efforts

towards drought resilience and sustainable land management.

I want to take this opportunity to highlight several areas where multilateral development banks (MDBs), such as IsDB, can make a transformative difference. Current estimates suggest that the world will need to mobilize US\$300 billion annually to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets by 2030. This far outstrips current funding levels, particularly in MENA and SSA, where investments remain insufficient to address the scale of the problem.

While public finance remains critical, it will never be sufficient to close this gap and meet the vast needs of countries battling desertification. That is why we must work to unlock private-sector investment. MDBs are well-positioned to deploy innovative financial instruments, such as green and sustainability Sukuk (bond equivalents), sustainability-linked loans, insurance, and blended finance mechanisms, to encourage private capital to flow into land use projects that would otherwise be seen as too risky.

We already see initiatives such as the Great Green Wall in Africa, which aims to restore 100 million hectares of degraded land across the Sahel by 2030. This initiative is currently being implemented in over 20 countries across Africa, with more than US\$19 billion mobilized and pledged in support of its objectives. IsDB has committed to expanding investments in similar large-scale initiatives across both SSA and MENA. We also look forward to supporting new initiatives, such as the Middle East Green Initiative (MGI) and Riyadh Global Drought Resilience Partnership.

In our experience, blended finance structures have proven effective in reducing risk and increasing the bankability of projects. In one of our recent projects in Tunisia, a combination of public grants and private investment helped restore over 100,000 hectares of degraded land while creating over 5,000 jobs in sustainable agriculture.

However, finance alone will not solve the problem of desertification. It is imperative that we also focus on building local capacity and strengthening governance. Drought resilience and sustainable land management require not only technical expertise but also inclusive decision-making processes that involve local communities, especially smallholder farmers and pastoral communities, who are often the most affected by land degradation. The IsDB's cumulative total

investment in agriculture since its inception is more than US\$20 billion, representing 12.3%, which puts the sector in third position after energy (39%) and industry & mining (15%).

Desertification does not occur in isolation. It is often a symptom of more profound socio-economic challenges, including poverty, poor land management practices, and water and food scarcity. Any comprehensive solution must, therefore, address these root causes. For instance, in MENA, where 12 out of the 17 most water-stressed countries are located, desertification and water scarcity are inextricably linked.

Similarly, where communities do not have access to improved energy sources, they may harvest local vegetation for cooking, lighting, and heating and set the ingredients for land degradation.

Through integrated approaches that combine sustainable water management, climate-smart agriculture, sustainable energy solutions, and social protection programs, development partners can help mitigate the drivers of land degradation while building resilience to future shocks.

A famous African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together."

No single party can achieve global goals on drought resilience and sustainable land management. Through partnerships, we can amplify our longer-term impacts on our member countries. The IsDB is a longstanding member of the Arab Coordination Group (ACG) and an active member of the MDB community. We value our ongoing partnerships with the United Nations and its specialized agencies, as well as the philanthropic community and other governmental and intergovernmental organizations.

In conclusion, we must have a clear-eyed view of the scale of the challenge ahead of us and be steadfast in our commitment to finding solutions.

Desertification threatens not only the environment but the livelihoods and security of millions of people. Yet, with the right financial instruments, governance frameworks, and international cooperation, we can reverse the trends of land degradation and restore hope to vulnerable communities across MENA, SSA, and beyond.

The IsDB Group is fully committed to this cause, and we look forward to working closely with all of our partners to turn today's discussions into tomorrow's actions.

Land Degradation Neutrality Targets are a Critical Tool in the Fight to Save Land



Dr. Osama Faqeeha
 Deputy Minister for Environment, Ministry
 of Environment, Water and Agriculture, and
 Advisor to the UNNCD COP16

Land is one of the main pillars supporting life on our planet. It is crucial for food and water security, terrestrial biodiversity, and many economic activities. However, land degradation is occurring globally at a rapid pace due to various human activities. Land degradation is an issue that already affects about a third of humanity, causing famine, drought, and large-scale migration, to name just a few. This will only worsen unless we take immediate action.

The unacceptable reality is our continued inaction blights the prospects of future generations. The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) estimates one billion people around the world under the age of 25 live in regions directly dependent on land for jobs and livelihoods. We are putting their futures at risk. Furthermore, half of the global economy, around US \$44 trillion annually, is at risk, with land degradation, drought and desertification threatening our natural capital: including the food we eat, the air we breathe and the water we drink.

In short, there is a real economic and environmental imperative for nations, industries, and businesses to find lasting solutions. As we approach the UNCCD COP16 in Riyadh, there is little time to waste.

The reality is that there are immediate steps we can take as an international community to tackle land degradation, drought, and desertification. Crucially, we do not need to start from scratch, but rather enhance an existing framework. In short, we must maximize the potential of the individual Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets and preserve the land resource base by ensuring no net loss of healthy and productive land.

Currently, however, just 130 countries have participated in the LDN Target Setting Programme and the voluntary nature of the commitments has also resulted in varying levels of ambition and implementation. While this flexibility has encouraged participation, it has also seen some nations set comprehensive, time-bound targets, while others have opted for less quantifiable or long-term goals.

Speaking plainly, the effectiveness of the commitments varies greatly from nation to nation.

There are also glaring regional differences. Much of the Global North and West are yet to sign up to LDN targets in significant numbers. Land degradation, drought and desertification are global issues that touch almost every corner of the planet. The effort to combat their root causes must be as international as the problem itself. Land neutrality and restoration, on the scale that is required, is not a responsibility that can or should be borne on the shoulders of certain regions. Now is the time for collective responsibility and action.

Clearly, all nations experience domestic land degradation differently, but at COP16 in Riyadh, we have the opportunity to integrate a more universal approach to LDN targets. Particularly in terms of the metrics and statistics we use to measure and describe them, alongside the time-bound objectives we are pursuing. By setting universal deadlines, for example, we will create a sense of urgency and momentum toward the delivery of LDN goals that in time will become self-perpetuating.

But we must also seek to increase the number of countries committed to land degradation neutrality, aiming eventually for universal participation, on the basis that every hectare of land restored contributes to global food security, climate change mitigation and biodiversity preservation.

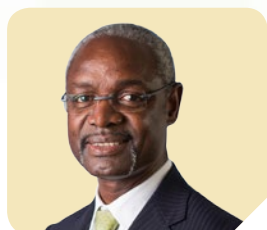
At COP16 Riyadh, let us signal an international willingness to adopt a more robust and systematic reporting of LDN progress in a manner that is transparent and that encourages accountability. We need to work collectively to accelerate actions to achieve LDN targets, leverage innovation and technology transfers, and strengthen private sector participation in land restoration and sustainable land management. Let us also find new ways to work with one another—nation with nation—in the spirit of partnership and peace.

Saudi Arabia well understands the path to restoration requires time-bound action, it is why we are helping to lead the Saudi Green and Middle East Green Initiatives. By infusing LDN commitments with statistical rigor, deadlines, and enhanced global cooperation, we can turn what began as voluntary pledges into a binding legacy of land stewardship.

COP16 in Riyadh provides us with a unique opportunity to work collectively and make it a turning point in global efforts to address land degradation. I hope in the future we look back to COP16 and remember it as the moment when the world came together and decided to commit, not to distant targets, but to decisive action for our planet's land and future.



Addressing Land Degradation and Drought: Opportunities and Actions Ahead of Riyadh COP16



Ibrahim Thiaw
Executive Secretary, United Nations
Convention to Combat Desertification
(UNCCD)

In the context of the current global crisis, the degradation of terrestrial ecosystems and growing water scarcity represent two of the most urgent challenges facing humanity. Countries in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and parts of Europe are all acutely vulnerable to land degradation, desertification, and drought. While these environmental challenges are of significant concern, they also present a crucial opportunity for international collaboration to advance sustainable solutions and enhance resilience across nations.

In December 2024, Saudi Arabia will host the 16th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). This major UN conference, the first of its kind for the country and the broader Arab region will exemplify regional leadership in sustainable land management and serve as a crucial platform for collective action.

Drought remains one of the most devastating natural disasters, affecting ecosystems, agriculture and economies around the world. Between 1998 and 2017, drought accounted for 60% of all deaths from extreme weather events, as it exhausted arable land and threatened food and water security. In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where water scarcity is already a critical issue, drought exacerbates land degradation, putting immense pressure on agricultural systems and economies. With only 2% of the world's renewable water resources, the region is particularly vulnerable to the devastating effects of drought. As no region is immune from the effects of drought, international action is essential to reduce its impact and build resilience.

In response to these urgent needs, the UNCCD has supported key initiatives around the world. Through the adoption of national drought management plans and advanced early warning systems, Parties are mitigating the socio-economic impacts of drought while promoting sustainable land management.

One of the core objectives of the UNCCD is Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN), which has three main pillars: preventing, reducing and reversing land degradation. Achieving LDN is critical to ensuring food security, conserving biodiversity, combating climate change, and promoting economic development.

Benin, for example, has set an LDN target by 2030 through the restoration of at least 50% of its degraded land. Chile has implemented measures to achieve LDN, including reforestation programs and ecological restoration efforts. Uganda aims to achieve 21% forest cover, and 12% wetland cover by 2030 as part of its LDN strategy.

Addressing land degradation and drought also offers socio-economic and environmental opportunities. These efforts can create jobs in green sectors, improve public health, reduce the risk of resource-related conflict, and promote sustainable development.

To this end, concrete actions need to be taken before, during and after COP16. Innovative solutions and effective policies are essential, based on successful examples in different countries.

Saudi Arabia has taken the lead in setting ambitious LDN targets for 2030. The country is working to increase protected areas to 30% of its total land area, rehabilitate designated mountain forests by planting 2.8 million trees, and restore 2.4 million hectares of rangeland through improved vegetation cover. These initiatives are part of the Kingdom's broader environmental and sustainability goals under Vision 2030.

Global flagship initiatives, including the G20 Global Land Initiative and the International Drought Resilience Alliance (IDRA), are also contributing to countries' ability to invest in land restoration and build long-term drought resilience by fostering international cooperation and knowledge sharing.



Improving land governance systems is essential to promote transparency, equity and long-term environmental stewardship. Gender disparities in land tenure add to the challenges of land management. Uruguay is a notable example in its commitment to increase youth participation and inclusion in rural areas and the agricultural sector by 2030. In addition, the country aims to implement 75% of gender-related measures in existing agricultural policies linked to the UNCCD and its Gender Action Plan by 2030. Strengthening land tenure systems to support gender equality is critical, as women play a key role in managing agricultural land and natural resources.

One of the strongest examples of leadership in action is the partnership with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), which celebrates its 50th anniversary this year alongside the 30th anniversary of the UNCCD. For decades, IsDB has been at the forefront of investing in projects that directly contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals and developing innovative solutions to some of the planet's most pressing challenges.

These solutions will be in the spotlight at the upcoming COP16, where powerful partnerships will be launched to accelerate action to restore land and build resilience, leaving a strong legacy from Riyadh to the world and ensuring that the most vulnerable populations can face the future with hope and confidence. With leadership from the Arab region, Riyadh can mark a turning point for collective action to address land degradation and drought on a global scale.

Building a Sustainable Future: The Saudi Fund for Development's Role in Advancing Global Sustainable Development



Sultan Abdulrahman Al-Marshad
CEO, Saudi Fund for Development (SFD)

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires a coordinated global effort that transcends borders. The challenges we face—ranging from climate change and food security to education gaps and infrastructure deficits—are deeply interconnected. For nearly five decades, the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) has been at the forefront of addressing these challenges through strategic financing and partnerships. SFD's funding support continues to drive sustainable development across multiple sectors, helping nations build resilience and achieve SDGs.

A Catalyst for Global Sustainable Development

Since its inception in 1974, the SFD has committed more than \$20 billion to over 800 development projects and programs in more than 100 countries. These efforts include critical sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, water security, education, healthcare, and energy—each of which is important in advancing the SDGs.

Access to clean water and sanitation is fundamental to SDG 6, and the SFD has made significant strides in this area, financing 129 development projects in the water, sanitation, and water-related sectors, representing a cumulative funding of \$3.97 billion. Through projects like the Saudi Program for Drilling Wells and Rural Development in Africa, which has drilled 8,800 wells across multiple countries, millions of people now have access to clean drinking water. This initiative not only contributes to water security but also supports broader goals related to health, agriculture, and poverty reduction.

Education and Healthcare: Foundations for a Sustainable Future

Education and healthcare are at the heart of human development and are directly linked to several SDGs, including SDG

3 (Good Health and Well-Being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education). The SFD's development support in these sectors has been transformative, helping to create opportunities for individuals and communities to thrive. Since its inception, the SFD has provided over \$3.78 billion of funding to 159 education and health related projects and programs.

A notable example is the SFD's support for secondary boarding schools for girls in several regions of Niger. By funding education projects, particularly for young women, the SFD empowers future generations to break the cycle of poverty and access economic opportunities. Similarly, the Fund's healthcare projects—such as the construction and modernization of hospitals—are improving access to quality healthcare services, reducing mortality rates, and enhancing overall public health systems.

Building Resilient Infrastructure and Promoting Innovation

Infrastructure development is another critical focus for the SFD, directly contributing to SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). The SFD has financed 228 projects for the construction and rehabilitation of transportation networks essential for economic growth and sustainable development, with an accumulative value of \$5.49 billion.

Over the last 5 decades, the SFD has also contributed to building resilient energy infrastructures, which are key to the socioeconomic advancement of countries, particularly in the global south and in rural communities. These projects also help reduce reliance on non-renewable resources and contribute to SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy).

To date, the SFD has funded 82 energy projects, worth \$3.54 billion. A prime example is the Merowe and Roseires dams in Sudan, the largest contemporary hydropower project in Africa, which is expected to yield more than 6,500 gigawatt hours of energy annually, increasing electrification levels in rural areas and villages.

Supporting housing and urban development is fundamental to achieving sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11). The SFD has financed 38 projects, worth \$1.36 billion, to develop housing solutions and provide safe

living conditions, including funding the construction of more than 3000 housing units for low-income communities in Kyrgyzstan.

In addition, the SFD's support for innovation in areas such as scientific research and technology has been critical in advancing SDG 9. By funding research institutions, universities, and specialized campuses, the Fund is helping to foster innovation and drive progress in sectors like biotechnology, renewable energy, and water management.

Partnerships for the SDGs: A Global Approach

One of the core principles of the SDGs is the emphasis on partnerships, as outlined in SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Through partnerships with governments, international organizations, and local communities, the SFD has been able to multiply its impact and address complex, multifaceted challenges.

A powerful example of the SFD's collaborative approach is its role in South-South and triangular cooperation, which brings together developing nations to share knowledge, resources, and best practices. This model of cooperation allows countries facing similar challenges to leverage each other's experiences and expertise, accelerating progress toward their shared goals.

The SFD has also been a key player in multilateral partnerships, working alongside development institutions such as IsDB, Arab Coordination Group, and other entities to implement large-scale projects that drive sustainable development. These partnerships are particularly important for addressing global challenges such as climate change.

Looking Ahead: Meeting Future Challenges

As we look to the future, it is clear that achieving the SDGs will require continued investment, innovation, and collaboration. Climate resilience, digital transformation, and community-led development are emerging as key trends that will shape the global development landscape in the coming years.

By continuing to work with its global partners, the SFD will remain a catalyst for positive change, helping countries achieve their development goals and build a sustainable future for all.

Catalysing Global Change AGFUND Fosters Sustainable Development and Partnerships



Dr. Nasser Alkahtani
Executive Director, Arab Gulf Programme for
Development (AGFUND)

As we approach the halfway point toward achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) remains steadfast in its mission to drive meaningful change globally. AGFUND addresses some of the world's most pressing challenges through pioneering initiatives and strategic partnerships, including poverty, food insecurity, and climate resilience. By aligning its programs with the SDGs, AGFUND plays a key role in promoting financial inclusion, gender equality, and sustainable development, ensuring that its work not only advances the global agenda but also improves lives.

AGFUND and SDGs

AGFUND's engagement with the SDGs began in partnership with UN entities in the 1980s, predating the SDGs. Today AGFUND promotes SDGs and human development in early childhood development, women's empowerment, civil society, education, and financial inclusion. AGFUND operates nine financial inclusion banks that tailor their financial offerings to align with the SDGs. The objective is to empower smallholder farmers, enhance women's livelihoods and equality, advance food security, foster agricultural innovations, and promote climate resilience through solar energy, clean cooking, drought-tolerant crops, supply chains, weather financial derivatives, weather index-insurance solutions, etc. AGFUND has assisted over 7 million microfinance beneficiaries, disbursing more than USD 1 billion, and opening more than 350,000 saving accounts. In Yemen, since 2016, AGFUND's *Al-Amal* Microfinance Bank has launched the PYes digital applications, providing access to mobile-enabled e-banking services and facilitating the distribution of millions of social cash transfers on behalf of NGOs and UN organizations. Three years ago, AGFUND initiated an annual Arab Climate Forum aimed at supporting the SDGs.

AGFUND, together with other partners fosters sustainable nutritional and entrepreneurial prospects through vegetable farming for refugee communities of South Sudan and Congo in Uganda. In addition, the Small Farmers' and Pastoralists Weather Index Insurance, developed in Sudan provides coverage for both crop and livestock. Digital agriculture initiatives are assisting farmers by delivering timely, science-based, and potentially personalized information on weather forecasts, pest management, and new seed varieties. In Niger, Rainwater Harvesting Training is being sponsored by AGFUND and conducted by the Innovative Commission of the University of Chicago to promote the adoption of on-farm rainwater harvesting techniques. In Sierra Leone, AGFUND and BADEA clean cooking initiative is now underway to be broadened to rural areas, reaching 10% of households with a projected financing requirement of USD 3.3 million by 2030.

The Prince Talal International Prize for Human Development: A Catalyst for Innovation.

A key instrument in AGFUND's efforts to promote sustainable development is the Prince Talal International Prize for Human Development. This prestigious prize is awarded to innovative projects that address the core challenges of sustainable development, advancing the

SDGs in measurable and impactful ways, encouraging knowledge-sharing, and replicating best practices across diverse contexts. It shines a spotlight on projects that target marginalized and vulnerable populations. The prize encompasses categories for UN agencies, international and regional organizations, national NGOs, public agencies, and individual projects.

Strengthening Global Partnerships for Sustainable Development.

In alignment with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), AGFUND actively contributes to multi-stakeholder initiatives that foster systemic change. AGFUND amplifies its impact through robust partnerships with international organizations, governments, and development banks. Our collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), the Saudi Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture, and the University of Chicago's Innovation Commission for Climate Change, Food Security, and Agriculture is an example of how we scale successful models across regions, particularly in Africa.

Looking Ahead: A Pathway to a Sustainable Future

COP16 in Riyadh will highlight AGFUND's leadership in addressing desertification, food insecurity, and financial inclusion through scalable, innovative solutions. The flagship initiatives, which will be presented at the 16th Conference of the Parties (COP16) to the UNCCD in Riyadh, address the critical issues of land degradation and food insecurity. This initiative focuses on scaling up evidence-based solutions such as rainwater harvesting and anticipatory cash transfers, designed to equip farmers with the resources they need to thrive in increasingly fragile environments. In addition, AGFUND's weather index-based insurance program helps farmers mitigate financial risks related to climate change. These efforts significantly contribute to SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while also addressing SDG 1 (No Poverty) by helping smallholder farmers enhance their livelihoods and build sustainable futures. As we prepare for COP16 and look toward the future, AGFUND remains unwavering in its dedication to advancing the SDGs through innovation, collaboration, and a focus on inclusivity. By prioritizing smallholder farmers, promoting financial inclusion, and advancing gender equality, we address some of the most urgent challenges facing the world today.



What's your Vision for a Digital Future for All?



Doreen Bogdan-Martin
Secretary-General, International
Telecommunication Union (ITU)

This simple yet profound question sparked a global conversation, led by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ahead of our SDG Digital event during the UN Summit of the Future Action Days in New York in September.

Voices from 148 countries shared their hopes and concerns through social media and an online survey. The response was overwhelming: people everywhere want a future where digital innovation serves us all equally, responsibly, and sustainably. Yet, regional priorities also emerged, reflecting unique local challenges and aspirations for a digital world that works for humanity in all its diversity.

For SDG Digest, here are my three takeaways from SDG Digital as we close in on the 2030 deadline for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Young Voices Leading the Charge

First, empowering young people is critical to sustainable digital development.

Youth took center stage on the first day of the UN Summit of the Future Action Days.

When Bianca Faith Johnson, President of Push to Walk, made her entrance using a self-balancing exoskeleton, the whole room held its breath, before erupting in applause. This young paraplegic woman shared how this technology has given back the freedom she thought was lost.

We also heard from Joan Joseph Moses, a young educator from Roosevelt Douglas Primary School in Dominica, about how getting her school connected to the Internet through Giga, the ITU-UNICEF initiative to connect every school in the world to the Internet, made her students more involved, more curious, and allowed them to achieve more than they ever imagined.

Even in the face of increasingly complex challenges—whether it's online safety,

privacy, digital literacy, or the mental health impacts of social media—young people are stepping up, using their creativity and technology to drive meaningful social change and sustainable digital development.

Driving the SDGs Forward

Second, digital technologies can accelerate humanity's progress towards a greener, more sustainable, and more inclusive future.

A broader coalition of stakeholders joined government, tech, and UN leaders around "A Digital Future for All" during the second Summit of the Future Action Day on 21 September. There was a clear consensus on two points:

- Digital technologies are critical to accelerating the SDGs, particularly for developing countries.
- Global digital development must be universal, affordable, inclusive, meaningful, sustainable, and prosperous.

The message from the participants was clear: we can no longer tolerate that, in an age of unimaginable digital opportunities—where artificial intelligence alone can help accelerate nearly 80% of the SDGs—a third of humanity is still unconnected.

Nor can we accept that countless others are left behind because, for them, the digital experience isn't affordable enough, relevant enough, or safe enough.

Scaling Solutions

Third, strengthening global digital cooperation and investing in digital

public infrastructure (DPI) can ensure sustainability and prosperity for all.

Recognized by the Global Digital Compact as a key driver of inclusive digital transformation and innovation, DPI is the backbone of modern digital interactions, with benefits ranging from unlocking new forms of healthcare to expanding financial access for millions.

With only 17% of the SDG targets on track to be achieved by 2030, the need for scalable solutions, increased investments, and strong public-private partnerships is urgent.

In response, initiatives like the Digital Infrastructure Investment Initiative, launched by ITU in April with the support of Brazil's G20 Presidency—where the Islamic Development Bank serves as one of the co-leads—are stepping up to meet this challenge.

Another strong example is the Partner2Connect Digital Coalition (P2C). SDG Digital sparked a surge of new investment P2C pledges to connect the hardest-to-reach communities worldwide, bringing total commitments to over USD 52 billion and moving us closer to the USD 100 billion target set for 2026.

SDG Digital took the question, "What's your vision for a digital future for all?", and turned it into action. But the work doesn't stop here.

As the UN agency for digital technologies, ITU stands ready to work with the Islamic Development Bank and all our members and partners to rescue the SDGs and build a future where digital is a force for good for everyone, for generations to come.



Scaling up Peace for Sustainable Development



Elizabeth Spehar
Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, UN Department for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs

At the Summit of the Future in New York in September 2024, Member States of the United Nations committed to “bold, ambitious, accelerated, just and transformative” actions to implement the 2030 Agenda, rescue the Sustainable Development Goals and leave no one behind. As Governments and multilateral institutions take forward these commitments, sustaining peace must surely be a critical part of our considerations.

Nowhere are the SDGs more at risk than in countries affected by conflict, and today, the number of conflicts is at a decades-long high. The World Bank has estimated that by 2030, two-thirds of the world's extreme poor will live in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence. Without tackling the sources of conflict and fragility, our wider efforts to eradicate poverty, promote education, and improve health will continue to be undermined.

Peacebuilding is a key enabler to the SDGs. It lays the foundation for sustainable development by fostering stability and social cohesion at local, national and regional levels. Peacebuilding approaches are tailored to each context: they help governments and societies address root causes of violence and inequality, whether by tackling long-standing patterns of exclusion or addressing new threats like climate change. Peacebuilding prioritizes equitable access to economic opportunities and essential services; it promotes inclusive governance and social justice, which are critical for achieving many of the SDGs. It also enhances resilience, enabling societies to better confront global challenges, thus contributing to a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

In 2023, the Peacebuilding Fund, which my office manages on behalf of the Secretary-General, approved investments of more than US \$200 million in 36 countries and territories, advancing three strategic priorities: (i) supporting cross-border and regional approaches, (ii) consolidating country transitions when a UN peace operation closes or draws down, and (iii) accelerating women's and youth empowerment.

For example, in **Mauritania**, the Peacebuilding Fund helped foster a collaborative approach to natural resource management between host communities and Malian refugees, enabling co-design of local economic development plans in a context where desertification has increased the pressure on scarce resources and fueled inter-communal tensions. In the **Liptako-Gourma** tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, the Fund supported inclusive community planning enabling financing of 72 local peacebuilding initiatives. In **Chad**, the Fund supported the Government to increase skills training and job opportunities for young people in Northern Chad, through a vocational training centre that helps young people learn marketable skills, while also sensitizing them to risks associated with irregular migration and recruitment into non-state armed groups. In **Somalia**, the Fund supported the Government in the ongoing implementation of national and sub-national action plans on Women, Peace and Security, including to support new treatment centres for survivors of gender-based violence

We constantly seek to improve our impact by learning from what works and listening

to our partners. In December 2024, we will host our second annual Dialogue with civil society peacebuilding organizations, reaffirming our commitment to the principle of inclusion and localization. Through our Peacebuilding Impact Hub initiative with partner organizations and academics, we are looking at ways to more rigorously measure and communicate peacebuilding results as we move towards the 2025 UN Peacebuilding Architecture Review.

In this context, deepening our strategic partnerships remains a key priority. In the recently adopted Pact for the Future, Member States have called for “systematic and strategic collaboration” between the UN peacebuilding architecture and development finance institutions, while Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has underlined the special role multilateral development banks can play as “agents for peace”. When we work together, we can scale up impact and support Governments to tackle conflict drivers before they escalate, thus protecting the space for the SDGs.

This is what I conveyed, together with IsDB Director General Dr Issa Faye, in a panel during the Summit of the Future entitled “Investing in prevention: scaling up peace, a call to action”. Our two institutions joined other multilateral development banks and development finance institutions in building renewed momentum for urgent collective action. The Islamic Development Bank has been at the forefront of efforts bolstering the resilience of its Member Countries for many years. We look forward to doing more together in the coming years, in support of sustaining peace.



Shaping the Future Together: Advancing the SDGs in Europe and Central Asia



Ivana Živković

UN Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator, and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

Recent global crises—from the escalating climate emergency to rising conflicts and deepening inequality—have severely tested the resilience of communities and global institutions to address these intertwined challenges through collective action.

However, history has shown that crises often pave the way for innovation and transformative change. The UN Summit of the Future in September 2024 introduced the Pact for the Future, emphasising the necessity for enhanced multilateral cooperation to overcome contemporary challenges like climate change, digital disruption, and inequality. This collective vision is an important direction for the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) approach, including in Europe and Central Asia, where we are driving efforts for a just, green, and digital transition that places people at the centre of development.

A Just Green Transition

The Europe and Central Asia region is committed to greener energy and infrastructure, as well as more sustainable production and consumption systems. UNDP has supported 15 countries in the region to formulate and implement their National Adaptation Plans (NAP) and 14 countries in developing Long-Term Low Emissions Development Strategies (LT-LEDS). Demonstration projects on circular economy, biodiversity, renewable energy, energy efficiency, transparency, forestry and agriculture, chemicals, and waste management support policy efforts. These locally driven, systemic, and sustainable initiatives have full ownership by governmental counterparts and communities.



At the heart of UNDP's efforts is the belief that a green transition must be more than just an environmental shift—it must also drive equitable societal transformation, empowering people to be the agents of change. Our collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) in Uzbekistan stands out in this respect: the Integrated Rural Development initiative, seeks to improve the living standards of rural residents through better road and transport infrastructure, engineering and communication networks, energy systems, and more environmentally friendly kindergartens, secondary schools and rural clinics. The project will transform social infrastructure across 157 makhallas (communities) in a climate resilient way, with communities as the driving force of change.

As these examples illustrate, UNDP across the region serves as a connector between the needs and efforts of those that are most affected, with national policy frameworks and global standards.

Inclusive Digital Transformation

At UNDP, we recognize the transformative power of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital technologies to accelerate progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and we see our and our partners' role in ensuring that nobody is left behind in this transition.

UNDP partners with countries in Europe and Central Asia on their digital transformation journeys, promoting the use of AI and digital infrastructure to improve

and rethink public services, fostering inclusive digital ecosystems, and respond more effectively to crises.

Our partnership with IsDB on the "NGO Empowerment Programme - Tadamon" invests in digital and alternative finance capabilities of civil society organizations to alleviate poverty across Organization of Islamic Cooperation Member States (OIC MS). In the wake of the devastating earthquake in Türkiye, Innovation for Development's platform Sosyal Zincir (Social Chain), a social initiative supported through the Tadamon Accelerator, contributed to the financial recovery of businesses in the affected areas by matching local producers with corporate buyers. This initiative has empowered smallholder producers to expand their customer base, secure long-term business opportunities, and stabilize their incomes—providing a vital lifeline for sustaining livelihoods in disaster-affected regions. More broadly, initiatives like Tadamon showcase how technology can enhance efficiency and effectiveness in both crisis and development contexts.

A Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, UNDP remains steadfast in its commitment to a just, inclusive green transition, and a digital transformation that leaves no one behind. Together with our partners, like the IsDB, we will continue to push the boundaries of what is possible, ensuring that every community benefits from a more resilient, sustainable, and technologically advanced future.

Unlocking Capital at Scale to Protect the Planet



Pradeep Kurukulasuriya
Executive Secretary, UNCDF

Land and degradation is an escalating global crisis, threatening biodiversity, food security, water resources, and economic resilience.

UN estimates reveal that 1.52 billion hectares of land have been degraded, impacting an estimated 1.2 billion people worldwide.

Least Developed Countries and other fragile and conflict-affected settings are the hardest hit, lacking the financial capacity to invest in land restoration.

Limited fiscal space and high debt levels exacerbate financial risks and lead to prohibitive borrowing costs, challenges made worse by conventional financial mechanisms that don't address the unique needs of underserved countries.

As a non-credit-rated hybrid development and finance institution, the UN Capital Development Fund is uniquely positioned to bridge this gap through blended finance solutions that de-risk investments in fragile contexts, helping spur much-needed investment at the pace and scale required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Being able to act as an off-balance-sheet de-risker for governments and development finance institutions, we have the ability to unlock larger flows of both domestic and private capital, amplifying the impact of the UN and the global development community.

As we look ahead to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification Conference of the Parties in Riyadh, attention is focused how sustainable land management can build climate resilience and help mitigate the increasing impacts of

climate change; countries least equipped with the resources to protect themselves are often on the frontlines of this impact.

Effective land restoration is now seen not only as an environmental imperative but as a driver of cross-border cooperation and conflict prevention.

Challenges and Opportunities in Financing Land Restoration

Among the challenges we face is the urgent need to finance land restoration.

Funding is scarce—particularly in fragile settings where transboundary resource management could have transformative impacts.

These areas require specialized support to implement nature-based solutions like water and soil conservation, reforestation, and pollination initiatives. These interventions are essential to combat land degradation and build peace.

To close the climate financing gap in these high-risk and early-stage markets—particularly in LDCs and conflict-affected regions—a comprehensive strategy is necessary.

This includes mobilizing capital for large-scale restoration projects, proving the financial viability of such projects, and building resilient communities through local partnerships. Recasting land restoration as a viable asset class, transforming land into a renewable economic asset, could attract investors and harmonize conservation efforts with sustainable economic development priorities.

The UN Capital Development Fund can amplify much-needed development impact alongside the UN Development System by leveraging its unique investment capabilities.

By combining patient capital with targeted de-risking strategies, UNCDF aims to foster community ownership, bolster financial ecosystems, and build long-term resilience.

This holistic approach ensures that restoration initiatives are inclusive, scalable, and sustainable – a future-forward model that delivers the environmental and socio-economic benefits of improved soil health, and enhanced water retention and drought resilience, while generating jobs, resilience and fostering peace.



Expanding Interagency Collaboration for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: A Synopsis of OIC Engagements within the United Nations



Ambassador Hameed Opeloyeru
 OIC Permanent Observer to the United Nations,
 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

There is no doubt that the role of regional organisations has become crucial in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This is evident in the various decisions and resolutions of the United Nations and those of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The guiding principles of universality, integration and inclusiveness have laid the grounds for the progressive collaborative efforts between the UN and its agencies and the OIC and its institutions.

Since the UN General Assembly (UNGA) granted observer status to OIC in 1975, recent activities have highlighted increased inter-agency collaboration on common objectives such as promoting the SDGs and South-South cooperation.

Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

In line with SDG 16, the annual participation of the OIC Secretary General and his delegation at the UNGA High Level Week has aimed to mainstream the OIC agenda on peace and security. Key issues such as

the war in Gaza, the question of Palestine and Al-Quds, and crises in other OIC member states have been prominently featured during the assembly. High-level meetings with world leaders and regional actors underscored UN-OIC collaboration to garner support for a long overdue ceasefire in Gaza and in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Expectedly, the various statements of the OIC Group at the UN Security Council's open debates on the Middle East, particularly the Palestinian question, have consistently underlined the need to break the impasse on the adoption of a resolution for humanitarian ceasefire in Gaza as well as the immediate cessation of hostilities.

In addition, the consistent support for the resumption of the 10th Emergency Special Session of UNGA during the 78th UNGA, has contributed to the adoption of significant landmark resolutions. These landmark resolutions called for resolving the ceasefire impasse at the Security Council and expanding protocol privileges for the State of Palestine within the General Assembly.

Only recently, UNGA resolution A/ES-10/L.31/Rev.1 endorsed ICJ Advisory Opinion for an end to Israel's unlawful presence in Occupied Palestine Territory within one year. In New York, the OIC Group has also intensified its negotiations as a cross-regional group within the Intergovernmental Negotiation process on the reform of the Security Council. Additionally, the OIC Group participated actively in the high-level debate on addressing historical injustices and

enhancing Africa's effective representation on the UN Security Council.

Poverty Alleviation, Food Security and Climate Action

The participation of the OIC Group in the open debate sponsored by the Guyanese UNSC presidency was robust, highlighting its myriad projects on poverty alleviation, food security, as well as the various funding mechanisms under the IsDB Group. The UNSC's call to action on food and human security issues could advance the realization of the SDGs, alongside the recently-adopted Pact for the Future and the Declaration of Future Generations.

With regard to regional initiatives, the various inter-agency efforts among OIC institutions have featured the recent allocation of US\$10.54 billion by IsDB on a Comprehensive Food Security Response Program towards promoting agriculture and food security in OIC member states. Equally significant is the establishment of OIC Food Security Reserve, and the OIC Plan of Action on Development of Strategic Agricultural Commodities which are under the operational mandate of OIC's specialised institution, the Islamic Organisation for Food Security in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Regarding Climate Change, OIC has aligned itself with the outcomes and recommendations of the 27th Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27), and the 28th edition (COP 28). With COP 29 set to take place in Azerbaijan, another OIC venue, the emerging collaboration on health, lives and livelihoods—highlighted in various compacts with UN specialised agencies, will be strengthened.

The increasing collaboration of OIC institutions in the various components of SDG portrays a good omen for OIC-UN collaboration. This is expected to become more robust with the increased partnership of IsDB on the UN peace-building agenda based on its agenda on support for fragile states and its humanitarian trust funding architecture. Other OIC institutions, such as SESRIC, IOFS, ICYF, ICCID and ISESCO are poised to step up their engagements with relevant UN institutions in the coming phase.



The VACS Opportunity at COP16



Dr. Cary Fowler
U.S. Special Envoy for Global Food Security, the Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils (VACS)



Mr. Joseph Forcherio
Foreign Affairs Officer and Advisor on the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, VACS



Degraded soils and drought go together naturally. Add climate change, biodiversity loss, and unadapted crops, and the result is food insecurity and conflict over political power, territory, and resources. The combination is combustible.

Addressing any of these issues out of context as if they are not connected has always been a naive strategy. Land degradation, drought, climate change, and biodiversity loss constitute a vicious cycle of environmental challenges causing food insecurity. The 16th Conference of the Parties to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP16) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia will highlight these challenges. Saudi Arabia's leadership and ambitious plans are leading this COP to be a landmark in the UNCCD's history; COP16 will be our collective opportunity to position the global community to respond to this potent combination of threats to food security and peace.

In early 2023, the United States, the African Union and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) jointly launched the "Vision for Adapted Crops and Soils" (VACS), not as an organization, a program or project, nor as something they wished to control, but as an idea that needed to take root. The premise was simple. We need good fertile soils to nourish our crops, and we need crops that nourish and build our soils. There is no other solution.



Countries require good soil data to make wise decisions about land use, to know where to incentivize agriculture and ascertain whether and where to promote trees or row crops or pastures. Farmers need more detailed information about soil conditions on their farms to understand how best to manage their land in a way that builds crops and yields. In both cases, satellite remote sensing data paired with predictive modeling is taken for granted in the most sophisticated farming systems. It can and must now be employed everywhere. It's the first step.

It's not enough, however. Initially focused on Africa, VACS identified 60 nutrient-rich traditional and indigenous crops that had enormous untapped potential to address food insecurity, malnutrition and the scourge of childhood stunting. Then, through climate modeling we ascertained which ones could still be productive in the future climates of 2050. Most could, we discovered, in contrast to many varieties of maize, for example, whose yields are projected to decline significantly due to climate change. These 60 "opportunity" crops include fonio, which has ten times the iron content of maize and could help solve the iron deficiency anemia that affects over 50% of Africans. It includes pigeon pea, cowpea, grass pea, spider plant and other legumes that convert their own nitrogen and build soils. These crops offer a huge return on investment. As yields on many of today's staple crops stagnate or decline, we need to offer options to farmers. Opportunity crops have that potential.

As an idea and strategy, VACS is applicable everywhere. When soils and crops are paired wisely, we combat drought, build soils and reverse the slide to desertification. We produce food reliably and sustainably and reverse the slide to hunger, malnutrition and the conflict that follows. While the initial work of VACS focused on Africa, it has direct and immediate applicability to the Middle East. Localized versions have spread to Central America and the Pacific Island nations. Donor countries, private companies, and civil society organizations have all stepped up. But VACS is still in its infancy. Much more needs to be done.

We now must seize the moment at COP16. The UNCCD is the logical forum for connecting the dots and launching bold initiatives. The opportunity to lead is available to all.

Sustainable Economic Growth and Climate Action: Regionalization, Localization and Projectization as Key Performance Indicators



Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin
UN Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Development Agenda, United Nations

The complementarity between sustainable economic growth and climate action is unquestionable; they have to be pursued in parallel, or neither will happen. Sharm El-Sheikh Implementation Plan underlined the urgent need to address, in a comprehensive and synergetic manner, climate change in the broader context of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Climate finance is indeed development finance. The realization of SDGs, including SDG 13 on climate action, requires a clear assessment of the size of current investment gaps and how to effectively and equitably bridge them. Building climate projects pipelines from concept phase to investment readiness is indeed an essential task for narrowing these gaps. These pipelines of projects are critical means for achieving the multiple sustainable development frameworks; SDGs, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement.

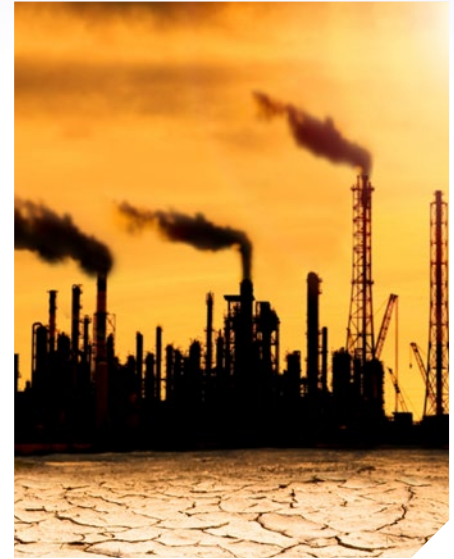
Since 2022, as the UN Climate Change High-Level Champion for COP27 and the UN Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, I spearheaded two initiatives that aim at sourcing a pipeline of investable climate projects. The first initiative at the regional level titled Regional Platforms for Climate Projects (RPCP) in collaboration with the five Regional UN Economic Commissions as well as the COP27 and COP28 Presidencies. This initiative directly contributes to efforts under SDG17 on revitalizing partnerships for sustainable development since it involves building multiple successful partnerships among various stakeholders; Governments, Intergovernmental Regional Organisations, Regional and National Development Banks, Investment Banks, Multilateral Development Banks, International Financial

Institutions, Private Sector Investors, local and regional project developers and the private philanthropic organisations. The second initiative at the local level in Egypt titled the National Initiative for Smart Green Projects (NISGP) that was endorsed by the Egyptian government. Both initiatives sought to bring together supply and demand for climate and sustainability projects across different sectors and impact systems and had a specific focus on mobilizing private sector finance. The latter needs to be at least quadrupled to narrow the current climate finance gap.

Within the RPCP initiative, remarkable progress has been achieved; over 450 investment-ready climate projects were sourced with an aggregate funding requirement in excess of USD 500 bn and a total of 19 projects featured in this initiative have raised financing of USD 1.9 bn with the involvement of over 200 financiers globally. Within NISGP initiative, over 15,000 projects were sourced with 18 nationwide winning projects from its two rounds and many of them have attracted investment and received technical assistance.

Supporting the development of project pipelines into investable opportunities is also a priority for the Advisory Board of the Africa Network within Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) that I Chair. The network also focuses on de-risking investments to crowd in private finance and driving interventions to maximize carbon currency benefits to Africa.

In the context of achieving climate justice and sustainable development goals, regionalization and localization of climate action that correspond to the specific needs and challenges at the regional and local levels must be encouraged and supported. Projectization is among the key indicators for our performance in addressing the current climate crisis. Thus, much momentum needs to be injected in fostering larger scale partnerships that mobilize further investments, especially private investments, in climate projects. Continued commitment from financiers to climate projects must be encouraged, while also ensuring that there is an enabling macroeconomic environment for such projects to succeed. The current geopolitical tensions urge countries to focus more on the context of their



climate action on generating investment and engagement opportunities through developing their "country platforms" and to expand on regionalized coordination for generating and executing projects pipelines through multi-stakeholder partnerships. The latter need to follow robust development and financial models that are green, inclusive and digital to ensure both their success and sustainability.

The required shift in the climate finance landscape from 'inefficient', 'insufficient' and 'unfair' to 'efficient', 'adequate,' and 'just' needs a wider range of actions and structural reforms that reflect the collective commitments to both fairness and sustainability. These actions and reforms include: providing concessional financing instruments to developing countries (taking into account the need to avoid compromising their already vulnerable long-term fiscal and macroeconomic sustainability), employing innovative finance mechanisms (including debt for climate swaps and carbon markets), significantly increasing adaptation and resilience finance (the Sharm El-Sheikh Adaptation Agenda lays out a blueprint for identifying the enablers needed to bridge the adaptation finance gap), realigning financial capital to conserve and restore vital natural capital and addressing the requirements of Domestic Resource Mobilization (through aligning budget processes, incentivising local private sector and domestic capital markets).

Investing in Life on Land:

A Call for Action on SDG 15 at the Sixteenth Conference of the Parties of the United Nations CCD



Dr. Khalid Al Abdulkader
CEO of the National Center for Vegetation
Cover and Combating Desertification,
Saudi Arabia

The world meets in December in Riyadh for the UNCCD COP16 at a critical moment in our collective efforts to combat land degradation, desertification and drought, and to achieve global sustainable development. It is in that context that we need to escalate an issue which collectively requires our immediate action, namely the chronic underfunding of Sustainable Development Goal 15, Life on Land.

SDG 15 is not merely one goal among many, rather it is the foundation upon which the success of so many other SDGs is predicated. Paradoxically, however, it remains the least funded of all the SDGs. This oversight not only jeopardises our ability to protect terrestrial ecosystems, it also undermines our efforts to address interconnected global challenges such as water security, food security, forced migration and the carbon levels in our atmosphere.

The stakes could not be higher. According to the UNCCD, land degradation today affects the lives of 3.2 billion people globally, with 52% of agricultural land moderately or severely degraded. The economic cost of land degradation is estimated at least \$10.6 trillion, or more than 10% of annual global GDP, according to the Economics of Land Degradation Initiative.

These stark figures underscore the urgency of the task.

Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) offers a practical framework for sustainable land management. Over 130 countries have already adopted LDN targets, recognising that healthy land is crucial for biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and sustainable development.

Quite rightly, these countries have understood that by restoring degraded land, we will simultaneously address multiple SDGs – including poverty



reduction and gender equality through improved land tenure rights.

Indeed, often the impacts of land degradation, drought and desertification are pushing vulnerable people, such as Indigenous Peoples and local communities, into even more precarious situations, and forcing more individuals to migrate in search of more fertile land that is better able to sustain life. By 2030, land degradation, desertification and drought are likely to cause 135 million people to migrate according to the UNCCD. In short, this is an issue that threatens to unpick the very fabric of societies.

It is worth pointing out, too, that the benefits of land restoration far outweigh the costs. According to UNCCD forecasts, for every dollar invested in restoration, we can expect returns of up to \$30 in economic benefits. Despite this, the current level of investment falls woefully short of what is needed.

We are now fully into the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, as such, I believe we must seize the opportunity to reimagine our relationship with nature. Land restoration is not just an environmental imperative, it is also a social and economic necessity. It offers a pathway to create sustainable livelihoods, enhance food and water security, and to build resilience against climate change and future pandemics.

To this end, at COP16 in Riyadh the incoming Saudi Arabia UNCCD COP16 Presidency will call upon the global community to take decisive action. The time has come to significantly increase funding for SDG 15. Governments, multilateral funding institutions, philanthropies and businesses must

prioritise investments in land restoration and sustainable land management.

We must also strive to integrate land restoration into climate action. That must begin with recognising and leveraging the potential of land-based solutions in national climate strategies and nationally determined contributions.

We must also do all that we can to promote responsible land governance and to ensure that land restoration efforts respect the rights and knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities.

Crucially, we must align agricultural policies with restoration goals, redirecting harmful subsidies towards regenerative practices that enhance soil health and biodiversity. Above all, we must be relentless in our pursuit of innovation and knowledge sharing, thereby accelerating the development and deployment of sustainable land management technologies and practices, for the good of all.

Here in Saudi Arabia, we are committed to leading by example. Our ambitious Middle East Green Initiative aims to plant 50 billion trees across the region, restore 200 million hectares of degraded land.

As we come together at COP16 in Riyadh, it is worth remembering that the health of our land is linked inextricably to the health of our people and our planet. By investing properly in SDG 15, we invest in our collective future.

The time for action is now. Let us unite in our commitment to restore our land, revitalise our ecosystems and create a sustainable legacy for generations to come.

Quest for More Efforts to Support Life on Land



Dr. Issa Faye
Director General, Global Practice and Partnerships (GPP), IsDB



Dr. Muhammad Jameel Yusha'u
Lead Knowledge Management Specialist, GPP Front Office, IsDB

To say that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are off-track is now a cliché. According to a statement by the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, during the launch of the 2024 report on the SDGs, only 17% of the SDGs are on track to be achieved by 2030.

While most of the SDGs are off-track, SDG15, which focuses on combating desertification and land degradation, seems to be forgotten.

It is reported by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), that “between 2015 and 2019, at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land were degraded every year, affecting food and water security globally.” This scourge seems to affect all regions that are home for the least developed countries, many of which are members of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). In 2015, the amount of degraded land in Central and Southern Asia was 10.26%; 21.62% in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia; 6.7% in Sub-Saharan Africa, and 3.78% in Western Asia and Northern Africa. Compare these figures to 2019, the amount of degraded land in Central and Southern Asia has moved to 14.04%; 23.89% in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia; 14.63% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 17.19% in Western Asia and Northern Africa. Desertification is real. The development community cannot be blind to its damaging impact.

The importance of life on land and the urgency to take action cannot be over-emphasized, if one is concerned with bringing back the SDGs on track. The recent report by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2024, released ahead of the UN Summit of the Future indicates that success about the SDGs has literally stalled since 2020. While less than 17% of SDGs are on target, five SDGs are in the danger zone. These include SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). The situation on the SDG focusing on the Life on Land is even more acute when one considers the overwhelming pressures on water resources.

A study by the World Resources Institute revealed that 50% of the global population, approximately four billion people, live under water stress conditions at least one month every year. In addition, twenty-five countries are the most exposed to high water stress annually, suggesting that 80% of their water is utilized for irrigation, livestock and domestic needs. Moreover, the fact that the world population will reach around 9.8 billion by 2050, combined with increasing urbanization in many Less Developed Countries (LDCs) and the risk of drought, will put more stress on water resources. Life on land is really in danger. Some IsDB MCs will bear the brunt. These include for instance Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman and Qatar.

The cost of inaction is deeply concerning. A study by the Allianz Global Investors, referring to data from the United Nations indicated that regions suffering from water scarcity could see a decline of growth rate by 6% of GDP by 2050. In fact, in the year 2020, water risks cost corporates around \$301 billion, yet if preventive action has been taken, the amount could reduce to around \$55 billion.

It is critical that the development community revisit the development agenda to reposition life on land as a high priority. That would require a paradigm shift whereby development partners will move from a reactive approach of managing emergencies to a more proactive approach of building resilience.

The era of isolated and narrowly focused development interventions is gone. Building resilience around the life on land should be based on comprehensive and practical solutions integrating both sectoral and thematic issues that matter. In that respect, those solutions should be agile enough to respond to the Climate-Water-Food system nexus and comprise both financial and non-financial instruments, of which some would be preventive such as early warning systems, while others are geared towards building long-term resilience and sustainability in MCs. Such solutions should also be able to deal with shocks related to conflicts and fragility which can exacerbate the pressure on water resources due to high influx of displaced people in some of our MCs.

A successful approach would require a massive and concerted effort from the development community leveraging (i) a strong coalition of the willing spearheaded by very influential personalities, institutions or countries eager to advocate for this very challenging cause. The role played by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia together with UNCCD is a case in point. This has helped raise the profile of the desertification COP16, (ii) stronger partnerships are critical, as no single institution can do it alone, (iii) innovation and R&D involving science and technology as well as financial engineering (takaful and sustainable finance instruments for dry lands) to ensure pragmatic solutions and systems are developed to enhance soil health and better manage desertification and land degradation; (iv) capacity development and awareness. Building capacity and institutions, as well as more advocacy work will be needed to sustain the effort and ensure Life on Land remains high on the development agenda long after the Riyadh COP16 conference.

Leveraging Science, Technology, and Innovation to Achieve the SDGs in the World's Poorest Countries



Deodat Maharaj
Managing Director, United Nations
Technology Bank for Least Developed
Countries

With just over 60 months left to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), more equitable access to science, technology and innovation may offer the most effective way to improve the lives of the people who are living in the world's poorest countries.

While there has been some progress during the last decade, less than a fifth of the SDGs are on track to be fully achieved. Global challenges including COVID-19 pandemic, growing conflicts and ongoing climate-related disasters have slowed—and even stalled progress, and time is running out.

For the Least Developed Countries or the world's poorest states (LDCs) that face unique challenges, these 60 months are critical. Burdened by debt, dependent on external financing and highly vulnerable to external shocks including climate-induced disasters, LDCs have few buffers to protect them from global crises.

This is where the United Nations Technology Bank for Least Developed Countries (UNTB) can step in and help them to fast-track progress. Science, technology, and innovation offer a powerful and enabling toolkit that can materially improve the lives of the world's poorest people. The UNTB is the sole United Nations entity dedicated to enhancing the science, technology and innovation capacities of LDCs. The UNTB plays a pivotal role in facilitating access to knowledge, technologies, and technical assistance essential for accelerated sustainable development.



We do this by conducting demand-driven Technology Needs Assessments (TNAs) to assist LDCs in identifying the key areas where they can take advantage of technological opportunities to advance their development. We design technology transfer projects and programmes based on the findings and recommendations of TNAs and ensure that the support provided by the UNTB is tailored to specific sectors in which technological solutions will deliver results. In addition, we help forge partnerships and mobilize resources for science, technology and innovation to boost human resource capacities and deliver low-cost, high impact solutions.

The UN Technology Bank is younger than the SDGs, having become operational just six years ago. We have so far conducted 15 TNAs, with three more in the pipeline. Working with our partners, we have provided over 100 industrial design scholarships to students from 22 LDCs, facilitated the screening of 75,000 children for hearing impairments, and helped with treatment for over 2,000 children for hearing loss in Bhutan. We have also supported the establishment of science

academies in Angola, Lesotho, Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi. These are just a few examples of our work, and we are ramping up our support to deliver more to our client countries.

The next five years are pivotal. As the world increasingly relies on science, technology and innovation to tackle complex development problems, the UNTB is uniquely positioned to make a difference, with a mandate to act for the world's poorest countries. We also know that to deliver results, working with partners is key. We are committed to building partnerships to deliver results on the ground and in people's lives.

By embracing technological solutions, fostering innovation, and building partnerships,

LDCs can overcome development barriers, and potentially leap-frog traditional Obstacles, opening entirely new pathways for growth and investment. Time is short. But with bold political will, strategic partnerships, sustained investment, and renewed international commitment, science, technology and innovation can shift the dial for the world's poorest.

Countries can Supercharge Development by Investing in their National Data Systems



Claire Melamed
Chief Executive Officer of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data, UNSDG, United Nations

The ability to collect and manage information—whether from paper-based community surveys or up-to-the-minute digital systems—is an essential part of how any modern government works. Data is so critical to every aspect of government that every dollar invested in national data systems, on average, creates \$32 in economic benefits.

This multiplier effect is all the more important in the present moment. Policymakers in developing economies are constantly being asked to do more with less, official development assistance budgets continue to be slashed, and the international community is calling for urgent and bold action to rescue the SDGs.

There are three ways to realize the opportunity of data, digital systems, and AI technologies: invest in skills, not just systems; learn from peers and experts; and institutionalize data-led decision-making processes. The secret ingredient for success is political will—governments have to believe in the power of data to help them achieve their objectives and deliver for their citizens.

For development partners, working with countries to understand how data can support national development priorities is crucial. Ensuring data systems are fit for purpose, aligned with the needs of the country, and that local data experts have the skills to use them, enables investments that deliver impact where it's needed most, whether that's in health, climate, or education.

The Power of Data initiative, launched as part of the SDG Summit in 2023, is the perfect example of this. It drives political commitment to data and mobilizes partners in support of national priorities. Since the launch, ten low and middle-income countries have made political commitments to strengthen their national data systems, with 15 more taking steps towards this. For example, Ghana has announced they are developing mandatory data sharing and release commitments across the government. In Botswana and the Dominican Republic, Power of Data partnerships have opened up financing opportunities, where conversations are underway with the World Bank to support their national Power of Data priorities. Working together, national governments and international organizations are demonstrating how partnerships can help to build political will and support practical systemic innovations for the long term.

The Power of Data initiative builds on partnerships we've fostered with national government partners over many years. Together with the Islamic Development Bank, the Global Partnership has been working with Guinea, Mali, Somalia, Suriname, and Togo to understand where a lack of data is holding back progress and helping to overcome critical development

challenges. Through capacity building and peer exchanges, involving government officials and communities, we were able to improve data collection, sharing, management, and use, enabling local experts and policymakers to tackle major challenges in environmental management, agriculture, and food security with timely and accurate data.

Our most recent collaboration is in Suriname, where data is key to understanding the scale and impact of artisan and small-scale gold mining. 90% of Suriname is rainforest; it is one of the greenest countries in the world and one of only three countries to absorb more carbon than it emits. Its forests are a precious resource, not just for Suriname but for the world. However, Suriname is also rich in another natural resource: gold. The extraction of this resource is both a key driver of the local economy and of deforestation.

The remoteness of the mining regions makes regular data collection difficult, limiting the ability of the government to develop informed policy interventions to protect the environment and mitigate the costs to biodiversity, health, and well-being. To overcome this challenge, the Government of Suriname asked the Global Partnership for support to develop the skills of local experts in using Earth Observation data. The collaboration included a pilot project that analyzed changes in the remote gold mining region of Lake Brokopondo. The results revealed shocking changes with satellite images visualizing the extensive environmental impacts of small-scale mining. For Ms. P. Simons, the Director of Mining at the Ministry of Natural Resources in Suriname, this is a critical first step, "Suriname is a blessed country with a lot of natural resources. We should find a balance between economic activity and environmental sustainability, and for that data is essential."

In a time of growing challenges and shrinking resources, data is key to ensuring that every dollar and every hour is used in the best possible way to drive progress on the SDGs. For too long data has suffered from political neglect and lack of investment. With new technologies and committed partnerships, the possibilities are infinite and it's critical that all governments and development partners invest in the strengthening of modern data systems to support progress for all.



Integrating the Rio Conventions: A Critical Pathway to Resilient Food, Land, and Water Systems



Dr. Ismahane Elouafi
Executive Managing Director, the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR)

We cannot emphasize this enough: the integrated implementation of the three Rio Conventions—Biodiversity (UNCBD), Climate Change (UNFCCC), and Land Degradation (UNCCD)—is crucial for building resilient food, land, and water systems. This is also a strategy for achieving multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Particularly, Goals 1: No Poverty, 2: Zero Hunger, 13: Climate Action, 14: Life Below Water, 15: Life on Land, and 17: Partnerships for the Goals depend on integrated action.

Integrated Action is Non-Negotiable

Implementing these conventions in concert will generate direct co-benefits. Preserving biodiversity and ensuring the sustainable use and sharing of genetic resources is fundamental to healthier diets, climate resilience, and reducing land degradation. The interconnectedness is clear: restoring ecosystems and practicing sustainable land management are essential to achieving the goals of the UNCCD and create advantages for the UNCBD and UNFCCC. Global warming, driven by greenhouse gas emissions, remains one of the most critical threats to biodiversity and land health.

2024: A Pivotal Year for Food, Land, and Water Systems

This year, the world is at a critical juncture as international leaders converge in Cali for UNCBD COP16, Baku for UNFCCC COP28, and Riyadh for UNCCD COP16. These conferences represent a chance to shift from promises to tangible actions. The stakes are high: 75% of terrestrial ecosystems, 50% of freshwater bodies, and 40% of oceans are suffering from varying levels of degradation. Added to this, the depletion of 30% of underground water and the annual dumping of 300-400 million tons of pollutants are further endangering our environment. Meanwhile, the world's population is set to increase from 8.1 billion today to 8.6 billion by 2030, and 9.8 billion by 2050, intensifying the demand for agricultural land. According to the 2023 SDG report, we are struggling to meet global targets—making 2024 a decisive year for reversing these trends.

Scientific Innovation: The Foundation for Transformation

Science is the backbone of effective implementation. Rigorous research and clear performance indicators are crucial to demonstrating how technological, technical, and social innovations can help achieve the goals of the Rio Conventions and the SDGs. Scientific innovations to sustainably manage drylands and enhance drought resilience are critical. Agroforestry, for instance, boosts biodiversity, improves agricultural productivity, and diversifies livelihoods. Wetland restoration, meanwhile, enhances natural water filtration and serves as a carbon sink, making it a cornerstone for climate action.

Sustainable Agriculture: A Pillar of Resilient Food Systems

Effective land management is central to healthy agroecosystems. Conservation agriculture, organic farming, agroecology, regenerative agriculture, and nature-positive solutions must all be integrated alongside traditional practices. They represent the best allies to the Rio Conventions and are crucial for sustainable food production.

Addressing the root causes of biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation, and climate change requires a multidisciplinary approach. In addition to technological advancements, social innovations—such as effective land-use planning, coherent policies, robust market incentives, financing mechanisms, and inclusive governance—are key to achieving a holistic response. All stakeholders must work together under a shared vision to deliver on these critical goals.

Ongoing Innovation: Preparing for Future Challenges

Existing innovations play a vital role, but ongoing investment in research is essential to address future scenarios amidst a changing

climate. Developing resilient plant, animal, and aquatic species is fundamental to ensuring food security. Crop breeding has already proven invaluable in stress-prone regions. For instance, stress-tolerant varieties of wheat, barley, chickpea, lentil, and potatoes have significantly boosted food and nutrition security in dryland countries such as Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, and Uzbekistan. Flood-resistant rice varieties have transformed food security for smallholder farmers in Africa. Parties to the Rio Conventions must make significant investments in genetic improvement and conservation.

Restoration and Conservation: An Economic and Environmental Imperative

Large-scale restoration projects, such as the Green Initiatives in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East and the Great Green Wall in the Sahara and Sahel, demonstrate the critical need for investment in genetic resources. Ecosystem restoration and cutting-edge research to anticipate future challenges for food, land, and water systems are key to productivity and sustainability (Figure 1). Reversing biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation is not only a moral obligation but also an economic opportunity—with the potential to generate annual economic returns of \$125 to \$140 trillion.

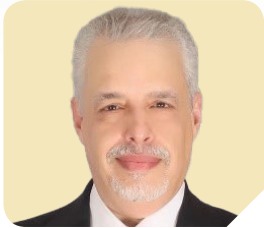
Time to Act: Uniting for the Future of Food, Land, and Water

The urgency of unified action across biodiversity, climate change, and land degradation cannot be overstated. All actors of food, land, and water systems must collaborate to develop integrated solutions. The moment to invest in restoring ecosystems, conserving genetic resources, and embracing innovative solutions is now. We cannot afford to delay and we must "walk the talk" to effectively deliver on the Rio Conventions.



Figure 1: The future we want to deliver on the Rio Conventions

The Role of the African Union Commission in Tackling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Africa: Achievements and Challenges



Djamel Ghrib
Director, Economic Development Integration and Trade, African Union Commission (AUC)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a global commitment to address pressing challenges facing humanity. The SDGs 2030 Agenda covers 17 SDGs, 169 Targets, and 232 Indicators. The African Union Commission (AUC) is pivotal in facilitating, coordinating, and promoting SDG implementation across African countries while aligning these goals with the continent's development framework, Agenda 2063. According to the 2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report, only 17% of the goals are on track globally, with nearly half showing minimal or moderate progress and over a third either stalled or regressing.

The continental progress on the SDGs presents a mixed picture, with some countries showing significant advancements while others need to catch up due to structural challenges. The AUC's mandate encompasses fostering continental integration, promoting sustainable development, and representing Africa's interests on the global stage. In the context of the SDGs, the AUC serves as a crucial bridge between global commitments and local implementation, ensuring that African countries can effectively pursue these goals within their national development framework.

I. Achievements of the AUC in Advancing SDGs

1. Coordination and Integration

The AUC has successfully aligned the SDGs with Agenda 2063, creating a unified framework for sustainable development across the continent. This alignment, known as the "one framework, two agendas" initiative, has fostered regional cooperation and harmonised policy implementation across Member States.

The Commission has successfully pushed for Member States to integrate these goals into their national development plans, ensuring that African countries pursue a coherent development strategy.

2. Programmes and Initiatives

The AUC has launched several initiatives that contribute to specific SDGs, particularly those related to poverty reduction, education, and health. For example:

- The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA 16-25) addresses SDG 4 on quality education.
- The Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) supports SDG 3, which promotes good health and well-being.
- The Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA) contributes to SDG 9 on industry, innovation, and infrastructure.

3. Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation

The AUC has built strong partnerships with international organisations, the private sector, and development partners, successfully mobilising financial and technical resources for sustainable development projects. The joint framework for implementing Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030 exemplifies this collaborative approach.

4. Monitoring and Reporting

The AUC has supported the development of continental indicators and facilitated data collection to monitor SDG progress. In collaboration with other organisations, the Commission produces the annual Africa Sustainable Development Report, which assesses progress on key SDGs and Agenda 2063 targets.

II. Challenges Facing the African Union Commission in Implementing SDGs

1. Resource Constraints

The AUC needs more financial, technical, and human resources to advance the SDGs effectively, as its dependence on external funding challenges the sustainability of its initiatives.

Domestic resource mobilisation is also a challenge, with most African countries unable to raise sufficient resources to

finance the SDGs. They face a financial paradox: a huge financing gap alongside losses from illicit financial flows (IFFs).

2. Political and Institutional Barriers

Political instability and institutional fragmentation in some member states have impeded SDG implementation. Varying levels of governance and institutional capacity among countries create significant challenges for the AUC in coordinating continent-wide efforts.

3. Data and Monitoring Limitations

The lack of accurate and comprehensive data remains a major barrier to effectively monitoring and evaluating SDG progress and the continent's performance. Data collection, quality challenges, and the establishment of a reliable monitoring framework hinder the AUC's ability to track and report on SDG implementation accurately.

4. Regional Disparities

Progress on SDGs varies significantly across African regions, with some member states advancing faster than others due to varied economic capacities and regional conflicts. This disparity poses a challenge for the AUC in ensuring equitable development across the continent.

5. COVID-19 Impact

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly slowed SDG progress, particularly in health, education, and economic development. The diversion of resources towards managing the immediate health crisis has further strained the AUC's capacity to advance the SDGs.

The African Union Commission plays a vital role in advancing the SDGs in Africa, aligning them with Agenda 2063. Despite significant achievements in policy integration, regional coordination, and partnerships, the AUC faces substantial challenges, including resource constraints, political instability, and data limitations. Addressing these challenges requires enhancing institutional capacity, fostering partnerships, and improving data collection, which are critical for effective SDG monitoring and implementation. Continued commitment and collective action by the AUC, member states, and development partners are essential to address ongoing challenges and achieve sustainable development goals across Africa.

DCO's Role in Advancing the SDGs through Digital Innovation and Cooperation



Hassan Nasser
Chief of the Cabinet of the Council, Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO)

In an increasingly digital world, the Digital Cooperation Organization (DCO) is working to ensure that digital transformation becomes a driving force for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With 16 Member States, representing over 800 million people and a combined GDP of \$3.5 trillion, the DCO plays a critical role as an information provider, advisor, advocate, and facilitator across governments, the private sector, international organizations, academia, and civil society. The DCO fosters collaboration to advance the digital economy in a way that promotes sustainable, inclusive growth across borders.

As an Observer of the United Nations General Assembly, the DCO actively participates in global discussions, including its recent involvement at the Summit of the Future. These engagements, alongside the adoption of the Global Digital Compact, highlight the critical role of digital cooperation in achieving the SDGs. By ensuring that its Member States have access to the necessary tools, infrastructure, and knowledge, the DCO is empowering countries to bridge the digital divide and fully participate in the global digital economy. Through its initiatives, the DCO helps harness the power of innovation and connectivity to foster sustainable, inclusive growth and create opportunities for all.

Accelerating Digital Cooperation: The Digital Space Accelerators

A key initiative that embodies the DCO's mission are the Digital Space Accelerators (DSAs). The DSAs are an innovative cooperation mechanism designed to bring together decision-makers, experts, and stakeholders from a variety of sectors—including governments, private enterprises, and international organizations. Its primary aim is to deliver actionable solutions to address the barriers towards an inclusive and sustainable digital economy.

DSAs run for six to twelve months and focus on critical topics that directly influence the digital transformation process. These include combating online misinformation, protecting digital rights, empowering women in the ICT sector, and enhancing digital skills for youth. By focusing on these areas, DSAs help countries build resilient, future-ready digital ecosystems.

Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: WE-Elevate

The DCO's commitment to inclusive digital growth is reflected in initiatives like WE-Elevate, which empowers women-led micro, small, and medium enterprises across Member States. WE-Elevate takes a holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, offering digital enablement, capacity building, global market access, and financial tools tailored to their needs. By advocating for gender-responsive policies, the initiative helps to close the gender gap in the digital economy and supports the broader goal of empowering women to thrive in the digital space.

Prioritizing and Coordinating Efforts: Digital Economy Navigator

Another groundbreaking project that highlights the DCO's role in advancing the SDGs is the Digital Economy Navigator (DEN). DEN is a powerful resource designed to provide Member States with comprehensive insights into their digital economy performance across 50 countries. DEN is more than a measurement tool—it offers a framework that enables countries to benchmark their progress, identify opportunities for improvement, and map out a clear path to becoming digital innovators.

DEN provides countries with the actionable insights they need to transform their economies and integrate digital technology into their national development strategies. By helping governments understand where they stand and what steps they can take to enhance their digital competitiveness, DEN paves the way for long-term sustainable growth.

Building capacity: GenAI Center of Excellence

In line with its forward-thinking approach, the DCO has recently launched the Generative AI Center of Excellence (GenAI CoE), a groundbreaking initiative spearheaded by Saudi Arabia. This initiative aims to build-up AI capabilities across DCO Member States, positioning them as global leaders in the generative AI space.

The GenAI CoE addresses key challenges faced by Member States, such as limited AI infrastructure and the fact that global concentration of AI investments resides in a handful of countries. The initiative aims to empower Member States to shift from being consumers of AI technology to becoming producers of cutting-edge innovations. The long-term impact will be transformative, fostering economic growth, job creation, and sustainable development across the region.

DCO's Commitment to a Sustainable Digital Future for All

The DCO's efforts, from empowering women entrepreneurs to fostering innovation and building resilient digital economies, demonstrate its commitment to shaping a digital future that is inclusive, sustainable, and equitable. However, the journey is far from over. As we navigate an increasingly interconnected and digitized world, the need for continued cooperation across sectors, borders, and industries becomes ever more urgent. The challenges we face—whether closing the digital divide, advancing AI governance, or creating opportunities for marginalized communities—require bold action and unified efforts.

Now is the time for governments, businesses, and international organizations to join forces in leveraging digital technologies as tools for transformation. The DCO stands ready to lead this charge, but meaningful progress will depend on collective commitment and shared responsibility. Together, we can harness the power of digital innovation to achieve sustainable development and ensure that no one is left behind in the global digital economy.



Training and Capacity-building for the SDGs – Insights on UNITAR’s Latest Initiatives



Mihoko Kumamoto
Director, Division for Prosperity, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR)

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) provides tailored capacity-building to enhance decision-making and action for a better future. UNITAR works with global thought leaders and industry and regional experts to advance the SDGs. Through customized programmes, we support our learners – including some of society’s most vulnerable such as women, youth and those in fragile economic and social situations – to make use of technology and innovation to address pressing local challenges and emerging trends.

In September 2024, world leaders gathered for the UN General Assembly and the Summit of the Future to forge new international consensus on global cooperation. The General Assembly focused on climate action, poverty reduction, and gender equality, while the Summit emphasized collective action on emerging challenges and advancing the SDGs.

During the Summit of the Future, UNITAR hosted several events, including the Intergenerational Dialogue for a Sustainable Future on 19 September, which brought together youth advocates, policymakers, and other stakeholders to discuss how digital technologies can bridge societal gaps and promote peace. Youth participants emphasized the importance of including them in policymaking, particularly regarding technology and innovation.

Youth also played a central role in “Co-Creation for a Sustainable Future: Empowering Youth in Global Dialogue”, held on 20 September with the United Co-Creation Lab. The young leaders

identified actionable steps for an inclusive and sustainable future. The event also launched the Co-Creation Lab, aimed at bringing youth voices into decision-making processes.

Alongside such initiatives, UNITAR continues to sustain its flagship programmes, developed and run with leading academic institutions, private companies, industry leaders and regional and local experts. In 2023, UNITAR reached over 544,000 individuals with our services, a 38 per cent increase from 2022. Of those who engaged in our learning activities, 79 per cent came from developing countries.

As of February 2024, the “Hybrid Training in Entrepreneurship and Financial Literacy” programme, run with UNDP, has trained over 5,300 women entrepreneurs in 45 countries and engaged four Regional Economic Communities in sub-Saharan Africa. The third phase of our “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment” programme trained 36 government officials from Jordan and Lebanon in essential leadership skills to help their countries implement their commitments to gender equality.

UNITAR also offers programmes to respond to the high demand for digital skills. The “Bolstering Livelihoods: Digital Reskilling for Ukrainian Women Evacuees”

programme, which ended in March 2024, trained more than 500 Ukrainian women evacuees in Poland on data analytics, web design, cybersecurity and geographic data analysis. Meanwhile, “Developing Essential Digital Skills for Women and Youth in Africa”, run in partnership with IBM and Microsoft, had by February 2024 supported over 7,000 women and youth from 24 countries to develop digital skills to improve their livelihoods.

These are just a few examples of how UNITAR enables knowledge exchange and empowers individuals with the tools they need to tackle pressing issues. In all our programmes, we make creative use of low- and high-tech tools and practical and interactive activities such as hackathons, study tours and simulations. We continually explore ways to offer sustainable development opportunities to all learners, regardless of their circumstances.

UNITAR knows the SDGs cannot be achieved solely by the work of any one entity. Rather, it requires the effort of every individual, no matter how small or local. We see our role in supporting such individuals and enfolded them in the global SDGs movement. We look forward to collaborating with others to collectively create an inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous world.



Unlocking Investment Opportunities in Human Capital, Food Resilience and Energy Security through Peace Finance



Yusuf Merchant
CFA, CQF, MAppFin, Vice President, Peaceinvest

Peaceinvest (PI) is a Geneva based, Swiss-regulated, for-profit financial service provider. Our mission is to leverage social cohesion, financial development, and human capital formation to drive peace and reduce conflict through investment. PI is pioneering a new class of investments that deviates from traditional Capital Asset Pricing Model (CAPM) approaches. Our unique methodology incorporates a "Peace Risk Premium," assessing factors such as conflict, violence, insecurity, resource exclusion, and economic peace deficits. This model defines three main pillars:

- Human Capital
- Food Security
- Energy Poverty

With a broad addressable market, PI arranges investments, presenting an alternative thesis for investment alpha generation by addressing SDG-16.

Human Capital

To date, Human Capital has not been defined as a financial instrument. PI aims to rectify this by structuring Human Capital as a financial product, thereby allowing it to function as a tangible investment with measurable returns. Through detailed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and structured methodologies, Human Capital can indeed

be bond-like, generate cash flows, and provide returns. PI's approach integrates the synergies between investment and human capital. Key highlights of PI's Human Capital investment thesis include:

- **Quantifiable Risk Premium:** The global Human Capital risk premium averages around \$2,380 per capita.
- **Targeted ROI:** Human Capital-focused investments, typically bearing a risk premium between 15% and 25%, could yield returns as high as four times of invested capital when combined with Labour and Investment into GDP.

PI is pioneering Human Capital as an asset class, creating an actionable pathway for private and public capital to drive economic and social transformation.

Food Security

Gaps in the global food system, cost roughly \$15 trillion per annum while contributing only \$10 trillion to GDP. This \$5 trillion deficit arises from direct (indirect) costs. GHG, land/water (mis)use, nitrogen emissions, undernutrition, and poverty. The impacts are particularly severe in conflict-affected countries, which account for 60% of undernourished individuals and nearly 80% of stunted children.

PI has analyzed over 30 years of data on hard grains (wheat, maize, barley, sorghum, and millet) to quantify the yield and resilience premia from grain storage. Our findings reveal substantial positive convenience yields in arable land-rich regions (e.g., Latin America, Sub-Saharan Africa), exceeding their country risk premiums. These yields could be harnessed through the creation of long-term climate-resilient silo storage facilities. Key features of such a model would include:

- **Silo Storage Facilities with Leaseholder Model:** Farmers lease these storage facilities to store grains for 2-3 years under a lease-to-own framework, reducing post-

harvest losses, which otherwise reach up to 40%.

- **Build-Operate-Transfer Model (BOTM):** PI partners with governments to structure cash flows, enabling funding and construction of large-scale silo storage facilities. Stable prices and reduced post-harvest losses from the lease payments would finance this model.

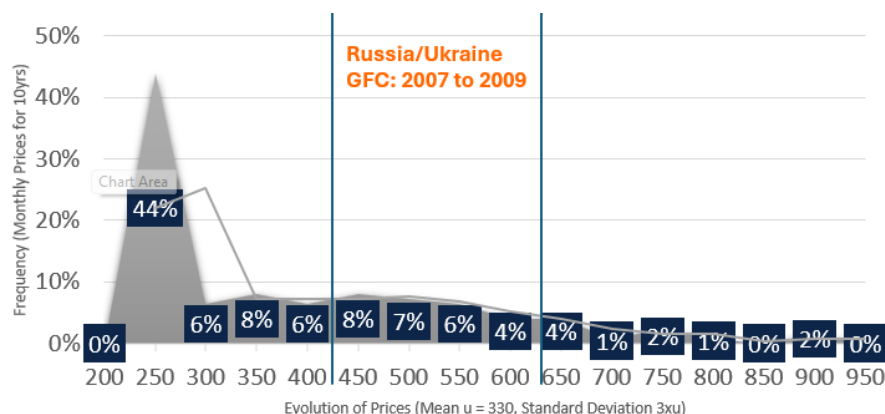
Additionally, PI is pioneering investment in indigenous plants ("lost crops"). A promising variety of water lentil is in trial for large-scale production and has shown potential to be 3-4 times more efficient in protein synthesis than soybeans. By addressing food insecurity with scalable financial instruments and innovative agricultural approaches, PI's strategies directly support peace-building and social resilience.

Energy Security and Poverty

Energy scarcity is a significant factor fuelling conflict. The vast disparity in energy access highlights the urgent need for democratizing energy access. The Global Energy Alliance for People and Planet underscores that 3.3 billion people lack sufficient access to electricity. Arguably, 2.4 billion people worldwide have access to less than 3 kWh of electricity per day. That is the equivalent of two 550W panels or about \$300 worth of equipment or \$750 billion of investment at less than 1% of global GDP with an outsized ROI potential. PI's strategy therefore involves mobilizing private capital markets to finance high-impact energy solutions, solar power, LED lighting, smart-city infrastructure, and e-mobility:

- **Cost-Plus Benefit Structured Finance:** PI structures investments across sovereign, sub-sovereign, and grassroots household levels, creating a cash flow model that addresses resource exclusion through energy capital formation.
- **Peace and Energy Security Bonds:** PI estimates that to end global energy poverty, approximately 228 GW of new energy capacity is required (equal to 2,000 TWh annually), with financing of around \$900 billion, or less than 1% of global GDP. By structuring investments around this goal, PI aligns the solution with both social impact and financial returns.

Additionally, collaboration with countries like India, the U.S., European countries, and China, with extensive engineering expertise and workforce capacity, is integral to executing this vision on a global scale. PI aims to optimize these investments through an SDG 16 lens, emphasizing both the economic and peace-building impact of energy equity, to ultimately reduce resource exclusion.



Advancing Sustainable Development Goals through Enhancing Government National Evaluation Capabilities



Denis Jobin
 Co-chair of Eval SDG and Senior Evaluation Specialist, Former IDEAS vice-president, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)



Marie-Hélène Adrien
 Senior Evaluator. Co-Chair EvalSDG, former President IDEAS



In a world where sustainable development is paramount, EvalSDG is at the forefront of integrating robust evaluation mechanisms into national systems. As co-chairs of EvalSDG, we are pleased to share the ongoing transformations in the evaluation sphere that drive our current activities. The challenges we face are complex and interrelated, each contributing to the broader goal of advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Addressing these issues is crucial for fostering more effective, accountable, and sustainable governance.

A significant challenge in advancing the SDGs is **embedding evaluation mechanisms within national systems**. Evaluations are critical for transparent, accountable, and effective governance, serving as a fundamental function of public management (United Nations, 2021). However, many countries struggle to integrate these mechanisms due to limitations in capacity, resources, and political will (United Nations, 2021). Embedding evaluation into national systems ensures that policies are evidence-based, thereby promoting more effective and sustainable development outcomes. Moreover, this integration fosters a culture of continuous learning and improvement, which is essential for adapting to the dynamic challenges of sustainable development (OECD, 2023).

Building on these challenges, the recent UN resolution on **embedding evaluation lenses into Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)** marks a significant milestone in global evaluation practices (United Nations, 2021). This resolution underscores the critical role of evaluation in achieving the SDGs by encouraging countries to adopt a more systematic and evidence-based approach to their reviews, ensuring that their reports are grounded in robust and reliable data.

While integrating evaluation into VNRs is a positive development, it is only the beginning. **We must transition from using VNRs as standalone tools to building the capacities and capabilities of National Evaluation Systems (NES)**. Evaluation capabilities are essential for effectively implementing and sustaining NES, as they ensure that policies and programs are evidence-based and continuously improved. Building these capabilities involves establishing strong institutional frameworks, providing the necessary resources and authority, and focusing on capacity building to equip government officials and stakeholders with the skills needed for conducting and utilizing evaluations. Additionally, a supportive policy environment with clear guidelines and standards is crucial to fostering effective evaluation practices (EvalSDG, 2024a).

Recently, EvalSDG made significant strides by participating in the Morocco Eval Partners Meeting on the Eval Agenda, where we played a pivotal role in sponsoring and leading two key activities. The first focused on building technical capacity in contribution analysis, with an emphasis on avoiding common pitfalls such as causality bias and poorly framed evaluation questions. The second was a panel discussion aimed at strengthening the evaluation capabilities of national government systems. This discussion highlighted the critical connections between budgeting, procurement, human resources, and public management systems within an integrated evaluation framework. EvalSDG is also enhancing awareness of existing National Evaluation Systems (NES) through the Spotlight Initiative (EvalSDG, 2024), which seeks to identify successful pathways for bolstering national capacities by showcasing best practices in developing effective evaluation capabilities.

EvalSDG has recently strengthened its efforts by engaging in significant global events. At the Morocco EvalPartners Meeting, EvalSDG spearheaded two critical activities: a capacity-building session on contribution analysis, focusing on avoiding pitfalls such as causality bias, and a panel discussion on enhancing evaluation capacities within national systems. The panel emphasized the integration of evaluation with key components of governance, including budgeting, procurement, human resources, and public management.

At the UNDP National Evaluation Capacity (NEC) 2024 Conference in Beijing, EvalSDG led a panel on embedding evaluation within the machinery of government, underscoring the importance of institutional alignment for evidence-based policymaking. Additionally, EvalSDG promotes awareness of strengthening National Evaluation Capability Systems (NES) through the Spotlight Initiative, showcasing best practices to bolster national evaluation systems.

Through these initiatives, EvalSDG reinforces the role of evaluation as a cornerstone of effective, transparent, and sustainable governance.

Uganda's Parish-2-Market Initiative: Transforming Smallholder Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs



Jayesh Patel
Terra-Agri solutions, Uganda



Thomas Fennell
Mavah Equity, London, UK

The transformation of economies around Africa, from predominantly agricultural to industrial, was kick-started by rapid agricultural productivity growth. Does the growth in agricultural productivity have to necessarily come from the smallholder farmers? Rapid improvement in small farm productivity is one of the primary mechanisms by which dramatic rural poverty reductions can be achieved as shown by the Green Revolution experience in Asia. The Government of Uganda recognises the need for high-quality and inclusive development planning to consolidate gains and advance achievement SDGs. President Yoweri Museveni has advised the people of Acholi sub-region in northern Uganda to exploit abundant resources and investment opportunities in order to fight poverty and create wealth. The 3rd National Development Plan (2020/21-2024/25) will be a vehicle for accelerating SDGs and Vision 2040. Using integrated SDG modelling approaches, the Government has fully mainstreamed the SDGs, identifying key accelerators based on their relative return on investment. Uganda had around a total of 7.4 million agricultural households. Maize, sweet potato, cassava green banana etc are the most produced food crops. The main cash crops are coffee, tea and cotton.

Government through the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries has urged farmers in the Acholi sub-region where farmers are still engaged in subsistence farming to embrace commercial agriculture as a game changer that will transform their communities and deliver them from poverty. Land holding in Acholi is on average 10 acres per household and poverty levels have crossed 70% making it the poorest region in Uganda.

Climate-related issues, such as droughts, floods and landslides, are occurring more frequently and with greater intensity, leading to major losses of cattle, crop failures and damage to infrastructure.

In partnership with Mavah Equity and Terra -Agri solutions, P2M will focus on smallholder farmers to transform Acholi sub region through the growing of high value crops. The agricultural and food industry struggles to drive local economic development due to inadequate financial and non-financial services for smallholder farmers and agro-based micro, small, and medium enterprises. The UN Food Systems Summit emphasized the urgency of

transforming food systems and defining comprehensive pathways for change. The Government of Uganda recognizes that achievement and delivery on SDGs requires strong cohesive coordination and partnership mechanisms. Terra-Agri solutions, a leading agriculture company based across East Africa, Mavah Equity, a boutique private equity firm based in London with a strong focus in Africa has joined forces to support smallholder farmers in Uganda. They embarked on an ambitious project known as the Parish-2-Market (P2M) Initiative. This groundbreaking endeavour aims to revolution the agricultural landscape for smallholder farmers in the Acholi Sub-Region of Uganda with priority commodities that include cassava, macadamia, vegetable, maize, rice, etc which are currently leading national enterprises in production and marketing.

A Vision for Transformation: The Parish-2-Market project has secured a minimum 25-year leasehold on 400,000 acres of fertile, previously unused land. This land will be dedicated to supporting over 280,000 smallholder farmers, empowering them to cultivate and commercialise their produce. The initiative promises to enhance food security, boost local economies, and improve the livelihoods of countless families in the region. Over the past three years, the P2M team has made substantial investments in developing a robust commercial platform. This platform is now ready to facilitate the rapid execution of the P2M vision, ensuring that the benefits reach farmers swiftly and effectively.

Impact on Smallholder Farmers: The initiative provides farmers with the resources and support needed to transition from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture, thereby increasing their income and fostering economic resilience. By boosting agricultural productivity, it will generate new employment opportunities, stimulate local businesses, and encourage infrastructural development. The Acholi Sub-Region is on the brink of an agricultural renaissance, thanks to the visionary efforts of Terra-Agri Solutions and Mavah Equity.

A Collaborative Effort with IsDB: The initiative was presented by Mavah Equity and Terra Agri Solutions. during the IsDB Capacity Building Workshop on Spurring Food Security, Climate Resilience and Agro-Industrial Development by Transforming Cassava Production and Processing in Kampala (25-27 June 2024). A strong collaboration was developed to improve service delivery and alleviate poverty at the grassroot level. The collaboration between IsDB, Terra-Agri Solutions and Mavah Equity exemplifies the power of strategic partnerships in driving sustainable development as the epicentre of multi-sectoral community development, planning, implementation, supervision and accountability. The Parish-2-Market Initiative is not just a project; it is a movement towards a more prosperous and sustainable future for rural communities in Africa. We are proud to have the IsDB to be part of this transformative initiative, and we look forward to witnessing the profound impact it will have on the lives of countless farmers and their families.



FAO's Commitment to Achieving Sustainable Development Goals



Serdar Bayryyev
 Senior Evaluation Officer, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) plays a vital role in the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), focusing on agriculture, food and nutrition security, water management, and environmental sustainability. FAO's strategic framework is aligned with the SDGs, particularly SDGs 1, 2, 6, 13 and 14, which emphasize the importance of eradicating poverty, ending hunger, managing natural resources sustainably, and combating climate change. The organization is the official "custodian agency" for 22 SDG indicators.

One of FAO's flagship programs, the Hand-in-Hand Initiative¹, prioritizes countries facing severe poverty and hunger, supporting national efforts to transform agrifood systems, enabling countries to eradicate poverty (SDG 1) and end hunger (SDG 2).

Recent evaluations show that about 91% of FAO's project portfolio focuses on achieving zero hunger (SDG2), highlighting its commitment to global food security and nutrition. FAO supports member states in enhancing agricultural productivity through technical assistance, policy development, and best practices while promoting sustainability. However, its limited presence at the country level restricts its impact, and more efforts are needed to operationalize the principle of "leave no one behind."

FAO's significant contribution to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6) further illustrates its impact on sustainable agriculture. A recent evaluation highlighted FAO's effectiveness in promoting irrigated agriculture, a crucial component of water resources management. The organization's expertise and partnerships are instrumental in addressing water management challenges. However, significant gaps were also identified, particularly concerning freshwater pollution from agriculture, as well as water governance.

The evaluation of FAO's support to climate action (SDG 13) found that FAO's Strategic Framework is aligned with SDG 13 and the Paris Agreement. However, FAO has not expressed a long-term vision on its leadership role in agriculture for climate action. The development of a corporate narrative on climate change and food systems, together with mainstreaming

climate action into all offices, divisions and levels, were some of the recommendations implemented by the organization.

FAO promotes healthy oceans and sustainable marine resource management, supporting SDG 14 (life below water) as a custodian or partner for seven indicators. Key initiatives include the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and guidelines for sustainable small-scale fisheries. FAO also combats illegal fishing and aids Small Island Developing States, emphasizing its role in marine conservation. However, recent FAO evaluations highlight the need for better partnerships and improved data quality on the environmental impacts of agricultural production.

In conclusion, the evaluations of the FAO's contributions to SDGs 2, 6, 13 and 14 initiatives have identified strengths and areas for improvement in the cooperation provided by the organization. These have emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to food security, water management, and marine sustainability, among others, as these are interconnected challenges. Future assessments of FAO's contributions will be instrumental in guiding the organization to identify good practices and lessons learned to prioritize aspects such as environmental sustainability and inclusivity, and to advance the transformational changes required for achieving the SDGs.



1. The Hand-in-Hand Initiative (fao.org)

How GIZ and IsDB realize the UN Sustainable Development Goals



Safa El Naser
Project Manager, GIZ

The Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) provides services worldwide in the field of international cooperation for sustainable development. GIZ has over 50 years of experience in a wide variety of areas. The German government is the main commissioning party, but there is also close cooperation with other donors and the private sector, fostering successful interaction between development policy and foreign trade.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) is an international financial institution whose purpose is to foster the economic development and social progress of member countries and Muslim communities, individually, as well as jointly, by participating in various development activities, both institutions agreed to join forces in accordance with the Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Together, they aim to contribute to sustainable development within global frameworks by engaging in information exchange, consultation knowledge sharing, network building and cooperation in projects, studies and joint events.

GIZ's work is guided by the 2030 Agenda. GIZ collaborates with partners, commissioning parties, and clients on a broad range of issues, from supporting host communities for refugees in Turkey to promoting digital transformation in Rwanda. GIZ is developing practical training programmes in Jordan and helping rice farmers in Thailand to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change. All of these projects contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs.

Before deepening its relationship with IsDB on sustainable development goals, GIZ had already worked with other Arab donors to realise the SDGs. The relationship with Arab donors started

in 2009 with the 'Cooperation with Arab Donors' (CAD) project, which lasted for over a decade, resulting in joint projects, discussions, events, studies, and papers on different topics across the Middle East and North Africa. In the last phase, Africa was also involved. This cooperation laid the groundwork for more sustainable future collaboration with IsDB and other Arab donors.

The relationship involved all members of the Arab coordination group – both multilateral and bilateral members, and the cooperation was based on mutual trust and interest towards sustainable development goals

In order to realise the Agreement with IsDB, several forms of cooperation have taken between GIZ and IsDB over the last decade, including and not limited to:

These MoU's focus on cooperation between GIZ and IsDB in areas such as: Economic Empowerment, Youth Employment, Education and Vocational Training, Transport, Water Security, Food Security, Agriculture and Rural Development, Renewable Energy, Climate Change, Poverty Reduction, Triangular Cooperation and Reverse Linkage etc. to ensure effective implementation and alignment among institutions, action plans were developed, detailing agreed interventions, key stakeholders etc.

In order to coordinate and harmonise IsDB and Germany efforts on triangular and south-south cooperation. GIZ supported the development of the declaration of intent between the German government represented by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development BMZ and IsDB.

Projects on the ground are among the most effective methods to jointly realise SDG's. In recent years, several projects have been implemented in various countries to support SDG's implementation in many areas including governance, crises responses, rural development, employment and financial inclusion among others in different countries.

Another form of cooperation has been joint events at various international fora, where topics such as mobility, climate change, and employment were discussed. These events also included study tours, missions and seminars, regular and monthly meetings are held to discuss potential project ideas, events and further cooperation. These discussions often involve technical experts working on the ground in beneficiary countries.

Trust and Transparency in Cooperation, the relationship with IsDB is built on mutual trust, clear tasks, transparency, and ownership at all levels. This partnership has been driven by the shared priority of implementing and realising the SDG's.

Future Cooperation: After years of collaboration both GIZ and IsDB are looking to reach an advanced level of cooperation on topics of mutual importance for the institutions and beneficiary countries, all while considering the implementation of the SDGs. This next level of cooperation requires involving GIZ's International Services division (InS). InS has delivered a full spectrum of services to international organizations, governments, and private entities beyond classical federal development cooperation. Combining GIZ's project expertise with entrepreneurial agility, InS has driven social and economic benefits for clients and partners, particularly in complex, fragile environments. Furthermore, InS has excelled through innovation and a steadfast commitment to quality, expanding GIZ's reach geographically and thematically delivering impactful, high-quality services.

Finally, the cooperation between GIZ and the IsDB represent a unique model for achieving the SDG's. This partnership's flexible, agile and fast approach, should be mainstreamed to other development institutions to achieve mutual goals and provide beneficiary countries and targeted groups with essential needs, jobs and decent living conditions.



Sustainability without Financial Resilience is not Sustainable: The Role of a Global Takaful Alliance



Jan Kellett

Global and Corporate Lead on Insurance & Risk Finance, Head of the UNDP Insurance and Risk Finance Facility, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

Tens of thousands of people are right now working on issues of absolute global, regional and national importance. Many of them have been working conferences where the global community is gathering to decide the future of how the development system and governments tackle key issues. First we had the UN biodiversity conference in Colombia, then the UN climate conference in Azerbaijan, and in the next few days the UN desertification/drought conference in Saudi Arabia. Next year, the development community will meet in Spain on how all of this should be financed.

In all of these policy processes, gatherings and conferences, there has been hope that we will see new commitments from member-states, new partnerships with the private sector and innovations in delivering development at the country level. Results have been mixed so far.

For those of us working in financial resilience, there is a growing concern that there is far too little focus on protecting all such investments from rising risk, hazard and shock. From the UNDP perspective, all of the investments in global development policy processes, all the work, every commitment, is at threat. The international community and countries are simply not looking at ex-ante financial solutions at the scale needed, and without such financing, the work across key sectors will remain at perpetual threat. Increasingly, we will see the lack of insurance and financial resilience seriously undermine growth and investment.



In this scenario, the positive cycle of insurance -where increasing levels of financial resilience strip away risk and uncertainty, so incentivising innovation and investment - is grinding to a halt. As a largely untapped resource of financial protection, Takaful (a form of shared risk pooling and prosperity that is aligned with Islam) is growing, and is already serving many Muslim communities around the world. Yet it has a long way to go to keep up with the pace of risk that many face as climate change and other global challenges undercut growth, investment and development.

To protect vulnerable people across the world from the escalating effects of climate change, policymakers and other public and private sector stakeholders must work together to better leverage this essential tool of Takaful. This is where the Global Takaful Alliance can and must make its mark.

The Global Takaful Alliance is making strides in bringing together public and private organizations and institutions with the ambitious target of increasing the financial resilience of 100 million people by 2030. To date, UNDP's vision to scale Takaful through the Alliance has

been joined by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND), Kuwait Finance House (KFH) Group, and the Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Global Initiatives (MBRGI) with many, many more institutions, Takaful providers and countries keen to know more.

When financed and operational, it will look to deliver results across the biodiversity, climate, desertification agendas and much more.

Currently the international community spends more than 100 times more on humanitarian assistance than it does on financial resilience, and a 1000 times more on development assistance than on the financial resilience needed to secure the value of such assistance. This is entirely the wrong direction for development and the SDGs.

Investments in financial resilience and in partnerships such as the Global Takaful Alliance, are the only way we can truly deliver on the sustainability of our global development goals.

Find out more about the Global Takaful Alliance or read about how Takaful can build financial resilience in the joint IsDB-UNDP reports available at irff.undp.org.

Financing for Gender Equality: A Critical Investment in Sustainable Development



Zohra Khan
Senior Advisor on Governance at UN-Women

Global crises, economic shocks, and geopolitical conflicts have widened gender gaps, posing significant challenges to achieving sustainable development, inclusive economic growth, and lasting peace. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted, with many pushed into extreme poverty, facing food insecurity, and increased violence. Gender equality is high on the global policy agenda and the clear benefits of closing gender gaps are abundant. Despite this, financing for gender equality remains persistently inadequate, hindering progress on multiple fronts. Tackling the gender financing gap is essential for economic growth and inclusive sustainable development.

The Urgent Need for Financing

An estimated \$6.4 trillion per year is needed across 48 developing countries to end women's poverty and hunger and to support women's equal participation in the economy and society by 2030. If the current trajectory of government expenditure is maintained, there will be a shortfall of \$360 billion per year. Declining revenues, debt servicing, capital flight, illicit financial flows, and regressive tax structures, diminish governments' capacity to invest resources in gender policies and programmes. Fifty countries, home to 3.3 billion people, face significant underinvestment in critical sectors for women, like health and education, due to high debt service payments. For the first time in a decade, the share of official development assistance with gender equality objectives has declined, dropping from 45% in 2019-20 to 42% in 2021-22, while development finance often lacks a gender perspective limiting its impact and effectiveness.

Systemic Barriers and Policy Solutions

To make international financial systems work for women, structural reforms are

needed to address both systemic barriers and the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Conducting gender impact assessments for economic programs, loans, and grants promotes more equitable outcomes in employment, wages, and social protection for women. Fiscal policies should prioritize sectors where women are heavily employed, such as healthcare, education, and social care. Policymakers must also avoid austerity measures that disproportionately impact public and social services, which women rely on more heavily. By shifting toward more progressive taxation, such as increasing corporate taxes, wealth taxes, taxing dividends and capital gains, and implementing gender-responsive budgeting countries can expand their fiscal capacity to finance gender equality initiatives.

To be more effective, development finance must integrate a gender perspective in all projects and programs, particularly in crisis contexts. A significant increase in the gender focus of all development finance is essential, particularly as global challenges such as climate change, conflict, and health crises disproportionately affect women and girls. Furthermore, investing in social protection systems including maternity benefits, unemployment insurance, and pension can address economic inequality. Expanding access to finance, credit, and financial services for women, particularly women entrepreneurs and small business owners, is also key to closing the economic participation gap. To support these efforts, multilateral development banks could increase funding for gender-specific projects, particularly in sectors like infrastructure and digital finance, which are crucial for women's economic empowerment.

Looking ahead

The 4th International Conference on Financing for Development is an important moment for the international community to reverse the trends of under-investment in gender equality and scale-up investment financing. UN-Women works to increase financing for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5. Along with the UN system, financial institutions, governments and private sector actors, we develop and promote relevant tools and strategies, including gender responsive budgeting, gender financing assessments

and innovative financing instruments, to generate more and better financing for gender equality.

Together we must work to:

- Mobilize financing for gender equality from all sources - public, private, domestic, and international - and scale up development finance.
- Ensure the progressivity of tax policies with a focus on taxing those with the highest ability to pay, including via wealth and corporate tax.
- Invest in resilient public finance management systems capable of mainstreaming gender equality considerations, including by strengthening gender analysis in national and local budgetary processes and fostering participation in budget processes.
- Support the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on International Tax Cooperation to combat tax evasion, avoidance, and curb illicit financial flows in order to create fiscal space for gender responsive policy implementation.
- Strengthen gender mainstreaming in thematic financing, including in crisis contexts, and fulfil existing financial targets.
- Address the impact of the debt crisis on fiscal space for gender equality, including by establishing a multilateral sovereign debt workout mechanism, adopting gender-responsive debt sustainability analysis, eliminating conditionalities in debt relief initiatives and debt restructuring packages, and scaling up concessional financing from multilateral and regional development banks.

Financing gender equality is not just a moral imperative; it is a critical investment in building more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economies. As the world faces unprecedented challenges ensuring that women and girls have equal access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power is more important than ever. Through systemic reforms and targeted investments in gender equality, the international community can pave the way for a more just and equitable future for all women and girls.

1 The costs of achieving the SDGs: Road to gender equality | UNCTAD

2 UNCTAD. (2024) https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osgttinf2024d1_en.pdf

3 OECD. (upcoming). Development Finance for Gender Equality 2024. OECD. [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD\(2023\)12/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD(2023)12/en/pdf)

Indigenous Peoples Ancestral Knowledge to Restore Biodiversity and Reduce Desertification and Water Loss



Yon Fernandez-De-Larrinoa
Head FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Scientists, policy makers and practitioners are making science-informed climate models and policy recommendations geared to reverse desertification, biodiversity loss and water scarcity.

Indigenous Peoples' science, combining ancestral knowledge with new technologies, is based on thousands of years of accumulated observation and refined over time through oral exchanges.

The FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit has been working for some years with Indigenous organizations in the Andes. What the elders are telling us is shocking: the Andean water lenses are drying, the nomadic and mobile patterns of the Andean camelids are shifting in the quest for water, and many medicinal plants are disappearing along with the shrinking native forests of Queñua (*Polypepis Tarapacana*), Qolle (*Buddleja Coriacea*), Molle (*Schinus Molle*), and Tara (*Caesalpinia Spinosa*).

The FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit has been meeting with municipal authorities, and Ministries in Peru and Bolivia. Their request is for FAO to create an Andean ecosystemic corridor based on Indigenous Biocentric Restoration.

In 2019, the FAO Indigenous Peoples Unit, together with Indigenous experts from across the world, crafted an approach to restore degraded ecosystems. This Indigenous-led approach rooted in Indigenous Peoples' cosmogonies, food and knowledge systems is called "Indigenous Peoples' biocentric restoration". This innovative approach, is aligned with the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (in particular targets 2, 3 and 22) and fits into the International Year of Camelids.

Indigenous Biocentric Restoration ensures the maintenance and recovery of damaged ecosystems and lands affected by erosion, vegetation and water loss, as well as those affected by drought and soil damage. It supports ancestral Indigenous Peoples' territorial management systems, their cosmogony, customary governance systems and collective rights, as recognized by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and ILO Convention 169.

Refined and improved over the past 6 years, thanks to pilot initiatives in North East India, Thailand, and Ecuador, the Indigenous Biocentric Restoration approach is now flourishing in Peru, Brazil and Costa Rica.

Indigenous Biocentric Restoration does not only restore the health of the soils and replenish water bodies, it also revitalizes the traditional knowledge in the communities through the Schools of life. The Schools of Life do not only undertake a mapping of the species of small mammals, vertebrates, invertebrates as well as plants and trees, they also set the restoration plans and identify the degraded lands that will be restored.

In Peru, Government institutions, Indigenous Peoples' authorities, Centro CINDES, and FAO have started the Andean Corridor. The works have started with 52 Schools of Life set up and over 100 Hectares in the process of being restored with Qeñua. The Qeñuas planted will infiltrate the water into the soil, recovering the water lenses that feed into the Bofedales. Bofedales, are essential for the Andean camelids, helping create an ecosystemic corridor for the Guanaco (*Lama Guanicoe*) and the vanishing Suri (*Rhea Pennata*). But not only, the Amazon river downstream is fed by these Andean water sources.

In Brazil, The Xucuru Indigenous Peoples and the FAO indigenous Peoples Unit are restoring the degraded areas surrounding their dry forest in the heart of the Caatinga, a unique semi-arid biome that covers more than 700.000 km² and acts as a humidity buffer zone for the Amazon basin. The cosmogonic relationship of the Xucuru with the biome, helps them understand the health of the Caatinga ecosystem. Similar to the Andean case, if the Bioma Caatinga and its dry forest is healthy, the Amazon forest will be protected.

These mosaics of initiatives in Peru and Brazil have attracted the institutional attention of the Governments of Costa Rica, Peru and Bolivia.

Costa Rica thanks to the work by the SINAC (The National System of Conservation Areas) of the Ministry of Environment and Energy (MINAE), the Ministry of Agriculture and the Mesa Nacional Indígena de Costa Rica, has resulted in a request for FAO to draft the first ever National Indigenous Biocentric Restoration plan for an entire country, announced by the President of the Republic in 2024.

At the 2024 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) COP16 in Riyadh, 196 countries will discuss global ambitions on land and drought resilience through a people-centered approach.

The situation is such that the 3 Rio Conventions - UNCCD, UNFCCC and CBD - are calling to address the triple planetary crises of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

Understanding the interconnection between different types of ecosystems is key to combating desertification, and adequate knowledge is required to address these challenges. It is fundamental to take into consideration the Ancestral Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples.

At the UNCCD COP16, the Global-Hub on Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems will present its latest collective research paper on the importance of Indigenous Peoples' mobility, nomadism, transhumance and collective rights for biodiversity and land preservation. The paper compiles written and oral contributions from Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts, offering a wide range of good practices informed by ancestral knowledge and innovation.

The paper builds upon earlier work on mobility showcased in the award winning 2021 FAO publication on "Indigenous Peoples' food systems: Insights on sustainability and resilience from the front line of climate change".

Protecting the environment requires recognition that our life on earth depends on a symbiotic relationship with nature. Indigenous Peoples' spiritual, cosmogonic and biocentric relationships recognize these relations, placing Indigenous Peoples as rights and knowledge holders at the center of decision making on restoration efforts that can change the world.

The Time is Now!

Financing High-Impact Nature-Based Solutions Investment Opportunities: Resilient Landscapes Luxembourg



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Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) are crucial. Not only because they can deliver up to one third of the reductions needed in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, but also because they have benefits that go beyond climate action, notably strengthening the resilience of local communities and conserving biodiversity. To achieve this, investments into NbS need to triple by 2030.

The world has already made significant progress in financing nature. Private finance investments increased elevenfold in four years – from 9.4 billion USD to over 102 billion USD. Despite positive progress, **closing the \$200 billion-per-year NbS finance gap requires a significant increase in private sector contributions. And science has a key role to play.**

The lack of bankable NbS projects is slowing down the rollout of private investments. Investments which are not evidence- or science-backed can lead to challenges in reaching impact targets and results. As a solution, **science offers a pool of project opportunities, derisks and enhances impact and results.**

CIFOR-ICRAF the world's leading development organization dedicated to terrestrial, coastal and wetland natural capital research, works to **harness the trusted science** on forests, trees, and soils to catalyse the transition to enhanced biodiversity and climate resilience.

CIFOR-ICRAF recognizes that science-driven NbS come to life when the right players understand each other and connect in action. At the same time, synergies between science and business do not occur spontaneously. **This is why CIFOR-ICRAF established Resilient Landscapes (RL)**, its private sector facing arm, with a mission to leverage science for high-impact NbS investments.

The objective of RL is to catalyse the design, execution, acceleration and learning of large-scale science-based

projects specifically tackling the climate crisis, natural capital degradation and biodiversity loss in line with CIFOR-ICRAF's mission. Through access to CIFOR-ICRAF science and evidence and by connecting these to the private sector, **RL enables better decision-making at NbS project level.** This quality of decisions helps facilitate the flow of capital to the NbS sector, ultimately propelling industry-wide advancement.

In 2023, **the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Biodiversity (MECB) of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and CIFOR-ICRAF launched the Resilient Landscapes Luxembourg (RLL) Incubator to accelerate and scale up investments in sustainable landscapes for urgent climate action.** Dedicated to operationalizing and accelerating linkages between science and business, RLL unlocks the untapped source of investments born out of scientific research. It incubates and brings to market high-quality, science-based, and financially viable nature-based solutions projects.

Under the RLL Incubator, Resilient Landscapes has started the incubation of impact investment deals through its first projects presented at two official events at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP16) in Cali, Colombia. In his opening address, **Serge Wilmes, Minister of the Environment, Climate and Sustainability of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg** highlighted Luxembourg's ambitious vision to leverage private investments for high-quality NbS projects through RLL, to bridge the finance and opportunity gap. "RLL will strengthen the climate-biodiversity nexus and foster investments in Nature-based Solutions by incubating science-based project ideas to

solve the biodiversity and climate crises to a level where they are financially viable, attracting the interest of private investors".

Dr. Éliane Ubalijoro, Chief Executive Officer, CIFOR-ICRAF; Director General, World Agroforestry highlighted the importance of science in providing project opportunities, derisking investments and enhancing impact and results.

Stephane Perrier, Global Lead at Resilient Landscapes shared an in-depth view of the latest RLL project developments while **Nevena Bakalar, Partnerships and Engagement Lead at Resilient Landscapes** reflected on comments and insights from the audience. Closing remarks were delivered by **Thomas Schoos, Director General at the Ministry of the Environment, Climate and Sustainability of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg.** Furthermore, the **European Investment Bank (EIB), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Finance in Motion** emphasized the importance of initiatives such as RLL, highlighting synergies and the crucial role of partnerships for scaling up action.

For the way forward, by substantially contributing to the fight against climate change and biodiversity loss in a synergetic way, Resilient Landscapes will continue to generate environmental and social co-benefits ensuring they are robust and science-based, with clear metrics and impact results to enable the private sector to make real changes for nature and people.

For more information about the RLL Second Project Incubation Cycle please contact Dominique Herman (D.Herman@cifor-icraf.org).



Serge Wilmes, Minister of the Environment, and Sustainability of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg with the Resilient Landscapes Team at CBD COP16

The Role of Risk Mitigation in Promoting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The Case of ICIEC in the OIC Member States



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The Islamic Corporation for the Insurance of Investment and Export Credit (ICIEC) is the credit risk and political risk insurance arm of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group. From its inception in the mid-1990s, ICIEC has been steadfast in its support for economic growth, infrastructure development and poverty alleviation in its member countries. The Corporation's emphasis has been on establishing sustainable economic trajectories in member countries by offering risk management solutions that stimulate both local and international investments. These endeavors have played a crucial role in fostering enduring economic development and progress that are necessary for realizing the SDGs.

ICIEC's impact on the SDGs can be seen through its various projects and initiatives throughout the years. In that regard, ICIEC supported, among others, energy, agribusiness and infrastructure projects, which are essential for achieving long term development goals, such as zero hunger (SDG 2), good health and well-being (SDG 3) and promoting industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9). To that end, we also supported renewable energy projects that not only delivered clean energy (SDG 7) but also generated employment opportunities and boosted local economies. These endeavors have notably decreased carbon emissions in member states, contributing to the global battle against climate change (SDG 13).

In recent times, ICIEC has ratcheted up its backing to projects aligned with the SDGs. Between 2023 and 2024, for instance, ICIEC has provided insurance to many important projects across its member countries,

showcasing its ongoing dedication to fostering economic growth and progress towards achieving the SDGs. Some specific examples may drive the point home, which I provide in the coming sections of the article.

In Cote d'Ivoire, one crucial project involves financing two regional hospitals with 150 beds each, funded by Deutsche Bank through an Islamic financing arrangement totaling EUR 149 million, under an ICIEC wrap. This initiative contributes directly to SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through improving healthcare infrastructure in the country, making quality healthcare services more accessible to a larger population in the wider West African region.

In Kazakhstan, a project that showcases ICIEC's developmental impact is the equity investment insurance provided by ICIEC for Rönescans Healthcare's project in a public private partnership (PPP) venture in the country. This project involves establishing a 630-bed hospital in Kokshetau, Kazakhstan, with ICIEC covering an equity amount of EUR 133 million. The significance of this project lies in its potential to transform healthcare services in the Akmol region, addressing the longstanding challenges faced by healthcare facilities. By meeting this crucial need, the project contributes to SDG 3 and underscores ICIEC's dedication to enhancing healthcare outcomes across its member nations.

In Senegal, ICIEC facilitated a rural electrification project funded by Standard Chartered Bank through an Islamic facility amounting to EUR 95 million. This project embodies ICIEC's dedication to the Green Agenda as it supports Sustainable Development Goal 7 by providing affordable and clean energy to rural communities, thereby enhancing their quality of life and fostering economic development. Additionally, ICIEC played a key role in financing a 55 km highway that connects the cities of Dakar and Tivaouane in Senegal. This project, funded through an innovative securitization structure by Société Générale with a EUR 336 million Islamic financing facility, supports SDG 9 by enhancing infrastructure and connectivity, which is essential for economic growth and trade.



Another notable project involves the construction of a high-speed railway from Yerkoj to Kayseri in Turkey, financed under an ICIEC cover by a group of banks led by MUFG with an amount totaling EUR 140 million. This project not only improves Turkey's transportation network but also aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) by promoting sustainable urban development and reducing congestion and pollution in major cities.

ICIEC's unique position as a provider of financial solutions for sustainable development projects in challenging environments stems from its role as an export credit and investment insurer.

By managing risks effectively, the Corporation attracts investments into key sectors like infrastructure, healthcare and agriculture that are crucial for achieving the SDGs. ICIEC's involvement in these initiatives showcases its ability to mobilize resources and forge partnerships with international financial institutions, member states and multilateral development banks (MDBs) to support sustainable development goals.

As ICIEC peers into the future, its vision for the next decade revolves around advancing the SDGs through innovation, technology and sustainability. The organization intends to further strengthen its partnerships with other multilateral institutions while drawing on successful past initiatives.

Transforming Maternal and Child Healthcare in Sierra Leone: Advancing SDG-3 in West Africa



M Ashekur Rahman
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Pregnancy can mean risking death in Sierra Leone. With one of the world's highest maternal mortality rates, 1 in 17 women risk dying during pregnancy or childbirth, as per the World Health Organization (WHO). Severely limited access to essential healthcare services is the real challenge. Legacies of war, Ebola, and the COVID-19 pandemic have compounded the fragile healthcare system. Extreme poverty has also pushed access beyond reach for many families.

However, Sierra Leone is set on transforming its system with support from partners like the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB). The partnership saw ten districts benefitting from 150 different types of life-saving hospital equipment, medicines, and medical supplies, as well as 28 health workers trained to operate the equipment. This is driving needed change on the ground in hospitals like Makeni Government Hospital, Sierra Leone's main regional referral hospital in the north. A new ultrasound device and other essential equipment are especially helping ensure safe, quality maternal healthcare for many expecting mothers.

Aminata Bangura (23), a first-time mother, shares her experience. Her journey to motherhood began with uncertainty and anxiety—like that of many others in her community. Women traveled long distances to access basic quality prenatal services. Aminata's story took a remarkable

turn when she stepped into the Makeni Government Hospital for antenatal services. The new ultrasound device meant that the development of her unborn child could now be monitored. "I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw my baby on the screen for the first time," Aminata recalls, her face lighting up with joy. "It was like a miracle. I felt reassured that my baby was growing healthy."

Aminata was later brought to the hospital by her husband, Aruna, when she experienced labour pain. Following an ultrasound scan, she was immediately referred for a C-section, as midwife Zainab Koroma discovered labour-related complications. A few hours later, both mother and child were safe following delivery.

Like Aminata, the arrival of the new device has helped hundreds of expecting mothers to have the same reassuring experiences. Zainab, the lead midwife at the hospital's maternity ward, notes the device's critical role in maternal and fetal healthcare. "We can now identify high-risk pregnancies much earlier and provide the necessary care on time," she explains, "This is helping us to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates."

Dr. Joseph Kamanda Sesay, the medical superintendent of the Makeni Government Hospital, emphasizes the importance of partnering with IsDB to make this possible. "Partners' efforts to complement the government's strides to provide quality health services to the population, especially pregnant women, are appreciated," says Dr. Sesay. "Our hospital being a regional referral hospital makes our caseload high. Having a dedicated ultrasound machine for pregnant women now means they do not have to wait in queues to access this vital service," he adds.

Thanks to this support, a total of 150 different types of hospital equipment, medicines, and medical supplies, including ten brand-new mobile digital X-ray machine units, ten ultrasound devices, surgical theatre lights, and other medicines



and medical supplies, were provided to health facilities in ten districts. In addition, 28 health workers have been equipped with the skills to operate the equipment and provide enhanced care.

A digital X-ray machine (L) and an oxygen production plant (R) installed at the Makeni Government Hospital with funds from the IsDB.

The Makeni Government Hospital provides hope, considering that Sierra Leone has a long way to go to ensure healthy lives that are in line with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3. Similarly, in other parts of the country, partnerships with IsDB have also resulted in procuring and installing oxygen production plants in two regional hospitals in Bo and Kenema. These are good examples of health sector initiatives that build on successful partnership collaborations and can provide useful lessons for the West African region.

Lastly, Aminata's timely access to quality care is an important reminder of how maternal and neonatal deaths can be prevented in one of the world's most difficult places for mothers to give birth. With this access, there is an opportunity to help break a cycle of health inequality that can begin even before a child is born and affect health outcomes over the entire lifespan. There are critical gender aspects too, especially for young mothers from vulnerable backgrounds and their right to safe motherhood. Ultimately, improving access to quality healthcare has far-reaching consequences. It will transform Sierra Leone's healthcare ecosystem and contribute to a reimagining of the high health inequalities in the West African region, paving the way for a healthier future for all.



Aminata carries her day-old baby inside the post-natal ward of the Makeni Government Hospital



Kazakhstan's Bold Move to Revolutionize Agricultural Water Infrastructure for a Resilient Future



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As Central Asia's largest country, Kazakhstan faces serious climate change repercussions that threaten environmental, economic, and social situation, which is urging the country to adopt ambitious climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Climate change has led to more frequent and intense droughts for the vast landscape of the country and impacts the agricultural sector, which constitutes a substantial part of Kazakhstan's economy and employs a significant portion of the rural population. On the other side, Kazakhstan has witnessed an increase in extreme weather events, including floods, which devastate local communities and infrastructure.

The climate change implications increase the economic toll on Kazakhstan. From damaged infrastructure and reduced agricultural productivity to rising social costs, the financial burden is significant. As the government invests more in climate adaptation and infrastructure resilience, the need for external resources (both financial and human capital) as well as adaptation of international best practices is needed to provide sustainable solutions.

Faced with urgent challenges of water scarcity and the increased frequency of devastating floods, the Government of Kazakhstan reached out to the Islamic Development Bank during 2024 with an audacious request to partner in a comprehensive transformation of the nation's water resources sector. The response from IsDB was swift and strategic, leading to the adoption of a Framework Program Agreement in June 2024, backed by financial pledge of USD 2.4 billion from the IsDB to address the country's urgent needs for this important sector.

As a result of scrupulous efforts the IsDB and the government of Kazakhstan rolled out a forward-looking Climate Resilient Water Resources Development Program. This ambitious program aims at bolstering agricultural productivity, ensuring food and water security, and building resilience against natural hazards and the impacts of climate change through modernizing dilapidated water infrastructure. The program will at the end ensure that Kazakhstan is better prepared for the volatile effects of climate change.

In October 2024, IsDB approved Phase 1 of the program, securing USD 1.15 billion in sovereign financing—the largest single project commitment in the Bank's history. This landmark project is a clear signal of IsDB's renewed commitment to Kazakhstan after a period of limited engagement and strengthens the Bank's portfolio by adding a high-quality investment in a member country. For Kazakhstan, this financing arrangement has been thoughtfully designed to maintain fiscal sustainability while unlocking essential resources for transformative change.

The Phase 1 of the project targets to improve agriculture productivity and build climate resilience through constructing, modernizing, and rehabilitating eleven (11) water storage reservoirs, flood control

systems, one water conveyance structure and 3,400 km irrigation networks to withstand the impacts of climate variability, ensuring that farmers have access to reliable water sources in times of drought and that critical infrastructure can manage excess water during flood events. On the institutional front, the project will establish an advanced automation center for water management, strengthen operational capabilities within water agencies, promote water saving technologies and integrate digital tools and vocational training for effective water resource governance.

The anticipated results are impressive. By the end of the project, 350,000 hectares of arable land will have sustainable irrigation, with an additional 180,000 hectares receiving reliable water supply for diverse agricultural activities, including pasture, fodder, and even aquaculture. Water loss in irrigation canals will be reduced by 25%, while agriculture production is expected to increase by an average 20% for key crops. Strengthening institutional capacity is central to this effort, ensuring that the impacts of these investments are sustained over the long term. Additionally, the program will offer 10,000 farmers access to digital extension services and deliver climate resilience training to more than 50,000 people. These initiatives will not only boost agricultural production but also build the resilience of communities to climate-induced disasters.

The IsDB's comprehensive approach goes beyond mere infrastructure upgrades. With a focus on climate change, agriculture productivity, inclusiveness and efficiency, the project will attract attention from other development partners eager to align their support with the project objectives. Furthermore, the capacity of the water operators and project implementing agency and partners will be enhanced on project management based on international practices and standards.

The Project will primarily contribute to the national SDG target 6.4: Increase water use efficiency and target 13.1: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters by delivering robust water infrastructure that are resistant and adapted to the adverse conditions of climate change and natural disasters. The project is universally aligned with the mitigation and adaptation building blocks of the Paris Agreement alignment framework.

Kazakhstan's commitment to water infrastructure reform is a powerful response to the dual imperatives of climate change and food security. Through its collaboration with IsDB, Kazakhstan is setting a precedent for sustainable development that leverages modern infrastructure and advanced technologies to safeguard its resources and enhance productivity. The Climate Resilient Water Resources Development Program promises not only immediate benefits but also a lasting legacy for a nation intent on transforming its agricultural landscape for a resilient, sustainable future.

While Kazakhstan has taken steps to address these impacts, the scale of the challenge requires a continued commitment to sustainable practices, international cooperation, and innovative solutions. Through proactive adaptation and resilience-building measures, Kazakhstan can not only mitigate the impacts of climate change but also set an example for other nations in Central Asia facing similar challenges.



The Midway Momentum Challenge; IsDB @ 50 Charting a Course to Augment SDGs Financing



SDGs CoP Team, IsDB

In 2023, the UN's mid-year assessment report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlighted significant setbacks due to the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine, a weak global economy, and the lingering effects of COVID-19. The report emphasized that these challenges disproportionately affect the world's poorest and most vulnerable populations, issuing a strong call to action for progress toward the SDGs. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) held the 2024 Annual Meeting from 27 to 30 April 2024 in Riyadh themed: "Cherishing IsDB at 50, Charting a Course for Augmenting SDGs Financing". This was a momentous occasion as it marked the Bank's 50th anniversary (Golden Jubilee) prompting reflection on the journey thus far while pondering on the SDGs midway momentum and new paradigms to attain the targets in both its member countries and the Muslim communities in non-member countries.

On the sidelines of the AM, the Bank's SDGs Community of Practice (SDGs COP) organized, an open dialogue session, that served as a platform for global experts and development practitioners in attendance to deliberate on this midway momentum furthering the discussion on remedial actions to kick start reforms for long term financing.

Welcoming the attendees at the event, the IsDB president, H.E Dr Mohammad Sulaiman Al Jasser noted the global financial system's incapacity to keep pace with the SDGs' urgent needs. He advocated for reforms towards a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable future, while reaffirming the Bank's commitment to the SDGs. He stated, "As the IsDB's 50th anniversary is being marked, the Bank reaffirms its commitment to leveraging the collective expertise and resources to support member countries on their march towards the SDGs".

The Keynote speaker, H. E. Dr. Akinwunmi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank addressed the challenges to the SDGs including change, food insecurity, limited access to energy and access to finance for the SDGs. He said "Urgent actions are needed to resolve the huge debt burdens of countries,



especially those in Africa, through faster implementation of the G20 Common Framework, speedier and orderly debt resolution and debt restructuring to reduce the extremely high debt servicing costs of countries that are now spending more on servicing debt than on servicing people to meet the SDGs."

Panelists engaged in rich and insightful discussions, touching on numerous critical issues like health, technology distribution, the role of multilateral development banks (MDBs), and the importance of peace and political leadership in achieving SDGs. The panelists who led the discussions include IsDB Executive Directors, H.E. Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Minister of Finance, Indonesia, H.E. Hala El-Said, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Egypt. Other panelists included H. E. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus Director General, World Health Organization, Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, UN Special Envoy on Financing the 2030 Agenda and Dr. Abdallah Al Dardari, Assistant Secretary General, Assistant, UNDP.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus: "COVID has exposed the unfairness of our world. The inequity of our world."

Dr. Hala El-Said: "We have issued the first green bonds in the MENA region and used the proceeds of these bonds to invest in climate and green projects. In addition, we issued for the first time, our environmental sustainability guidelines, whereby we trained all public institutions to start looking into their projects and have now about 50% of our public investments are green"

Dr. Sri Mulyani Indrawati: "Indonesia started by putting legislation in place to be able to diversify our financing by introducing the Sovereign Sukuk and combining it with green financing".

Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin: "We are in a development crisis, and everybody needs to be aware of that. Many of our countries are spending more on debt service than what they spend on education, health, and basic services combined, and we are in a great reversal."

The dialogue concluded with several proposed actions:

- Increase Climate Focus: MDBs should provide grants, not loans, for climate adaptation and mitigation.
- Scale Up Food Security Initiatives: Efforts by IsDB and AfDB are commendable and should be expanded.
- Implement Energy Initiatives at Scale: High-level collaboration among MDBs is essential.
- Prioritize Health Initiatives: The Pharmaceutical Technology Foundation by AfDB aims to boost medicine and vaccine production on the continent.

Key takeaways regarding sources of financing for the SDGs include i) MDBs should initiate alternate mechanisms to raise more capital. ii) Concessional financing should be significantly increased to improve access for countries in need iii) Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) could be rechanneled to MDBs; iv) Greater private sector mobilization is crucial and v) Developed nations must honor their official development assistance (ODA) commitments.

Islamic Development Bank and Arab Coordination Group Role in Preparations for COP16



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UNCCD
COP16
Riyadh | 2024

also at IsDB Annual Meeting, a workshop titled “On the Road to KSA-UNCCD hosted COP16; Unlocking Potential of Land Resources for Investment” was organized by IsDB, UNCCD and MEWA, on behalf of the ACG. There were approximately 40 participants in the meeting including representatives of Arab Coordination Group, MDBs, UN Specialized Organization and Agricultural institutions.

Further meetings were held in June 2024 between the representative of UNCCD, MEWA, IsDB and other members of ACG to discuss COP16 including a possible ACG financial announcement at COP16. IsDB leading the Finance Day at COP16 will provide the Bank a strong profile for COP16, strong support for KSA, and potential to help leverage broader financing support for many IsDB Member Countries.

IsDB has ongoing collaboration with MEWA and UNCCD on knowledge development. RCA has worked with MEWA and UNCCD to develop two policy briefs for the T20 (G20 Think Tank) on topics including Just Land Transition for Drylands, and Sustainable Financing Models for Drylands, both of which may contribute to broader G20 dialogue. Additionally, IsDB is working with UNCCD, MEWA and UNEP-Finance Initiative to produce a Knowledge Product on Sustainable Financing Models for Drylands, which is proposed to be launched on Finance Thematic Day at COP16. Additionally, RCA and IsDBI are working with UNDP on a knowledge products on Takaful (Islamic insurance) for climate resilience, which may result in a potential launch of the Global Takaful Alliance at COP16 (which aims to support 100 million vulnerable people by 2030, including those in dryland areas, exposed to drought and aridity).

Many of the IsDB’s Member Countries are located in drylands and suffer from drought and land degradation. Land degradation is strongly linked to poverty and is exacerbated by climate change impacts. IsDB has a strong record of support for dryland Member Countries (MCs) via investments in water security and food security, and other related infrastructure.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) 16th Conference of Parties (COP16) will be held in Riyadh, from 2– 13 December 2024. COP16 will be the largest-ever meeting of UNCCD’s 197 Parties, the first to be held in the Middle East region and the largest multilateral conference ever hosted by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA)¹. 2024 also marks the 30th anniversary of the UNCCD, one of the three major environmental treaties known as the Rio Conventions, alongside but separate from climate change and biodiversity COPs. COP16 is expected to be a landmark COP for KSA and related sustainable land management and drought support for many of IsDB’s Member Countries.

IsDB has been requested by UNCCD to lead the coordination of Finance Day (3rd December) for COP16; and by UNCCD and KSA’s Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA) to coordinate a potential collective announcement by Arab Coordination Group (ACG) members².

First discussion on IsDB’s engagement related COP16 started at COP28 UAE – United Nations Climate Change

Conference in December 2023 between representatives of ACG, MEWA and UNCCD. Bank discussed the possibility of meeting the technical focal points during early 2024 to chalk out a clear plan for substantial engagement.

The meeting, hosted on 31 January 2024 at the Arab Gulf Programme for Development (AGFUND) headquarters in Riyadh, was the beginning of preparations for the COP16. On the same day as this high-level meeting, KSA and the UNCCD signed an agreement paving the way for COP16 in Riyadh.

In May 2024, at the IsDB Annual Meeting in Riyadh, the Bank held a meeting with Mr Ibrahim Thiaw, Executive Secretary, of the UNCCD. The UNCCD secretariat identified two issues as priorities: (i) Drought: An intergovernmental working group was established to work on this issue and report back to parties. This is the first time that this issue is coming up at the level of the COP and a major decision on drought is expected in Riyadh; (ii) Land restoration: There are 1 million square km of land degraded every year. By 2030, 1.5 billion ha of land will need to be restored. Overall, for COP16 an Action agenda will be established, expression of interest requested, and pledges expected to be made by key stakeholders. The UNCCD expressed their desire for IsDB to take the lead role on behalf of the ACG. The IsDB was invited to play an important role in the event, by holding its own Pavilion in the Green Zone of the COP and by taking a lead role along with other ACG members during the Finance Day. During the same time

¹ <https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/press-releases/saudi-arabia-host-largest-ever-un-conference-land-and-drought>

² Members of ACG: Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa (BADEA), the Arab Gulf Program for Development (AGFUND), the Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Qatar Fund For Development (QFFD), the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), and the Saudi Fund for Development.

Driving Change: Advancing Electric Bus Systems in the MENA Region



Atiq Ahmad
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Sustainable mobility is not just a goal; it's a necessity for our future. The global market for electric vehicles (EVs), particularly electric buses, is expanding rapidly, with significant implications for urban transport in developing regions. The transition to electric mobility is crucial for sustainable development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

A collaborative study by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe (CEDARE) examined electric bus systems in Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco. This article highlights the opportunities, barriers, and policy recommendations outlined in the report, aimed at fostering cleaner and more efficient public transport systems. It explores the current state of e-mobility in the MENA region and offers actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders.

Global Overview of E-Mobility

The global electric bus market was valued at approximately \$20 billion in 2022 and is projected to reach \$50 billion by 2030, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) exceeding 10%. Despite this growth, the market relies heavily on subsidies to compete with conventional internal combustion engine (ICE) buses. In the MENA region, efforts have mainly focused on pilot projects, with limited large-scale implementation. The dominance of Chinese manufacturers underscores the need for local capacity building and investment in sustainable infrastructure.

Situation Analysis: Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco



In Egypt, with a population of about 102 million and a GDP per capita of \$3,548, the public transport sector operates around 16,000 buses. The government plans to introduce 100 electric buses in Greater Cairo, supported by the World Bank as part of the Greater

Cairo Air Pollution Management and Climate Change project (2020-2026). However, clear incentives for electric bus adoption are lacking, and infrastructure planning remains a critical gap.

Jordan, with a population of 10.2 million and a GDP per capita of \$4,283, operates approximately 5,169 buses. The country is engaging the private sector to electrify its transport fleet, with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) providing a €20 million loan for electric buses in Amman. Nevertheless, comprehensive policies for widespread adoption are still needed.

Morocco, with a population of 36.9 million and a GDP per capita of \$3,058, has about 2,783 buses in operation. The country has implemented a National Strategy for Sustainable Development mandating that 10% of new state-owned vehicle procurements be electric. Additionally, Morocco has successfully piloted electric trolley buses and integrated renewable energy into its e-mobility initiatives, serving as a model for others.

Recent Regional Development Trends



Recent developments indicate a growing commitment to electric mobility in the MENA region. Egypt plans to establish 30 charging stations in Cairo as part of its electric bus initiative. In Morocco, public-private partnerships for electric bus projects exemplify a viable model for other MENA countries, with the e-BRT project in Casablanca aiming to integrate electric buses with renewable energy. The IsDB and international partners are focusing on knowledge exchange and capacity building to overcome local barriers to electric mobility.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

The journey to electric mobility requires collective effort and collaboration. The MENA region faces several challenges, including high upfront costs, as electric buses can cost up to double that of conventional buses. Inadequate infrastructure, particularly a shortage of charging stations, hinders adoption. Additionally, a lack of local expertise in electric mobility technologies complicates the transition.

Despite these challenges, there are significant opportunities for collaboration and investment. Enhanced cooperation

among MENA countries can facilitate knowledge sharing, while increased funding for infrastructure development can accelerate the transition to electric mobility.

SDG Development Perspective

The advancement of electric bus systems in the MENA region aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It contributes to SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities by promoting urban livability through reduced pollution. It supports SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy by encouraging the use of renewable energy. It also plays a crucial role in SDG 13: Climate Action by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, it fosters sustainable industrialization, aligning with SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, and improves health outcomes under SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being through enhanced air quality.

Policy Recommendations

To facilitate the transition to electric bus systems, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Set Clear Targets:** Establish explicit targets for reducing diesel consumption and promoting e-mobility at national and city levels.
- 2. Integrate Policies:** Align electrification plans with stricter emission standards and incentives for sustainable transport.
- 3. Capacity Building:** Enhance local capabilities through targeted training and knowledge-sharing initiatives.
- 4. Financial Support:** Provide subsidies and financing schemes to mitigate the high upfront costs of electric buses.

The transition to electric bus systems in Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco presents a unique opportunity to advance sustainable mobility in the MENA region. By addressing key challenges and implementing prudent policies, the region can pave the way for cleaner, more efficient public transport systems.



Home Grown (School Feeding Program)- A Conduit for Attaining SDGs



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A recent report indicated that in a decade, 825 million children – half of all young people in the world – will not have the most basic skills necessary for jobs of the future if the issue of out-of-school is not addressed.⁴ The consequences of any form of out of school are obvious for children and society. Children who are out of school are exposed to social stigma, fewer job opportunities, lower salaries, and higher probability of involvement in criminal activities. Being out of school affect pupils' self-esteem and psychological well-being, and they are faced with the reality that they lack skills and knowledge to fulfill their desires^{5,6}.

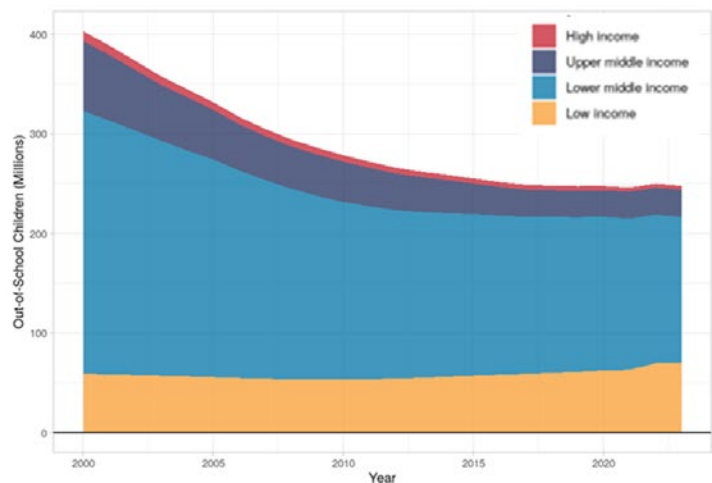
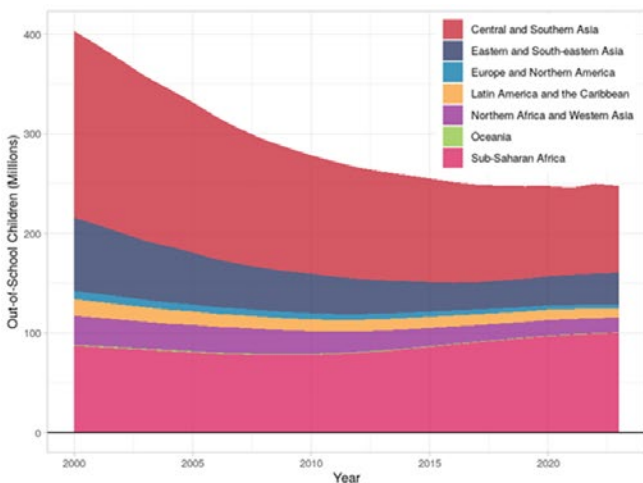
Home Grown (School Feeding Program): The school feeding programs (SFP) are recognized as a key part of food assistance and relief in emergency and development programmes. They are principally

Significant progress was achieved during the last decade in increasing access to education and school enrolment rates at all levels. Despite these gains, there are still about 250 million children that are out of school¹. *Out-of-school rate is the proportion of children*

and young people in the official age range for the given level of education who are not enrolled in pre-primary, primary, secondary, or higher levels of education². The situation in the IsDB member countries (MCs) is alarming, with MCs falling into groups where the Out-of-school is higher.

Factors Contributing to out of school

Access	Child marriage	Conflict	Distance to school	Gender inequality	Lack of teachers	Language	Poverty
Child labour	Climate change	Disabilities	Funding	Illiteracy	Lack of Infrastr.	Natural disasters	Pregnancy



Out-of-School Rate³

1 UNESCO - <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/250-million-children-out-school-what-you-need-know-about-unescos-latest-education-data>

2 UIS - <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/out-school-rate-1-year-primary-primary-education-lower-secondary-education-upper>

3 UNESCO - <https://education-estimates.org/out-sdgof-school/>

4 RELIEF WEB - <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/20-reasons-why-2020-there-are-still-260m-children-out-school>

5 Okoh, C. N., Emenike, J. A., Doma, A., & Akinsola, M. O. (2020). Out of School Children: Enhancing factors and consequences for sustainable development in North Central geo-political zone, Nigeria. American Journal of Educational Research, 8(10), 804-811.

6 Vayachuta, P., Ratana-Ubol, A., & Soopanyo, W. (2016). The study of 'out-of-school' children and youth situations for developing a lifelong education model for 'out-of-school' children and youth. In SHS Web of Conferences (Vol. 26, p. 01015). EDP Sciences.

concerned with transfer of food to school to alleviate hunger, meet daily consumption needs and encourage attendance and retention⁷. Home-Grown School Feeding programs HG(SFP) links existing SFP with local agricultural production⁸. The HG(SFP) presents a comprehensive opportunity to achieve the SDGs, directly or indirectly.

The HG(SFP) can help increase the demand for locally produced crops/foods, which can allow the local farmers to have reliable income (SDG 1) and guaranteed markets through preharvest agreements. Also, readily available market can help farmers reduce post-harvest, thus more income. The program can relieve parents from having to budget for lunches, leading to savings of about 10 percent of the income of vulnerable households . With a guaranteed income, the local farmers have room to expand their production to cater for the food security need (SDG 2) of their immediate communities. The program can also create decent jobs (SDG 8) for farmers and other agricultural workers, such as food processors and transporters.

The program can improve children's nutritional status by providing healthy balanced meals, that can improve overall micronutrient status and reduce the prevalence of anemia in primary school-aged children (SDG 3). The program can increase enrolment, sustained attendance in school and provision of vital

micronutrients that may benefit cognitive abilities and educational outcomes , thus improving school performance and productivity (SDG 4). School feeding can limit the negative consequences on health, nutrition and education thus lowering the barriers to accessing and completing education. Including local food sources in school meals also promotes the consumption of diversified diets.

Poverty is one of the main drivers of early marriage among girls. Some families marry off their daughters to reduce their economic burden or earn income. Child marriage is often the result of entrenched gender inequality, making girls disproportionately affected by the practice. Globally, the prevalence of child marriage among boys is just one sixth that among girls. Child marriage robs girls of their childhood and threatens their well-being. Girls who marry before 18 are more likely to experience domestic violence and less likely to remain in school . HGSFP encourages more girl-child to be enrolled in school, thus helping to achieve equal access to education for male and female gender (SDG 5).

Agriculture is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emission, and climate change is already negatively impacting agricultural production around the globe. Sustainable agriculture can help farmers cope with the impacts of climate change,

Challenges facing HG(SFP)

- Inadequate Funding
- Exclusion
- Poor infrastructure
- Limited training for the cooks
- Inadequate human resources
- Weak program monitoring
- Inadequate/irregular Food supplies
- Low production
- Supply chains and logistics
- Poor quality and quantity of meals

such as drought, floods, and other extreme events. The HGSFP presents an opportunity for the buyers to include in the pre-harvest contract that only foods produced under sustainable environments will be acquired from the local farmers. This would contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13).

Making HG(SFP) Work: The benefits of the HGSFP in relation to health, education, food security, and income cannot be overemphasized. However, establishing and sustaining it requires understanding the challenges of the program. The challenges vary from country to country, and some are cross-cutting. In the box are some challenges reported in various countries.

Addressing the challenges: In many countries, the HG(SFP) relies on external donor support, which is not sustainable in the long run. Governments need to factor the programs in national budgets and seek other funding models to ensure sustainability. The logistic issue requires investments in storage facilities, distribution networks, and personnel training. Use of technology and community participation in monitoring can enhance data collection efforts. Providing nutritious, safe meals requires training cooks in food handling, making capital investments in kitchens, and monitoring food preparation.

To conclude: HG(SFP) presents a path to push SDGs attainment. To achieve this, the design of the program should adopt an integrated and collaborative approach, involving government bodies, NGOs, educators, parents, and communities. This way, the HG(SFP) can catalyze economic and social advancement.



7 FAO - <https://www.fao.org/3/I8063EN/I8063en.PDF>

8 WFP - <https://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/newsroom/wfp204291.pdf>

9 WFP - <https://www.wfp.org/school-meals>

10 Roberts, M., Tolar-Peterson, T., Reynolds, A., Wall, C., Reeder, N., & Rico Mendez, G. (2022). The effects of nutritional interventions on the cognitive development of preschool-age children: A systematic review. *Nutrients*, 14(3), 532.

11 UNICEF - <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage#:~:text=Child%20marriage%20is%20often%20the, and%20threatens%20their%20well%20being>

Amplifying SDGs Impact through Effective Communication



Dr. Musa Elkheir Fadl Alla
Senior Internal Communication Specialist, IsDB

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) consist of seventeen global objectives aimed at achieving a promising, equitable, and sustainable future. These goals address various areas, including poverty, health, education, climate change, peace, and justice. As we engage in projects related to the SDGs, effectively communicating their impact to the audience is essential. This article outlines six key communication steps to achieve this. Getting to Know target Audience

The first step to communicate SDG impact requires perceiving the communication objectives and how effectively they integrate. Different audiences may have different levels of familiarity, interest, and expectations regarding the SDGs. Some may have more interest in the social or environmental benefits, while others may focus on the financial or reputational returns. Therefore, it is essential to tailor messages and tones to suit audiences' needs and preferences. Using relevant examples, stories, or testimonials can make the impact more relatable and engaging.

Using clear and consistent indicators

The second step requires using clear and consistent indicators to measure and report progress and results. The SDGs have a set of indicators to track global and national performance on each goal and target. However, there may be a need to develop indicators that are more specific and relevant to the context and objectives. These indicators should be SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound), compatible with the SDGs framework and reliable data sources and accurate methods for collecting and analyzing these indicators must be used.

Data Visualization

The third step focuses on visualizing the data in a clear and engaging manner for the target audience. Data visualization can help highlight the key findings, trends, and patterns of impact and convey messages more effectively. Depending on the presentation's purpose and the audience's needs, various formats can be utilized, including charts, maps, and infographics. To enhance clarity, some basic principles of data visualization should be adopted, such as choosing the right format, using appropriate colors and fonts, labeling clearly and avoiding clutter.

Storytelling

The fourth step works for telling a cogent story that connects data and indicators with vision and values. A story that can help with humanizing impact and appealing to target audiences' emotions and motivations. Different elements

of storytelling can be used, including characters, conflicts, challenges, solutions, and outcomes, to structure the story and make it more interesting, human-centered and memorable. Different formats and channels can also be used to tell the story such as videos, podcasts, blogs, newsletters and social media.

Inviting Feedback and Dialogue

The fifth step centers on the target audience and stakeholders' dialogue and feedback. Feedback and dialogue can help improve impact measurement and reporting in addition to building trust and credibility with beneficiaries and target audiences. Various methods and tools can be adopted to solicit and respond to feedback and foster dialogue, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, webinars, forums and chats. It is essential to show openness and transparency about challenges and limitations, as well as achievements and successes.

Inspiring action and collaboration.

The sixth step calls for inspiring target audiences and stakeholders to act and collaborate in a way that does not only inform and educates, but also motivates and mobilizes. The benefits of the impact should be highlighted, as well as the gaps and opportunities for further improvement. This also includes showcasing the best practices and lessons learned, as well as the resources and support available for others who aspire to engage and contribute to effective communication.

In conclusion, effectively communicating the impact of SDGs involves the six key steps discussed above. While these steps provide a solid foundation, integrating additional strategies will further enhance the overall communication process.



ENABLING COMMUNICATING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IMPACT



How to achieve SDG 4 in Nigeria- Case study from Jigawa, Niger, and Yobe States



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Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In Nigeria, the challenge of millions of out-of-school children, particularly in the northern regions, poses a significant threat to achieving this goal.

With this backdrop, the Regional Hub of Abuja (RHA) technical team comprising Br. Alhaji Umar Ibrahim and Br. Irfan Ullah Khan visited Jigawa, Niger, and Yobe states to conduct consultative meetings with officials to find ways for IsDB to support the Government in achieving SDG 4.

Overview of States

State	Zone	Area (Sq. Km)	Population (million)	Local Government Areas (LGAs)
Niger	Northeast	89,000	4.5	25
Jigawa	Northwest	24,742	7.5	27
Yobe	Northeast	47,153	4.0	17

Outcomes of the Discussions

The IsDB team held discussions with respective state's education teams regarding the feasibility study and Project Profile for proposed SmartEd Project. Key topics included the State Education Sector Strategic Plan (SESP), latest Annual School Census (ASC) report, latest Annual Education Sector Performance Review, State budget and share allocated for MBOE, situation of Out-of-School Children (OOSC), completed/on-going GPE and other donor funded interventions etc.

The interactive sessions emphasized the need for state governments' commitment to secure Federal Executive Council (FEC) approval, inclusion in the national borrowing plan, provision of counterpart funding, and implementing arrangements including identification of Executing Agency and the critical members of the PMU.

Key Challenges of states

From the visits, the team identified that the current challenges of the education sector in all the three states are common. These challenges can be broadly illustrated hereunder:

Out of School Children

Many children in Jigawa, Niger, and Yobe states, particularly Almajiri children, are out of school, with many of these out of school. These children attend Almajiri schools, which provide only Quranic education and lack formal education. The privately owned are run by Malams, who depend on community alms and student earnings.

The Integrated Qur'anic Tsangaya Education (IQTE) schools is the upgraded form of Almajiri system, by integrating formal education with Quranic teachings. Both Almajiri and IQTE schools, suffer face severe challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, accommodation, and WASH facilities. While some children receive support from their parents, many are forced to beg or engage in labor to survive, leaving them marginalized and neglected by society.

Overcrowding and Lack of Schools Infrastructure

Overcrowding and inadequate infrastructure are major challenges in these States. Classrooms designed for 40 students often house over 100, with divided sections. Insurgencies, particularly Boko Haram, have damaged

schools and forced closures, children out of school or migrating to other states. The influx of displaced children has worsened overcrowding, straining resources and impacting the learning environment.

Poor School Infrastructure

The third issue is the dilapidated condition of school buildings due to lack of maintenance. Many classrooms have cracked walls, torn roofs, and broken floors, creating an unsafe and unwelcoming environment for students. The absence of essential facilities such as WASH, perimeter fencing, and water boreholes along with poor drainage leads to waterlogging and unsanitary conditions, especially during the rainy season.

These infrastructural deficiencies not only hinder education quality but also pose health and safety risks, including security threats and increased risk of waterborne diseases.

Lack of Textbooks and Teaching Learning Materials

The shortage of textbooks and teaching learning materials is affecting education quality. Without these resources, teachers struggle to deliver lessons, often rely on outdated or improvised materials. Students are deprived of the opportunity to reinforce their learning, widening the educational gap. Addressing this scarcity is essential to ensure equitable and effective education, providing all students with the tools they need to succeed.

Lack of Teacher Capacity Building Programs

The lack of structured teacher capacity-building programs significantly affects education quality. Without regular training, teachers struggle to adopt modern teaching methods, technologies, and educational standards. This limits their effectiveness in the classroom and impacts students learning.

Lack of effective school monitoring and assessment

The lack of effective school monitoring and assessment undermines education quality and accountability. Limited resources, untrained inspectors, and weak evaluation processes leave issues like absenteeism and poor teaching unaddressed. Without consistent assessments, schools lack the data to drive improvements and tailor strategies to student needs. Strengthening these frameworks is essential for better performance and learning outcomes.

Strategies to achieve SDG 4

Thematic areas	Gaps/Challenges	Strategy
Improving Access, Equity and Inclusion	Out-of-School Children in Almajiri Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade Almajiri schools to IQTE schools. Provide infrastructure, materials, and teacher training. Offer feeding programs and skill acquisition support. Deploy teachers.
	Overcrowding, Poor School Infrastructure, and low quality of education and learning outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction/upgradation of new/existing classrooms, along with essential facilities.
Enhancing Quality and Learning Outcomes	Outdated curriculum, Lack of regular teacher training programs, and absence of IT/skill acquisition programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade curriculum to include ICT, digital learning, and skill-based content. Provide teacher training in innovative pedagogy and digital platforms.
Education System Strengthening	Lack of effective monitoring of schools and assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and upgrade EMIS. Introduce real-time monitoring tools.

Driving SDG Progress for Disadvantaged Women and Youth: Insights from the VOLIP Project in Tajikistan



Oguz Ceylan
Lead Evaluation Specialist, IsDB

In Tajikistan, the Vocational Literacy Program (VOLIP), financed by the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), has made great strides in empowering women and youth in rural areas. Through vocational training, literacy programs, and microfinance support, VOLIP directly contributed to three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on education (SDG 4), economic growth (SDG #8), and poverty alleviation (SDG 1). This flagship initiative of the Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD) has proven effective in driving sustainable outcomes through enhancing skills, employability, and livelihoods for 8,000 young people and more than 5,000 women while also strengthening the alignment between the education system and the labor market in line with the development priorities of the Government of Tajikistan.

Leveraging an Integrated Approach for Success

The VOLIP project has emerged as a good practice model for poverty reduction, offering valuable insights for future interventions. The project strategically targeted highly vulnerable communities experiencing poverty, unemployment, and migration. It sought to boost the literacy and vocational skills of youth aged 15 to 24 years and facilitate access to functional literacy, skills training, and microfinance for women aged 24 to 49 years to develop income-generating ventures.

VOLIP in Tajikistan has made significant contributions towards SDG 1, SDG 4, SDG 5, and SDG 8, respectively in the areas of poverty eradication, quality education, gender equality, and decent work and economic growth. This can be attributed largely to the simultaneous focus on

vocational training, literacy programs, and access to microfinance, which has equipped 8,000 young people with practical skills to enhance their employability and upskilled 5,115 women, opening new economic horizons for up to 66% of them. The microfinance component has successfully extended loans to 2,036 individuals (64% women), empowering them to start or expand their businesses. Approximately 65% of the allocated funds were utilized, resulting in a remarkable 100% repayment rate. The primary sectors that benefited from these microloans included sewing, confectionary, folk crafts, services, catering, beekeeping, and welding.

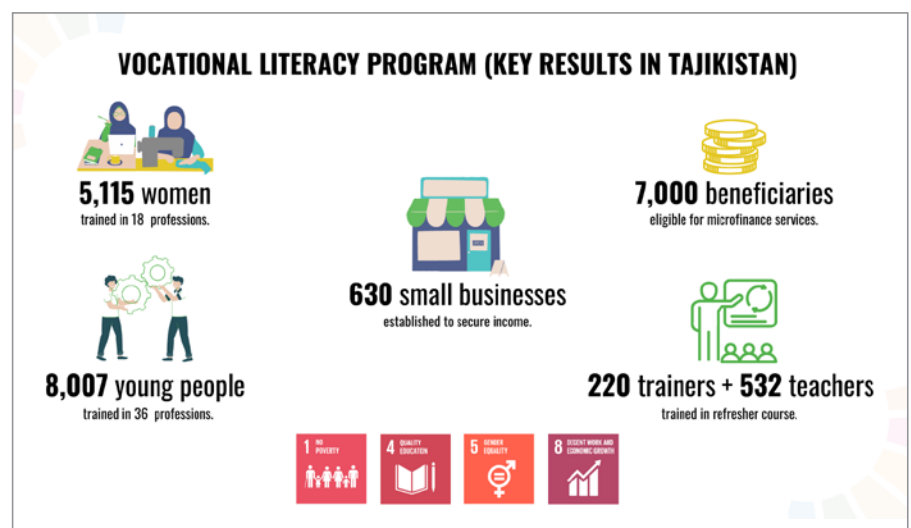
A major contributing factor to the success of the VOLIP project was the emphasis placed on ensuring the sustainability of its results. VOLIP ensured that 220 training providers received adequate training before they could transfer their expertise to an additional 532 trainers and to the direct beneficiaries. On the infrastructure front, four new training centers were built, eight existing ones were rehabilitated and provided with instructional materials and equipment. Furthermore, the project established a revolving fund through microfinance and bolstered the capacity of local institutions on Islamic microfinance management, ensuring that beneficiaries would have continued access to the necessary funds to support their income.

The strong commitment of the VOLIP project's Executing Agency and local authorities was also a key factor in the success of the project. Their role as dependable partners was crucial to achieving the project's objectives, which shows the importance of fostering ownership and partnerships to achieve development goals.

The VOLIP in Tajikistan offers key lessons. To enhance the TVET sector, it is crucial to establish a central coordinating body, effectively promote TVET education, implement a robust M&E system, and ensure adequate follow-up on employment generation after project or program completion.

Beyond Tajikistan: A Replicable Model for Sustainable Development

By combining vocational and literacy training, microfinance, and institutional capacity-building, the VOLIP project has not only improved the lives of thousands of women and young people, but it has also established a solid foundation for scaling up and out this initiative to other underserved regions. The success of the VOLIP project in empowering disadvantaged communities in Tajikistan provides valuable insights for future projects. It demonstrates the power of integrated interventions that consider linkages between diverse sectors and between the SDGs.



High Level Political Forum

Global Advocacy Function, Partnerships, Global Advocacy and Resource Mobilization Department, IsDB



In July 2024, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) delegation from Partnerships, Global Advocacy and Resource Mobilization (PGARM) Department participated in the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development at the United Nations in New York, hosted by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

Br. Amir Hamza Syed, Associate Manager Global Advocacy, was enlisted as a discussant at a high-level side event organized by the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). The event, titled "Exchanges of Innovative Solutions for Debt Relief: Country Experiences and the Role of South-South and Triangular Cooperation", underscored the importance of these modalities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). IsDB emphasized its commitment to providing concessional and blended financing, enhancing technical and capacity assistance of member countries, leveraging its reverse linkage mechanism to connect member countries with proven solutions and expertise by leveraging the South-South and triangular cooperation.

Additionally, Br. Amir Hamza Syed contributed as a panelist at the UN Women side event, "Accelerating Gender Equality and Change for Women and Girls: Catalyzing Collective Action Across the SDGs". This event highlighted IsDB's ongoing efforts to support marginalized groups, particularly women, by improving their access to education, health services, and financial resources. The Bank continues to focus on enhancing women's socio-economic status through targeted financing, risk mitigation, and capacity building.

Bilateral meetings were also held with the UN partners to advance the Bank's global positioning and drive progress on the 2030 Agenda implementation. These discussions are expected to strengthen IsDB's role and engagement at the upcoming UNGA-78 Summit of the Future. Critical meetings were conducted with UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) with regards to IsDB's contribution under various work streams to the 4th International Conference for Financing and Development, Spain 2025, that seeks to reevaluate the financial architecture of development, aligning with the 2030 Agenda.

Empowering Women Through Financial Inclusion in Jordan



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Promoting financial inclusion and women's empowerment has received more attention worldwide, including in Jordan.

The Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) has actively participated in designing a strategy and framework for intervention in empowering Jordanian women through financial inclusion.¹ This involvement significantly impacts bridging the gender gap and creating economic opportunities for women through its strategic initiatives and gender-responsive policies. This effort has also been induced by the breakdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, which encouraged the government to accelerate the adoption of digital payments and financial services. The CBJ announced the National Financial Inclusion Strategy for Jordan 2018-2020, which emphasises commitment to ensuring that women, among other underserved communities, have affordable access to financial services, which is crucial for their economic empowerment. Despite the CBJ effort, the country faces more challenges related to unemployment and gender disparities.² The labour market in Jordan is also highly affected by the Syrian crisis, particularly the unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Women's higher education has not helped due to the slow creation of jobs. Another essential challenge is that Jordan's score for gender equality in the workforce is lower than that of other MENA countries, ranking among the ten lowest countries globally. Hence, more efforts might be needed to improve women's participation in the labour force to achieve a reasonable level of inclusion and economic empowerment.

Unbanked Jordanian Among Underserved Categories 2017-2021

Efforts to address the financial gap of underserved Jordanians are crucial for sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, and socio-economic development. Figure 1 shows that until 2021, 78% of women in Jordan remain unbanked, and only 23% used digital payment nationwide. Likewise, 73%, 63%, and 58% of Jordan's Youth, Refugee, and Low-income groups were retrospectively unbanked.³ This indicates that more of the underserved category, mainly women, youth, refugees and low-income groups in Jordan, did not have enough access to the formal financial system. Key barriers included a lack of money, distance to financial institutions, and a lack of documentation.

The Government Initiatives in Women's Financial Empowerment

Jordan has made significant strides in empowering women through financial inclusion, with several initiatives and programs to reduce the gender gap in access to financial services. The government launched the National Financial Inclusion Strategy (NFIS), which focuses on enhancing financial inclusion for all population segments, including women. The main objective of NFSI is to provide convenient

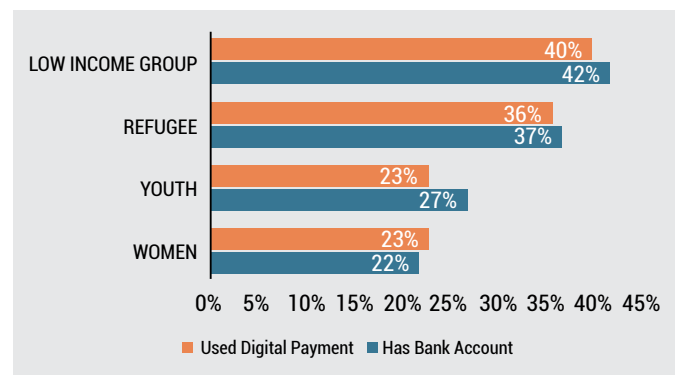
access to affordable and suitable financial products and services. In collaboration with UN Women, the government, represented by the CBJ⁴, has organised dialogues and assessments to understand the financial needs of women entrepreneurs. The government has also designed a Women's Economic Empowerment Action Plan to enhance women's financial access to economic opportunities⁵. Moreover, the government adopted digital financial inclusion to overcome the challenges of poor basic and financial infrastructure. The recent years after 2020 showed significantly increased digital payments as people sought safer, contactless transactions. This led to a surge in mobile wallets and online banking services. Digital financial services have provided a lifeline for women and other vulnerable groups, including refugees, who often face barriers to accessing traditional banking services.

The Role of IsDBG in Women's Financial Inclusion in Jordan

The Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDBG) has been actively involved in microfinance projects that promote financial inclusion in Jordan. These include but are not limited to Creating Sustainable Economic Opportunities for Youth, empowering a Generation of Vulnerable Children and Youth, Developing the Economic and social welfare of Adolescent Girls and Young Women, and Supporting SMEs and Strengthening the Economic Resilience of Vulnerable Enterprises. Empowering women is one of the main aims of IsDBG projects in Jordan. These projects focus on providing financial services to underserved populations, including women, to help them start and grow their businesses. Moreover, the Islamic Development Bank Institute (IsDBI), a member of IsDBG, has been involved in capacity-building programs to enhance the skills and knowledge of underserved groups, including women entrepreneurs and SMEs. These efforts collectively aim to empower underserved women in Jordan by providing them with the financial resources and support needed to achieve economic independence and improve their quality of life.

Conclusion

Despite the government efforts, IsDBG and other multilateral interventions, the gender gap concerning financial inclusion in Jordan, such as account ownership, digital banking and Fintech usage, have remained significant. Several factors contribute to this gap, including cultural norms that often see men managing family finances, minimum balance requirements set by banks, and limited participation of women in the labour force. Hence, more efforts might be needed to address these issues in digital financial services, improving financial literacy to reduce the gender financial access gap. These results might have promising implications for the government and IsDBG.



1 [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/311371586286029516/pdf/Womens-Economic-Empowerment-in-Jordan.pdf](https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/311371586286029516/pdf/Womens-Economic-Empowerment-in-Jordan.pdf)

2 [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://jordan.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Jordan/Images/publications/2020/November/Meta_LR_021120.pdf](https://jordan.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Jordan/Images/publications/2020/November/Meta_LR_021120.pdf)

3 <https://digitalfinance.worldbank.org/country/jordan>

4 <http://www.cbj.gov.jo/Pages/viewpage.aspx?pageID=197>

5 [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/311371586286029516/pdf/Womens-Economic-Empowerment-in-Jordan.pdf](https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/311371586286029516/pdf/Womens-Economic-Empowerment-in-Jordan.pdf)

Maternal, Newborn and Child Health: IsDB's Support to Health System Strengthening in Djibouti



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Kampala Regional Hub, Uganda, IsDB

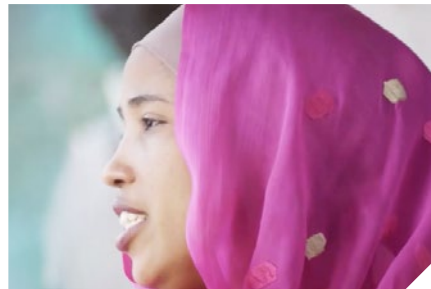


In one of the health facilities in Djibouti, Fatima, was born prematurely. Fatima was very fragile, and she needed regular monitoring, treatment and care for premature babies. But the facility doesn't have the necessary setup or unit for premature babies. A few days later, let alone baby Fatima died of developed respiratory complications. "I can't describe to you the pain I felt, and still feel today. I lost my daughter, and my wife almost died too" said the father Mohamed who added "I don't blame the midwives, who do their best with the means they have. But I think that if the facility had been better equipped to address health problems related to newborns, Fatima could have survived."

Amina, a Djiboutian mother, gave birth to her three children in this facility. As a mother who frequently visit the facility for maternal and child health services, she believes that there is a long waiting time and still not accessible to many women and children."

However, from these two testimonies there is hope embodied in the IsDB's Lives and Livelihoods Fund Project titled "Health System Strengthening with Emphasis on

Maternal, Newborn and Child Health" with the objective to Improve access to quality health services particularly to mothers and children and strengthen the institutional and human resource capacity. The projects' objectives speak directly to the two testimonies outlined above and underpinned



spirits of the SDGs 3 and 5. While internally we see this as a project that will enable us to satisfy the required disbursements and meeting our KPIs, we often do not pay enough attention that behind every IsDB's funded project, it could be a matter of life or death to the beneficiaries in our member countries. Therefore, conscious

efforts must be made by the Bank's staff to humanize their respective projects during implementation considering the potential difference that each project is in the lives of the beneficiaries. This will go a long way towards preventing tragic situations like the testimony of Br. Mohamed. The rehabilitation of Bouffard hospital, and the construction of emergency units in Cheiko and Peltier hospitals will help address the concerns mentioned in Sis. Amina's testimony.

In conclusion, this article is an illustration of IsDB philosophy of leaving no one behind. It also demonstrates that everyday count in making sure each project is satisfactorily implemented, with the beneficiaries at the heart, as we try to restore hope and dignity, reduce regional inequalities and disparities towards access to healthcare and give smile to our future generations.

In terms of the expected impact of this project, this article could not say it better than Fatima's father "I believe that this new facility will save lives and prevent other families from experiencing the tragedy that I experienced".



Artistic design of the mother and child Bouffard Hospital



Hospital under construction/renovation

¹ Lives and Livelihoods Fund is a joint vision of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), and other development cooperation partners (Abu Dhabi Fund for Development, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development, King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center and Qatar Fund for Development) aimed at raising the poorest out of poverty in IsDB member countries.

IsDB's Future Vision Symposium: A Firm Commitment to the SDGs



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During its Golden Jubilee celebrations, IsDB organized the "Future Vision Symposium" (FVS) to explore the future of select development topics that are crucial for Sustainable Development, namely Energy, Finance, and the Future of MDBs. The FVS discussed emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in those areas and aimed to trigger innovative ideas and development solutions on each topic.

Dr. Al-Jasser inaugurated the FVS by pointing out that those three topics are common denominators of sustainable development. He stressed the importance of access to reliable energy – traditional and renewable – for sustainable development, pointing out that energy security is a growing challenge and that commitment to energy transition adds a layer of complexity. Dr. Al-Jasser also emphasized that the Islamic finance (IF) industry witnessed remarkable growth recently offering a reliable financing option to development markets. He cited the example of Sukuk as one of the fastest-growing asset classes where IsDB sees immense potential for development and climate finance. Dr. Al-Jasser also underlined MDBs' central role in mobilizing resources and channeling investments toward sustainable development, and their potential to facilitate resource pooling for more effective South-South Cooperation (SSC).

The FVS first session discussed the nexus between energy security and development, hosting a high-level panel that consisted of KSA's Minister of Energy, Indonesia's Minister of Finance, and IsDB President.

The discussion emphasized the need to restructure the energy transition narrative to strike balance between energy security, affordability, and sustainability without compromising growth and prosperity. The panel emphasized the need to enable countries to capitalize on their natural



endowments, stressing that developing countries are at different levels of readiness to meet their commitments to green transition. Speakers pointed out that Affordability depends on fiscal space and governments' ability to secure needed funding from public and private sources as well as from MDBs. Dr. Al-Jasser stressed the need for addressing energy poverty on the local level, while striving to achieve fair and just energy transition, and reiterated IsDB's commitment to closing the financing gap for energy transition and energy poverty in Member Countries.

The second session explored forward-looking elements and challenges of the global Sukuk market. The session hosted a high-level panel that consisted of the Islamic Financial Services Board (IFSB) Secretary General, Malaysia's Central Bank Deputy Governor, IsDB Group Sharia Board Chairman, and IsDB Vice President for Finance.

The discussion highlighted the importance of building a comprehensive ecosystem with a strong regulatory framework to enhance sukuk markets by developing local sukuk markets. Speakers discussed some of the challenges and opportunities for this market including the liquidity, tradability, and accessibility of retail sukuk, and pointed out that digitalization and technology create an urgent need for IF regulatory institutions to keep improving standardization of Sukuk issuance. IsDB showcased its catalyst role in developing IF markets and stressed the need to bring in the private sector to support the sukuk market.

The last session hosted Cameroon's Minister of Economic Planning, IsDB President, AfDB President, and WBG Vice President for MENA to explore the potentials of larger coordination among MDBs, particularly in the Global south.

The discussion emphasized the importance of MDBs cooperation in the global South to collectively address country priorities without conditionality, pointing out that MDBs need to have more innovation, complementarity, and additionality in partnership. The panel stressed that future MDBs should be built around three pillars: providing sustainable development at scale; assisting countries to build macro stability and support structural reform; and promoting vibrant private sector. Speakers agreed that MDBs' priorities should come bottom-up from the country's priorities, and that diverse shareholding should be driving for a single development agenda led by countries. Furthermore, the discussion highlighted the importance of scalable concessional finance, and the necessity of a new MDBs approach that is more innovative, impactful, bolder and faster, where MDBs play complementary roles. Dr. Al-Jasser emphasized that SSC and understanding of local realities are two of the edges of South-based MDBs, stressing that IsDB is a Bank "from the South, by the South, for the South".

The FVS was indeed an inspiring event that showcased brilliant ideas crucial to be considered by development actors and policymakers as the world charts the future of sustainable development beyond the 2030 Agenda.



Bridging the Digital Divide: The Role of Digital Public Infrastructure in Achieving SDGs



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Digitalization is rapidly transforming societies, economies, and governance structures globally. As we navigate this digital horizon, it becomes imperative to align digital innovations with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to create a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable world by 2030. The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) has been at the forefront of promoting digital transformation in its Member Countries. Recently, the Bank has launched its new Digital Inclusion Operational Strategy 2024-27, Digital Inclusion Strategic Partnership Program and has been actively participating at related international working groups and global events reaffirming its commitment to bridging the digital divide.

What is Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)?

Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) refers to the digital foundations necessary for a country's economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability. DPI encompasses digital technologies, infrastructure, and services that enable efficient, inclusive, and sustainable development.

IsDB's DPI Initiatives

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) has taken concrete steps to promote Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) in its Member Countries. Through its initiatives, IsDB aims to bridge the digital divide and foster inclusive and sustainable development. Notable examples of IsDB's DPI projects include the ECOWAN fiber optic backbone programs in Sierra Leone and The Gambia, which enhanced digital access for government services in the two countries and the Submarine Cable System projects in Djibouti and Bangladesh, which not only increased the reliability of internet services in the respective countries but also increased the overall telecommunication bandwidth as well.

The Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) has unveiled its Digital Inclusion Operational Strategy (DIOS) 2024-27, a comprehensive framework aimed at promoting universal connectivity and digital transformation

in its Member Countries. Grounded in six core principles, DIOS prioritizes leaving no one behind, human-centered digital transformation, regional differentiation, sustainable investment policies, online safety, and dual green and digital transformation.

IsDB's new DIOS 2024-27 aligns with its Green, Resilient, Inclusive, and Sustainable (GRIS) Development approach. This strategy focuses on five key areas: ICT infrastructure development, mainstreaming ICT/digital technologies across sectors, digital skills development, cybersecurity, and private sector investment mobilization. By prioritizing these areas, IsDB aims to create a robust digital ecosystem that supports economic growth, social development, and environmental sustainability.

Globally, investments in DPI have yielded significant returns. For instance, a World Bank study found that every 10% increase in broadband penetration leads to a 1.4% increase in GDP growth (World Bank, 2019). Similarly, a report by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) notes that digital technologies can contribute up to 25% of GDP growth in developing countries (ITU, 2020). IsDB's past interventions in the sector and its new strategy demonstrate its commitment to DPI.

Looking ahead, IsDB plans to increase its DPI engagements, focusing on telecommunication infrastructure projects, capacity building, digital agendas design, and regulatory frameworks development. By doing so, IsDB will support its Member Countries in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The Islamic Development Bank's Commitment to DPI

The rise of digitalization reshapes society, economy, and governance, making Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) essential. The

Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) leads efforts in promoting digital innovation among its Member Countries, demonstrated at the Global DPI Summit in Cairo from October 1-3, 2024. This event gathered key global stakeholders to share ideas, innovations, and collaborations. The IsDB participated actively, showcasing its focus on DPI as crucial for achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through its Economic & Social Infrastructure Department (ESID), the IsDB highlighted DPI's role in inclusive digital transformation, online safety, and digital skills development. The ESID is also an active participatory member at multiple international working groups including but not limited to DPI Safeguards as part of the International Organization Consultative Group (IOCG) led by UNDP, Digital Infrastructure Investment Initiative (DIII) Working Group led by International Telecommunication Union and Connectivity for All Working Group led by UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) etc.

Conclusion

As we move forward in this digital era, it is essential to harness the power of digital technologies to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Accordingly, the IsDB has allocated USD 250 million for ICT and Digital Development projects over the next four years. Through DISPP, the bank aims to develop Member Countries' capacities, showcasing successful digital ecosystem developments and bridging the digital divide. Through its initiatives and strategies, IsDB is poised to unlock the potential of digital technologies for inclusive and sustainable development. These innovations are designed to enhance the overall effectiveness of development projects, drive financial inclusion, optimize infrastructure, and improve human capital. The IsDB's efforts are aligned with the overarching goal of reducing the digital divide and ensuring that digitalization contributes meaningfully to achieving the SDGs by 2030.

Supporting Sustainable Development in Suriname through a New Country Engagement Framework (CEF)



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Suriname is one of the two Member Countries of the IsDB Group located in South America, hosting slightly more than 623 thousand population which has an upper-middle income status. Covered mostly by forests, the country is rich in natural resources like bauxite, gold, and oil, where its economy has been driven mainly by the extractive sector with mining accounting for nearly half of public sector revenue and gold representing more than 80 percent of total exports.

Recently, the Suriname economy experienced turbulent times due to the COVID-19 crisis, depreciating currency, and falling commodity prices for major export products that fueled high public debts. Consequently, Suriname agreed to work under an International Monetary Fund (IMF) Program in December 2021 that will end in March 2025. Over the past two years, key macroeconomic indicators have improved, including inflation cooling and debt reduction. Importantly, the country has recently discovered offshore oil reserves that could be associated with high economic growth and increased fiscal space, particularly starting in 2028- once the massive oil production starts.

Since joining the Bank in 1997, the IsDB Group approved 36 operations for Suriname worth US\$ 263.6 million to support sustainable development and concluded a two-year (2014–2015) Interim Member Country Partnership Strategy (MCPS) for the country. After several years, with the historic visit of H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser, the IsDB President, to Suriname in October 2023, the Bank has given a new impetus to its engagement with Suriname by launching the new Country Engagement Framework (CEF), which covers the period 2024–2026. The CEF was launched in Riyadh on May 1st, 2024, on the sidelines of the 2024 Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group's Annual Meetings and the Bank's 50th Anniversary Golden Jubilee by Suriname's Minister of Finance and Planning, H.E. Mr. Stanley Raghoebarsing (IsDB Governor for Suriname) and IsDB President and Group Chairman, H.E. Dr. Muhammad Al Jasser.

More specifically, launching the CEF reflects the IsDB's continued commitment to Suriname's development for 2024–2026 by allocating an indicative amount of US\$ 235 million under two main pillars. Pillar

1: Igniting Growth and Diversification will support three sectors: energy, agro-industry, and water and sanitation. Pillar 2: Building Human Capital for the Future will support complementary human development by focusing on health, education, and affordable housing. Cross-cutting CEF pillars include Islamic finance sector development and small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) support, climate change, women and youth empowerment, and capacity development.

The implementation of CEF will help Suriname to attain the national development objectives stated in the Multi-Annual Development Plan (2022–2026)—the national development strategy of the country—and several SDGs within the scope of the sustainable development agenda such as SDG3, SDG6, SDG7, and SDG8.

Initially, within the scope of the implementation of the CEF for Suriname (2024–2026), the first project in the energy sector namely "Expansion of Transmission and Distribution Systems" was approved in June 2024 by IsDB (US\$105.7 million). This is the first intervention of IsDB in supporting the power sector in the country. IsDB will co-finance the project along with the Saudi Fund for Development, OPEC Fund for International Development, and the Government of Suriname, a testament to concerted efforts among key developmental partners for achieving sustainable development in Suriname. The Project will contribute to satisfying the increasing national electricity demand, allow connecting 4,350 new households and 470 new commercial units, and improve the electricity network performances by reducing the system average interruption frequency and duration, mainly contributing to the achievement of SDG7 in Suriname.

While Suriname has made progress in several areas of SDGs, significant challenges remain, particularly in SDG3 (Good Health and Well-Being). The increasing prevalence of Non-Communicable Diseases, like diabetes and hypertension is a growing concern. With more than 9 percent of adults having diabetes and about 30 percent with hypertension, Suriname is among the top Caribbean countries with the highest prevalence of noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). Comprehensive strategies that include education, improved access to healthcare, and lifestyle interventions are crucial to addressing these issues effectively. The Bank provided Technical Assistance to the Government of Suriname to prepare project documents for the Construction of a new hospital in Paramaribo with a focus on the treatment of NCDs. Within the CEF period, the Bank will consider financing this project.

Overall, the CEF for Suriname is designed to support the country's development needs by using IsDB's operational tools and mechanisms to ensure sustainable development via igniting growth, diversification, and building human capital for the future of Suriname. The successful and effective interventions within the context of CEF for Suriname (2024–2026) could help Suriname to attain the Sustainable Development Goals and objectives of the Multi-Annual Development Plan (2022–2026), which would ultimately increase the well-being of Surinamese people.

Suriname's Progress on Key SDGs

SDG	Progress	Key Challenges
No Poverty (SDG 1)	46%	High poverty rates, regional disparities
Zero Hunger (SDG 2)	50%	Food insecurities for vulnerable populations
Good Health & Wellbeing (SDG 3)	35%	Access to healthcare in rural areas
Quality Education (SDG 4)	60%	Quality and equity of education in remote areas
Gender Equality (SDG 5)	40%	Gender disparities in poverty and employment

Source: UN SDG Global Database, Suriname Voluntary National Review (VNR), 2023

The Waqf Evolution as a Historical Tool for Social Welfare



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Historically, Waqf has been instrumental and deeply rooted in the Islamic world, providing sustainable funding to schools, hospitals, water systems, and other forms of infrastructure. This has contributed to economic and social development over centuries, particularly in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Unlike other forms of charity and philanthropy, which may be more short-lived or project specific, Waqf is more sustainable. From a Shariah lens, Waqf enables individuals or institutions to dedicate property or assets for the benefit of the public or a specific cause, with the principal preserved in perpetuity while income generated from it is used for charitable purposes.

The traditional Waqf involving land for the development of graveyards, mosques, schools and clinics requires cash. A lack of cash would have impeded the development of Waqf properties in LDCs. This constraint requires solidarity from more developing countries to build a sizeable Waqf capital and income to be used for infrastructure building and human development programs for LDCs. However, in other countries with better ecosystem development in Islamic social finance resources, the Waqf is more tailored to address the funding gaps effectively. Its superior management, specific framework and legislation, and potential for long-term sustainability, make it possible as a valuable complement to existing fiscal resources.

The Islamic Solidarity Fund for Development (ISFD) and Its Intersections with SDGs

The role of Waqf in human development is aligned directly with at least five (5) of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). In terms of ISFD portfolio allocation, Economic Empowerment, comprising Agriculture,



Energy and Microfinance sectors, forms 50.1% of its total portfolio. The creation of jobs through Economic Empowerment activities enhances access to employment opportunities for marginalized populations. Similarly, Human Capital Development forms 44.4% of the ISFD total portfolio, under which Waqf-funded schools and training centers, healthcare centers as well as water and sanitation facilities help bridge the inequality gap. By integrating Waqf into national and local SDG strategies, LDCs can leverage this traditional financial instrument to advance sustainable development outcomes.

The operationalization of ISFD, applying the Waqf approach, is the best example for replication by its Member Countries with high preparedness in governance, legislation and Waqf resources. Starting from a Waqf paid-up capital of USD 2.53 billion, the ISFD's Waqf asset grew significantly to USD 3.43 billion as of 31 December 2023, after 17 years in operations. With a prudent management on its return, Islamic financing assets grew to approximately USD 450 million during the same period, from which more than 90% apply Qardhul Hassan principle and the remaining apply either Instalment Sale or Istisna'. The allocated Waqf capital of approximately USD 2.1 billion for subscribing Sukuk and deposit-placement under Commodity Murarabah promotes directly the proliferation of high-rated Sukuk issuances and expands liquidity to certain Islamic banks in its Member Countries, which still requires USD-denominated liquidity in their Islamic banking and capital markets. The proceeds from Green Sukuk by IsDB itself and its Member Countries for the last 4-6 years, which were subscribed partially by Waqf fund, have supported many infrastructure and program developments related to environmental protection goals such as the Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), Goal

7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), Goal 13 (Climate Action), and Goal 15 (Life on Land).

A Bright Outlook of Waqf in the Contemporary Financial System

Integrating Waqf into Islamic financial instruments such as Sukuk (Islamic bonds) could mobilize larger sums of capital for development purposes. This was evidenced by the issuance of the Indonesian's Sovereign Cash Waqf Linked Sukuk (CWLS). It is noteworthy that the total Sukuk proceeds equivalent to approximately USD 250 million are used for complementing fiscal resources to build public infrastructure and a portion of the Sukuk return is endowed as Waqf to further complement other Islamic finance resources for human development programs, building resilience, and supporting fragile states.

Moreover, digital platforms and crowdfunding can democratize the Waqf system, allowing a broader base of contributors to participate. This could be particularly beneficial in LDCs where the individual wealth base might be limited, but collective contributions through technology could lead to meaningful endowments. This approach also promotes transparency and engagement with the broader public, ensuring that Waqf initiatives remain relevant and responsive to the needs of the communities they are designed to serve.

It is an interesting observation to witness that ISFD is under ongoing efforts, under the Waqf evolution, to establish its own Cash Waqf Sukuk and a digital platform to broaden its capital contributors base beyond the typical governments' contributions.

Evaluation and Learning for Strategic programming and SDG Progress



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As the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, the importance of evaluation and learning in achieving sustainable development has never been more pronounced. In the journey toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), evaluation and learning are essential tools that enable organizations to make strategic, evidence-based decisions. As global development challenges become increasingly complex, the role of evaluation goes beyond mere measurement. It fosters a learning ecosystem that enables continuous improvement, strategic planning, and accountability. Since its inception in 1991, the Independent Evaluation Department (IEvD) of the IsDB has played a pivotal role in guiding decision-making processes by providing evidence-based findings and recommendations. It has reinforced accountability and promoted learning to enhance interventions that contribute to the development aspirations of its member countries.

To commemorate the IsDB golden jubilee and reinforce its commitment to learning, the IEvD organized its 6th annual IsDB Group Evaluation Symposium under the theme "Cherishing Learning and Charting Out the Future: The Strategic Value of Evaluation in Decision-Making." The symposium served as a knowledge sharing and learning space where experts explored how evaluation can help to effectively address global challenges and drive sustainable development. By sharing experiences and methodologies, panelists discussed how evaluative insights can inform policy and adaptive strategies to emerging issues—ensuring that interventions are effective, efficient, and aligned

with global goals. Discussions highlighted how evaluation and learning can serve as a compass for SDG alignment and progress tracking. In this respect, H.E. Dr. Zamir Iqbal, VP Finance and CFO of IsDB, indicated the importance of reflection and learning, stating "As we reflect on our journey over the past 50 years, [...] let us look ahead with a shared sense of purpose and a renewed commitment to delivering meaningful, sustainable development for generations to come."

During the symposium, various global challenges, such as access to health and education, poverty, climate change, the AI/digital divide, and the role of evaluation in providing evidence-based findings and recommendations were discussed and deliberated upon, using findings from projects evaluated by the IEvD. The sessions demonstrated that leveraging evaluations for strategic insights directly supports the Sustainable Development Goals by enhancing the effectiveness of MDBs interventions. Enduring the Discussions stressed the need for reliable data collection and analysis to guide policy and practice that support development effectiveness. Dr. Sabine Bernabè from the World Bank Group said: "We must focus on harnessing new data, technology, and methods to improve the rigor, quality, and usefulness of evaluations, and most importantly, refocus on outcomes." Similarly, continuous and adaptive learning can enable organizations to remain resilient and agile to keep SDG implementation on track and adjust course when necessary. In relation to this, discussions emphasized the necessity of not only implementing evaluation recommendations and aligning them with operational strategies but also considering both the intended and unintended impacts of development efforts.

The Symposium's "Private Sector Day" spotlighted the private sector's unique role in advancing the SDGs. This was clearly articulated by H.E. Eng. Hani Sonbol, CEO of ITFC and Acting CEO of ICD, who recognized that meeting the annual funding gap in developing countries requires mobilizing private sector resources. He stated: "[The global] challenges are too vast to be addressed through public funding or traditional development assistance. We must leverage the private sector's immense potential to mobilize resources, innovate solutions, and create sustainable impacts." The private sector has the potential to accelerate SDG progress by integrating ESG principles (Environmental, Social, and Governance) and impact investment into their operations. This can be best achieved with the support of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems that provide guidance on actions and measure their effectiveness.

It is paramount to recognize the critical role evaluation and learning play in accelerating the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. When organizations engage in rigorous evaluation, they gain actionable insights that drive effective decision-making and ultimately enhance their contributions to sustainable development. Through learning events such as the IsDB Group Evaluation Symposium, IEvD fosters a culture of reflection, learning, and innovation with the IsDB Group. As the world seeks to realize the SDGs, a collective commitment to learning and evidenced-based decision-making becomes a foundation for long-term progress. As Br. Ahmed Ag Aboubacrine, Acting Director of IEvD, so aptly put it: "One of the key takeaways from this Symposium is that Learning is not an endpoint but a continuous process. Our ability to embrace learning at every opportunity ensures we stay agile, resilient, and forward-thinking in an ever-changing world."



IsDB Group Delegation at United Nations General Assembly (UNGA79)

Global Advocacy Function, Partnerships, Global Advocacy & Resource Mobilization Department, IsDB



The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) is the largest international annual gathering of the Heads of States/Governments et al. as well as for the UN Institutions, Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and other international financing, humanitarian and development agencies. The objective of the UNGA is to promote international co-operation among all nations and development institutions in the political, social, cultural, economic, educational and health fields.

The UN granted the IsDB Group the Observer status in April 2007. This status helped IsDB strengthen its cooperation with the UN and its agencies, funds and programs. Currently, IsDB has agreements with over 30 UN institutions, out of the 70+ UN Programs, Agencies and Funds. Since the launching of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 and Agenda 2030, IsDB has been a regular participant at UNGA.

As delegated by H.E. the President, IsDB the Vice President Finance and Chief Financial Officer, Dr. Zamir Iqbal, joined the mission team on 22 September and represented the Bank at the MDB Heads meeting with Mr. Antonio Guterres, United Nations Secretary General (UNSG), Ms. Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary General (UNDSG) and the Heads of UN Agencies. The focus of the meeting was on joint efforts to strengthen collaboration and financing towards the SDGs, respecting each institution's respective mandate, governance and comparative advantages. The discussions covered three priority areas: (i) Bigger and better MDBs; (ii) Catalyzing private sector; (iii) System-wide in-country collaboration. Leaders reaffirmed the need to enhance the effectiveness and impact of UN-MDB collaboration at the country level, especially in fragile and conflict-affected countries. This collaboration could also include work on country-led platforms, an area in which MDBs are increasing coordination, according to countries' preferences and priorities. Leaders underscored the primordially of country-owned efforts for the success of country platforms.

Dr. Issa Faye, Director General, Global Practice and Partnership, led the Bank's delegation to UNGA from 18-27 September. The theme of UNGA79 was "Leaving no one behind: acting together for the advancement of peace, sustainable development and human dignity for present and future generations."

One of the central themes of the Summit of the Future that took place on 22-23 September was the urgent need to accelerate progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly in light of the concerning statistics that only 17% of SDG targets are currently on track. Global leaders adopted a Pact of the Future with a strong focus on sustainable development and financing, international peace and security, STI (science, technology and innovation) and digital cooperation, youth, and global governance.

The Declaration on Future Generations puts forward concrete proposals aimed at safeguarding the interests of future generations. The Declaration commits to providing meaningful opportunities for young people to participate in shaping policies that affect their lives, emphasizing their role as key stakeholders in global governance.

Prior to the Summit, Actions Days were held. They provided IsDB key platforms to emphasize its commitment to enhancing the role of the Bank as a voice of the Global South. One of the key outcomes from the various engagements during the Action Days was a reaffirmation of IsDB's dedication to fostering collaboration among developing nations and development partners, focusing on shared challenges and opportunities for sustainable development.

At UNGA, IsDB also co-organized the Second Edition of the 2024 Global Advocacy Dialogue Series, launched earlier this year with the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), which took place on 26 September 2024. The Dialogue titled: "Advancing Strategic Alliances: Leveraging Private Sector Strength in the Global South" highlighted the impacts and lessons learned from IsDB's operations on the ground. The Bank emphasized its commitment to supporting its Member Countries in harnessing the power of South-South Cooperation through innovative financing mechanisms and knowledge sharing initiatives, particularly through the Reverse Linkage mechanism, which facilitates technical cooperation and knowledge exchange. IsDB led the Ideas Foundry Session demonstrating how the Bank's Reverse Linkage mechanism harnesses private sector contributions to advance development through South-South and Triangular Cooperation (SSTrc). UNOSSC introduced its SSTrC Solutions Lab, a digital platform designed to facilitate knowledge sharing and foster collaboration among stakeholders. Discussions with the private sector highlighted the necessity for increasing their engagement and adopting practical approaches, innovative financing mechanisms and promoting digital transformation to achieve SDGs.

Raising Female Aspirations through Education and Building Sustainable Futures



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In an age of rapid technological advancement and ever-changing challenges, the value of education cannot be overemphasized. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established by the United Nations, serve as a framework for addressing these challenges on a global scale. Among these goals is SDG 4 that aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The IsDB Women's Empowerment Policy gives specific attention to ensuring women and girls have access to primary, secondary and higher education and vocational training, as well as promoting their enrolment in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) and other fields, especially where they are underrepresented. The Bank's Digital Inclusion Strategy also commits to support its member countries to mitigate the risks of digital exclusion based on gender and other factors to ensure universal access for all populations, including the provision of affordable quality services, relevant content and e-services, and the skills required to effectively participate in knowledge-based societies and the digital economy.

Through a range of programs and initiatives, the Bank strives to make digital skills education accessible to all, focusing particularly on underrepresented groups. It aims to bridge the gender digital divide by providing women and girls with equal access to technology, digital training, and to be safe online. Raising the aspirations of young women and girls for STEM-related fields is indeed critical for achieving SDG 4 and driving sustainability in IsDB member countries.



Fostering Female STEM Talent: IsDB experience with Tech4dev's Women Techsters Fellowship

While the world is making strides towards gender equality, women remain largely underrepresented in STEM careers. According to UNESCO, women make up less than 30% of the world's researchers and a mere 3% of women hold leadership positions in the science and technology sector. By fostering female talent in STEM, we can accelerate innovation and scientific progress. Young women are encouraged to imagine themselves in technology and innovation roles when they observe successful female role models in these fields. This empowerment has the potential to change entire communities, even entire countries.

Since last year, the IsDB has entered into a strategic partnership with Tech4Dev, a Nigerian non-profit social enterprise founded in 2016, that creates access to decent work and opportunities for Africans through digital skills empowerment and advocacy. The partnership between IsDB and Microsoft in supporting Tech4Dev's Women Techsters Fellowship Program in 2022/2023 has been a significant value addition in this area. Women Techsters addresses a glaring gender gap in STEM fields and aims to empower, by 2030, 5 million women across Africa with digital, deep tech, and soft skills required to thrive within the tech ecosystem. The program does not only provide young women with technical skills but also foster leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving abilities.

It is all about empowerment, economic inclusion, and breaking barriers.

Tech4Dev uses a multifaceted approach to instill confidence and resilience in female participants through the Women Techsters Programs. The Advocacy programs – the TechGirls Drive and the Women Techsters Open Day – have raised awareness about the importance of digital literacy and advocated for equal access to technology and education. The Training programs – the Women Techsters Fellowship and the Women Techsters Bootcamp train young women in technology skills across 8 learning tracks. Beyond technical training, great importance is given to mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, networking, and continuous support even after the training concludes. 8 out of every 10 beneficiaries are placed in jobs thus bettering their lives and that of their families, and some even started their own tech businesses. This success story is one of inspiration, transformation, and hope.

Paving the way for women in STEM by reducing the digital skilling gap is more than an initiative, it is a commitment to building a better future for everyone. It has been established that when women enter the technology industry, they frequently open doors for others, which has a multiplier effect on communities. Their inventions have the potential to solve societal problems ranging from environmental sustainability to healthcare, ultimately realizing the goal of universal access to high-quality education and lifelong learning.

Regional Wheat, Millet, Sorghum Transformation and Trade Initiative: A Proposal for IsDB Member Countries to Achieve the SDGs



Ougfaly BADJI
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The world, particularly IsDB Member countries, urgently needs a transformation of the global food system, to achieve healthier diets for all and a drastic reduction in agriculture's environmental impact. The major cereal grains such as wheat, millet, maize, and rice must play a central role in this new revolution for the benefit of the populations. Pioneering research on the three most important cereal grains — maize, rice, and wheat, millet, sorghum— has contributed enormously to global food security over the last half century by boosting the yields of these crops and by making them more resilient in the face of drought, flood, pests and diseases. But with more than 800 million people still living in chronic hunger and many more suffering from inadequate diets, much remains to be done.

The challenges in IsDB member countries are complicated by climate change, rampant degradation of the ecosystems that sustain food production, rapid population growth and unequal access to resources that are vital for improved livelihoods. Traditional farming practices release significant greenhouse gases, especially when involving deforestation or wetland conversion. By transitioning to sustainable crop production, including the use of cover crops, crop rotation, and



organic farming, we can reduce carbon emissions and foster carbon sequestration, which will contribute to advancing SDG 13 (Climate Action). Additionally, introducing drought-resistant crop varieties and rainwater harvesting techniques can help communities become more resilient to climate-related shocks, echoing SDG 11's emphasis on sustainable cities and communities. Socio-economic aspects of crop production also tie back to the SDGs. The global agricultural sector employs over a billion people, many of whom live in IsDB member countries. Enhancing crop yields and improving post-harvest techniques can boost farmers' incomes, helping alleviate poverty (SDG 1) and stimulating economic growth (SDG 8). However, for crop production to effectively contribute to the realization of the SDGs, it's important that governments, industry stakeholders, and local communities collaborate. Initiatives such as Regional Commodity Value Chain development, should emphasize research into innovative agricultural practices, infrastructure development, farmer training, and market access. This multi-pronged approach not only secures the future of crop production and productivity but also

ensures that its growth remains hand-in-hand with the broader vision of SDGs.

The crucial link between agricultural growth and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations Development Programme is established through efficient development of the cereal production and productivity systems. Agriculture systems in IsDB member countries need to adopt sustainable cropping solutions to deal with existing issues of food insecurity and resource depletion. Wheat, Millet and Sorghum offer one such solution as they have nutritional, environmental and economic superiority over the most common staple crops. Global warming is expected to present a major challenge to food security with wheat being the most vulnerable crop, followed by maize and rice whereas millet is expected to be more resilient towards climate change. Member countries in Africa are expected to be adversely affected by soil degradation, water scarcity and climate change. Hence adoption of Wheat, sorghum and millet-based cropping systems needs to be promoted by governments.



From Access to Excellence: IsDB's ICT Initiative Enhances Islamic University in Uganda's Learning Environment



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"All the SDGs come down to education." - Malala Yousafzai, the renowned Pakistani education activist and 2014 Nobel Peace Prize laureate at just 17 years old, aptly emphasized this profound truth. In 2013, the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) approved financing of US \$13.94 million to enhance the learning environment at the Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU). This marked the second phase of the project, building upon the first phase implemented from 2005 to 2009.

The "Enhancing the Learning Environment at the Islamic University in Uganda" project consisted of three main components: construction and equipping of the Faculty of Engineering, construction of a 500-capacity male hostel, and enhancement of the ICT infrastructure.

The ICT component for enhanced digitalization

The Islamic University in Uganda's (IUIU) ICT component aimed to enhance its ICT infrastructure, fast-track digitalization, and ensure seamless educational, operational, and business processes. This project aligns with IUIU's Strategic Plan 2021-2026 and contributes to SDG 9, enhancing access to ICT and digitalization.

The investment upgraded ICT infrastructure across all IUIU campuses, including the Main Campus located in the Eastern region of Uganda, Arua Campus in the North, Kampala City Campus, and Kabojja Female Campus in the outskirts of Kampala City. At the Main Campus, a state-of-the-art Data Center was established to support the University's bespoke Academica Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System. This Core data infrastructure for Digital Learning benefits all students and faculty across campuses.

Seamless internet access is now available through distributed access points in all campuses, ensuring uninterrupted learning. Lecture rooms are equipped with audio and video conferencing equipment

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The IsDB Phase II project has allowed IUIU to provide world-class quality education and created a dynamic and innovative learning environment

Prof. Ismael Gyagenda, Rector, Islamic University in Uganda

for eLearning, blended learning, and online meetings, leveraging the advanced Data Center. Additionally, a cost-free intercom telephony system facilitates internal communication within IUIU.

Notably, the project introduced a state-of-the-art multimedia studio for graphics and video productions, revolutionizing the learning experience in creative arts. This transformative project has positioned IUIU as a leader in digital education, fostering an innovative and inclusive learning environment.

Reaping the investment benefits

The University's strategic investment has yielded remarkable results, transforming the educational experience for over 10,000 students and 1,000 staff and faculty members. The customized Academica Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system has revolutionized administrative operations, eliminating paper-based reporting, streamlining business processes, and enhancing data storage. This has significantly improved student support services, fostering a more efficient and responsive academic environment.

Beyond ERP, the investment has also upgraded key institutional systems, including human resources, accounting and finance, procurement, library, audit, medical/health center, university website, mobile apps, and inventory management. Furthermore, high-speed internet access across campuses has reduced students' internet costs by over 80%, benefiting over 10,000 students. Distance learning students have particularly thrived, thanks to the enhanced ICT infrastructure, which has elevated the Open Distance and eLearning (ODeL) platform. As a result, the University has seen a remarkable 50% surge in online distance learning enrollment.

Building on its success, IUIU has also extended support to Lakeside University College Ghana (LUCG), sharing its expertise through the South-South and Triangular Cooperation framework. IsDB has provided a US \$54,000 grant to facilitate this technology transfer, boosting LUCG's efficiency, productivity, and business processes.

Looking ahead, IUIU's future is bright, with this project also supporting the construction and equipping of a state-of-the-art Faculty of Engineering. Upon completion, the IsDB-supported ICT investment will be integrated into the new faculty, ensuring a cutting-edge learning environment that prepares professionals for the challenges of tomorrow.



If You Have Only a Dollar, How Many Cents Would You Dedicate to Climate Finance?!



Rami Ahmed
Senior Advisor to the President, IsDB

Apologies if the title of this piece sounds a bit loaded, and maybe irritating to some, but the fundamental premise is valid if you are decision maker in a developing country striving to finance existential development needs with meager available local resources and limited borrowing capacity from MDBs and international capital markets.

Climate change issues are real and cannot be dismissed, but it is a global crisis, and the real discussion should be focused on how to tackle this crisis and finance climate action. Of course, the financial and technical capabilities of the 'North,' and not to mention the moral responsibility given

the history of who caused the problem in the first place, form a good foundation for such a discussion.

It is encouraging to see more and more developing countries (e.g. Morocco, Egypt, UAE, Azerbaijan, etc.) host COPs recently, ensuring participation and ownership from the 'South' in these global events. However, this should not take the attention from the fact that the 'North' is still largely responsible for putting the bill. It is sometimes confusing to see strong positive declarations during COPs and G20 Summits, and then see governments in the North sending conflicting signals (e.g. getting, conveniently, in and out of the Paris Agreement) and not putting their money where their mouth is.

MDBs are being pressured to showcase their commitment to climate finance. They are indeed aligning their strategies and activities with this agenda. Actually, they are bragging about the percentage of climate finance of their total financing portfolios. For example, the World Bank announced it was reaching 45% in their last annual meeting, and IsDB has surpassed the 35% target long before the target year of 2025. While these efforts are commendable, one hopes that these achievements are not being

celebrated at the expense of other basic development needs and priorities, especially in least developing countries.

Back to the question facing policy makers in developing countries, it is crucial that MDBs consider the basic development needs and support the local decision makers in channeling the available local resources and the least expensive funding in line with the national development priorities, including poverty, health, food security, education, job creation, and affordable energy. Although interrelated, addressing the batch of the SDGs related to basic development needs (e.g. SDGs 1 to 8) is a priority for many developing countries over addressing the SDGs related to climate and the environment.

As for financing climate action, it would be more reasonable, and ethically more responsible and justifiable, to work innovatively towards mobilizing resources from rich governments and big international corporations. With the profits made over many decades, exploiting the resources of developing countries, many of the international corporations could, and honestly should, contribute significantly to climate finance. I thought this was not much to ask for!

IsDB Group SDGs Community of Practice (CoP) in Action: Brown Bag Session on SDGs

As part of the IsDB Group SDGs CoP strategic plan to enhance knowledge sharing and advocacy for SDGs practices, the CoP actively engages in sessions that highlight important developments and promote SDGs as a priority within the IsDB group's agenda.

On October 30, 2024, the CoP, led by Mr. Amir Hamza Syed, Associate Manager of Global Advocacy, in collaboration with the Resilience and Climate Action (RCA) Department, conducted a Brown Bag session. This pivotal session focused on IsDB's recent accreditation to the Green Climate Fund (GCF), a significant achievement reached during the GCF's 39th Board Meeting in Songdo, Incheon, South Korea, on July 16, 2024.

The session opened virtually with remarks from Mr. Salah Jelassi, Director of the Partnerships Global Advocacy and Resources Mobilization Department. He emphasized the significance of the GCF accreditation in advancing the Bank's development agenda and enhancing support for IsDB member countries.

Dr. Issa Faye, Director General of the Global Practice and Partnerships Directorate, delivered the keynote address. He highlighted the benefits of the GCF accreditation, discussing its importance for resource mobilization, concessional funding, and achieving climate finance goals. Dr. Faye elaborated on how the accreditation could help escalate funding for projects tackling climate change, thereby amplifying the developmental impact on member countries.

Detailed insights into the accreditation process were provided by Mr. Syed Hussain Quadri, Director of the RCA Department, and Mr. Habib Abubakar, Senior Climate Change Specialist. They acknowledged the support from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other member countries, as well as various IsDB departments throughout the accreditation journey."

