



SDG 16 CONFERENCE

Peace, Justice & Inclusive Societies



SDG 16 AS A COMPASS FOR NAVIGATING INTERSECTING CRISES

SDG 16 CONFERENCE REPORT 2023

Rome, Italy
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Co-organized by:



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



IDLO

International Development
Law Organization



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation

Co-organized by:



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



International Development
Law Organization



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
and International Cooperation

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The Conference



The 2023 SDG 16 Conference addressed the role of SDG 16 in navigating the intersecting crises the world is facing. The Conference reviewed the progress and challenges related to SDG 16, focusing on conflict, and shrinking trust in public institutions and SDG 16’s catalytic role in responding to food systems and climate change crises.

Hosted in Rome by the Government of Italy from 30 May to 1 June and co-organized with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), the SDG 16 Conference brought together a range of panellists and participants, including ministers and senior government officials, heads of United Nations system entities and other multilateral organizations, and representatives of civil society, youth, academia, the judiciary, and media to address the following themes:

- Promoting the United Nations’ New Agenda for Peace;
- Restoring trust in public institutions; and
- Promoting participatory decision making to accelerate transformative action: food systems and climate change.

The Conference was structured around plenary sessions, parallel sessions and sessions dedicated to capacity building over the three days.

Setting the scene for the Conference deliberations, the opening session featured special addresses by the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and the President of ECOSOC, as well as remarks by the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, the Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs of UNDESA, and the Director-General of IDLO.



Reflecting its timing at the mid-point in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Conference featured two plenary sessions on “Stocktaking of progress on SDG 16”, and “Looking forward to the SDG Summit and beyond”. Each of the three main themes of the Conference were addressed in a plenary session and three parallel sessions that explored specific sub-themes in depth. The Conference also featured a special session on “SDG 16 and the challenges of misinformation and disinformation”.

Capacity building activities included knowledge pitches and knowledge exchange sessions, where various organizations highlighted activities, interventions and tools that are supporting the implementation of SDG 16.

The Conference also included a dedicated civil society track, which resulted in the updated [2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+](#).

Conference deliberations aim to inform the 2023 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in July and the SDG Summit in September 2023, as well as other intergovernmental processes.

The Conference featured more than 100 speakers and gathered more than 550 participants. About 220 participants attended in person, and more than 400 participants followed the Conference online. Participants came from 130 countries, covering all regions.

Key links

- [Conference website](#)
- [Conference agenda](#)
- [Conference pictures](#)

Key Messages

Across the three themes addressed by the Conference, speakers and participants highlighted the following insights on SDG 16's catalytic effect in addressing some of the most significant crises facing the world today and achieving sustainable development.

- **SDG 16 is both a standalone goal and an enabler and accelerator of all other SDGs.** It is at the heart of what makes the 2030 Agenda transformative, and it can play a vital role in addressing multiple global crises, including conflict, lack of trust in public institutions and climate change. The causes and effects of these crises – and the actions needed to address them – are interconnected and deeply rooted in issues of human rights, justice, equity, inclusion, accountability, and good governance.
- **SDG 16 can help build a future where violent conflicts are prevented rather than managed, and where resources are invested in development rather than destruction.** Participants called for proactive investment in addressing root causes of conflicts such as inequality, injustice and exclusion; ensuring the participation of women, young people, Indigenous Peoples and other excluded groups in peace processes; and promoting multistakeholder partnerships for conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation at local, national, regional and international levels.
- **Restoring trust in public institutions is a prerequisite for renewed social contracts that underpin inclusive and sustainable societies.** Participants emphasized the need to enhance the capacity of public institutions to deliver responsive and inclusive services to all. This requires investing in the public sector, building the capacity and skills of public servants and empowering citizens and communities to exercise their rights.
- **Transparency and accountability are of the utmost importance to ensure that public resources are effectively spent.** Participants noted that fiscal transparency has proven positive effects on budget credibility, the capacity of governments to access finance, the effectiveness of public services and their responsiveness to people's needs.
- **Harnessing the “missing funds” stemming from illicit financial flows will be critical for implementing the SDGs.** Participants shared that combatting corruption at national and international levels, including by building on existing instruments such as the UN Convention Against Corruption, is critical to ensure that public resources are effectively spent, including in the context of additional financing for sustainable development.
- **Strengthening the rule of law and access to justice can catalyse progress across the 2030 Agenda.** Participants considered that this will require transitioning to people-centred approaches that emphasize better use of data and evidence, innovating service delivery, and utilizing diverse pathways to justice with a focus on improved outcomes for the end users. Empowering people and communities to claim their rights and participate in

policymaking can generate transformative actions such as strengthening land governance, increasing food security, preventing environmental degradation, and climate justice. Fair and effective policies and mechanisms are needed to balance the interests of current and future generations.

- **Women's equality and empowerment is both a human right and a prerequisite for peace and sustainable development.** Participants underlined that action at many levels is urgently needed to repeal gender-discriminatory laws; to increase women's representation in all institutions, from company boards to parliaments and judiciaries, and from higher education to public institutions; to advance women's economic participation and inclusion, through special measures, economic empowerment, access to finance, and social protection; and to devote the planning and resources required to stop violence against women.
- **The scale, complexity and interconnectedness of challenges necessitates multidimensional, "whole-of-government" solutions.** This requires better use of official and unofficial sources of data and evidence, strengthened future planning and increased policy coordination and coherence across all 17 SDGs. Participants observed that national efforts are needed to better monitor all relevant aspects of SDG 16, from budget credibility to the inclusiveness of public institutions to corruption to access to justice. Efforts to develop futures thinking work best if they are embedded in governments' regular ways of working, as this helps mobilize political will and increase ownership. While led by the center of government, planning should empower all parts of government departments to create ownership and buy-in.
- **The inclusive use of digital technologies can drive transformative change.** Participants highlighted that priority must be given to developing digital literacy, building critical digital infrastructure and people-centered digital services, while urgently addressing risks to privacy, freedom of expression, discrimination and human rights. These issues should be considered by the intergovernmental process to elaborate a Global Digital Compact.
- **Changing the trajectory of SDG 16, and ultimately the 2030 Agenda, requires urgent collective action on a global level.** Participants concluded that multistakeholder partnerships among governments, multilateral institutions, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders are needed to generate political will and financial support and convert it into concrete actions. The inclusion, contribution and leadership of women and young people and right holders such as Indigenous Peoples are critical and must be supported through dedicated measures. By engaging with diverse stakeholders as partners, governments can foster "whole-of-society" approaches that prioritize shared goals, collective problem-solving, and mutual accountability and help lay the foundations for a more peaceful, just and sustainable future.

Quotes from speakers

“Halfway to the SDG deadline of 2030, the challenges we face are immense. [...] Solving these crises from securing peace to addressing debt issues, to combatting climate change and tackling food insecurity and inequalities will require unwavering commitment and solidarity, and a revitalized multilateral system.”

H.E. Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations

“SDG 16 is an essential catalyst of all the other SDGs. It is a point of reference that allows States, the United Nations, societies to achieve and pursue all the other goals.”

H.E. Mr. Edmondo Cirielli, Vice Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy

“The 2023 SDG Summit must be an inflection point. It must rally countries and stakeholders to take decisive action to accelerate progress towards the vision of the 2030 Agenda.”

H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations in New York, President of ECOSOC

“As we have passed the midpoint to the journey to 2030, it is high time we tackled these challenges frontally and with boldness. This requires addressing all the dimensions of SDG 16, including reducing violence in all its forms, ensuring the rule of law and access to justice, combatting corruption, enhancing the transparency and accountability of institutions at all levels, and increasing the capacity of institutions to be inclusive and responsive.”

Ms. Maria-Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UNDESA

“We have seen a sustained global decline in the rule of law, as justice systems come under tremendous pressure from insecurity, attacks on the independence of the judiciary, and corruption. There is a very real risk that, in the words of the Secretary General, the SDGs are turning into a ‘mirage of what might have been’. SDG 16 is critical in ensuring that this does not come to pass.”

Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, IDLO

Stocktaking of progress on SDG 16

SDG 16 data and monitoring

A robust follow up of progress on Sustainable Development Goal 16 is critical, given its importance for all the other Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. There are challenges to SDG 16 monitoring. For instance, the indicators we have often do not cover the underlying issues in a comprehensive way. Some issues such as corruption are multifaceted and cannot be captured by one or two indicators. In addition, there are frequently gaps between what we can get from the existing global indicators, and the policies that would be needed to influence them. Often, the underlying issues are complex, and there is only so much that quantitative indicators can tell us. Qualitative data is critically important to provide lessons on what has been tried, what has worked and what has not.

There is a clear need to strengthen national monitoring systems for SDG 16. According to the latest SDG progress report issued by the Secretary-General of United Nations, Goal 16 is the second to last amongst 17 goals in terms of proportion of countries with availability of data. International comparability remains very low. Many countries lack necessary resources and capacities, and there remain significant gaps in SDG indicator geographic coverage, timeliness, and disaggregation. Relevant data sources are found in a wide array of institutions from the line ministers in charge of security, defense, public administration, and migration to the justice sector to oversight institutions to national statistical offices. This poses a challenge in terms of collaboration and coordination.

In relation to global indicators for SDG 16, participants in the Conference pointed the need both for more participation of countries in global data collection efforts undertaken by custodian agencies, and for official data to include monitoring done by civil society organizations in an official way where relevant.

Non-official data is critically important to assess progress on SDG 16. Several international organizations and networks produce measurement tools and publish progress reports that inform national and global stocktaking. For instance, International IDEA's Global State of Democracy Initiative produces data on the quality of democracy. Alongside the initiative's global report and indicator platform, it provides monthly country snapshots through its Democracy Tracker. The World Justice Project's Rule of Law Index now covers 140 countries, with a consistent methodology since 2015.

There likely is space for increased attention given to governance issues in voluntary national reviews (VNRs). While over the years many countries have highlighted institutional aspects in their VNRs, the focus has tended to be on institutional mechanisms to steer and implement the SDGs, and broader governance issues have not been examined in a systematic way.



SDG 16 trends

The recent special edition of the [United Nations Secretary-General's report on Progress towards the SDGs](#) presents global trends from the limited set of global indicators that are available. The trends are not encouraging. Among the indicators that are available, about half point to progress, although insufficient, and the other half to stagnation or regression.

Trust is decreasing. According to the Edelman Trust Barometer, 66% of the world's population think that the government lies to them. In the face of uncertainty, danger and crises, people are less willing to embrace change.

According to International IDEA, there has been backsliding of democratic institutions and processes. Compared to 15-20 years ago, public sentiment is more favorable to autocratic leadership. Civic space is being reduced. There are widening inequalities, for example in the representation of women in national and subnational assemblies.

The report card coming from the Rule of Law Index does not provide a positive outlook. In 2022, for the fifth year in a row, majority of countries

declined in measures of the rule of law. The steepest declines were in areas of their metrics related to targets under SDG 16 and that have major implications for realizing other SDGs. Since 2015, 68% of countries have declined on measures of constraints on government powers; 62% of countries have declined on measures to fight corruption; and 76% of countries have declined on fundamental rights. The pandemic presented a major shock for many types of institutions, and especially to the functioning of justice systems.

There are, however, some areas of promise. While globally, corruption appears to be on the rise, there is progress on index measures that focus on the judiciary, with 53% of countries registering progress in this area since 2015. This data suggests that efforts targeted at judicial accountability, transparency, and technology can pay off. More justice policy makers across the globe are embracing a new way of thinking in delivering justice services.

Recommendations

The session provided several recommendations, including the following:

- Insuring ourselves as humanity against danger of letting people fall behind by investing in basic services and social safety nets.
- Continue to strengthen national accountability for SDG implementation, for example, by producing independent evaluations of SDG implementation as well as strengthening engagement with parliaments and with civil society.
- Provide more opportunities for marginalized groups to exert influence. There is evidence that transparent and inclusive participation can help to improve the quality of public services and fiscal accountability.
- Intensify the focus on understanding people's justice needs, including through data collection.
- Increased focus on preventive strategies to reduce the prevalence of justice problems, and investment and innovation in delivering justice services, including finding ways of leveraging technology that leave no one behind.
- Invest significantly in government systems, in a way that allows them to be inclusive, accountable, and effective.
- Use technological change and innovation such as leveraging artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies for everyone's benefit.
- Illustrate the interlinkages of SDG 16 with other SDG areas to raise awareness of the importance of SDG 16 across government departments and be able to better "sell" SDG 16 to external audiences.

Quotes from speakers

"It is time to launch an internet campaign – not just about data, but choices – on how evidence can guide policymakers' choices."

Mr. Massimo Tommasoli, Director, IDEA Global Programme, International IDEA

"Justice is about people, not institutions. The impact on peoples and communities, justice problems, is why institutions of the judiciary exist. Expanding the avenues through which people can access justice is why judiciaries exist..."

Hon. Lady Justice Philomena Mbete Mwilu, Deputy Chief Justice of Kenya

"Member states must seize this momentum and redouble their efforts to implement the SDG 16 as the key enabler of peace, security, and sustainable development."

Ms. Ghada Fathi Waly, Executive Director, UNODC

"There is scope for addressing SDG 16 more in VNRs. While over the years many countries have highlighted institutional aspects in their VNRs, the focus has tended to be on institutional mechanisms to steer and implement the SDGs, and broader governance issues have not been examined in a systematic way."

H.E. Ms. Lachezara Stoeva, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations in New York, President of ECOSOC

"We need to ensure ourselves as humanity against the danger of letting too many people fall behind... That is also a governance issue, and it is worth reinvigorating the idea that it is part of the coherence of our societies, our ability to deliver basic services to our people."

Mr. Arvinn Gadgil, Director, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre

"We need continued and intensifying focus on understanding people's justice needs...it means increased focus on preventive strategies to reduce the prevalence of justice problems in the first place, and investment in innovation in the delivery of justice services, including finding ways of leveraging technology that leave no one behind."

Ms. Elizabeth Andersen, Executive Director, World Justice Project

Theme 1: Promoting the United Nations' New Agenda for Peace

Violent conflicts, dramatically on the increase since 2010, have become one of the most significant challenges to sustainable development, with the war in Ukraine and the violence in Sudan and their regional and global ramifications providing yet more stark reminders. The current multilateral architecture, with the UN Security Council at the centre of maintaining international peace and security, has struggled to reverse this upward trend.

Against this backdrop, the UN's New Agenda for Peace seeks to "[reshape responses to all forms of violence](#)" and boost investments in prevention and peacebuilding by addressing the root causes and drivers of violent conflicts, many of which are linked to injustice, inequalities and exclusion – many of them in areas that the SDGs are intended to correct. The New Agenda for Peace is, therefore, a critical opportunity to develop a roadmap that centres the 2030 Agenda as a tool that can guide and inform initiatives at the sub-national, national, regional and international levels that can prevent, stem or reverse the tide of violence in all its forms with national governments and other national actors in the driver's seat, providing political leadership and financial support, supplemented by international financial support where necessary.

Ensure inclusive participation

The rule of law and SDG 16 with its emphasis on effective, accountable and inclusive institutions are key. Inclusivity and a whole-of-society approach lie at the heart of effective conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Women and girls, who are often most impacted by violent conflict, are not simply victims, but have proven time and again to be agents of change and fundamental to peace and stability. There is, in this respect, a direct correlation between women's involvement in peace processes and sustainable peace. Harnessing the power of women through their meaningful participation must be institutionalized through involvement in decision-making at all levels.

The same is true of young people, whose numbers far outweigh those that represent them in governance mechanisms, including parliamentary structures. Indeed, no decision should be taken about them without their active involvement. Young women and men should be empowered to participate in political processes and all activities related to peace and stability, as well as education and economic empowerment. Inclusion of youth is also critical in institutions of governance, such as parliaments, which should be far more representative, with only 2.6% of parliamentarians under the age of 30, despite being over 50% of the world's population.

Peace and justice are mutually reinforcing

Peace and justice are mutually reinforcing. It is imperative therefore that past grievances are addressed, and redress is provided for wrongs to prevent the risk of violence recurrence. Accountable and effective justice mechanisms must be at the heart of that endeavour and people must be at the centre of those mechanisms, which must be responsive to people's needs and have their buy-in. Customary and informal justice processes should be explored as an effective justice tool that can complement formal justice mechanisms, or as an alternative where formal justice systems are unable to deliver or lack trust among affected communities.

Quotes from speakers

"Conflicts hold back the 2030 Agenda. They erase decades of sustainable development investments and gains. Research on SDG 16 stressed that more political and financial investment is needed for prevention and sustaining peace."

Ms. Rosemary A. DiCarlo, Under Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations

"The Government has prioritized a holistic and complementary approach by investing in development, security, and justice. The budget available to the Ministry of Justice has been increased by 30% to support the programme on promoting access to justice for vulnerable and the most remote populations. In the context of this programme, we are supported by our partners, IDLO in particular."

H.E. Mr. Ikta Abdoulaye Mohamed, Minister of Justice, Niger

"We never had a woman SG, out of 78 General Assembly presidents, only four were women, and less than 8% of personnel in our UN mission are women."

H.E. Mr. Ivan Šimonović, Permanent Representative of Croatia to the United Nations in New York

"Parliaments should be representative of the people and not the monopoly of political parties."

Mr. Martin Chungong, Secretary-General, Inter-Parliamentary Union

"Strong women build nations, but strong men destroy nations."

Mr. Helder Da Costa, General Secretary, g7+ Secretariat

"People have to be at the center of justice institutions."

Ms. Fatiha Serour, Co-founder, Justice Impact Lab; Chair, Africa Group for Justice & Accountability; Member, Global Women Leaders

"Know the law, use the law, shape the law."

Mr. Vivek Maru, Founder and CEO, Namati

Parallel session: Effective responses and managing risks

In addressing crises and managing risks, the prevention of violent conflicts is increasingly identified as a key area that requires prioritization and better funding. In the United Nations Secretary-General's upcoming New Agenda for Peace, conflict prevention is a universal goal for all states. In West Africa, ECOWAS' early warning and early action system (ECOWARN) is an excellent example where regional and national actors have assigned a high priority to prevention and implemented a system that works effectively with communities and civil society to collect data on a number of indicators that are analysed to identify risks and appropriate actions to prevent conflict. This system is also able to include more recent risks related to climate change and artificial intelligence into account.

Although, there are solid examples of ways in which early warning and early action are working effectively, to truly make conflict prevention a universal norm, there are areas where urgent measures are needed. Effective data collection and analysis are key for two reasons. Firstly, information is the basis of early warning and data can ensure that analysis is based on realities on the ground. Secondly, data is also important in

communicating the importance of prioritizing conflict prevention to relevant actors, including donors. Funding has been identified as a key gap in early warning and action, which need sustained support politically and financially from countries and the United Nations.

Effective conflict prevention requires a whole-of-society approach that includes marginalized groups. This means the meaningful participation of women and girls, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other excluded groups, as well as social protections for these groups, as they are often the most acutely affected in times of crisis. Artificial intelligence and emerging technologies hold potential to create spaces for marginalized groups, but carry risks that need to be identified and mitigated.

Parallel session: Using the rule of law and human rights to prevent violent conflict

The root causes of violent conflict often have their origins in actual or perceived grievances related to injustices, discrimination and exclusion – be they political, security-related, social or economic in nature. The absence of or inability to access justice and redress injustices are important factors in this. Unmet justice needs can erode the social contract and maintain a cycle of injustice

Theme 1: Promoting the United Nations' New Agenda for Peace



that aggravates the risk of violence. It can also create a trust deficit in governance structures, which includes formal justice systems that are often inaccessible.

A plethora of solutions exist in the areas of rule of law and human rights that can facilitate the effective prevention of violent conflict. This includes a people-centred approach to justice programming that is data-driven, innovative and solution-focused as a means to close the justice gap; strengthening access to justice by opening up the justice market to other justice actors or services that are more accessible, such as community paralegals or community courts that can take the strain off of formal justice mechanisms; investment in legal education and empowerment so that those who have legal challenges know how to use justice systems and resolve their justice problems, rather than resort to other means in which to resolve

grievances; developing capacities and investing in women and youth as the drivers and shapers of the law and conflict prevention; and using the Universal Periodic Review Process to strengthen national protection systems, which, if stronger and adjusted to human rights norms, can help in building resilient societies that can protect marginalized or vulnerable communities.

Parallel session: Advancing the women, peace, and security agenda

At a time of intersecting crises, advancing women's engagement in peace, security and development is more critical than ever. Although there has been progress, the women, peace and security agenda (WPS) remains unfulfilled. As we move towards a New Agenda for Peace and 25 years of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, we need comprehensive, ambitious, coordinated actions to address many of the challenges women and girls continue to face in conflict and post-conflict contexts. These include: eradicating patriarchal and harmful gender norms that continue to persist and subject women and girls to discrimination and violence, especially those who take on leadership roles; advancing women's representation and participation in peace and security, and applying multiple and parallel tracks for their inclusion at local, national and international levels; supporting women's empowerment, in ways that underscores the critical interlinkages between the WPS and the development agenda, including for example by supporting internally displaced women with economic and livelihood programmes as well as increased investments for women ex-combatants to improve their income; strategically engaging men to address notions of masculinities and advance the WPS agenda, especially those in positions of authority and who champion change; and ensuring the meaningful participation of the youth, especially young women, in WPS processes.

Where a WPS agenda is already in place, ensuring its full implementation remains a challenge. National action plans on WPS are a key component to the WPS agenda and they need to be financed, evidence-based, inclusive, and operational. Advancing a WPS agenda also entails addressing gender-based violence, in particular conflict-related sexual violence. Despite rhetoric, there is limited understanding given to intersectional identities when developing, implementing and monitoring the WPS agenda, including in relation to, among others, persons with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ persons. Intersectional approaches need to be integrated better and reflect lived realities of women and girls in their diversity. Other recommendations include strengthening partnerships, including between governments and CSOs as well as building consistent and complementary alliance between women's CSOs and women in power, such as women in parliament; mobilizing communities to support the WPS agenda, enabling local ownership, and enhancing the role of women's organizations and CSOs, especially local, rural, minority and indigenous women's groups.

Theme 2: Restoring trust in public institutions

Rebuilding public trust

Robust actions are required to ensure the rebuild public trust. Lack of trust is not limited to public services and governments, but impacts the whole of society, including the private sector, civil society and global institutions.

A global compact for women may be required to achieve gender equality. Building blocks to ensure gender equality include: recognizing women rights and implementing related measures; ensuring the representation of women in high level positions in public institutions and the private sector through special measures and quotas, among other approaches; guaranteeing equal pay and job protection; enacting emergency response plans to address violence against women and girls; and taking into account intergenerational aspects to that no one is left behind.

Building the capacity of public institutions

Anticipatory capacity in government needs to be built up. In Singapore, the Center for Strategic Future in government of Singapore aims to build trust between the government and people as part of long-term relationship. Experience from the center highlights concrete lessons. As we use tools like scenario planning, there is a need to balance the present and the future and take the interests of future generations into account. It is important to link and embed new ideas within the actual process and bureaucracy of government, for example by linking the work



on budget done by the Ministry of finance with scenarios. Individual departments can be asked to include programmes that address the big trends unveiled by the government's futures team. While good planning work should be led by the center of government to secure credibility and political backing, it should empower the whole system, from government departments to actors outside government, to create ownership and buy-in. It is also critical to build skills internally in government, lest the private sector (consulting firms) takes over the agenda.

The rule of law and public trust

Upholding the rule of law is one of ingredients in rebuilding public trust. The rule of law requires independent judges and effective justice systems; nobody should be outside, below or above the law. However, in many countries judges are facing pushbacks and attacks on their independence. Lawyers face harassment, surveillance, and criminalization. The effectiveness of institutions is compromised due to lack of trust in the judicial system. Justice needs often far exceed the capacity of justice systems. Lawyers are often seen as allies of the main powers and not accessible to people. By contrast, “barefoot lawyers”, grassroot workers, paralegals and community defenders, are more favorably perceived as being able to “squeeze justice out of a broken system”. They are not intended to replace lawyers, but rather to support citizens on the ground, rebuild trust between communities and public institutions serving them and ensure inclusion of marginalized communities by making them aware of their rights – which in turn can make institutions more responsive to their needs. It is important to legally recognize these professionals, decriminalize their work, and see them as an amplifying force to move justice forward.

Digitalization

The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), data analytics and online platforms can enhance service delivery and citizen engagement and can also enhance the transparency of decision-making processes. For instance, the Republic of Korea’s new government innovation strategy seeks to mobilize AI and data to create a unified government platform, centered around people, to facilitate citizen and business access to public services. The “government-for-the-people” initiative aims to enhance the everyday life of citizens through single access to government

services (e.g., tax services), streamlined processes, personalized services, including a benefit notification system, implemented through artificial intelligence and tailored to specific needs. The “Citizen dream project” uses AI and data to tackle citizen issues, including youth. The goal is to transform the relationship between the government, citizens, and the private sector.

Budget and fiscal transparency

Recent research shows that trust in public institutions can be enhanced by fiscal transparency, which can also lead to higher tax compliance and better access to financial markets, both of which should strongly appeal to governments. Building the capacity of ministries of finance to ensure that long-term finance is available is critical. Fiscal transparency can be used as a tool that allows feedback on the performance of public finances. This improves confidence in fiscal policy and institutions. User-centered transparency goes beyond the mere publication of reports. It involves actively engaging with and considering the needs of information users. When information publication is a result of dialogue that acknowledges institutional constraints and addresses users’ needs, the impact of these efforts becomes significantly more pronounced. Collaboration then becomes a catalyst, transforming the behavior of both governmental and social actors and reshaping their relationship. Fiscal transparency transcends into fiscal openness, marking the initiation of a positive feedback loop between transparency and accountability.

Anti-corruption and illicit financial flows

Fighting corruption is essential to restore trust. In many countries, a majority of citizens believe that government officials are prone to corruption. There are well-established global instruments to

Theme 2: Restoring trust in public institutions

fight corruption, for instance the UN Convention Against Corruption, which is now almost universally ratified and translated into national legislation. However, countries need to be held accountable about implementing the Convention. Fighting corruption is a complex and long-term process, which requires the involvement of all stakeholders. Examples mentioned included the case of Italy, which has a comprehensive institutional anti-corruption system. Efforts are made to increase collaboration between the public and private sectors, for instance in relation to ethical business practices, and to raise awareness and involve civil society in

drafting anti-corruption strategies. There is need for international cooperation to share best practices and technologies. The positive role of non-government stakeholders in preventing corruption in times of emergency is recognized.

Illicit financial flows may be one of the biggest impediment to the achievement of the SDGs. Trillions are lost each year due to illicit flows. Reducing illicit financial flows can open resources which could be used for SDG implementation. The international community missed on the “peace dividend” in the 1990s; it should not miss on the “integrity dividend”.

Quotes from speakers

“Restoring trust in public institutions should be at the heart of our societies; governments need to protect national security, uphold rule of law, protect human rights; deliver high-quality public services; and strengthen governance to uphold certain standards and provide opportunities for their citizens.”

Ms. Maria Francesca Spatolisano, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UNDESA

“There is evidence that transparency and inclusive participation can help ensure that governments are able to use public resources more strategically, thereby helping to improve both the quality of public resources and fiscal sustainability, all of which has a positive impact on the level of trust in the use of public resources.”

Mr. Juan Pablo Guerrero, Network Director, Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency

“[We need to] establish a global compact for women: recognize women rights and implement related measures; ensure representation of women in higher level positions in public institutions and the private sector; guarantee equal pay and job protection; enact emergency response plans to address violence against women and girls, paired with political leadership and sufficient financing.”

Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Chair, United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Parallel session: Strengthening accountability and transparency and tackling corruption

Corruption remains a serious concern in many countries. Even though the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) has been in force since 2005, its implementation and enforcement remain challenging. In some cases, the regulation is not fit for purpose or has loopholes. Those involved in corruption often benefit from impunity. Lack of capacity in government is a common issue, and addressing it should be a major focus for the next 7 years to 2030.

Examples presented during the sessions included the case of Nigeria and Aruba. In Nigeria, multiple anti-corruption institutions have been created over the years. However, according to civil society assessments, these institutions have not performed well. In Aruba, the institutional landscape has seen the addition and evolution of tools to promote accountability and integrity in government.

Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches should be applied to anti-corruption. For instance, holistic anti-corruption mechanisms need to deal with asset disclosure, conflict of interests, public procurement and funding of political parties in an integrated manner. The fight against corruption can strongly benefit from participatory approaches, through which central parts of the government or central control bodies such as audit institutions engage with citizens.

Access to information is a tool to promote transparency and accountability and fight corruption. Implementation of access to

information laws is often insufficient, and there is a lack of monitoring at the national level. There is a need to train public officials on how to apply the law. This can be done in collaboration with civil society. There is a need to collect data on how public bodies are managing freedom of information requests, at all levels of public administration.

Digital technology can reshape the way governments design and implement their tax, spending and macro-fiscal policies. Fiscal systems and policies have been profoundly changed by the progress of information and communications technologies. In general, the impact of this for transparency and accountability is positive, with great potential. However, many conditions need to be observed to fully reap the benefits of digital technologies.

The participation of all actors in monitoring SDG 16 is crucial. Proactive disclosure is also important, including open data and proactive publication of information by public bodies. The rise of open data and open government is a positive development, but unless the datasets are connected or data is disclosed in a comparable manner, their value in fighting corruption is limited.

Parallel session: Promoting gender equality, inclusion, and participation

Gender equality, inclusion, and participation present significant challenges. Compounding and cascading crises have amplified the existing inequalities and violence faced by women and girls. Increasing instability, debt distress and budget cuts have a higher impact on women's access to decision-making, participation in public life, education, economic empowerment, land rights and inheritance, and livelihoods.

Theme 2: Restoring trust in public institutions

Addressing the challenges of gender equality, inclusion and participation requires a multi-pronged approach. It is important to acknowledge and address the pervasive harmful gender norms and patriarchal practices which result in economic disempowerment, as reflected in unpaid or underpaid work, political disenfranchisement, and a lack of engagement or political or public life, ineffective and unimplemented laws and policies at all levels, discrimination, and gender-based violence.

Disaggregated data based on gender is necessary to track challenges faced by women. Such data should encompass, for instance, not just barriers to entering political spaces, but also the harassment or violence faced by women, online and offline, for doing so. Disaggregated data also allows looking at the gendered effects of crises and assessing the vulnerability of policy choices. It is needed to inform gender budgeting and to make smarter policy that more effectively responds to the needs of women and girls.

Partnering with local and national civil society organizations will be critical to both sustain gains made. In a climate of backsliding gains for gender equality and women's empowerment, all partners, and in particular, international actors should listen to and support civil society organizations working on gender. Women's inclusion and gender equality should not be viewed as a project, but rather as a long-term goal, requiring long-term commitment.

Investing in women's decision-making and power at the national, provincial, and local levels is necessary. Giving better recognition to the care economy can foster continued political and economic engagement of women. Bolstering effective, responsive and accountable institutions at municipal, provincial and national levels is also critical. Public institutions need substantive

capacity but also different mindsets allowing to break institutional silos, including with women at the forefront of economic and social recovery policy. Gender equality can also benefit from the promotion of innovations, for instance in the area of e-justice, recognizing that there is a need to actively take into account lack of access to information and communication technology.

"We need to equip public institutions to be able to foresee backlashes [on gender equality] and equip themselves with the necessary capacity [to counter them]."

Ms. Ana Landa, Focal point - Gender Equality Seal for Public Institutions, UNDP.

Parallel session: Leveraging digital government to navigate intersecting crises and build resilience

The UN e-Government Survey 2023 noted the continued expansion of e-Government development, although the trend seems to be slowing, on average, between 2020 and 2022. For developing countries, digital development remains challenging. The digital divide is increasing and is becoming the new face of inequality. Digitalization could promote accountability, but only if communities not currently reached are included.

Digitalization is double-edged: it can support transformation but also entrench existing inequalities. While the potential of information technologies is huge, often societies do not fully grasp how to use them and how disruptive they could be. Calls to “accelerate the digital transformation” should be heeded with caution, as they require more than investment. Governments need to better understand the risks as well as the negative and positive impacts of technology, for example, of artificial intelligence (AI). This requires regulation, capacity for foresight, and more than a technical focus –ethical considerations are of paramount importance. Human rights should be at the centre of digital innovation and shape digitalization strategies. The disruptive impacts of AI on democracy should also be of concern.

Successful implementation of digital transformation requires a concrete strategy and coordinated approaches at the national and international levels, to avoid fragmented

outcomes (for instance, in health or tax matters). Data-sharing architectures are needed, while protecting data privacy and security. Design needs to be user-centred.

Digital strategies at the national level faces structural tensions. In many countries, the public digital infrastructure is provided by the private sector, which is not accountable to citizens, raising the issue of how to regulate digital innovation and digital services. Inclusion is a challenge, and governments need to figure how to enable everyone to access the digital world and participate in its governance. Recognizing this, some countries have moved from “digital only” to “digital first”. Another challenge is to develop capacity in government for digital transformation. Core skills in this regard include technical skills, digital leadership, and skills in digital contracting. It is also important for those who promote digital transformation to harness the power of the bureaucracy and embed innovation within public administration. This can be achieved by inclusive approaches in government, which recognize that “no transformation will happen if it is not somebody’s problem”. To counter this challenge, the Government of Singapore identifies a chief digital officer in each ministry.

Theme 2: Restoring trust in public institutions

Quotes from speakers

“The digital divide is increasing (...); it is the new face of inequality.”

Mr. Vincenzo Aquaro, Chief, Digital Government Branch, UNDESA

“We tend to assume that digitalization will somehow transform all our systems. This is possibly true; but digitalization can also end up entrenching current systems.”

Mr. Aaron Maniam, Deputy Secretary (Industry & International), Ministry of Communications & Information, Singapore

“Digital innovation is not necessarily a way to heaven; it could perfectly be a highway to hell.”

Mr. Javier Surasky, Research Director, CEPEI



Theme 3: Promoting participatory decision making to accelerate transformative action: food systems and climate change

The session was opened by a special address by the Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy. Inclusive and participatory decision-making is crucial in the face of global crises, including climate change and food insecurity, that demand “whole-of-society” solutions. Empowering people and communities to claim their rights and participate in policymaking is not only a core principle of good governance; it can help build resilience, safeguard development gains, and catalyse transformative action to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

Effective and inclusive governance for food systems transformation raises issues regarding transparent and accountable decision-making processes, policy coherence across sectors, and the integration of local knowledge and expertise. Strengthening institutional capacities and establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships between communities, governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector are key measures to address these challenges. People-centred governance can enable right-holders and other stakeholders to drive systemic changes in food systems and ensure that diverse voices are heard in decision-making and implementation processes.

Obstacles to equitable and inclusive land governance include unequal land rights and inaccessibility of policies, particularly among marginalized groups. Increased investment is needed in rural areas to prioritize tenure security, promote equitable distribution of land resources, and protect indigenous rights. Amplifying the voices of local communities, especially women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples, in decision-making processes related to land use and resource management is crucial. Strengthening land governance frameworks and implementing inclusive land tenure systems will foster sustainable and equitable food systems. Policies should be designed and communicated in a way that resonates with individuals and ensures they understand the impact on their lives.

Participation and engagement for inclusive climate action highlights the significance of engaging diverse actors in addressing climate change challenges. Applying a climate justice lens is important to accelerate progress. Empowering historically excluded groups, including women, youth, and indigenous communities, through capacity development, access to information, and inclusive platforms for knowledge exchange, scientific innovation and collaboration is crucial. Furthermore, integrating local knowledge

Theme 3: Promoting participatory decision making to accelerate transformative action: food systems and climate change

and practices into climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies is essential. Intersectional approaches, with a strong focus on gender equality, can foster inclusive climate action and ensure that no one is left behind. Anticipatory action should be prioritized to bolster peoples' resilience to future challenges.

Quotes from speakers

"We are confronted with global challenges which are all interconnected (...). We must make sure that we can heighten the awareness of public opinion so that we are all informed of the severity of these crises."

H.E. Mr. Antonio Tajani, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy

"Better resolution of land disputes can help farmers obtain tenure and enhance their livelihoods, leading to increased food security. Empowering historically excluded groups, including women, youth, and indigenous people, can help prevent environmental degradation and catalyze transformative climate action."

Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, IDLO

"We need effective and inclusive people-centred governance. We need to bring together all the relevant stakeholders and adopt innovative participatory decision-making."

Mr. Qu Dongyu, Director-General, FAO

"Sustainable Development Goal 16 recognizes the vital importance of justice and strong institutions as the bedrock for stable and prosperous societies. They are also essential to ensure we build food systems capable of supporting those communities most at risk of hunger and malnutrition."

Ms. Cindy McCain, Executive Director, WFP

"People understand policy, but sometimes they don't understand how it relates to them. Let's break down that language. If it's a people's policy, then it must speak to the people."

Ms. Pato Kelesitse, Founder of Sustain267

Parallel session: Effective and inclusive governance for food systems transformation

Ensuring justice in food systems necessitates a rights-based approach that prioritizes the protection and well-being of communities. Human rights frameworks should provide the benchmark about what can be considered violation of rights across food systems. Confronting discrimination is one of the crucial issues that should be addressed for a substantial move towards more sustainable, inclusive, and equal food systems. Despite existing international instruments, there are prevalent gaps between national legal frameworks and effective regulations for their implementation. In addition, the lack of a global accountability mechanism to track food systems' transformation impedes proper performance monitoring.

The systematic exclusion of those most vulnerable from the discussion around the transformation needed is inhibiting their potential to leverage their knowledge and act as agents of change, instead of being passive beneficiaries of the transformation. Discrimination in food systems is a type of violence that remains among the key drivers of food insecurity and is prevalent among food systems in different forms. Inclusiveness requires that the voices of those most excluded are brought into the discussion on the transformation needed. Digitalization as well as open and fair access to information are critical for the effective participation of vulnerable groups in decision making, and it requires the adoption of accountability mechanisms to enhance data governance around the collection and use of data.

Parallel session: Equitable and inclusive land governance

Land provides water, food, and natural resources that sustain life. Equitable and inclusive access to land requires providing and enforcing adequate legal protection and putting in place effective mechanisms for preventing and resolving land conflicts. It is important to recognize the links between inclusive land governance and water rights. Control of water resources is relevant to cultural integrity, health, and the prevention of conflict.

Land distribution has become more skewed over recent decades. This undermines human rights and significantly threatens peace. The number of people killed over land tenure issues went up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The reporting on land indicators included in the SDGs is weak. Data on violence against defenders of land rights is often not monitored and reported by governments but comes from civil society.

Women have often been denied rights to access, manage, inherit and benefit from land. In many parts of the world, Indigenous Peoples have struggled to have their rights to land and natural resources upheld and enforced. Modern legal systems often keep them outside of decision-making structures and mechanisms that recognize land and natural resources. There must be a stronger recognition of collective rights. There is also a need for legal harmonization across the land, forests and agriculture sectors. Notaries are well positioned to challenge discriminatory practices that contribute to inequality in land tenure and other areas. Their work can help to protect the rights of women, Indigenous Peoples and minorities, including through "soft law approaches" that aim to influence parties before they make a decision.

Theme 3: Promoting participatory decision making to accelerate transformative action: food systems and climate change

Around the world, Indigenous Peoples are being criminalized. Expropriation often takes place within the boundaries of the law, endangering rights rather than protecting them. Free prior and informed consent is crucial, but has frequently not been respected. Many Indigenous Peoples are killed defending their land. There is a need for Indigenous Peoples' voices, and especially Indigenous Women's voices, to be included. The regression in many countries on Indigenous Peoples' rights has negative impacts on SDG 16.

Indigenous Peoples are part of the solutions to today's most critical challenges. There is increasing recognition of Indigenous Peoples as knowledge-holders, including by scientists. The current discussions on climate action and biodiversity represent important opportunities to achieve progress. However, there are important risks going ahead, as more land is sought for renewable energy projects, tourism and conservation.

Quotes from speakers

"Indigenous Peoples are not intrinsically vulnerable. No one is born vulnerable. People are pushed into situations of vulnerability because their rights are not respected."

Mr. Yon Fernández-de-Larrinoa, Chief of the Indigenous Peoples Unit, FAO

"The reality of Indigenous Peoples and their values systems date from before the creation of modern states. They imply forms of knowledge and relations with land different from the modern concept."

Mr. Darío José Mejía Montalvo, Chair, United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues



Parallel session: Participation and engagement for inclusive climate action

Progress towards peace and justice as well as inclusive, effective, and accountable institutions has a transformative impact in addressing multidimensional crises. More than climate action, we need climate justice, as it offers holistic, inclusive, and equitable responses to the climate crisis. Therefore, we need to work at the intersection of and further integrate agendas of SDG 16 and SDG 13 on climate action. In this regard, SDG 16 is a powerful tool for policy coherence and breaking through silos by ensuring convergence between climate, sustainable development, and human rights agendas.

There is a need to reimagine, realign, and reinvest to address some of the main barriers to inclusive, fair, and just climate action. Applying the human rights lens to complex scientific climate policies can accelerate people-centred climate action in favour of people and the planet. Strong, transparent, and accountable democratic institutions can ensure that laws are effectively implemented, complied with, and enforced.

Access to justice and dispute resolution should be effectively ensured by both customary and formal justice systems. Climate vulnerable communities, including women, indigenous peoples, and youth, when empowered, can efficiently contribute to decision-making, developing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and to just energy transition. Environmental human rights defenders, to work at the nexus of climate, peace, and security, must operate in safe civic space with no risk of criminal or other forms of repression.

Special session: SDG 16 and the challenges of misinformation and disinformation

Multiple obstacles stand in the way of the SDGs. These challenges can be solved by closer cooperation, but only if we acknowledge the hidden battle at the core of all others: the battle over information. Disinformation and misinformation are threatening democracies, eroding human rights and the rule of law and undermining trust in public institutions.

Weaponized information is fuelling conflict and spreading hate, amplifying tensions and prolonging violence. Disinformation is being used to attack public institutions, impacting all areas of conflict prevention. UN peacekeeping operations themselves are under attack and targeted with false allegations. Climate action is also undermined by misinformation, as globally coordinated campaigns are attacking climate activists online.

Misinformation especially targets minorities, vulnerable groups and excluded communities, such as refugees, migrants, and social minorities with the aim to reinforce pre-existing prejudices and notions. Disinformation then leads to stigmatization and violence.

There are also existing and emerging threats around elections. Micro advertising messages are used through social media to target specific groups and manipulate voters with misleading messages. Due to the high demand for control over online narratives, a “dark public relations industry” is offering services to manipulate information and influence political decision

making. Gender disinformation is spreading. Women candidates are often withdrawing their candidacy because of attacks received online.

Misinformation and disinformation are spread online through social media platforms by some governments, businesses, and non-state actors for political, personal, or financial gain. There is an increasing professionalization of misinformation through the deliberate use of powerful public relations groups and networks to spread fake news. The disruptive power of artificial intelligence (AI) on disinformation has developed faster than corrective tools. Generative Artificial Intelligence can become a false multiplier to promote harmful or false content. It is being used to populate “content farms” – low quality websites entirely generated by AI tools that feature articles containing false claims. Misinformation is also spread offline with serious consequences, as in the case of human rights defenders, who are often described as anti-development agents in their communities and risk their lives. This requires proactive approaches within communities to explain the role of human rights defenders so that they are not threatened.

Digital platforms are at the center of the issue of misinformation and disinformation. Global digital platforms highlight their efforts to raise quality information, remove content that spread misinformation, and avoid tools for the monetization of disinformation. However, other actors consistently point to a dramatic underinvestment by social media companies

in fighting misinformation and disinformation, especially in developing countries where it is most needed.

To counter disinformation, there is a need for more awareness and understanding of the issues, as well as effective mechanisms and tools. A whole-of-society approach is necessary to make societies more resilient to fake news and information manipulation. Effective programmatic and policy responses are needed, including for strengthening the capacities of public institutions to promote access to reliable and accurate information sources; improving media capacity to effectively manage information pollution; and increasing public resilience to information pollution.

Solutions to regulate the digital space must involve all the relevant actors, including the public sector, the private sector, independent regulators, and academia. Global approaches to the regulation of information on the web must take into account the need to safeguard freedom of information. There is a need to elevate the conversation away from talking only about disinformation and misinformation. Accountability must be demanded from companies in various areas, including the design of their algorithms and products, their recommendation systems, internal policies for managing content and their enforcement, and their advertising services.

Empowering online users is important. Media literacy is crucial in the fight against misinformation. Online readers can be empowered by providing information on the reliability of news and information sources through trustworthiness indicators that leave the readers free to choose what to read but provide

additional information on who is feeding the news. Educating the public to identify misinformation should start at an early age and become part of school curriculums.

Another axis of action is to demonetize disinformation and misinformation. There is a need to support high quality journalism and help redirect advertisers away from the disinformation sites towards responsible journalism. Fighting misinformation and disinformation will also require figuring how to make those who spread fake news accountable. Examples mentioned include the EU Digital Services Act and the forthcoming UN Code of Conduct for Information Integrity on Digital Platforms. Such tools can help to demonetize the spread of misinformation, increase transparency in political advertising, foster strengthened collaboration with fact checkers and make data easier to access for researchers.

Quotes from speakers

“Conspiracy theories and disinformation can enter the public debate and be a threat to democracies. Disinformation and misinformation know no border and can rapidly move across countries, slowly eroding trust in national and international institutions.”

Ms. Virginia Padovese, Managing Editor and Vice President of Partnerships, Europe and Australia NewsGuard Technologies

“Strengthening information integrity can drive progress on many fronts towards peace, justice and effective institutions.”

Ms. Melissa Fleming, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Global Communications

“A whole-of-society approach is necessary to develop actions to make our societies more resilient to fake news and information manipulation”.

Mr. Alessandro De Pedys, Acting Director General for Public and Cultural Diplomacy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy

“The disruptive power of artificial intelligence on disinformation will come faster than our tools of correction.”

Mr. Gianni Riotta, Journalist, Italian Observatory on Digital Media

Looking forward to the SDG Summit and beyond

This year's SDG Summit comes at a critical juncture. Governments and other stakeholders must come together to identify solutions to get us back on track in the seven years we have left to deliver on the promise of the 2030 Agenda. A failure to deliver on that promise will further erode trust in governance and in multilateralism, and it will also condemn current and future generations to a more unequal, unjust, and insecure future. To address the current crises, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that includes strengthening legal frameworks, promoting transparency, and mobilizing investments in institutions that uphold the rule of law. SDG 16, as both an enabler and accelerator of the 2030 Agenda, serves as a compass to navigate the various intersecting crises, guiding us towards solutions that prioritize peace, justice, strong institutions, and inclusive societies as the fundamental pillars of transformative change.

Achieving the transformations that we need requires contributions from the broadest set of stakeholders and empowerment of local communities. It is imperative to amplify the voices of marginalized groups, including women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, and those affected by conflict and violence. Meaningful and inclusive engagement of those communities is essential in identifying specific measures that promote peace, justice, and effective institutions at all levels. This is particularly important in crisis-affected contexts to help build trust and support for reform processes. The active participation and engagement of civil society and youth in multilateral processes are of paramount importance as their perspectives, expertise, and

advocacy play a crucial role in driving progress, accountability, and the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS) has successfully advocated for the integration of the protection of environmental ecosystems and biodiversity in the Italian constitution. The UN system and other intergovernmental actors can also play a key role in tackling the current crises and accelerating action towards sustainable development.

Empowering youth in decision-making processes is crucial and includes the establishment of youth advisory boards and other formal platforms that incorporate youth inputs into policies and initiatives, as well as the integration of peacebuilding, sustainable development, and civic engagement into educational systems as essential curriculum components. This equips youth with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to drive positive and systemic changes across the SDGs. It is also vital to bolster support for youth-led initiatives by investing resources and mentorship that facilitate the transformation of ideas into action. Fostering intergenerational collaboration is essential, creating spaces where young people and decision-makers can come together to exchange ideas, learn from one another, and co-create solutions.

As we move forward, it is crucial to apply a justice lens to climate change. This approach recognizes the unequal distribution of both the causes and consequences of climate change, emphasizing the need for equitable solutions. By addressing historical and systemic injustices, we can ensure

that marginalized communities, particularly in developing nations, are not disproportionately burdened by climate impacts. By integrating climate justice principles into policies and actions, we can foster inclusive governance, enhance resilience, and mobilize resources for adaptation and mitigation. Climate justice acts as a catalyst for transformative change, encouraging collaborative efforts to combat climate change while promoting social, economic, and environmental justice.

There is also a need for increased investment in capacity-building initiatives, technology, and data collection to strengthen the rule of law, improve access to justice, and enhance transparency and accountability. Leveraging digital tools and innovation can help bridge existing gaps and create opportunities for marginalized communities to engage in decision-making processes. Four key principles to advance SDG 16 through technology include designing solutions with fairness and equity in mind, promoting participatory approaches, utilizing representative models and data sets, and ensuring interpretability of algorithms and decision-making processes.

These measures should inform multilateral processes and guide the actions of the international community in the years ahead. Anticipatory and forward-looking action on SDG 16 is of utmost importance as it allows for proactive measures to address emerging challenges, strengthen governance, promote access to justice, and foster inclusive societies, leading to more sustainable and resilient development outcomes.

Quotes from speakers

“Governments must take the lead but the collective efforts of international organizations, civil society, parliamentarians, the private sector, academia, the justice community, the media, and other stakeholders will be needed to provide the “whole of society” solutions needed. It is only by working together that we can create a more peaceful, just, and inclusive world for all.”

Ms. Jan Beagle, Director-General, IDLO

“On justice, we are doing judicial reform which IDLO has been doing with us for 10 years now, if not more. (...) We are also working on educational reform, labor reform, dead forgiveness, and nine national development plans.”

H.E. Mr. Adam I. OHirsi, Minister of State for Environment and Climate Change, Somalia

“SDG 16 is the one that ties together and interweaves all the other SDGs and is the way forward for the future.”

Ms. Katherine Meighan, Associate Vice President and General Counsel, IFAD

“A reference to the interest of future generations is the core value of sustainable development.”

Mr. Enrico Giovannini, Scientific Director, Italian Alliance for Sustainable Development (ASviS)

“New technologies are not going to solve all our present dilemmas on the peace, security, and justice front, but if designed and deployed with care, I think they will certainly give us a fighting chance.”

Mr. Robert Muggah, Head of Innovation, Instituto Igarapé, Brazil

“Justice and the rule of law must be at the heart of climate actions to achieve a fair, inclusive and climate secure future for people and the planet.”

Ms. Yamide Dagnet, Director for Climate Justice, Open Society Foundations

“Breaking stalemate requires challenging the hold of exclusionary power dynamics. It demands both hearing and acting on people’s preferences and objectives in pursuing more inclusive development such as through high quality services, decent jobs and opportunities for a meaningful political voice.”

Ms. Marina Ponti, Global Director, UN SDG Action Campaign

“We call on governments, organizations, and communities to create dedicated and formal platforms for young people to participate in the decision-making processes.”

Ms. Reekelitsoe Molapo, United Nations Youth Representative

Rome civil society declaration on SDG 16+



During this session, representatives from civil society presented the [2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+](#). The SDG 16 Campaign and Voices of SDG 16 initiative were also presented.

The discussion with the audience acknowledged the need to recognize the difficulty of the current geopolitical context and its negative impacts on SDG 16. Participants wondered how to reignite the excitement and the flame that existed in 2014, when the SDGs were elaborated and advocacy efforts led to the inclusion of Goal 16 in the 2030 Agenda.

It was mentioned that the existence of SDG 16 has created a space that enables stakeholders to bring together different perspective on democracy and state building, discuss linkages between human rights and governance issues, and create new tools. It was said that whereas the pandemic

was a major stress test for democracies and public institutions, in all, democratic institutions have proved to be resilient.

Among the reasons for optimism for the future, participants mentioned a sense that States were starting to hear the call for progressing on SDG 16, perhaps for the first time since 2015, which presents a window of opportunities for non-State actors to push for more concrete actions.

Among the messages that participants expressed for the attention of Governments in preparation for the SDG Summit were a strong call to “just do it”; a recommendation to use non-official data to provide a clear picture of current trends; and a call to remember what brought the international community together to create the 2030 Agenda.



SDG 16 CONFERENCE

Peace, Justice & Inclusive Societies



The following is a summary provided by the convenors of the Rome Declaration.

An urgent call for transformative SDG 16+ commitments at the midpoint of the 2030 agenda.

“At a time of the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the international community is severely impacted by escalating humanitarian crises due to geopolitical conflicts and their consequences on international security and multilateralism, in addition to climate-induced events. At this critical crossroads, governments and the international community must rethink commitments to the SDGs and bring civil society stakeholders into wider decision-making processes to put SDG 16+ at the forefront of global discussions. [The 2023 Rome Civil Society Declaration on SDG 16+](#) calls upon member states and other stakeholders to collectively work together and commit to bold actions on advancing progress towards SDG 16+ for the realisation of peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The declaration was issued in the context of the 2023 SDG 16 Conference in Rome (31 May - 1 June) and urgently calls for concrete and ambitious commitments from member states to SDG 16+ as we proceed towards the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in July and the SDG Summit in September. Through the Rome Declaration, Civil Society proposes detailed and action-oriented recommendations in four key areas to bolster and accelerate action around SDG 16+: 1) Recognizing and utilising SDG 16+ as an enabler for achieving the 2030 Agenda and for responding to current global crises as well as a development outcome; 2) Delivering bold and ambitious commitments at the 2023 SDGs Summit, 2024 Summit of the Future and beyond; 3) Delivering catalytic financing for SDG 16+ and fixing the broken global financial system; 4) Recognizing the indispensable role of civil society for SDG 16+ and the 2030 Agenda, and protect and where possible expand civic space.

As civil society, we fear that if urgent and immediate action is not taken, governments and the international community will collectively fail to deliver on SDG 16+ and the entire 2030 Agenda. To fulfil the promise to “Leave No One Behind” and for global governance institutions to perform successfully, we must work collectively together and ensure inclusive and participatory decision-making processes to secure the rights and well-being of everyone on a healthy, thriving planet that is in peril.

Without a strong and steadfast focus on the SDG 16+ targets for peace, justice and inclusion, none of the Sustainable Development Goals will be delivered in full. Bold commitments for urgent action are needed now! If Not Now, Then When?”



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