



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT  
INCHEON, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

## CONCEPT NOTE

### 2017 Sustainable Development Transition Forum

*SDG Mainstreaming and Means of Implementation: A Retrospective and Prospective View*

30 October to 1 November 2017, Incheon, Republic of Korea

#### 1. Rationale

The UN Office for Sustainable Development contributes to building, exchanging and facilitating the use of knowledge in support of transitions to sustainability. UNOSD specialises on mapping, assessing and improving exchange of knowledge resources, providing advises to Member States and the broader policy communities on sharing and applying such resources, and conducting research and capacity development in areas of sustainability transition.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by UN Member States in September 2015. Included in the Agenda are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets, described as “integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.” Furthermore, through the Agenda Member States noted the following: “We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind... The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next fifteen years in areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace (and Justice), and Partnerships.”

In 2016 the UNOSD’s Sustainable Development Transition Forum (SDTF) convened 100 participants from governments, the United Nations system, policy think tanks, and academic institutions from around the world in Incheon, Republic of Korea to discuss experiences, approaches and challenges in mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and SDGs into national and sub-national development plans.

The 2017 SDTF will be convened from 30 October – 1 November 2017 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. The forum will build on its 2016 outcomes and insights and help create a bridge between the 2017 High Level Political Forum’s thematic focus of “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world” and the 2018 HLPF thematic focus of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies” including the HLPF’s attention in 2018 to SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Production and Consumption), and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

#### 2. Forum Objectives and Format

The objectives of the 2017 SDTF are to achieve a better understanding of successes, lessons and specific mechanisms for initiating and fostering the profound transformation that is urgently needed to make our societies sustainable and resilient, as expressed in the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development. While discussing the specific thematic foci and selected SDGs of the 2017 and 2018 HLPFs, the 2017 SDTF will seek to achieve the right balance between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development throughout the different session of the Forum.

The event will be designed to accommodate approximately 100 participants from governments, UN Agencies, Think Tanks, Development Banks and Academic institutions from around the world.

To achieve the Forum's objectives, six sessions will be convened as described below.

**Transformation Towards Sustainable Societies.** The Oxford English Dictionary defines '[transformation](#)' as "a marked change in form, nature, or appearance." But what does this mean in the context of sustainable development by 2030? The Business Dictionary provides some additional guidance, defining '[transformational change](#)' as "a shift in the business culture of an organization resulting from a change in the underlying strategy and processes that the organization has used in the past...A transformational change is designed to be organization-wide and is enacted over a period of time." Furthermore, the UN's [5<sup>th</sup> Global Environment Outlook](#) recognized that moving off our current unsustainable path will require a transformation without precedent in human history and it identified some common strategic elements for advancing sustainability including: compelling visions and social contracts; reversing the unsustainable; affecting leverage points; and adaptive management and governance.

This session of the Forum will explore these and other definitions of transformation and will seek to learn from participants about real examples of transformation and ideas for how transformative change can be pursued by governments and stakeholders in pragmatic ways. This will build on discussions at the 2016 SDTF in which Forum participants reflected on the notion of an 18<sup>th</sup> SDG, not as an actual new SDG, but rather as a conceptual reminder of the audacity of sustainable development, that it is a living and moving target necessitating an ongoing conversation about what it means to 'us' and why it is so important to 'everyone'.

**Mainstreaming and Monitoring the SDGs.** The [2016 SDTF Communique](#) summarized that developing and developed countries alike are learning lessons and making progress on adapting SDGs to their national contexts, proving the universal applicability of the 2030 Agenda. It was also concluded that forums like the HLPF and the SDTF, among others, provide an important and practical means for all countries to share experiences on governance and implementation of the SDGs as we navigate this complex journey together. Forty-three countries presented their Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the 2017 HLPF, joining 22 countries who did so the year prior. Our evidence base is growing as we move toward the third year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Are we on track to realize a transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies by 2030?

The 2017 SDTF will reflect on this question and will learn about the mainstreaming and reporting efforts of select countries, including the VNR experience of the past two years. These discussions will provide a useful segue to the Expert Group Meeting on the Update of the Secretary-General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines which will be held in Incheon in the two days following the SDTF.

**SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities.** This half-day session will explore the status of implementing SDG 11 following the adoption of the New Urban Agenda, the Sendai outcome and the Paris Agreement on climate change. The session will build on the momentum of the World Cities Day celebrations and will address how related agreements, in

particular the New Urban Agenda, can support implementation of SDG11 and will illustrate national approaches to implement SDG11 that are aligned with other domestic priorities such as promoting a low carbon economy, integrating 3R planning, and improving engagement of local authorities and stakeholders outside government. The session will also seek to identify ways to find the best scope and format of review of SDG11 on a continuous basis at the national level.

**SDGs and Finance.** Today, almost two years after the introduction of the SDGs, many stakeholders are ready to share their efforts to meet the 17 objectives and the challenges they have faced. For most of the actors, financing has emerged as a key issue on the way to attaining their national -and ultimately, the common global objectives. Given the lack of policy space for many emerging economies and increasing efforts to streamline funding with the aim of attaining higher impact and effectiveness in government spending, there is a strong need to consider innovative financing options. In this context, corporate actors and businesses have emerged as key players in governments' plans to achieve the SDGs.

This session of the Forum will build on the annual ENVforum conference held in September 2017 in Hanoi, Viet Nam. Under the title 'Asia Europe Sustainable Development Goals: No Longer Business as Usual' representatives from the private sector and policymakers as well as other important stakeholders will discuss emerging challenges towards financing the SDGs and explore opportunities for collaborative approaches.

**Transformation Towards Resilient Societies.** To begin a transformation towards a resilient society we must continually challenge our understanding of what resilience is and how we can achieve it across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Participants at the 2015 SDTF reflected on the drivers of change that might either enhance or hinder the achievement of the SDGs through to 2030, including funding commitments and mechanisms; political will; changes in administration; political stability; natural disasters; security; climate change; technology change; and capacity at the national level. Assessing risk and fostering adaptability are key components of building resilient societies and are highlighted in the [UNDG Mainstreaming Reference Guide](#) for the 2030 Agenda. But resilience is both a broad and deep concept, as evidenced by the range of thematic topics being addressed at this year's [Stockholm Resilience Conference](#), including: social-ecological transformations for sustainability; connectivity and cross-scale dynamics in the Anthropocene; multi-level governance and biosphere stewardship; and approaches and methods for understanding social-ecological system dynamics.

This session of the Forum will hear from experts as well as from country case examples about pragmatic approaches for achieving resilience across society in response to economic, social and environmental shocks and stresses. Discussions will delve into the common traits that together can foster both transformative change and resilience in societies.

**Exploring the SDG Nexus.** Participants at the 2017 SDTF will have the opportunity to work together in groups on Day 2 to explore the interconnections among the focal SDGs at the 2018 HLPF and thereby, identify leverage points for transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies by 2030.

### **3. Forum Agenda**

Please visit the [Forum website](#) for the latest agenda and list of speakers.

## **4. Outputs**

The Forum will produce three primary outputs, some that will prepare and guide discussions during the event, and others resulting from its deliberations. They include:

- Discussion paper (this document) to guide the preparation, proceedings and reporting of the respective sessions;
- Forum report documenting the presentations and discussions of the successes, lessons, and key mechanism for ensuring that no one is left behind; and
- 2017 Incheon Communiqué summarizing the successes, lessons, and key mechanism for leaving no one behind in the context of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.

## **5. Schedule and Venue**

The SDTF will be held at Sheraton Grand Incheon Hotel, Songdo, Republic of Korea. The event will last 3 days, scheduled from 30 October to 1 November 2017. English will be the language of the Forum.

## **6. Participants and Organisers**

The 2017 SDTF will bring together an international audience of between 70-100 national government officials and experts who have responsibility for and interest in national development planning.

The Forum is organized by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) of UNDESA in partnership with the Division for Sustainable Development (UNDESA-DSD) the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).