



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
INCHEON, REPUBLIC OF KOREA

CONCEPT NOTE

Sustainable Development Transformation Forum 2019

How Can We Achieve Transformations Needed?

22-24 October 2019, Holiday Inn Incheon Songdo (tbc), Incheon, Republic of Korea

1. Background

Established in 2011, the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) is part of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). UNOSD contributes to building, exchanging and facilitating the use of knowledge in support of sustainable. UNOSD specialises in mapping, assessing and improving the exchange of knowledge resources, providing advice to Member States and the broader policy communities on applying such knowledge, and conducting research and capacity development in different areas related to sustainable development with the goal of accelerating progress towards the SDGs.

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, in the Agenda Member States note 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 event will accommodate approximately 100 participants from governments, UN Agencies, Think Tanks, Development Banks, Academic Institutions, Civil Society Organisations, and private sector from around the world.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is nearing four full years of implementation. The positive story is that millions of people continue to raise themselves out of extreme poverty in the developing world. Life expectancy and the quality of life continue to improve for people in the developing world.

The negative story is that, despite the recognition that our growth model is unsustainable over the long run, there is little to suggest that world leaders have gotten to grips with the scale of the transformations needed to put the world economy onto a sustainable development path. We continue to emit greenhouse gas emissions, clear forests, deplete fish stocks and destroy biodiversity at a rapid rate.

Rich countries have enjoyed high living standards for decades and were supposed to be able to show the way forward on transitioning away from fossil fuels and from environmentally destructive patterns of consumption and production. While there has been some progress in decoupling economic growth from pollution, it has been far too slow relative to the pace needed for example to avert a greater than 2-degree C. rise in mean global temperature, not to mention other negative impacts.

Much has been written about what it will take to decarbonize the global economy and move towards sustainable development, but we still know too little about how to catalyze the needed actions at the required scale.

2. Forum Objectives

This year's Sustainable Development Transformation Forum (SDTF) focuses centrally on what it will take to achieve the fundamental transformations in energy, industrial, food and other systems needed to shift course from a BAU path. It will consider not merely the technicalities but the political economy and behavioral economics of a sustainable development transition.

With regard to political economy, the Forum will explore what it will take to overcome entrenched resistance to change from vested interests, and to get political leaders to take the difficult policy decisions needed for effecting systemic changes. Are there good examples of building effective change coalitions?

With regard to behavioral economics, the Forum will explore the psychology of consumer choice and how sustainable choices can become the default across all types of consumers.

For this to happen will require that production advance rapidly towards far more sustainable practices and technologies, to minimize energy and resource use as well as various types of waste and pollution. The least polluting options need to become low- if not least-cost options across a broad spectrum of goods and services.

Questions to be addressed

The Forum will explore answers to the following questions:

- What guidance can history offer on how to move from incremental change to large-scale positive change in economic and social systems?
- Are there new green growth trajectories available to developing and emerging economies which offer the prospect of robust improvements in well-being of their citizens consistent with environmental sustainability?
- What can motivate people to take the actions and change preferences and behaviors in ways which will help drive market transformations?
- Can we identify tipping points in behavior of economic agents and systems, such that once passed movement accelerates towards a new, desired steady state – say, a zero-carbon energy system?
- What is needed to induce large-scale shifts of private capital towards environmentally sustainable investments?

3. Forum Agenda

Please visit the [Forum website](#) for the latest agenda and list of speakers, which are currently under development.

4. Outputs

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

- Concept note (this document) to guide the preparation for and structure the discussions;
- Forum report documenting the presentations and discussions on the entire integrated agenda, and enumerating suggestions for accelerating progress and enhancing institutional effectiveness in the coming years; and
- 2019 Incheon Communiqué summarizing the key messages which participants would like to convey to the international community regarding the main theme of the Forum, i.e., the ways to achieve the transformations needed and the concrete actions to undertake urgently to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

5. Schedule and Venue

The SDTF will be held in Songdo, Republic of Korea, at the Holiday Inn Incheon Songdo (TBC). The event will last 3 days, scheduled from 22-24 October; the Agenda is under development. English will be the language of the Forum.

6. Participants and Organizers

The Forum is organized by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) of UN DESA, Division of Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) in partnership with the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

The Forum will bring together a cross-section of decision makers from the public and private sectors, as well as economists and social science researchers. It will encourage lateral thinking across specialities and sectors. Through cross fertilization, It aims to germinate new ideas about how to induce large-scale positive shifts towards sustainability in our economies and societies with a view to “transforming our world” by 2030.