

Summary Report

‘Preparing for the 2027 Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Including the SDGs,’ a 2026 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) side event at UN HQ, New York, NY, July 6, 2026 - Edited by Kyra Sadat Ruben

Can the SDGs Get Back on Track? Preparing for the 2027 Review

In a little over a year, the state of global development will receive a report card. The graders, an independent group of scientists commissioned by UN Secretary-General António Guterres, will release the third Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) on the well-being of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The aspirations outlined in the 17 SDGs in 2015 were high, seeking to build on the Millennium Development Goals and complete what these did not achieve. However, stakeholder confidence has increasingly wavered as the SDGs’ 2030 deadline approaches, with only 36 per cent of the 139 SDG targets on track or making moderate progress.

In advance of the 2027 Review of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2026 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was preparing to conduct in-depth reviews of five SDGs under the theme “Transformative, equitable, innovative and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals for a sustainable future for all”: SDG 6 (water and sanitation); SDG 7 (energy); SDG 9 (infrastructure, industrialization and innovation); SDG 11 (cities and human settlements); and SDG 17 (means of implementation and the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development).

On Monday, July 6, 2026, Stakeholder Forum for A Sustainable Future (SF) and WWF International hosted the first side event of High-level Political Forum week, *Preparing for the 2027 Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Including the SDGs*. After the opening by SF Chair Louis Meuleman, Felix Dodds explained that the session built on a recent SF project for the United Nations Environment Programme that resulted in a Primer for Stakeholders Engaging in the 2027 Review of the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, Focusing on the eight Environment-related SDGs. The side event, held in person at UN Headquarters in NY and online by Zoom webinar, aimed to provide a foundation for stakeholders, including those who were not engaged in the 2012 and 2015 SDG processes, to prepare their thinking on the 2027 review of the SDGs.

Working beyond silos

Elena Khishchenko, Head of Strategic Influence at WWF, sees the 2027 review as both a health check-up on the current state of the SDGs and the ramp that will lead us up to the next stages of implementation. And for there to be any hope of this next stage being deemed a success, Khishchenko outlined three criteria that must be met:

interconnectedness, passing the ‘credibility test’, and a diverse set of leaders championing multi-stakeholder coalitions. For this to happen, Khishchenko emphasized the need for systemic shifts in energy, food, and financial systems, not just for targets being met.

Khishchenko argued that, “...it is incredibly important to look at goals and metrics, but ultimately we need to ask what are the big shifts we need to focus on now.” This means overcoming silo thinking: it is not sufficient to address each SDG as a separate goal, but instead, to employ a systems-thinking approach that prioritizes a few positive tipping points that will sustain the progress of multiple goals at once.

Better data drives better decisions

While the 2030 Agenda is a global agenda, success or failure will ultimately be determined by the choices made by national, sub-national and local governments and the investments made, including in the cities and communities. Today, 1.16 billion people live in slums and informal settlements, an increase of 130 million since 2015, and 3 billion people lack access to adequate housing, making global housing prices one of the most defining development challenges of our time.

Toni-Shae Freckleton from UN-Habitat discussed the importance of SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), which she referred to as the point “...where the ambitions of the entire 2030 Agenda become tangible in people’s everyday lives”. SDG 11 is under review in this year’s HLPF and will also be assessed in the midterm review of the New Urban Agenda at the UN General Assembly on July 16-17, 2026.

Freckleton shared that the upcoming SDG 11 Report will show that while progress has been made, it is neither fast nor equitable enough to fulfill the 2030 commitments. Although advances have been recorded in areas such as public transport, urban policy and disaster risk reduction, these continue to be outpaced by rapid urbanization, growing inequalities and a global housing crisis affecting more than three billion people. Sustainable urbanization and adequate housing are essential to sustainable development, shaping access to employment, education, health care, transport, resilience and economic opportunity. Persistent urban data gaps pose a significant obstacle to implementing SDG 11. Information on women, children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and those living in informal settlements is where these gaps remain strongest, and must be prioritized to support evidence-based policy-making.

Looking ahead, she highlighted that the Midterm Review of the New Urban Agenda confirms sustainable urbanization as one of the strongest accelerators of sustainable development. She called for these findings to receive high consideration in shaping the post-2030 development framework, placing sustainable urbanization, adequate housing, localization, stronger local finance and improved urban data systems at the centre of the next global agenda to better connect global commitments with local action.

The need to change course

“The clock's ticking, ticking very fast, and there's a decisive window that will close before we know it. Ultimately, the review that we will see in 2027 is going to be more than just a pure stocktake; it has to be a course correction,” said **Raphael Peralta**, Director of the UNEP New York Office.

Environmental SDGs, or the environment at large, are the backbone of the 2030 agenda, and they are not on track. UNEP has placed them at the core of its 2026 - 2029 Medium-Term Strategy, designing an impact framework to catalyze action informed through science. Monitoring 92 environment indicators shows that pollution, biodiversity, climate resilience, and sustainable consumption and production are the greatest areas where implementation is lagging behind ambition. As environmental pressures increase faster than policy responses, the largest barriers to delivering on environmental targets are implementation gaps, data gaps limiting evidence-based decision-making by Nations, and fragmented governance.

With only 8.6% of the global economy being circular, Peralta says the UNEP has linked unsustainable consumption and production patterns to a series of “lock-ins”. “Investment lock-ins, fiscal lock-ins, infrastructure lock-ins, labor lock-ins, behavior lock-ins have all created some sort of wheel that is difficult to break in, with dependencies going around from top to bottom.”

Disparate access to and valuation of resources

SDGs 6 (water and sanitation for all) and 7 (affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all) focus on universal access to essential resources. While both SDGs have seen progress made, it has not been geographically or socially equitable.

In the case of SDG 7, individuals without access to clean cooking numbered 2.7 billion in 2015. If current trends continue, 1.8 billion people will still lack access in 2030. **Albert Butare**, former Energy Minister of Rwanda and Group CEO of Africa Energy Services Group Limited Company, reminded us that cities' population growth is the cause. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people lacking access continues to grow by 14 million annually, with gains in access outpaced by rapid population growth.

Since 2015, the number of people without energy access has decreased from almost a billion to slightly more than 600 million today. While this progress is notable, the majority of those 600 million reside in Sub-Saharan Africa, highlighting a geographical disparity in the energy transition.

Despite its essential role in everyday life, water was one of the last topics to be included in the SDGs. The next UN Water Conference will take place later this year, highlighting the increased political visibility of efforts to address global water systems, though there is still no UN agency for water. Over the last decade, nearly a billion additional people have gained access to safely managed water, but we are far from universal access. According to

Ingrid Timboe, the Deputy Executive Director and Senior Policy Lead at the Alliance for Global Water Adaptation, stronger recognition of water's systemic role in climate change and ecosystem health is essential to SDG 6, while underpinning the entire sustainable development agenda - working in and beyond silos. SDG 6 and 7 really illustrate this.

A New Narrative is Needed

Why do we have the Sustainable Development Goals and what are we actually trying to achieve?

Daniel Perell, of the Baha'i International Community UN Office for the UN, doesn't ask this rhetorically; he believes that the concept of development has changed over time. The contradiction between sustainability principles and a global narrative that equates development with consumption and acquisition is too great to overlook in the 2027 SDG review. Perell sees this as an important opportunity to honestly analyze the limitations of the SDGs at the level of concept. He says we should do more than ask-why they haven't been achieved - especially regarding material means, as the global community knows what needs to be done - but consider the underlying reasons why political will towards their achievement has been so difficult to generate.

While it has been established that SDG implementation suffers from siloed institutionalizations, there is still a need for each SDG to have its own implementation mechanism. In closing comments, **Felix Dodds** identified the lack of a process to outline a means of implementation (MOI) for each goal and its targets as a missed opportunity and recommends it be considered going forward, with broad agreement. Moderator **Louis Meuleman** concluded the discussion with the suggestion that stakeholders can help bridge silos - institutional as well as mental - by expanding what they already do: collaboration across SDGs to propose solutions to interest conflicts and promote synergies.

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