



HLPF 2023

Report

I. Background: High-Level Political Forum 2023

The annual [High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development \(HLPF\)](#) is the main space to follow reviews of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the progress made towards achieving the [17 Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#). It is convened once a year in July under the auspices of the United Nation's (UN) [Economic and Social Council \(ECOSOC\)](#) and twice every four years, the second time in September, under the auspices of the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#).

(NB: ChildFund Alliance is an ECOSOC-accredited NGO with "special consultative status" at the UN, which grants us access to UN premises, permits us to take part in events and conferences, make written and oral statements at events, organize side-events, and advocate for child rights with key stakeholders within the [UN system](#), government representatives and other civil society organizations.)

As the first HLPF to take place fully in person since the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020, the July 2023 theme was "Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels." The 2023 HLPF was held **at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 10 to 20 July 2023**. More than 120 ministers and vice-ministers, as well as other representatives from governments were in attendance, and over 2,700 representatives of intergovernmental organizations, NGOs and civil society had registered to participate in the July HLPF.

The participants from government, the private sector, civil society and academia discussed the most effective and inclusive recovery measures to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the SDGs, as well as explore actionable policy guidance for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at all levels. **As the major platform to follow-up on the implementation of SDGs**, every HLPF focuses on **a select number of SDGs for in-depth review**. In July 2023, they included:

- **Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation** ([factsheet](#))
 - *Overall assessment:* Several updates confirmed the somber tone of the Secretary-General's report that SDG 6 is "alarmingly off-track."
- **Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy** ([factsheet](#))
 - *Overall assessment:* It was noted that achieving SDG 7 by 2030 poses "an unprecedented challenge" but is still achievable with scaled-up ambition and the right policies.
- **Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure** ([factsheet](#))
 - *Overall assessment:* There is a growing urban divide, inadequate housing is a pressing problem, and only half of the world's urban population has access to public transport.
- **Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** ([factsheet](#))
 - *Overall assessment:* For SDG 9 "there is hope" with progress targets such as mobile network access, but the implementation pace on others needs to quicken and more support for innovation and infrastructure in least developed countries (LDCs) is needed.
- **Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals** ([factsheet](#))
 - *Overall assessment:* While there have been advances in areas such as development aid, remittance flows, and access to technology, funding for development remains a major challenge, particularly in low-income countries.

Given **2023 marks the halfway point towards fulfilling the commitments of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**, the HLPF in July 2023 also supported the mid-term review of the implementation of [all 17 SDGs](#) during a special

iteration of the UNGA in September 2023 named the [SDG Summit](#) (i.e., the HLPF convened under the auspices of the UNGA every four years, as mentioned above).

In years when the HLPF takes place twice (as in 2023) there is only a single negotiated Political Declaration (rather than one for each HLPF) that is **released at the September session**, covering the different and complementary functions of both HLPF sessions that year. A link to the Annotated Program with speakers for the July 2023 HLPF can be found [here](#).

II. Summary of Opening Segment

The 2023 HLPF commenced with a call to action and a stark reminder that we are fast approaching the midway point towards 2030 and, alarmingly, **falling behind in our progress towards achieving the SDGs**.

Leading the HLPF 2023 as Chair was Lachezara Stoeva, the current President of ECOSOC and Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations. UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Li Jinhua of China, highlighted **Member States' adoption of innovative strategies, policies, and partnerships that have helped and will continue to help overcome the obstacles of data gaps and limited finance**. He called on all participants to learn from the valuable insights provided by the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs, see Section VI. below) during the event.

Building on this, ECOSOC Vice President Arrmanatha Christiawan Nasir, the Permanent Representative of Indonesia to the United Nations, emphasized the importance of **the interlinkages between the 17 SDGs** and of breaking down barriers in order to make the progress needed to achieve them by 2030. (Collectively, [only 12% of the SDG Targets are on track, and some are even regressing below the 2015 baseline](#).) He urged a candid review of the existing gaps and transformative action to ensure substantial advancements at this crucial midpoint towards 2030.

To inspire participants, a touching video titled "[Voices for Change](#)" (starting at 25:54) showcased calls to action from individuals across the globe, emphasizing the **shared responsibility of achieving the SDGs**.

The voice of youth was represented by Edward "Eddie" Ndopu ([here](#) at 30:00), an SDG Advocate and Youth Representative from South Africa. In his impassioned speech he stressed the **significance of meaningfully integrating youth in decision-making processes**, citing the core principle of "[leave no one behind](#)" from the 2030 Agenda. Ndopu underscored the **importance of inclusion and equal opportunities** to achieve the SDGs successfully and **urged the redesign of an accessible and sustainable global financial system**. His speech resonated powerfully, reminding the delegates of their duty to work tirelessly for the betterment of the next generation and the imperative of global partnerships that value inclusion. Ndopu made history as **the first speaker with a disability to address the opening of the HLPF**, further highlighting the importance of representation and inclusivity.

A **summary of the [Secretary-General's Sustainable Development Goals Report 2023](#)** was provided by Li Jinhua, reiterating key points that called for advancing policies that leave no one behind, strengthening public sector capacity and accountability at national and subnational levels, and ensuring effective regulatory frameworks for public-private sector alignment. Moreover, the report emphasized the necessity to mobilize resources and investment, bolster multilateralism, reform the international financial architecture, and ensure accessible, timely, and disaggregated data to support informed decision-making.

III. Key Takeaways and Impressions from the HLPF (Official Summary to Follow)

In the coming weeks the UN Representative will provide Alliance members with the official summary of the July 2023 HLPF, capturing the key messages of the discussions that took place. The President of ECOSOC, Lachezara Stoeva (Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the United Nations), is currently preparing this report.

The following thus constitutes an assessment of the HLPF's key takeaways, informed by conversations that ChildFund Secretariat staff have had throughout the event. It also includes ideas to further improve future HLPFs.

There were several remarkable moments during the event, including the **first meeting on middle-income countries (MICs)** and the **diversity of participants**, such as youth and people with disabilities. However, given the July HLPF was a precursor to the SDG Summit taking place in September, it is perhaps unsurprising that some participants felt that the **July HLPF was overshadowed by the upcoming SDG Summit in September, leading to many actions and decisions being deferred to the latter**. At the same time, there is hope that, following the July HLPF, the Political Declaration in September (as mentioned above, only one is made in years when the HLPF takes place twice) can offer concrete accelerated recommendations for SDG implementation, improved methods for review and follow-up, and facilitate a better multilateral environment for countries to achieve the SDGs. **Participants called for a larger section (than exists in the current draft) of the Political Declaration to focus on implementation**. The prevailing hope is that it will be quickly adopted by world leaders in September, so that the rest of the SDG Summit can focus on plans for implementation.

In addition, **in 2024 there will be a review of the HLPF as a forum**. Suggestions were made that Member States mandate Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to assess the accelerated actions stipulated in the existing draft Political Declaration. (As explained later in this report, VNRs are the basis for assessing SDG progress.)

In general, there was broad consensus for the **need to look beyond the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to inform progress made on the SDGs** at the national and sub-national levels. Rather than being satisfied with the presentations of the country reports (VNRs) themselves, there needs to be **more focus on the changes made by countries afterwards, namely the implementation of concrete plans Member States promised** in their VNRs. Several UN officials and high level Member State representatives stressed the importance of this. It is also important to note in this regard that, currently, the **VNRs do not systematically include reflections on progress from previous presentations**. Some Member States report on progress, while others do not. An improved, more comprehensive VNR reporting framework that includes follow-up on previous commitments is thus desirable.

The **2023 HLPF did not feature any Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)** (see p. 8 for details on a VLR-focused side event). Additionally, some opined that this year's HLPF would have been even more effective had it analyzed SDG progress until 2025 or 2026 (rather than 2030). There also needs to be more space for discussions in regional fora in order to **translate the increased focus on localization into actual practice, which would strengthen the reporting and monitoring chain of SDG progress**. Thanks to the Alliance's "Locally Led Development and Response through Quality Partnerships: ChildFund Alliance Position and Commitment Paper 2023," the Secretariat is in a good position to contribute to advocating for greater localization through its engagement with UN agencies and Member States.

Furthermore, around half of the VNRs were presented by high-income countries. Yet the **debate on financing and universality of the SDGs** would have benefitted from more participation in the VNRs by countries from poor regions.

Participants also urged a significant **increase in the pace for energy access to achieve the SDGs**, citing the [SDG 6 Global Acceleration Framework](#), the [UN 2023 Water Conference](#), and the [Climate and SDGs Synergies](#) series of meetings. Lynn Wagner, Senior Director of the Tracking Progress program at the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), at one point noted **the need for "Knowledge Brokers" to provide the necessary data and evidence to policymakers** in order to accelerate this process.

The Chair of the UN Committee for Development Policy expressed the **need for improved coherence among different action plans to achieve the SDGs**, indicating that the current sum of initiatives does not amount to meaningful global progress. More ambitious efforts are thus needed to forge a **stronger connection between the Secretary-General's call for an urgent rescue plan and the initiatives discussed during the July HLPF**.

SDG 17, which focuses on partnerships as a means to address all challenges in achieving the SDGs, was highlighted as **key for improving evaluation of SDG progress**. A new version of VNRs ("Version 3") that would provide a more solid basis for national governments and stakeholders to reflect on and learn from the gaps and failures identified was called for. As mentioned before, this could include reflections on progress from previous VNR presentations. **Suggestions were also made that Member States commit to more vigorous and systematic approaches, such as utilizing independent reviews to enhance the VNR process**. It is important to note that in the past some Member States have rejected proposed changes to the VNR process. This is also the reason why participants called for Member States to remain open to improvements and constructive evaluations to increase VNR effectiveness.

In order to build additional momentum for the SDG Summit in September, participants stressed the **need to outline concrete global commitments and high-impact initiatives within the UN, as well as cross-cutting issues like gender equality**. Greater support to help developing countries achieve the SDGs was urged.

Other discussions and questions revolved around **progress on the loss and damage fund** at the upcoming SDG Summit in September, which reflects **concerns that financing remains the biggest hindrance for countries and is leading some to break away from the plan and goals**. It is important to note that the **Political Declaration** (to be issued in September) **contains pledges towards the loss and damage fund at COP 28**, even though specific details on ambition and financing are yet to be disclosed.

In deliberating the post-2030 period, participants cautioned against becoming distracted from current actions and emphasized the need to focus on accelerating progress towards fulfilling the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs. There appeared to be **broad consensus that the SDGs should remain the primary focus**, and that it would be better to wait until 2026 or 2027 to begin discussions on the post-2030 period and actions. This underscored the **importance of accelerating progress now and aiming for an improved framework by 2030 by taking immediate action**.

IV. The Secretary-General's "New Agenda for Peace"

On 20 July, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres presented "[The New Agenda for Peace](#)," his latest in a series of policy briefs that complement the recommendations of "[Our Common Agenda](#)," the Secretary-General's vision for the future of global cooperation that calls for turbocharging action on the SDGs. ("Our Common Agenda" also calls for a "[Summit of the Future](#)," which will take place in September 2024.)

"The New Agenda for Peace" is a wide-ranging document outlining recommendations from women's rights to climate change and peacekeeping to cyber-security. The Secretary-General outlined five priority areas that contain twelve specific recommendations for action. First, he spoke of the **need to step up preventive diplomacy**

and prioritize diplomacy – especially when states disagree. He also noted the threat of the world’s seeming fragmentation into geopolitical blocs with “different trade rules, supply chains, currencies and Internets.”

His second priority (**the prevention of conflict and violence, and sustaining peace**) recalled the interlinkages between sustainable development, climate action and peace, to be anchored in and across all human rights (civil, political, economic, social and cultural). Improved access to education and healthcare are especially important to strengthen the social contract and security of humans. The Secretary-General lamented that the **prevailing gendered power dynamics continue to prevent women from meaningful leadership and participation in decision-making**, as well as **hampering the progress towards ending all forms of violence against women** and uphold their rights.

The third priority calls for **a new approach to peace operations**, including the protection of civilians from violence. Noting the “persistent mismatch” between mandates and resources, the Secretary-General deplored that “peacekeeping operations cannot succeed where there is no peace to keep.” He thus called for newly calibrated UN peacekeeping operations, specifically based on more nimble, adaptable models with appropriate exit strategies in place. Recalling the **importance of localization**, the Secretary-General is **urging the Security Council to authorize peace-enforcement actions by regional and sub-regional organizations**.

Fourth, **emerging technologies** (A.I., etc.) **shall not be weaponized but rather used to promote responsible innovation**. He called on the international community to consider the creation of a global body to mitigate the risks posed by A.I. To this end, the Secretary-General has **created a high-level body to assess A.I. governance options** that will report back to him by the end of 2023.

Fifth, in an effort to improve the collective security machinery and reestablish effectiveness and legitimacy, he **called for reforms to the Security Council to make it more representative** and further the democratization of its procedures. He also proposed **enhancing the role of the [UN Peacebuilding Commission](#)**.

Before closing, the Secretary-General mentioned a **forthcoming policy brief** (the second to last) **on transforming education** with recommendations to equip humans with the skills and capacities needed to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Scaled-up international cooperation, a rethink on how we learn, and the **creation of true learning societies in every country**, shall be part of this. The final brief will be on a “**UN 2.0**” and outline the Secretary-General’s vision for a modernized UN that helps Member States accelerate the 2030 Agenda and **focus expertise in vital areas of the twenty-first century: Data, digital innovation, strategic foresight and behavioral science**. The final announcement concerned his intention to **make the UN a more accessible and inclusive institution** where **youth empowerment, gender diversity**, geographic diversity, creativity and agility are the guiding principles.

In sum, the “New Agenda for Peace” is a bold proposal for a UN system that must evolve into a body that recognizes and accommodates a new sense of strategic independence among Member States. Having outlined the contours of what such a reformed system could look like, it will now be up to Member States to deliberate these proposals and decide on a consensus document at the Summit of the Future in September 2024.

V. General Debate (17-20 July 2023)

The General Debate was held during the ministerial days of the HLPF and the high-level segment of ECOSOC from 17 to 20 July 2023. It focused on the theme “*Building momentum towards the 2023 SDG Summit: Transformation for accelerating implementation of the SDGs.*” It allowed Ministers and high-level representatives of participating

States, as well as NGOs and civil society representatives, UN agencies, and Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) to exchange experiences and discuss lessons learnt, policy guidance, as well as transformative actions and initiatives for the SDG Summit in September 2023.

Statements were given by the following Member States where a ChildFund Alliance member is based:

- [Australia](#) (H.E. Dr. Fiona Webster, Permanent Representative and Chargé d’Affaires, Australian Mission to the United Nations)
- [Canada](#) (Karina Gould, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development)
- [Spain](#) (Sra. D^a. Pilar Cancela Rodríguez, Secretaria de Estado de Cooperación Internacional en el Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores de España)

For all statements delivered during the General Debate, including from the [Least Developed Countries \(LDCs\)](#) and the [African Group](#), click [here](#).

VI. 39 Countries Presented Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages as part of its SDG follow-up Member States to conduct **regular and inclusive reviews of SDG progress at the national and sub-national levels**. These reviews are country-led and country-driven, with input from non-state actors such as NGOs and CSOs. Known as [Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRs\)](#), they **serve as a basis for the regular SDG reviews by the HLPF**, meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC annually in July. The 2030 Agenda notes that regular reviews by the HLPF ought to be voluntary, state-led, undertaken by both developed and developing countries, and shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the **participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders**.

As in years prior, in January the Alliance Secretariat provided members with the **2023 VNR Engagement Packet**. It includes critical information on the countries that are officially presenting country reports (their VNR) that document their progress in achieving the SDGs at the July HLPF. The packet explains the **various ways in which Alliance members can influence and intervene in the development and presentation of country reports (VNRs) during or after their presentation at the HLPF**. The objective is to encourage governments to do more to end all forms of violence against and exploitation of children ([SDG Target 16.2](#)) and urge the **meaningful participation of children in the VNR process**.

A compilation by the UN Secretariat of the main messages of the 2023 VNRs can be accessed [here](#). The following countries carried out VNRs during the July 2023 HLPF (countries where Alliance members are based are in bold):

Bahrain, Barbados, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, **Canada**, Central African Republic, Comoros, Chile, Croatia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, **European Union**, Fiji, **France**, Guyana, Iceland, Ireland, Kuwait, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Maldives, Mongolia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, St Kitts & Nevis, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, United Republic of Tanzania, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Zambia.

[Burkina Faso](#), a Children Believe country, presented its second VNR at the July HLPF (its first was in 2019).

Christelle Kalhoule, Children Believe’s Regional Director for West Africa and a member of Burkina Faso’s official delegation to the HLPF, contributed to the country’s VNR via [virtual participation](#). As a member of [SPONG](#), Burkina Faso’s civil society network, Christelle also met with Burkinabè Ministers and representatives of the Permanent Mission of Burkina Faso to the UN to present SPONG’s **“Alternative Report on the Implementation Status of the**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) In Burkina Faso.” This report, which focuses on the perception of grassroots communities in Burkina Faso regarding program accelerators to achieve the 17 SDGs, was particularly timely given the July HLPF’s theme of “Accelerating (...) the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels.”

To highlight **the perception of children of the 2023 VNRs and SDGs**, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children (SRSG-VAC), Dr. Najat Maalla M’jid, will publish a report titled “**Seeing the Sustainable Development Goals and Voluntary National Reviews through a Child Protection Lens**” at the end of 2023 (see [here](#) for the 2022 report). The Alliance’s UN Representative will share this report with all Alliance members upon its release.

VII. Highlights of Select Child-Focused HLPF Side Events

Every HLPF is accompanied by a string of **side events (250+ in July 2023) that take place in parallel to the main program**. The side events agenda is typically released three weeks before the HLPF. As in years prior, the Alliance’s UN Representative individually contacted Alliance members via email to disseminate the [list of side events](#) and offer that the Secretariat attend any sessions of particular interest to a member and report back on the key takeaways. The selection of recommended events for individual members is based on their respective programmatic foci.

In addition, the **Secretariat attends as many side events and main agenda sessions as possible – provided they are thematically relevant to our members’ work**. What follows is an overview of the key takeaways of select side-events during the July HLPF, in chronological order. Where the names of participants are known, they have been included.

Empowering Youth for A Better Food Future – Driving Youth-led Solutions to Deliver the SDGs in a Post-Covid World (10 July), hosted by the World Food Forum

Participants: Bibek Shrestha, representing the WFF Youth Food Lab; Lana Weidgenant, Campaigns and Policy Manager, ProVeg International; Fenna Timsi, Dutch UN Youth Representative on Human Rights and Security; Pramisha Thapaliya, Head of the WFF Youth Action track; David Giles, UN Youth Delegate for Ireland; Audrey Wong, WFF Youth Policy Board Member; Christabelle Ong, Policy Advisor of the NYC Mayor’s Office of Food Policy.

The event (recording [here](#)) highlighted the **significance of actively involving young people in decision-making processes concerning food security, agriculture, and sustainable development**. Its main message emphasized the **importance of creating platforms for youth to voice their ideas, concerns and solutions**, ensuring that their perspectives are considered in policy-making and program implementation. **Youth voices** were identified as **crucial in driving positive change in these areas**. Furthermore, the event called for encouraging and supporting youth-led initiatives and projects focused on sustainable agriculture, food waste reduction, nutrition, and related fields.

To facilitate these efforts, suggestions were made for **more funding, mentorship and networking opportunities to help young individuals implement their ideas and scale up successful projects**. Empowering youth to advocate for policies that promote sustainable food systems and support the achievement of the SDGs was seen as a key

objective. To achieve this, the event proposed equipping young people with the necessary skills and platforms to engage with policymakers and influence decision-making processes effectively.

Transformation from the Ground Up: Acting at Local Level (11 July), hosted by UN Secretariat

Participants: UN Secretariat representatives.

This event, held on 11 July, reemphasized that, in line with the [Secretary-General's Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report](#), **local action is a precondition for delivering the promise of the SDGs**. The [OECD estimates](#) that nearly **62% of at least 105 of the 169 SDG Targets cannot be reached without proper coordination and engagement with regional and local governments**. Only the inclusion of all local stakeholders can foster sustainable solutions and the accountability needed to deliver the 2030 Agenda. Underscoring the findings of the VNRs presented at the July HLPF, the [VNR Synthesis Report 2022](#) further notes that **"actions to engage local municipalities and include more diverse sets of stakeholders have led to VNRs that encompass more in-depth reports of the state of national progress."** One clear sign of **enhanced local-level engagement** to implement the SDGs are the [Voluntary Local Reviews \(VLRs\)](#), which initially replicated the VNR process at city-level and have since moved to include provincial, district and municipal administrative levels as well as rural areas. VLRs are conducive to more integrated policy-making between national and local governments. They also open up **new opportunities for non-state actors to engage in the process of SDG implementation, such as CSOs/NGOs**, the private sector and academia. A steadily increasing number of Member States are making use of VLRs and referencing them in their national reviews (VNRs). These pioneering countries, some of which put a **strong emphasis on localization**, include Argentina, Cabo Verde, Denmark, Finland, Gambia, **Germany**, Ghana, Greece, **Italy**, Kenya, Norway, Indonesia, **Japan**, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines, **Sweden**, Thailand, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. **Regrettably, however, as noted above no VLRs were presented at the July 2023 HLPF.**

As recognition of the value of localization grows further still, we can hopefully expect more VLRs and greater acknowledgement of the same at the international level. Examples include the [2021](#) and [2022](#) Ministerial Declarations of the HLPF that point to VLRs as a useful tool to enhance exchange and further SDG progress.

Experiences in Peer Learning in Achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs (12 July), hosted by the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the United Nations

Participants: Representative of the Permanent Mission of Luxembourg to the UN; Diadra Ni Bhuachalla, European Economic and Social Committee's Youth Delegate to COP28 and COP29; Arnau Queralt-Bassa, Director of the Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia (CADS), Chair of the Network of European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory (EEAC).

This side event presented the Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (SDSN) report ["Indicators and a Monitoring Framework for Sustainable Development Goals: Launching a data revolution for the SDGs."](#)

The speakers emphasized the **importance of translating political mandates into words that children can understand**, in addition to enhancing collaboration between different stakeholders, such as civil society and indigenous communities. There is also a **need for science-policy-society interfaces** in order to achieve the SDGs. Concretely, policy-makers need to consider and collaborate with scientist working on climate change, sustainable development, etc. This paper outlines a **collaborative and science-based approach to achieve the SDGs** in Europe and globally by outlining **how a comprehensive indicator framework might be established** to support the SDGs

and its Targets. It emphasizes the **necessity of a data revolution** to accurately evaluate and assess SDG progress. It also underlines the need for policymakers, governments, and other stakeholders to have **access to accurate, trustworthy, and timely data in order to make educated decisions** and take the necessary steps to address the most important global crises. The article suggests **a set of metrics that can be used to measure the advancement of each SDG Target**. These metrics were carefully chosen to reflect the complexity of sustainable development and to offer a comprehensive picture of the state of global development. The report also addresses potential solutions to these problems and highlights the **difficulties and gaps in data gathering, particularly in developing nations**. It **emphasizes how crucial technology, creativity, and cross-border collaboration are in assisting data collection operations**. Overall, the article emphasizes the necessity of starting a data revolution in order to guarantee that the SDGs are achieved by 2030. It emphasizes how important data-driven decision-making is for advancing sustainable development and raising general living standards. Policymakers can effectively collaborate to realize the SDGs and build a more sustainable and equitable future for all by building a strong monitoring framework and leveraging pertinent indicators.

Ensuring Education Continuity: The Roles of Education in Emergencies, Protracted Crises, and Building Peace (14 July), hosted by Save the Children International

Participants: Awut Deng Acuil, Minister of General Education and Instruction, South Sudan; Somaya Faruqi, Youth/Girl Representative from Afghanistan, former captain of Afghan Girls Robotic Team; H.E. Tijjani Muhammad Bande, Permanent Representative, Permanent mission of Nigeria to the UN; Yasmine Sherif, Executive Director, Education Cannot Wait (ECW); Charles North, Deputy CEO, Global Partnership for Education (GPE); Rotimy Djossaya, Executive Director for Policy, Advocacy, and Campaigns, Save the Children; Yayoi Segi-Vltchek, Chief, Section for Migration, Displacement, Emergencies, and Education, UNESCO; H.E. María del Carmen Squeff, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the UN, Co-Chair of the Group of Friends for Education and Lifelong Learning; Frank van Cappelle, Senior Adviser, Education, UNICEF; moderated by Professor Yuto Kitamura, Graduate School of Education, University of Tokyo.

Awut Deng Acuil emphasized the **critical role of conflict resolution in achieving peace and expanding educational opportunities** in his country of South Sudan. Acknowledging that education is vital for economic recovery, the Minister highlighted how **children's long-term aspirations are often to return to school, showcasing the significance of education** in their lives. Somaya Faruqi shed light on the **challenges faced by girls in her country**, describing how many are now confined within their homes. She drew a contrast between the situation before and after the Taliban, sharing stories of an all-female robotics team she was once part of, but that now girls are banned from higher education. She also underscored the **importance of demonstrating to parents the accomplishments and benefits that education can bring for their daughters in order to gain their support**. Without education, none of the SDGs can be achieved. **Investing in education now means empowering a new generation with the ability to shape the future**. The Permanent Representative of Nigeria to the UN emphasized that **education is the cornerstone of development**. He highlighted the **significance of inclusive education** in fostering progress and addressing societal challenges. Charles North emphasized the rising school-age population in low-income countries and the **importance of providing psycho-social support for children in areas of crisis**. Rotimy Djossaya and the representatives from UNESCO and UNICEF urged the **importance of preparedness for emergency situations and using digital learning to educate refugee children in their host language**.

This event was **relevant for our members that work in emergencies: EDUCO, WeWorld and ChildFund International**. Alliance members are working on improving their expertise in this realm and building stronger partnerships with Member States who fund this thematic area. During the event, **Japan reiterated its**

commitment to fund education, including education in crises settings, stating that children and young people affected by conflict must continue their education even when living in temporary camps. Other speakers relayed similar messages, and Somaya Faruqi lamented how 20 years of progress on education in Afghanistan is being eroded because of the current ban on education for girls imposed by the Taliban.

Child Vulnerability Mapping and the Quadruple Threat of Urban Fragility, Climate Change, Gender Inequality & Social Exclusion (14 July), hosted by World Vision International and the [Institute of Economics and Peace](#)

Participants: Representatives of the Institute of Economics and Peace.

This event was a presentation on the results of World Vision’s and the Institute of Economics and Peace’s partnership in research, and the launch of the first version of their “[Mapping and research to comprehensively measure child vulnerability worldwide.](#)” For this project different maps were designed to assess child vulnerability, encompassing factors such as **child poverty, child violence, and exposure to natural hazards. Child deprivation** was also taken into account, considering child mortality, poverty, underweight children, **exposure to violence, and food and water insecurity.** Throughout the process challenges arose in measuring certain harms affecting children, like bullying, which is difficult to quantify accurately.

The **vulnerability of children to natural hazards** was assessed based on mortality rates, providing valuable insights into regions with heightened risks. Similarly, **child exposure to violence** was studied in relation to armed clashes and terrorist incidents, with the Middle East, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso showing the highest levels of vulnerability. Rapid urbanization was also a concern, and the increasing estimated **number of children living in slum households was tracked as a critical indicator of child vulnerability.**

- The data on child vulnerability maps is regularly updated, with the frequency depending on the type of information received. For instance, terrorism rates receive daily updates due to their dynamic nature, while other factors may not change as rapidly.
- A question from the audience highlighted the challenge of measuring gun violence in the USA, as it is currently not included in these maps due to its greater focus on conflict and terrorism.
- Regarding the connection to SDGs, the **greatest opportunity lies in the cost-effectiveness and accessibility of the data provided by child vulnerability maps.** These maps play a crucial role in identifying areas where interventions are needed to achieve specific SDGs related to child well-being and protection.
- To establish a connection at the country level, **discussions centered on enhancing data collection and updating mechanisms. Ensuring robust and up-to-date data is essential for creating effective policies and interventions to address child vulnerability effectively in each country.** Additionally, fostering collaboration and cooperation among stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, NGOs, and civil society, is vital to utilize the data and implement targeted actions to safeguard children's rights and well-being.

Digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and the digital gender gap: strategies and solutions (18 July), hosted by the Permanent Mission of Austria to the United Nations

Participants: H.E. Karoline Edtstadler, Austrian Minister for the EU and the Constitution; H.E. Permanent Representative of Rwanda, Fatou Haidara, Deputy to the Director General and Managing Director of the Directorate of Global Partnerships and External Relations, UNIDO; Cecilia Ugaz Estrada, Special Advisor in the

Office of the Managing Director, UNIDO; Google Representative Melike Yetken Krilla, Head of International Organizations, Google; Gerda Binder Senior Adviser on Gender and Technology, UNICEF; Dr. Brooke Grindlinger Chief Scientific Officer, New York Academy of Sciences, Patricia Shaw, Director, Women Leading in AI.

The Austrian Minister opened by emphasizing the **importance of a human rights-based internet with a legal framework that has human oversight, transparency, and explainability built into it**. She warned that democracy is at stake if a new framework is not quickly developed. The Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the UN reminded us that millions of people still lack access and an understanding of concepts like the [Global Digital Compact \(GDC\)](#), internet safety, and AI, and that the **increasing technological divide only deepens inequality**. He provided examples of a **successful transformation towards a more digital world from Rwanda**, where finances and government programs have been revolutionized to be easily accessible online. Fatou Haidara warned that **gender-blind machine models perpetuate gender inequalities** and stressed the **need to avoid biased tech development**. [UNIDO's Global Alliance on AI for Industry and Manufacturing \(AIM-Global\)](#) was cited as an initiative to address these concerns. Cecilia Ugaz Estrada highlighted the **gender gap in the AI workforce** and the need for women's increased representation in programming, engineering, STEM fields, and beyond. Research by UNIDO found that a **lack of technology access is not the only factor contributing to labor market segregation, but that gender stereotypes and societal norms are equally to blame**. It is important to remember that technology cannot be simply provided to women unless these additional barriers are broken down.

Google's representative gave the private sector perspective, and provided examples of **Google's work towards broadening technology access**. She highlighted the company's billion-dollar investments in women's development that support women-owned businesses, training and skills building.

Gerda Binder of UNICEF underscored the **underrepresentation of women and girls in technology and the disproportionate impact of online harassment and violence** on them. The **gender gap is attributed to factors like accessibility, connectivity, low digital literacy, online safety concerns, and gender stereotypes**. She emphasized the need to **engage not only girls but also their surroundings, including spouses, parents, and teachers**, in training and **co-creating digital solutions**. She shared the success of the "[Ok](#)" app, a female health app **developed together with girls** to make information on menstruation, puberty, safe reproductive health and others more easily accessible.

Dr. Brooke Grindlinger discussed the importance of "getting started" and retaining women and girls in STEM careers. The Academy runs a Global STEM Alliance in which they provide afterschool STEM programs at underprivileged schools in New York City, mentorship and virtual STEM classes with a global reach. She also addressed **gender bias in curricula and workplaces** along with the need for **collaboration with AI industries to update training and promote inclusivity**. Patricia Shaw stressed the assessment of **AI system ethics** and the monitoring of **algorithmic biases** in the short, medium and long term. The [Alliance for Universal Digital Rights](#) was mentioned as an effort to establish a new and improved rights framework for women and girls in the digital age.

In the ensuing Q&A session, various participants raised key points, such as the **importance of normalizing technology in girls' lives, starting early with STEM teachings, tackling gender norms, promoting meaningful connectivity, and involving everyone in the process**. Concerns about privacy, data breaches, and respecting individual choices to engage with digital and AI technologies were also discussed and need to be addressed in the near future.

The conclusion reiterated that **all stakeholders developing AI must prioritize women and girls** and acknowledge the fundamental differences of twenty-first century technology – **through standards, certifications, and gender-sensitive solutions**. Creating a **safe and inclusive digital world requires collective efforts, local language training,**

and the understanding and accessibility of AI models. The aim is to connect everyone and ensure no one is left behind in the digital age.

Youth at the Forefront of Change: Agenda-Setting for Strengthening Partnerships to Accelerate the Recovery from the COVID-19 (18 July), hosted by the [Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women \(Arrow\)](#)

A more detailed summary of this side event is attached for your reference.

Delivering the SDGs: Revitalized Partnerships with the EU (20 July), hosted by the [European Union Delegation to the United Nations](#)

A more detailed summary of this side event is attached for your reference.

VIII. Recommendations and Opportunities for ChildFund Alliance in 2024

The Alliance Secretariat will be working with members to develop a plan for engagement in the HLPF and relevant preparatory processes in 2024. The HLPF 2024, convened under the auspices of ECOSOC, will be held in July 2024, with exact dates, the theme, and the to-be-reviewed SDGs yet to be announced.

Regarding the countries planning to present VNRs, as in previous years priority will be given to countries presenting their VNR for the first time, as well as to those that have not yet presented a VNR during the on-going four-year cycle of the HLPF (2020-2023).

The recommendations below are intended to inform the development of ChildFund's engagement plan:

- Share a 2024 HLPF preparation and VNR engagement package in January 2024;
- Engage in joint advocacy around the language in the Ministerial Declaration to be adopted at the HLPF in 2024, together with other child-focused agencies in New York;
- Consider submitting a joint statement on SDG Target 16.2 (with other organizations working to end violence against children, for it would be strategic to keep emphasizing EVAC while it is not under official review);
- Strengthen engagement in the VNR and VLR processes by supporting Alliance members to participate in regional and local reviews;
- If children will be supported by ChildFund members to participate in the 2024 HLPF, it will be important to have a minimum of six months advance notice to be able to create an application process and engagement strategy. Planning will need to begin a minimum of four months in advance to engage children in 2024 HLPF activities;
- Develop social media messaging for the 2024 HLPF that incorporates children and youth voices and perspectives from the Web Safe & Wise campaign;
- Co-host side events with Member States and other CSOs;
- Alliance members should consider launching a report during the 2024 HLPF.