

SDG Lab

Annual

Report

2021



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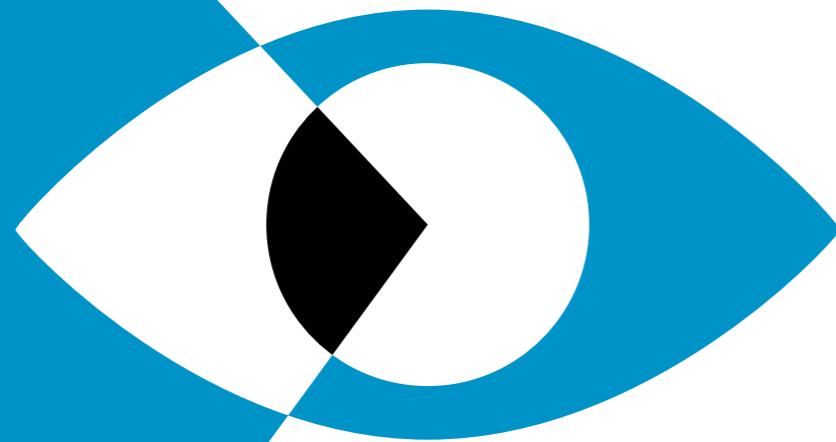
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# A Look Back




The start of 2021 marked the SDG Lab's fifth year of operations and the second year of Phase II Swiss funding, with both milestones realized against the backdrop of the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic. Like 2020, the year 2021 was influenced by the crisis: telecommuting remained in force and in-person events and meetings were restricted or limited in scope. However, with working remotely now considered the norm, the team carried out its activities fully adapted to virtual collaboration and continued to experiment with new gathering formats while finetuning its activities based on the experiences of the previous year.

A significant priority and highlight of 2021 was the external evaluation of the Lab, commissioned by the Swiss Government. The evaluation occurred at an important phase in the Lab's lifecycle: with five years of experience, learnings and results since its creation, an in-depth exercise to inform its future was highly welcomed. The evaluation served as an opportune moment to reflect on the Lab's lessons and achievements to date and to solicit external views and feedback on its work, not only from the perspective of its primary donor, the Swiss Confederation, but also from its other contributors and key partners and collaborators, past and present.

The positive and comprehensive conclusions and recommendations of the external evaluation, released in February 2022, underscored the impact, results, relevance and niche of the Lab, as well as articulated a strong investment and business case for the Lab to continue its work in the years to come.

The year was equally dynamic from a team perspective with three new team members joining the Lab: Sydney Alfonso – Partnerships Analyst Consultant; Evgeniya Altukhova – JPO Member State Focal Point (funded by the Russian Federation); and Trine Schmidt – Manager of the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem (replacing Kali Taylor from the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) who left in May).

The forthcoming pages provide illustrations of the Lab's key activities and milestones in 2021 under the following themes: Engaging the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem; Supporting country SDG challenges; Positioning sustainable finance for the SDGs; Communicating for the goals; and Management and operations.



# Engaging the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## **ACCELERATE – the Ecosystem relaunch**

On 28 January, the SDG Lab and IISD co-convened the virtual launch of [ACCELERATE](#), the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem’s strategic priorities for mobilizing the collective and transformative potential of Geneva-based SDG actors in 2021. A [series of initiatives](#) were introduced to reanimate the Ecosystem, including a pilot micro-grant programme to support collaborative projects that place the SDGs at the centre of COVID-19 recovery. The virtual launch was opened by the UN Geneva Director-General and attended by 90 Ecosystem members.

## **“We are Geneva 2030” Ecosystem profile series**

Announced during the January ACCELERATE event, this [initiative](#) provided a glimpse into the people behind the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem, the individuals who represent the rich mosaic of actors focused on delivering the 2030 Agenda. In total, [12 individuals were featured](#), representing one profile for each month in the year. The aim of this initiative was two-fold: one, to build a stronger sense of community and identity among the 350+ Ecosystem members, and second, to better capture the uniqueness and diversity of Geneva’s SDG actors. It also served to highlight the breadth of expertise and scope of mandates within the community.

## **Spotlight newsletter**

Kickstarted at the end of 2020, the Ecosystem “Spotlight Series” was fully launched at the beginning of 2021. The newsletter provides monthly updates—in English and French—to keep the Ecosystem engaged and informed of the latest resources and knowledge related to the paradigms of the 2030 Agenda, under the themes of integration, collaboration and innovation. This series continued throughout 2021 providing Ecosystem members with tangible opportunities to engage with these paradigms and examples of good practices in these areas.

## **HLPF Informal Briefing**

In the lead-up to the 2021 High Level Political Forum (HLPF), the Lab together with IISD co-convened representatives of the Geneva 2030

Ecosystem and Permanent Missions for an [informal briefing](#). This briefing was the first joint gathering between members of the Ecosystem and Geneva’s Member State representatives. Held on 24 June, the briefing, titled “HLPF 2021: All You Need to Know”, was attended by 70 individuals representing a balance of governments, UN entities and other international organizations, civil society organizations, and NGOs.

The briefing was opened by the UN Geneva Director-General followed by the Lab presenting information and an analysis on the main themes of this year’s HLPF and of the SDGs under review, practical information on attending the virtual event, and updates from participants on their own HLPF side-events and engagements. Following the briefing, participants received a communications package containing a [video summary](#) and materials with useful information and links.

## **Pre-COP26 gathering of the Ecosystem**

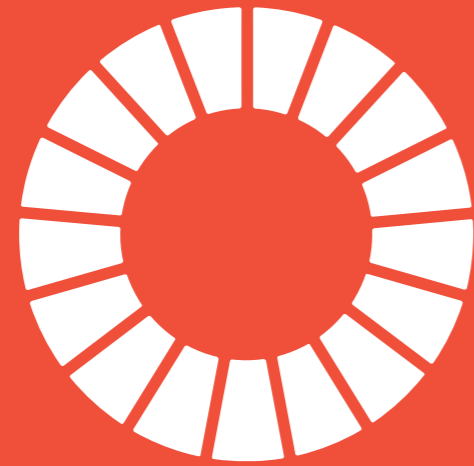
The approach of connecting the Geneva Ecosystem ahead of global events was equally deployed in the lead up to the 2021 UN Climate Conference in Glasgow. The COP26 meetup provided an opportunity for members who were either attending or engaging online to share knowledge and information on developments related to the conference. The gathering was a concrete follow-up to a recommendation from Ecosystem members for more informal and regular moments to exchange around specific themes and events.

## **Micro-grant programme**

In 2021, a [micro-grant programme](#) was piloted to support collaborative projects in the Geneva Ecosystem. Launched as part of the ACCELERATE initiative, the micro-grants were aimed at supporting community action that placed the SDGs at the centre of COVID-19 recovery. Out of 18 applications submitted, five organizations were awarded a 5’000 CHF grant to implement their project ideas. The objective was to create blueprints of how even small amounts of resources can spur innovation in the Ecosystem.



The Geneva 2030 Ecosystem is made up of 355 people from over 200 organizations, a dynamic network of individuals and organizations dedicated to delivering the SDGs. The Ecosystem is convened by the SDG Lab and the International Institute for Sustainable Development.



# Supporting country SDG challenges

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## Disseminating the Africa's Pulse report

On 3 February, the SDG Lab partnered with the World Bank Group's Geneva Office to hold an [in-depth briefing](#) for Geneva-based Permanent Missions on the 2021 edition of [Africa's Pulse](#). This biannual report presents an analysis of the near-term macroeconomic outlook for sub-Saharan Africa, with the 2021 iteration focused on the impact of COVID-19 on economic activity in the region. The briefing was delivered by the World Bank's Chief Economist for Africa, Dr. Albert Zeufack, with contributions from the Minister of Digital Economy and Digital Transformation of the Republic of Togo, Ms. Cina Lawson, and the Director of the ITU Telecommunication Development Bureau, and SDG Lab Advisory Group member, Ms. Doreen Bogdan-Martin.

The briefing was tailored to highlight the role of digitalization in helping African countries recover from COVID-19 and to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Having interventions from a country official (Togo) and a Geneva-based technical agency (ITU) provided participants with replicable examples of digital tools to drive new investments in infrastructure; enhance leadership, transparency, and governance; and strengthen policy regulations and legislation.

This first engagement between the Lab and the World Bank Group was initiated by the Director of the World Bank Geneva Office as they wanted an 'entry point' to the Geneva Ecosystem and to collaborate with a trusted and valued partner in accessing Geneva-based country missions. The fact that the World Bank Group reached out to the Lab speaks to its role as a neutral and reputable partner. For the Lab, the collaboration was aligned to its theory of change and its programmatic niche of engaging Geneva actors in concrete themes where the 2030 Ecosystem and the broader International Geneva community can support countries through its unique expertise and resources.

## Building resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics

The Geneva Science-Policy Interface (GSPI) reached out to the Lab to help frame and curate the [launch of a policy brief](#) on promoting a holistic mindset to governing future pandemics

in light of COVID-19. Held on 25 March, the event convened policy practitioners, diplomats and other country representatives, and experts to unpack the [policy brief](#) in practical terms so its recommendations and tools can help enhance the governance of pandemics and similar crises in the future and in the context of the SDGs. Some 80 participants joined the event, curated by the Lab, to ensure alignment to the 2030 Agenda and the diverse engagement of the Geneva Ecosystem—from having the UN Geneva Director-General give opening remarks to Geneva-based policy experts share insights across trade (WTO), health (WHO), and work (ILO). This event represented the second such joint initiative between GSPI and the Lab to launch a policy brief, with the first held in January 2020 on [Behavioral Insights for Climate Action](#).

## Amplifying regional voices and SDG progress:

The Lab is known for its ability to translate the outcomes of complex SDG processes and events into digestible and meaningful information for broader uptake by governments and other SDG actors. The Lab applies this 'unpacking' and amplifying role across the main intergovernmental processes for the global goals such as the annual HLPF and the UN Regional Forums on Sustainable Development.

In the lead up to this year's HLPF, the Lab took this function to new heights by proactively reaching out to the UN offices<sup>1</sup> tasked with organizing the regional forums and the HLPF to suggest a collaboration to expand communication on the main political messages coming out of the regional forums. This initiative of the SDG Lab was instigated by the Lab's drive towards ensuring that the substance of key UN reports and events reach their intended audiences.

Based on the realization that all too often reports are not read, this collaboration with UN DESA materialized with a campaign featuring [video summaries](#) of the five regional sustainable development forums. The videos produced by the Lab featured the lead SDG experts from each

1. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), the five UN regional economic and social commissions, and the UN Regional Commissions New York Office (RCNYO).

Information on the SDGs was shared through 18 in-person and virtual briefings offered to diplomats, students, business executives and other groups, reaching some 1200 individuals.



of the five economic commissions speaking to the main take-aways of their respective forum, underscoring the impact of COVID-19 on SDG implementation and highlighting measures for accelerating progress.

Together with a corresponding social media campaign developed by the Lab, including Twitter cards customized for each region, the regional forums communications initiative received high-level support and amplification across the UN development system, with UN DESA, the President of ECOSOC, and the global UN communications department sharing the Lab's materials on social media. This combined effort resulted in the Lab recording its highest-ever social media metrics, demonstrating the relevance—and appetite—of such initiatives.

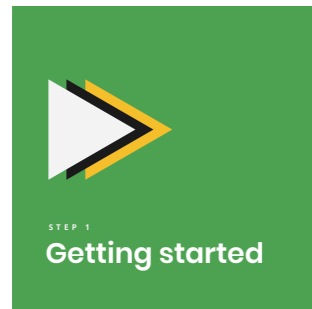
These outcomes serve to reinforce the Lab's role as a 'go-to' source on SDG-related information.

#### Sharing the SDG Lab's learnings:

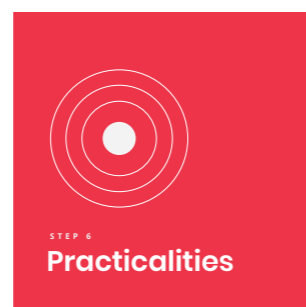
The Lab's [Learning Journey](#) was developed throughout 2021 and launched in December—a project in direct response to demand received from countries and other partners for greater insight into replicating the SDG Lab model or aspects of how the Lab works<sup>2</sup>. The Learning Journey includes information on how to set up a Lab in principle and in practice, how to establish a network or community of SDG actors, and how to convene, collaborate and innovate around the SDGs, among other topics. Importantly, the Learning Journey builds on and fully integrates the SDG Lab Toolkit that was developed in 2019 as its first attempt at capturing lessons and how it works in supporting the Global Goals.

Enhancing member state engagement: Supporting countries in SDG implementation is at the heart of the Lab's raison d'être, with many offerings and engagements directed

2. Examples of demand for guidance on replicating the model: UN Development Coordination Office (UNDCO), UN country teams in Albania, Brazil, and Lebanon; the Government of Costa Rica; UN organizations (UNIDIR and ITU); SDG Swiss Sports Lab; the Hague Humanity Hub; IHEID Sustainable Finance Department; GESDA and EHL Lausanne; and civil society organizations in Canada, the Russian Federation, and Switzerland.



# Nine modules from the SDG Lab Learning Journey were developed, an online resource to help individuals and organizations set up a lab of their own or take action around the SDGs that matter to their community.



towards Member States and tailored to specific requests received. In line with the Lab's theory of change, and to expand its interactions with countries, a new Member State strategy was articulated during the first half of 2021 under the stewardship of the Lab's new Junior Professional Officer (JPO) who serves as the focal point for Geneva-based Permanent Missions and requests from capitals.

The strategy is pragmatic and responsive to the possible needs of Member States, and it identifies five concrete entry points to support and collaborate with Permanent Missions in Geneva and country-level SDG practitioners: information-sharing on SDGs; collaborations on sustainable finance; connecting Member States with the expertise of Geneva 2030 Ecosystem; amplification of good national practices; and engaging Member States in in-depth focus areas of work.

As a result of the Member State strategy and additional team capacity, the Lab's engagement with countries has become more structured and intentional. Having a dedicated Member State contact person has increased the participation of country representatives in SDG Lab events and ensured they receive key communications and updates. It has also been particularly important to dedicate a team member to reaching out to Member States, as the restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have limited the opportunities for the Lab to meet government representatives in informal and formal settings.

Such reinforced outreach to Member States also allowed to ensure diversity of views and voices in the dialogue on sustainable finance at the 2021 edition of Building Bridges Week (BBW). Country representatives and SDG practitioners—namely from Costa Rica, Colombia, Ghana and Indonesia—participated in BBW, and their calls to action were brought forward at different levels and showcased national challenges, initiatives, and achievements—perspectives that, otherwise, would not have been present at Building Bridges.

Moreover, BBW participants underscored the importance of 'building bridges' from Geneva and Switzerland to other countries and regions to ensure sustainable finance solutions are not developed in a 'vacuum' and distant from country realities. This 'bridging role' is one

part of the Lab's contribution to the Building Bridges movement, facilitating interactions and connections between the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem and other countries to support implementation of the SDGs.

Another notable example of a request from a Member State during the reporting period was from the Indonesian Permanent Mission in Geneva seeking advice on framing the development agenda of the Indonesian Presidency of the G20 in 2022. The country's focus will be on ensuring that the COVID-19 response will not slow down or stall global efforts to bring the SDGs to life.

In response to this request, the Lab engaged on several fronts, namely: provided insight into the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda as an existing roadmap for the recovery; suggested a new outlook on sustainable development through the social dimension lens of sustainable finance, which could be taken forward by the G20; and elaborated on the role of governments in closing the SDG financing gap, not only by framing the regulatory narrative but also providing incentives for capital to flow in investment-hungry sectors. The Lab team also joined the UN G20 Working Group on Dialogue with the Government of Indonesia on its proposed overarching G20 priorities and contributed a "Geneva perspective" to this UN System-wide exchange.

Furthermore, pro-active communication with Geneva-based Permanent Missions has allowed the Lab to keep a close overview of SDG themes and trends of interest to Member States and to ensure the Lab's current and future work is relevant to the evolving global political and SDG context. An example is the increasing interest and demand by many governments for dialogue, expertise and partnerships on the themes of digital transformation and data for the SDGs. The Lab had already identified these overarching and cross-cutting themes as key topics of common interest across many members of the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem (and beyond) and will facilitate initial discussions with the participation of SDG stakeholders and Member States in the beginning of 2022.





# Positioning sustainable finance for the SDGs

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## Building Bridges Week (BBW) 2021

Following a one-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Building Bridges returned at the end of November 2021 with a week-long series of over 70 events and numerous announcements on concrete sustainable finance initiatives and partnerships, including by the Swiss Confederation. In the lead up to and throughout Building Bridges, the SDG Lab stuck to its raison d'être and its identity. **At the level of strategy and substance, the Lab focused namely on four core deliverables—ensuring:**

1. The 2021 edition leads to more meaningful participation of Member States and of the broader sustainable development community in Switzerland and from other parts of the world.
2. The SDGs feature prominently as a win-win framework for countries and for investors.
3. Sustainable finance is understood as SDG finance versus only “green finance”.
4. Concrete SDG financing actions emerge out of the week.

## Highlights of the Lab's engagement in Building Bridges 2021 include:

**Ensured that the message of “SDGs at the centre” of sustainable finance remained at the core of the week** including through high-level UN participation of the UN Deputy Secretary-General [Amina J. Mohammed](#) and ILO Director-General Guy Ryder as well as bringing forward [country viewpoints](#) through organizing video messages from the President of Costa Rica, the President of Ghana, and a senior representative from the Government of Indonesia. At BBW, the SDG Lab and IISD also released a [guide](#) with concrete steps for how to enhance the collaboration between development actors and the finance industry to leverage finance for the SDGs.

## Measuring the “S” through enhanced data

The Geneva 2030 Ecosystem [hosted two data](#)

[workshops](#) that saw participants engage in dialogue on how to measure the social dimension of sustainable finance. The two workshops, which were attended by a diverse mix of stakeholders from both the finance sector and the sustainable development community, clearly signaled a need and an appetite from the community to tackle the challenges associated with measuring the social impact of investments. The strong response to these two workshops demonstrated how this issue is maturing and the important niche the Lab has in this evolving space. The Lab will respond to this by continuing the work with the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem on the issue in 2022.

## Focused communications

The Lab served an important role in raising awareness of Building Bridges throughout the Geneva ecosystem and beyond. This included writing and dissemination two [“primers”](#) on SDG financing ahead of Building Bridges; writing and placing a [joint op-ed](#) by the SDG Lab Director and the Executive Director of Sustainable Finance Geneva on widening the scope of sustainable finance to include social investments; organizing a [press interview](#) for the Deputy Secretary-General with Geneva Solutions; and interviewing and producing [nine video ‘capsules’](#) of high-level speakers at the Building Bridges Summit that featured the Deputy Secretary-General, the President of Building Bridges (Patrick Odier), and the Head of Global Cooperation at the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, SDC (Christian Frutiger), among others.

In a [special newsletter](#) of the Canton of Geneva for its Interparliamentary Group on International Geneva, UN Geneva Director-General Valovaya wrote on the importance of ‘building bridges’ with the finance community and underscored how the 2030 Agenda represents an unparalleled business opportunity.

## Curated diverse voices and themes:

This second iteration demonstrated a welcomed and dramatic shift in representation of voices and perspectives when compared to the first edition of Building Bridges. This was an

The 2021 edition of Building Bridges was held over 4 days involving 73 sessions that attracted 1400+ in-person participants across 3 venues in Geneva. UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed was one of several high-level participants who spoke at the event.



intentional result of the Lab. Speakers and events reflected the broader sustainable finance community in 2021, with representatives of governments, civil society, academia, the private sector, foundations, as well as the UN and other international organizations.

A more detailed summary of the SDG Lab's participation in the Building Bridges 2021 can be accessed [here](#).

#### **Pipeline Builder:**

Work on the Pipeline Builder<sup>3</sup> project made significant progress and attracted much attention during 2021 with efforts focused on pitching the concept to partner countries and marketing developed pipelines to potential investors, as well as connecting with UN country teams where pilots are starting, such as in Costa Rica, Ghana, the Caribbean region, and Eastern Africa. Together with project partner The Ground\_Up Project, the Lab held regular briefings for representatives from government and the UN (country teams, HQ, UNDP) to raise awareness, promote coherency across the UN system on SDG financing initiatives, and to secure potential buy-in for replicating the Pipeline Builder concept in different countries.

To heighten broader knowledge of the Pipeline Builder initiative, the project team wrote and secured the placement of a [three-part series](#) in the online news and views magazine Geneva Solutions that presented the Pipeline Builder through a deep dive into some of the key opportunities, questions, and challenges

associated with turning the SDGs into an investor's roadmap.

As part of Building Bridges 2021, the [SDG Lab Pipeline Builder event](#) secured the engagement of the UN Resident Coordinator of Ghana, Charles Abani, who joined virtually, a Chief Executive Officer of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre, Yofi Grant, a Ghanaian investor, Jerry Parkes, who also spoke at the Summit, as well as Agi Veres, UNDP Representative in Geneva. The Pipeline Builder project team launched a US\$ 50 million Ghana pipeline of companies at the event and held one-to-one meetings between Ghanaian counterparts with potential funders and partners of the Pipeline Builder pilot in Ghana.

In the final quarter of 2021, the Pipeline Builder team entered into discussions with UNDP's Financial Centers for Sustainability (FC4S) to replicate creation of pipelines of investments done in Ghana in three other African countries. Various levels of engagement have been underway with UNDP's Financial Sector Hub, the SDG Impact team, and Resident Coordinators in key countries to secure funding of this partnership in the first half of 2022.

An ongoing and key focus of the Pipeline Builder work throughout 2021 remained at securing an invested deal through ongoing negotiations with an impact investor and investment companies. These activities will be strengthened by the launch of a bespoke digital investor platform to connect investors and companies, the development of which will be finalized in early 2022.

3. The Pipeline Builder is a market-based solution that helps investors find and invest in projects that align directly to the SDG priorities of a country to ensure tangible and additional impact. The project aims to drive more capital to the SDGs. Visit the [FAQ](#) for more details.



# Communicating for the goals

2021 HIGHLIGHTS



## Accelerating SDG solutions podcast

In December, the SDG Lab and the UN Geneva Library & Archives joined forces to produce a new podcast mini-series on SDG implementation in times of crisis. Titled “[It Takes a Global Crisis](#)”, the four-episode series is part of the Library’s [The Next Page podcast](#), which is designed to advance the conversation on multilateralism.

Using the COVID-19 pandemic as its context, the podcast highlights how certain pro-SDG policies and projects have accelerated because of the urgent social, economic and environmental needs and considerations that the global pandemic brought to the fore: some of these SDG policies and initiatives were often talked about, but rarely implemented.

The series also touches upon some of the implementation challenges and other aspects that the international community has learned in SDG implementation that can be taken forward to supercharge delivery of the Global Goals. Each episode is structured as a conversation between experts on four topics: digitalization and connectivity; resilience and the environment; social protection; and sustainable cities.

The series is moderated by the Lab’s Edward Mishaud with technical and content support provided by team members of the Lab and UN Library & Archives Geneva. At the end of podcast, listeners are provided with a short “Spark”, providing an additional opportunity to dig deeper into case studies related to the topics addressed. An introductory episode, featuring the Lab’s Director and the Director of UN Library & Archives Geneva, was [released](#) in December to introduce and build interest in the series.

## It’s a wrap – Season one of “Go! Solutions Durable”

The SDG Lab-backed television programme by Geneva broadcaster Léman Bleu, “[Go! Solutions durables](#)”, concluded during the reporting period with a total of 10-episodes focused on SDG sensitization and showcasing International Geneva actors. In May, a special two-part episode on implementing the 2030 Agenda

and the role of cities was filmed at the Palais des Nations featuring several notable guests including UN Geneva Director-General, Ms. Valovaya, Swiss Federal Councilor, Ms. Simonetta Sommaruga, the Deputy Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, Dr. Elena Manaenkova, representatives from the Canton and City of Geneva such as Mr. Sami Kanaan, and the Lab’s Director, Nadia Isler.

The Lab played an instrumental role in this joint co-production by ensuring the specificities of the 2030 Agenda – including references to the paradigms – and the uniqueness of the Geneva Ecosystem were accurately captured and reflected in the episodes. The final viewership and production report of the pilot season indicates that the series was one of the most watched in Léman Bleu’s history, with on average 100’000 television viewers per episode. Based on these positive findings, Léman Bleu together with the group of co-producers, including the Lab, kicked off a second season of “Go! Solutions durables” at the end of October.

## Thought leadership commentaries

To better communicate the Lab’s theory of change, its focus on the 2030 Agenda’s paradigms, and to share the learnings of its journey, the team kicked-off its first thought leadership series in early June with a [guest commentary](#) published on the IISD SDG Knowledge Hub. The article outlined the Lab’s perspective on using the SDGs as the plan to recover from COVID-19 and to respond to other crises such as the climate emergency. The Agenda’s paradigms of collaboration, integration, and innovation were presented as key enablers to make the planet more resilient and to accelerate SDG progress.

Ahead of Building Bridges, an opinion piece by SDG Lab Director Nadia Isler and Sustainable Finance Geneva Director Sandrine Salerno was published in Geneva Solutions ([English](#)) and l’Agefi ([French](#)). In the article, they made the case as to why sustainable finance must factor in the “S” (social considerations) and how platforms such as Building Bridges are key to boosting

*It Takes a Global Crisis* podcast series was launched in December, assessing SDG progress in light of COVID-19. The series highlights how certain SDG policies have accelerated because of the urgent needs linked to the global pandemic.



collaboration for the 2030 Agenda. Their article was the only such commentary to be published on this theme in the lead up to the event.

#### **Pre-HLPF briefing communications**

In support of the 24 June HLPF informal briefing for the Geneva 2030 Ecosystem and Permanent Missions, and in tandem with the Lab-led regional forums' communications campaign, the team prepared a [two-pager](#) in the same spirit of the briefing, "All You Need to Know". The document presented an analysis of the HLPF, the main findings and messages from the Secretary-General's 2021 SDG Progress Report, and key takeaways from the five UN Regional Forums on Sustainable Development. This two-page document was included in the information pack given to participants and was shared with more than 400 actors based in Geneva and around the world.

The objective of this multi-pronged information campaign was to provide Lab stakeholders with quality content and analysis of the messages of these major events through the lens of the collaboration, integration, and innovation paradigms that underpin the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Only top-level and relevant information was shared with the different stakeholders for a better understanding of the issues at stake—at country, regional, and international levels. This contribution of concise and 'to-the-point' information gathering is a hallmark of the Lab and demonstrates the value it brings through a service tailored to the needs of the Lab's stakeholders.

#### **Lab viewpoints featured in SDG related articles and updates**

Members of the Lab team continue to be solicited for media interviews and articles focused on amplifying SDG progress, good practices, and challenges. During 2021, three interviews or features were published: the [Swiss UN Association \(ASNU\)](#) profiled Nadia Isler as part of its series focused on Swiss nationals working in the UN system; [The Geneva Observer](#) interviewed Edward Mishaud on the impact of COVID-19 on SDG progress; and [SDGZine](#), a

# The SDG Lab Twitter account had 4700 followers, and its new LinkedIn account welcomed 950 followers.



publication of Geneva's AddictLab, featured a contribution by team member Marlene Borlant on how to communicate the integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda.

## Social media

The Lab team uses social media to, namely, amplify its work, to help promote the paradigms of the 2030 Agenda, and to raise awareness of major SDG-focused events. As for most organizations, an active social media presence is an essential pillar of the Lab's communications and outreach strategy. The Lab's social media audience is composed of both experts and individuals interested in the SDGs, which informs the content that is disseminated.

The Lab's presence on Twitter continues to grow with over 600 new followers in 2021, for a total of nearly 4700 followers at the end of the year. Attractive visuals and simple message campaigns – such as developed for the UN regional forums – as well as targeted promotion to influencers have helped to increase reach. Reflecting the growing visibility of the Lab's Twitter presence, the Lab is getting tagged and mentioned in more posts from important profiles, such as the global UN account and those of specialized entities like ILO and UN DESA.

Looking at specific Twitter initiatives in 2021, the campaign developed for the UN regional forums was the Lab's most successful initiative, with over 75'000 combined views of the various posts on the Lab's account alone. The communications team developed an appealing set of quote cards, messages, and visuals, the content of which was created in partnership with the regional commissions. These videos and messages were shared across the entire UN system prior to the HLPF, helping to boost awareness and buy-in. In addition, the Lab created a smaller campaign focused on the voluntary national review process, an essential tool for monitoring countries' individual SDG efforts.

In 2021, the team created a LinkedIn profile to communicate about its work and expertise on SDG themes allowing users of this social

platform to obtain information about the Lab and its priorities. The decision to use LinkedIn was informed by the realization that SDG practitioners are active on the platform to network, find out about events, and to share expertise and resources. Nearly 1000 people follow the Lab on LinkedIn and each of its posts get viewed by at least these followers.

## SDG Lab website refresh

Work was initiated to redesign and move the [SDG Lab website](#) to a new hosting platform to allow the site to be more dynamic and responsive to future content needs and updates, as well as to ensure the site can adapt to technological developments. Scheduled to be launched in mid-2022, the new website will provide visitors with a revitalized 'look and feel' and easier access to key information and resources.

The web site serves as the Lab's core information platform and is available in English and French, corresponding to the main languages of the Lab's stakeholders: in 2021, 36 pieces of content were published in English and 19 in French, with many articles receiving thousands of views.

# Management and operations

2021 HIGHLIGHTS

## External Evaluation of the Lab

In the last quarter of 2021, the Lab undertook an extensive external evaluation, commissioned by its primary donor, the Swiss Confederation. This evaluation occurred at an important phase in the Lab's lifecycle: with more than five years of experience, learnings and results since its creation, an in-depth exercise to inform its future was welcomed. The leadership of both UN Geneva and SDG Lab viewed the external evaluation as an opportune moment to reflect on the Lab's lessons and achievements to date—at the mid-point of the Lab's Phase 2 funding, 2020-2022—and to seek external views and feedback on its work, not only from the perspective of its main donor, but also from its other contributors and key partners and collaborators, past and present. Furthermore, the external evaluation provided the SDG Lab with the opportunity to receive a 360°-degree assessment of its work and to offer additional clarity on how its activities are perceived, as well as to receive feedback on ideas, themes and areas for further exploration and improvement.

The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation are highly positive for the SDG Lab. The [report](#) underscored that the Lab "... is both strategically and operationally relevant"; that it has "... a clear niche within the complex international co-operation architecture of Geneva and is appropriately located within the UN system as the main convening platform for the SDGs"; that the "concept of the Lab has been proven"; that "no other platform provides a similar entry point to the SDGs and the UN or has similar convening power to bring together high-level stakeholders"; and that based on these and other findings, "...core funding for Phase 3 is merited".

Substantially, and reiterating a central element of the Lab's raison d'être, the report underscored how the SDG Lab approach, i.e., its model of advancing innovation, connecting stakeholders, forging unexpected partnerships, breaking silos, and amplifying good practices, among other roles, has demonstrated what is feasible for such an entity in a complex UN and international

setting. As the report notes, the SDG Lab "...has actively demonstrated that... despite differences, more unites the international community than divides it". The report also acknowledged the adaptability of the Lab and how it has remained strategically relevant to stakeholders since inception and has adjusted to the highly dynamic situation presented by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which unfolded at the start of Phase 2.

Overall, the evaluation has helped the SDG Lab team in further finetuning and reflecting on the next phase of its development. The positive review provides additional momentum to accelerate the Lab's contributions to advancing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Importantly, the evaluation's recommendations are critical and pertinent in designing the Lab's Phase 3 period (2023 to 2025) and are already influencing activities in 2022.

## Monitoring results and measurement framework

The team fully deployed its monitoring, evaluation and learning tools in 2021, building on the successful work completed in 2020 to articulate and refine the Lab's logframe, which was developed in late 2019. The purpose of this undertaking was to help the team prioritize and focus its activities and measure its impact.

## The Lab's logframe represents its key measurement and evaluation framework, articulating outputs and activities across four main higher-level outcomes:

### 1. Outcome 1 - Geneva Ecosystem

Measuring the growth and the increase in multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement of SDG practitioners in the international Geneva ecosystem.

### 2. Outcome 2 - In-country challenges

Assessing the extent to which Member States actively use Geneva's SDG expertise to address in-country challenges, including through UN country teams (UNCTs) when relevant.

### 3. Outcome 3 - Model

The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the External Evaluation are highly positive for the SDG Lab. The report underscored that no other platform provides a similar entry point to the SDGs and the UN or has similar convening power to bring together high-level stakeholders.

Tracking how SDG actors utilize and replicate the tools and lessons from the SDG Lab model in their own activities.

#### 4. Outcome 4 - Sustainability

Monitoring the provision of funding as well as the strategic partnerships the SDG Lab is engaging in.

#### Feeding into the above-mentioned outcomes are data points coming from five main internal SDG Lab trackers, or M&E tools:

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Collaborations Tracker: Tracks formal and informal collaborations the Lab has been implementing with external actors.
- Speaking Engagement Tracker: Monitors the team's speaking activities, which are largely focused on giving an overview of the 2030 Agenda and its paradigms of integration, collaboration, and innovation, together with information about the work of the Lab and the UN at large.
- Request for Lab's Model Replication Tracker: Records requests received by external actors in replicating the model or aspects of the SDG Lab's model.
- SDG Challenges Country Requests Tracker: Tracks requests received by countries about specific SDG challenges.
- SDG Lab Salesforce CRM Database: Keeps record of the contacts of individuals and organizations the Lab engages with. This customer relationship management platform (CRM) also helps the team keep track of the Lab's activities and subscribers to its different mailing lists, and to monitor the growth and composition of subscribers and attendees to its events.

This framework, and the corresponding data trackers, proved instrumental in preparing the Lab's 2020 Annual Report, which was finalized during the first quarter of 2021, as well as orienting engagement with external partners. For example, one planning and collaboration

tool called "I DO (P)ARTS" was rolled out with the World Bank Group Geneva Office to prepare the end-January briefing on the Africa's Pulse report. The activity served to frame the event, map roles and responsibilities, set expectations, and—importantly—highlight how the 2030 Agenda paradigms are to be reflected. World Bank colleagues shared positive feedback after the exercise and thanked the team for doing it jointly.

# Annex: Overview of key events and milestones in 2021

In 2021, the Lab team engaged in 27 events reaching some 1850 participants.

| Date       | Event  |
|------------|--|
| 28 January | Geneva 2030 Ecosystem ACCELERATE Launch  |
| 3 February | Joint SDG Lab - World Bank briefing for Permanent Missions: Africa's Pulse: Charting the road to recovery  |
| 18 March   | Geneva Trialogue of the Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative (GTI):<br>"Blended finance for open innovation and the SDGs" (Lab panelist)<br>"Open innovation in the UN Geneva ecosystem" (Lab moderator) |
| 25 March   | First Francophone Ecosystem Meeting<br><br>SDG Lab and GSPI policy brief launch on "Building resilience to COVID-19 and future pandemics"  |
| 7 April    | Presentation to the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz University (FNHW University)  |
| 13 April   | Publication of the SDG Lab Annual Report 2020  |
| 4 June     | Launch of SDG Lab Thought Leadership series: publication of commentary on IISD SDG Knowledge Hub: "The world has a plan to get out of COVID-19: it's called the 2030 Agenda"                   |
| 16 June    | SDG Lab Director as Keynote Speaker for "Showcase 2030: Co-creating sustainable finance solutions: the example of Building Bridges Week" at EPFL   |
| 17 June    | SDG Lab Director as Keynote Speaker for the module "Next Generation PA - Sustainability and performance: ESG and SDGs in public and private sector" at SDA Bocconi School of Management        |
| 17 June    | Students Reinventing Cities Challenge: UNOG and UNIGE Conversations with Academia (Lab panelist)   |
| 24 June    | SDG Lab pre-HLPF 2021 briefing for Permanent Missions and Geneva 2030 Ecosystem members  |
| 28 June    | Launch of "Unpacking the UN Regional Forums on Sustainable Development" communications campaign with UN DESA and UN regional commissions   |
| 9 July     | Presentation to student representatives from the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA) on the role of youth in achieving the SDGs                                  |



| Date         | Event   |
|--------------|---|
| 10 August    | Presentation on scaling up businesses for the SDGs at Accelerate2030  |
| 2 September  | Briefing on the SDGs during Theia Foundation's conference on tools for achieving the 2030 Agenda  |
| 3 September  | SDG Lab Director's remarks at Building Bridges Media workshop in Zurich on the role of the UN during Building Bridges 2021<br><br>Presentation to students at University of Geneva on financing the 2030 Agenda and the role of the philanthropic sector for the SDGs |
| 13 September | SDG Lab Director's presentation on the SDGs at the Graduate institute of International and Development Studies  |
| 15 September | Geneva 2030 Ecosystem focus group   |
| 22 September | Building Bridges 2021 warm-up event: Shining a light on the social dimension of sustainable finance event   |
| 5 October    | Presentation at HEC Lausanne Economic Policy Seminar on the 2030 Agenda and 17 SDGs   |
| 7 October    | SDG Lab Director's moderation at the GESDA Summit on Neuro-rights panel   |
| 11 October   | Presentation to students from University of Geneva on the Pillars of peace and security, human rights and development   |
| 18 October   | Lecture to XLab, UNITAR, Tsinghua University on the SDGs and Innovation   |
| 27 October   | Geneva 2030 Ecosystem pre-COP26 Meetup  |
| 30 November  | Building Bridges 2021 data workshops: Measuring the social dimension of sustainable finance   |
| 1 December   | Building Bridges 2021 event on Twelve lessons in gender lens investing in partnership with International Trade Centre (ITC)<br><br>Building Bridges 2021 event on Pipeline Building: Linking investors and national SDG themes  |

