The Labs 2.0

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Evolving into a global research and development capability for the SDGs

Annual Report 2023

UNDP accelerator labs

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Introduction

In 2023 there was a pervasive feeling that there was little room for hope.

Headlines recounted a somber narrative of conflict, displacement and the challenge of coping with the escalating cost of living. Poverty increased while trust receded. Climate change continued to accelerate, adding to a rising toll on lives and livelihoods, changing the way we look at how we survive and thrive. The world's interconnected crises still pose a significant threat to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ultimately impacting all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UNDP Accelerator Labs offer reasons to hope. The Labs learn firsthand that solutions at the grassroots level are often working – and working well – in their community contexts. This 2023 Annual Report "*The Labs 2.0: Evolving into a global research and development capability for the SDGs"* highlights accelerated action towards the SDGs through new ways of working, new and more real-time data, grassroots solutions and diverse partnerships in 115 countries of the Global South. The Accelerator Labs are harnessing the power of research and development (R&D) to push the boundaries of what is known and unknown about the biggest problems we face.

With special thanks to founding investors, **the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ)**, and the **Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD)**, and support from Partners at Core for UNDP, including the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security and the Japan Cabinet Office as action partners, the Accelerator Labs have steadily matured into a fast and agile Network which is turning learning into action.

The Accelerator Labs Network conducts experiments, creates prototypes and amplifies grassroot solutions leading to new value propositions: supporting public sector innovation capability, evolving approaches to informal and circular economies, generating AI-informed tourism and tapping into digital tools for financial inclusion as part of poverty reduction efforts.

In this 2023 review, the way ahead is clear: the Network is evolving into an **open, globally distributed R&D capability for the Sustainable Development Goals**. (See: Chapter 6, Looking Ahead: A Global South-driven R&D capability for the SDGs, pp. 57-58). This Annual Report maps the evolution of that journey.

What you will find in this report

This report illustrates the enhanced impact and potential for scale of the Labs as they generate insights and deliver value for development efforts by UNDP, governments, private and public sector partners, grassroots innovators, and marginalized and vulnerable populations.

In this **introductory chapter**, you will learn about the Labs' contribution to the SDGs. **Chapter 1** presents the insights and value propositions that emerged from the Network in 2023 and how these enable collective action and help reimagine global cooperation for sustainable development. **Chapter 2** shows how the Labs have started to shift towards becoming an open, globally distributed R&D capability for the SDGs and what are the new avenues to scale insights and solutions regionally and globally. **Chapter 3** describes the way forward on the creation of an SDG Innovation Commons backed by the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network that will support SDG acceleration.

In **Chapter 4**, partnerships have their chance to shine. The Accelerator Labs have engaged with more than **1,800 partners** at the global, national and local levels. Discover how they continue to bring on board unusual actors to collaborate and to reimagine development for the 21st century. In **Chapter 5**, the Labs' top communications achievements for the past year are presented. The report concludes in **Chapter 6** with a look ahead at the evolution of the Labs as an R&D function.

Thank you in advance for reading about the UNDP Accelerator Labs' year in review and its in-depth case studies (*deep dives*) and impact stories (*snapshots*). This report honors the investors, partners, the 91 Accelerator Labs, and grassroots communities that form part of a vibrant innovation ecosystem focused on advancing the 2030 Agenda.

Connecting the dots: Bringing the SDGs back to where they belong

The UNDP Accelerator Labs catalyze localized action and take an experimental, community-centered approach to finding development solutions tailored to local contexts. The Labs engage directly with communities to understand needs and perspectives, co-design interventions and rapidly test new ideas and innovations. By fostering grassroots participation and ownership, the Accelerator Labs increasingly:

■ create (near) real-time, contextual and experiential data on various development challenges;
■ tap into off-the-radar opportunities to accelerate the SDGs from the ground up; and
■ develop and scale inclusive and sustainable development solutions that leave no one behind.

In 2023, the UNDP Accelerator Labs experimented on 268 unique development challenges impacting and facilitating linkages across all 17 SDGs with the highest impact on:

■ **SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth:** 46 Accelerator Labs worked on this SDG and conducted 58 experiments.
■ **SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities:** 36 Accelerator Labs worked on this SDG and conducted 50 experiments.
■ **SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructur**e: 37 Accelerator Labs worked on this SDG and conducted 48 experiments.
■ **SDG 13 Climate Action**: 32 Accelerator Labs worked on this SDG and conducted 38 experiments.
■ **SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities:** 24 Accelerator Labs worked on this SDG and conducted 33 experiments.

SDG impact map across closed experiments in 2023

UNDP Bolivia. The Accelerator Lab piloted the use of satellite imagery and AI for detecting environmental liabilities related to mining.

UNDP Maldives. The Accelerator Lab tapped into the power of collective intelligence for climate action. They engaged volunteers in Maafaru island to create a detailed Hazard, Vulnerabilities and Capacities (HVCA) map using digital tools and paper maps to identify household risks and resources for disaster response.
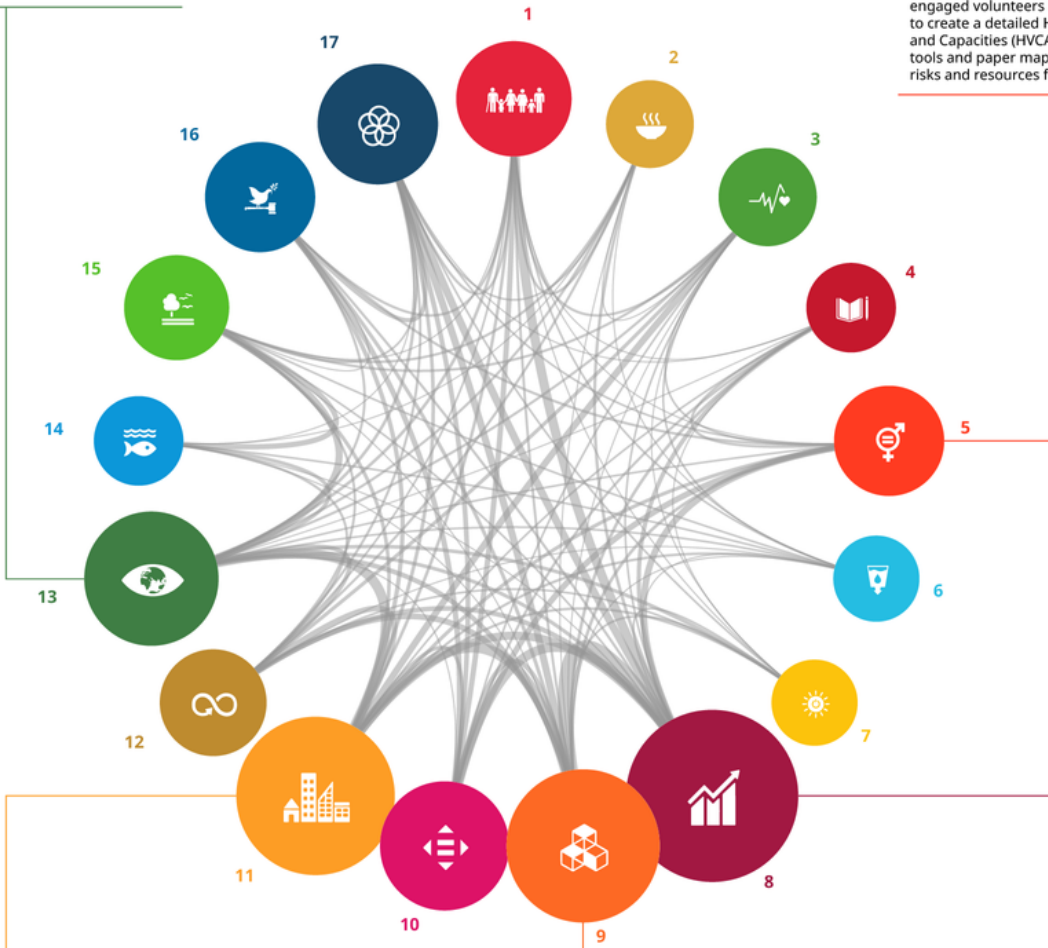
UNDP North Macedonia. With the support of the Accelerator Lab, the City of Skopje inaugurated its first biohacking laboratory to catalyze entrepreneurial ventures on upcycling biowaste, increasing environmental awareness and encouraging responsible waste management practices.

UNDP Egypt. The Accelerator Lab collaborated with the Ministry of International Cooperation and the American University in Cairo for a systems analysis of the national climate tech ecosystem, and these insights were showcased at COP28, reaching development partners, government representatives and the private sector.

UNDP Nigeria. In collaboration with partners, the Accelerator Lab promoted climate-smart farming practices by providing access to timely weather data to over 250 smallholder farmers.
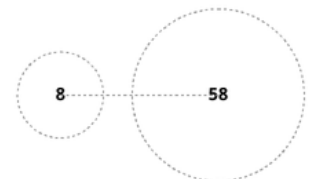
SDGs 5, 8 and 10

The Maldives lacks granular data on island infrastructure and vulnerabilities, hindering disaster preparedness. To address this, the **UNDP Maldives Accelerator Lab** engaged volunteers in Maafaru island to create a participatory map of infrastructure and hazards using digital tools such as Mapillary and OpenStreetMap alongside paper maps. This collective mapping exercise produced a detailed baseline map and a Hazard, Vulnerabilities and Capacities (HVCA) map, identifying household risks and resources for disaster response. Involving locals improved data accuracy and relevance. The maps informed the island's disaster plan and can support risk modelling by authorities. The experience highlights the value of mobilizing collective intelligence to contribute to effective local and national planning and decision making. Moving forward, the Lab aims to institutionalize this approach across other islands.

SDGs 8, 9 and 11

According to the North Macedonia National Waste Management Plan (2020-2030), biowaste represents 45 percent of the total municipal waste in the City of Skopje. As part of **UNDP North Macedonia'**s portfolio, the **Accelerator Lab** started "Re-Thinking Biowaste" through biowaste audits. They found that transformation of biowaste can open new opportunities for sustainable business models, new economic activity and innovation. Through the award-winning endeavor: "BioHack My World," UNDP, UNICEF and the City of Skopje established the first BioHacking Laboratory, putting Skopje on the map of cities in Eastern Europe with a state-of-the-art, open, innovative space. The BioHacking Lab brings science closer to a new community of entrepreneurs, young people, and other enthusiasts who want to pursue circularity activities with a focus on, but not limited to, biowaste. More details about the BioHack My World intervention can be read on the website.

SDGs 9, 2 and 13

Smallholder farmers play a pivotal role in Nigeria's economy, constituting over 90 percent of the country's agricultural yield, which accounts for around 20 percent of Nigeria's GDP, and employs 36 percent of the working population. Faced with increasing challenges of dry weather shocks and extreme flooding, farming communities lack essential data to adapt, minimize waste and mitigate vulnerability to weather shocks. In collaboration with partners, the **UNDP Nigeria Accelerator Lab** worked with over 250 smallholder farmers, providing access to timely weather data, and promoting climate-smart farming practices – improving their yields by over 100 percent. This initiative not only enhances agricultural productivity in the short term, it also strengthens the resilience of smallholder farming communities in the face of climate-related challenges.

SDGs 11, 8 and 13

Egypt's national innovation scene is facing funding constraints, market uncertainties and regulatory complexities. **UNDP Egypt, powered by its Accelerator Lab**, collaborated with the Ministry of International Cooperation and the American University in Cairo for a systems analysis of the national climate tech ecosystem. Beyond the need for essential policies like public funding, tax credits and regulatory clarity, creating a conducive legal environment is paramount for scaling start-ups and establishing a robust venture pipeline. To support climate tech entrepreneurship, insights from the Lab's systems analysis were showcased at COP28, reaching development partners, government representatives and the private sector.

SDGs 13, 11 and 17

UNDP Bolivia, powered by its Accelerator Lab, partnered with the state governorate of Chuquisaca to pilot the usage of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to identify mines that are environmental liabilities. Leveraging satellite technology, near real-time data collection helps identify potential environmental issues across vast mining areas. The initiative in Chuquisaca focused on digitizing mining royalties and georeferenced mapping of environmental liabilities using AI algorithms. These experiments signify a technological leap, enhancing institutional capacities of the governorate, providing timely information for decision making, improving the delivery of public services related to the mining sector, and facilitating the evaluation of public policies.

Chapter 1

New insights and value propositions to scale up collective action and reimagine global cooperation

Output 1: The Accelerator Labs Network increased capabilities and ways of working, providing new insights and value for sustainable development

In 2023, the Accelerator Labs and their partners led the way in creating decentralized, bottom-up, citizen-powered and data-driven development solutions. By harnessing both the capabilities and insights of diverse groups of people, and the power of data and digital technologies, they came up with new pathways to tackle problems such as the climate crisis and waste management, and to seize digital transformation opportunities for small informal businesses in the Global South.

Another achievement of the Network in 2023 was the ubiquitous use of **inclusive and participatory approaches to fill SDG data gaps.** This is due to the unique set up of the 91 UNDP Accelerator Labs. Acting as a connective tissue, the teams are deeply rooted in and connected to local communities while being in direct relation with policy makers and private sector actors. The data they collect goes beyond ones and zeros to become insights for **decision making.**

Thirdly, the Labs demonstrated the value of conducting and learning from hyper local, low cost, fast and agile **experiments** which help policymakers **derisk** their broader, more resource intensive programs. Like a speed boat, the Network can be deployed to test the waters and map the current for the larger fleet to make informed and sound decisions.
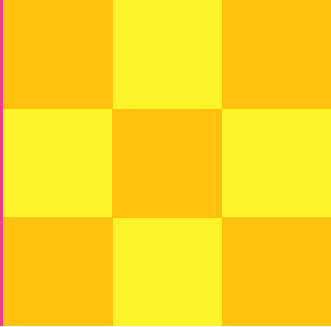
2023 was also a year of consistently pushing the edge of knowledge. By zooming out and connecting the dots between the agile and mature work of the 91 Labs, a **breakthrough** happened: the Network started to identify which data sources bring value for specific sustainable development challenges, thus positioning the Global South to explore the use of **frontier technology for the Sustainable Development Goals.**

1.1. Creating new data sources for the first time

In developing countries, scarcity of data impedes effective policymaking and development planning, making it challenging to address specific local needs, capture new issues and measure progress.

Around 90 percent of the data used by the Accelerator Labs comes from firsthand, primary sources where the Labs collect and make it available for the first time.

Because some SDG-related datasets simply do not exist, many Accelerator Labs **generated data directly from firsthand sources** such as interviews (in-depth, semi-structured and informal), focus groups and surveys. Once available, these datasets then become useful for other practitioners or can help understand other development challenges.

By grounding experimentation in community knowledge, needs and experiences, the Labs helped amplify the voices of those closest to the problem. **Ethnographic, observational and experiential data** give policy makers a sense of what is happening and is often missing in decision-making processes. The Labs are contributing to filling this gap, as featured in the below snapshot from the UNDP Paraguay Accelerator Lab.

Census taker collecting data in a garment workshop in Yaguarón. Photo: UNDP Paraguay/Marisol Jara.

Snapshot:
Data to drive the empowerment of the garment sector in Paraguay

The UNDP Paraguay Accelerator Lab, in collaboration with the Municipality and the Association of Garment and Related Industries, conducted a census of garment workshops in the City of Yaguarón, Paraguay's main textile cluster. The census identified 159 workshops in the city and characterized their access to infrastructure, production strategies, labor force, employment practices, and markets and institutions.

This initiative was aimed at collecting primary data to empower the textile workers to work together while also informing the development of local industrial policies and strategies. The datasets and results from this census are now openly available for research, academia and benchmarking with other industrial policies and sectors.

The PopInsight team, winners of the mobile data theme in the Depopulation Data Challenge in Serbia, used mobile, satellite and open data in order to better understand state-level depopulation trends. Photo: UNDP Serbia.

Snapshot:
Making data openly available:
the case of UNDP Serbia

The UNDP Serbia Accelerator Lab's focus on Artificial Intelligence, the future of work, women in STEM and migration is leading to unique insights thanks to new types of data sources. The team is making these datasets available in the public domain.

For example, their Depopulation Data Challenge helped them uncover diverse data types from mobile phones, job ads, social media and satellite information to run predictive modeling of population trends to inform policy making. This data is now freely available to the public globally, in Serbian and English languages. The accessibility of this data encourages individuals and organizations to explore it to garner new insights to stem depopulation, create opportunities for women in STEM, drive circular migration and understand the future of work in Serbia.

1.2. Cracking the code: which digital data for what development challenge?

Along with deep immersion in communities, the Accelerator Labs have also advanced on mainstreaming data innovation in development. In 2023, the Accelerator Labs' global team curated patterns across the Network, looking specifically at how the Labs use different new types of data, combined with various advanced computational techniques, to inform and serve different development priorities.

Data innovation in the Global South: How the UNDP Accelerator Labs are advancing the use cases for new data in development.

This Sankey diagram shows how broadly categorized data types and sustainable development challenges are connected, as well as the Labs that are leading in this space.
A more detailed breakdown is available at https://undp-accelerator-labs.github.io/SDG-map/#browse

A main takeaway is that earth observation and remote sensing data, whether low-quality satellite imagery or high-resolution drone imagery, are the most used in the Accelerator Lab Network. In 2023, 13 Labs actively used this data. This is likely due in part to the relative simplicity of accessing imagery and the maturity of the computational techniques required to process them.

These data types are often used for **agricultural and waste management** purposes, in particular to detect crop diseases (Cameroon and Cabo Verde) or areas of accumulated waste (Guatemala, the Philippines, Serbia and Viet Nam), and to generate land use and cover maps (Ecuador and India).

Online comments and posts, mostly on travel websites, are another increasingly used source of data in the Network. These are typically used to better understand sub-national **tourism dynamics** (Jordan, Malawi, and Tanzania).

1.3. Maturing and evolving the innovation practice to drive systems change

In 2023, the Labs continued to use a diverse set of innovation methods[1] (on average five per learning experiment) with an uptake of sensemaking, data visualization, Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, and foresight. A noticeable trend is that Labs are increasingly using **inclusive innovation methods**. Around 80 percent of learning experiments conducted in 2023 have employed one or several people-centered design approaches such as co-creation, participatory design or sensemaking.

What stood out is the Labs' ability to evolve the practice of core innovation methods such as **collective intelligence**. By focusing the work of 16 Labs on collective intelligence for climate action in 2023, the Network has created new knowledge on climate adaptation in the Global South while evolving the application of collective intelligence as a way to build **the future of climate action**.

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1. The innovation methods used by the UNDP Accelerator Labs are part of a portfolio of nearly 40 in total. This list evolves over time as the practice continues to change. See Annex 1 for a detailed overview, p.59.

COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE FOR CLIMATE ACTION

The UNDP Bolivia Accelerator Lab visited the Kaami communities to gain a better understanding of their livelihoods. Doña Rogelia's (pictured) son-in-law is one of the authorities in the Pipi Parirenda community in Kaami. Photo: UNDP Bolivia/ Diego Suarez.

Deep Dive:
Empowering Indigenous Peoples through collective intelligence for climate action in Bolivia

The Global Climate Risk Index, 2021, places Bolivia as the 10th most vulnerable country globally, grappling with recurrent droughts, forest fires and floods. In the last four years, forest fires and agricultural burning have affected more than 15 million hectares, damaging biodiversity, ecosystems and livelihoods of rural communities. Yet adaptation planning in some of the most affected regions such as the Amazon, Chiquitania and Chaco is complex due to the priorities of local people who rely on the land for their homes and livelihoods. The Bolivian government introduced the "Lifesystems" plans for Indigenous Peoples to include their perspectives in territorial development and climate adaptation planning. However, gaps persisted, particularly in representing the views of Indigenous Peoples communities, hindering the integration of traditional knowledge into official climate strategies.

To bridge this gap, the **UNDP Accelerator Lab in Bolivia used collective intelligence** to engage Indigenous Peoples communities and municipal decision makers in deliberative workshops. The Lab saw an opportunity to support Kaami, one of the Indigenous Peoples in the Chaco region, by prototyping a crowdsourcing process to understand the community's climate adaptation needs and contribute to their local Lifesystems plan. This work culminated in the co-creation of a 3D climate adaptation map which will contribute to territorial planning developed by the Municipality of Camiri, with budget allocation reflecting a commitment to connect the Kaami Lifesystem plan with municipal planning.

"Indigenous Peoples have a heritage of profound connection with nature, empowering them to live in the present. Their current challenge lies in integrating scientific and indigenous knowledge to anticipate the future and effectively adapt to the climate crisis."
Patricia Choque Fernandez, Head of Solutions Mapping, UNDP Bolivia Accelerator Lab

The benefits of this collective intelligence initiative were profound. It demonstrated the value of developing highly localized, inclusive climate adaptation land use plans, empowering Indigenous Peoples to contribute to national planning. Bringing together Indigenous Peoples communities, municipal representatives, and the Plurinational Authority of Mother Earth fostered mutual understanding and bridged the gap between traditional and official knowledge.

Eloy Chiruripa participates in an Accelerator Lab-run workshop in the Puente Viejo Community (Comunidad de Puente Viejo) for the development of Kaami's Lifesystems Plan. This work emphasizes the role of collective intelligence in creating new data through citizen science, making information more accessible to community members. Photo: Carlos Arce, UNDP Bolivia.

Women and children are on the move for daily water retrieval. With a mapping platform, they can identify water sources and utilize them more efficiently. Photo: UNDP Kenya/Michael Kibuku.

Snapshot:
Understanding water scarcity in Kenya's Tana River County

Extreme weather events have had devastating effects on the local population in Kenya's Tana River County by disrupting access to fresh drinking water, reliable irrigation and fishing. The **UNDP Kenya Accelerator Lab** is developing a prototype for a collaborative mapping platform that seeks to combine data on water infrastructure in Tana River County from satellite data, hydrometeorological data, ethnographic data from the community and other relevant data sets from related Government agencies. Insights generated from the water resource mapping can support communities and vulnerable populations to build resilience and adapt to climate impacts. See the photo essay: "Water Scarcity in Tana River County."

The work led by the UNDP Accelerator Labs in Bolivia and Kenya underscores the potential of collective intelligence as a transformative tool for climate action, enabling marginalized communities to actively participate in shaping resilient and sustainable futures.

Read the full stories in **"UNTAPPED: Collective Intelligence for Climate Action**," a first-of-its-kind research conducted in partnership with Nesta's Centre for Collective Intelligence Design, to be released on Earth Day, April 22, 2024.

A portrait of a STEM scientist
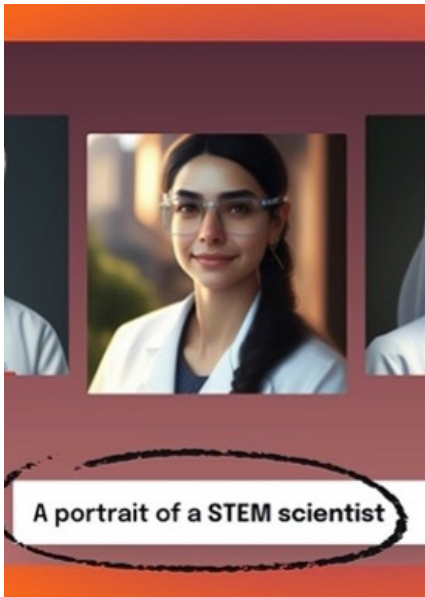
Snapshot:
At the forefront: experimenting with adapting generative AI

2023 was a year of experimentation with generative AI across the Accelerator Labs Network. **UNDP Guatemala, powered by its Accelerator Lab**, tested the potential of generative AI on topics like participatory budgeting, water usage efficiency, peaceful electoral processes and the promotion of digital culture to gather initial ideas for brainstorming sessions on policy interventions and development programs with relevant stakeholders.

Similarly, the Lab team in Serbia investigated how generative AI models might replicate gender stereotypes in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. They prompted the models with terms like "engineer," "scientist," "mathematician" and "IT expert" to see how women were represented. They found that over 75 percent of images generated showed men, reinforcing the stereotype of STEM professions being male dominated. This implies that AI tools alone cannot be relied on to create more equitable systems.

These early-stage experiments are firstly conducted internally. They are limited in scope to allow the Labs to learn and experiment before engaging with external partners.

Snapshot:
Signposting to the future with UNDP's work on signals and trends

In 2023, the Accelerator Labs contributed to UNDP's inaugural Signals Spotlight 2023 report thanks to their active involvement in signal scanning and foresight. The report provides a comprehensive view of emerging changes and asks what these might mean for the future of development.

The Labs identified **one in every five signals** on the platform, bridging local insights with global trends. The **UNDP Panama Accelerator Lab** for instance, identified signals and trends which helped inform the redesign of the new country portfolio, particularly in addressing social cohesion. Looking ahead, the contribution of the Accelerator Labs to UNDP's future scanning capabilities will expand further, with Heads of Exploration from all Labs joining the scanning network, augmenting UNDP's ability to anticipate and better understand the evolving global landscape.

1.4. Experiments that help derisk policy making

In 2023, the Accelerator Labs across the world rolled out small-scale, cost-effective and fast underline experiments to test new hypotheses and learn alongside policymakers what works or what doesn't in sustainable development. The results provide decision makers with insights to react, learn and correct the trajectory of public interventions in a more agile manner. On average, Heads of Experimentation conduct **five experiments per portfolio**.

Space to fail and to learn. Prototyping and proof of concepts help to understand and address sustainable development problems early on. By creating a safe, controlled environment where new ideas can be trialed, the Network has used prototypes to explore the viability of policies and intervention.

Waste pickers work in a landfill at Buhongwa ward in Mwanza city. Photo: UNDP Tanzania.

Snapshot:
Collecting and recycling waste. What works and what doesn't?

To date, 55 percent of the Accelerator Labs have conducted experiments to address the issues of waste management and the opportunities of circularity to provide policy makers with new insights on ways to increase recycling rates in urban areas and address improper waste management.

For instance, the **UNDP Tanzania Accelerator Lab** tested whether satellite data could be used to monitor and quantify waste in the city of Mwanza. In **Guatemala**, the **Accelerator Lab** team investigated if publicly available satellite images can help to identify the location of clandestine waste sites. **UNDP Philippines, powered by its Accelerator Lab,** is using satellite data and surfacing grassroots solutions to inform a larger portfolio on circular economy to fight climate change.

All three prototypes show not only an accessible and cheaper way of monitoring waste, but also reveal the existence of new sites that were previously not registered and thus off the radar of government services.

Another approach to experimentation in the waste management space is the use of social media messaging to influence waste collection and recycling. For instance, the **UNDP Ghana Accelerator Lab** tested the impact of strategic communication to boost household recycling. These insights were taken to scale by the Ministry of Environment in the form of a new national recycling program.

1.5. Sharing insights with the broader development ecosystem

In 2023, the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network produced 201 blogs and over 65 publications (global and local) to openly share its learnings and insights spanning the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with the wider development and innovation ecosystem. Notably, Latin America and Africa emerged as the regions with the highest number of blog publications, key indicators of creating public knowledge on innovation in sustainable development.

For example, the **UNDP Egypt Accelerator Lab** published a report called "Rural Resilience in Egypt: Exploring finance as a tool," to share the results of an exploratory qualitative study conducted with women and men whose livelihoods depend on agriculture. This publication examines the notion of rural resilience to inform community-centered solutions to alleviate poverty in rural Egypt.

Learning in Uncertainty: Tourism Recovery Across Mauritius, Rodrigues and Seychelles outlines the learning cycle of the **UNDP Mauritius and Seychelles Accelerator Lab** and lessons learnt on tourism recovery in both countries. The report provides a glimpse into the realities of communities who have coastal and tourism-dependent livelihoods. The report also demonstrates ways to leverage new and old resources of intelligence, harnessed at various levels – from government to grassroots – to understand complex problems, make informed decisions and find new solutions.

MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

INFORMAL INNOVATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

JULY 2023

Snapshot:
Uncovering the potential of informal innovation for the SDGs

The UNDP Accelerator Lab Network, in collaboration with Utrecht University School of Economics Entrepreneurship, MIT Sloan School of Management and the University of Johannesburg, conducted the first in-depth study of informal (household) innovation on the African continent spotlighting grassroots innovators. It was launched virtually in July 2023, on the sidelines of the High-Level Political Forum, with more than 200 registered attendees from Member States, academia, African start-ups and the wider UN system.

As the first inquiry into informal innovation using internationally comparable methods for household innovation, it helps fill a major research gap in understanding informal innovation in Africa. It sheds light on many informal innovators whose knowledge could unlock progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.

Read the report, "Making the Invisible Visible: Informal Innovation in South Africa"

Scaling social innovation

Learning from the UNDP Uganda Accelerator Lab

SPEAKERS

HADIJAH NABBALE
UGANDA

INNOCENT FREDERICK EJOLU
UGANDA

BERNA MUGEMA TURYAGYENDA
UGANDA

TAYO AKINYEMI
NEW YORK

Snapshot:
United Nations Innovation Network (UNIN) Webinar: Scaling social innovation with the UNDP Uganda Accelerator Lab

The Accelerator Labs continued to be invited to speaking opportunities to share their learning and drive collaboration and engagement in the wider development and innovation ecosystem.

On November 23, 2023, the United Nations Innovation Network (UNIN) invited the **UNDP Uganda Accelerator Lab** to share how, together with e-commerce company Jumia and other partners, they scaled an innovative digital solution to support the digitalization of informal market vendors in the midst of COVID-19. With over 100 participants, 96 percent reported gaining new insights. The webinar recording is now accessible in both the UN Innovation Library and on YouTube.

Chapter 2

Embracing a bottom-up R&D cycle, breaking the scale barrier

Output 2: Sustainable development insights and value (as products of R&D) will be scaled regionally and globally as part of UNDP's programmes

In 2023, the Network shifted towards becoming an **open, globally distributed research and development (R&D) capability for the Sustainable Development Goals,** allowing it to continuously renew UNDP's contribution to the future of development and accelerate impact and scaling nationally, regionally and/or globally. R&D refers to early-stage innovations and socialized learning that help define a set of interventions for systemic change and navigate uncertainty.

The Network started to write this second act by prototyping a new R&D cycle based on distributed knowledge. It begins with discerning patterns from the diverse initiatives undertaken by Labs (from building more resilient foods systems to rethinking cities) which are then curated so they become open and publicly available resources that facilitate global learning. Two examples of such assets are **toolkits** on the topics of digital financial inclusion and national innovation ecosystems.

This cutting-edge open innovation approach gave birth to **UNDP Accelerator Labs-powered value propositions** on emerging sustainable development challenges readily available for national innovation partners, communities and governments in the Global South and offers new avenues to scale insights generated by the Labs for SDG acceleration.

2.1. Cross-country scaling: our bottom-up R&D cycle in full action

In 2023, we progressed with our bottom-up R&D cycle. Each Accelerator Lab chooses the directions for its work based on perceived needs and opportunities in its local context, then shares its work on digital platforms. By aggregating the work of all Labs into a bigger picture, emergent coherence appears. In this sense, the Accelerator Labs Network functions as a global grid of sensors for opportunities to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

We call a *pattern* a situation where Labs across different contexts work on the same issues. They signal new demand and new opportunities.

A pattern requires breadth (over 10 Labs involved) and/or depth (evidence of scaling). Patterns are the first stage of the Accelerator Labs' R&D cycle, some of the patterns emerging in 2023 were related to circular economy, foods systems or digital financial inclusion for instance. Deep dives into patterns are then documented for cross-country insights, enabling scaling of the learning globally.

Below is a table of the main patterns identified in 2023:

Pattern	Percentage of Labs working in this area
Circular economy & climate action	80%
Data and digital innovation	18%
Digital financial inclusion	25%
Food systems	20%
Informal economy	26%
National and public sector innovation	75%

Insights are generalizable results from learning.

For example, 16 Labs collaborated in a survey on the use of digital tools by informal businesses and came to the conclusion that the "digital breadcrumbs" generated using these tools offer a new pathway to formalization. (See Chapter 3: Accelerator Labs' open research on digital uptake by informal entrepreneurs, p. 31)

While insights are based on evidence from a subset of countries, some of these insights inform development interventions elsewhere. Here lies the first building block of the potential for scale. Backed by insights, the Lab Network then moves on to build a value proposition, the third stage of the R&D cycle.

Value propositions **are action-oriented statements on what the Network learns to respond to emerging sustainable challenges. They help UNDP and development partners chart an action-driven journey from where we are now to where we want to be in 2030.**

For example, the Accelerator Labs have demonstrated with evidence that governments that invest in innovation policies, innovation units in the public sector and budget lines for innovation, develop a greater capacity to engage with broader sustainable development agendas.

The UNDP Accelerator Labs' R&D cycle

How does it work?

Developing new value propositions

Positioning UNDP at the edge of sustainable development. Responding to emerging development challenges with agility, curiosity, and systems transformation capacity.

Codifying insights

Mapping, codifying and amplifying promising solutions, data sets and innovation ecosystem to inform the strategic planning, design and delivery of development programmes.

Identifying patterns

Identifying opportunities, gleaning patterns of insights, signals, solutions from a global learning network of local ecosystems.

By investing in **support to public sector innovation**, then, UNDP can improve its cooperation with its government partners across the board. Based on this value proposition, the Accelerator Labs have contributed key value to UNDP units enriching the organization's offer on governance and digital transformation, and connecting with the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs which launched, in 2023, a new facility for public sector innovation called FutureGov.

In late 2023, the Accelerator Lab Network created a value proposition on **financial inclusion** through the use of digital tools. It is based on the work of 26 Labs on finance, 19 of which focused on the inclusion of groups underserved by both traditional banks and fintech companies.

Snapshot:
Strengthening national innovation ecosystems

UNDP Dominican Republic, powered by its Accelerator Lab, was invited by the Presidency to support the creation of a National Innovation Policy. Photo: UNDP Dominican Republic.

In 2023, 75 percent of the Accelerator Labs responded to governments' demand to help develop national innovation policy, map national innovation ecosystems, or strengthen their existing innovation capabilities. These Global South governments attempt to learn from one another. Most of them turn to UNDP for support in this learning process.

The Labs ran a survey that shows that governments that have invested in innovation learned to absorb new processes and methods faster and more smoothly. This suggests that investing in the public sector's innovation capacity can speed up progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

To help development practitioners and Global South governments strengthen their national innovation ecosystems, the Labs **created an open source toolkit.**
It contains resources from the highest impact work they have done in this area. Anyone can re-use and remix it.

Bhakita Ghedai, a group leader of the Akut Ci Mat Sanduk group which benefitted from the prototype, standing in front of her hotel business in Warawar, South Sudan. Photo: UNDP South Sudan/Buay Tut.

Deep dive:
Facilitating financial inclusion for marginalized communities in South Sudan

In South Sudan and Sudan, women living in borderland areas like businesswoman Bhakita Ghedai, found a way to support each other amid tough financial times, an idea that can be traced back generations to the South Sudanese concept of "sanduk," or "box." Each member deposits money periodically and the collective lends the pooled savings to one recipient each cycle.

This simple savings and borrowing scheme was created out of necessity to scale up small businesses and help to provide supplementary income for women who can't access credit and suffer from predatory high-interest rates. The system has helped women across both countries plan savings as well as raise start-up capital at an interest free rate.

UNDP Sudan and UNDP South Sudan, powered by their Accelerator Labs, and the UNDP Africa Borderlands Centre experimented with a migration of three sanduks to digital platforms for activities such as saving, lending and money transfers among their members.

"This experiment has been a game-changer for me. It has enabled me to access more loans, which I used to increase my hotel capacity. I now have more rooms, which means more business for me. My fellow traders can now have a comfortable and affordable place to stay while conducting their business at Warawar Peace Market and the digital money has provided security for my money." - Bhakita Ghedai

Trained sanduk group members (131 participants in total, including women, youth and cross-border traders), received booster packages and small phones to facilitate the adoption. This shift contributed to an 80 percent increase in the adoption of digital platforms by the three experimental sanduks comprising of 75 participants and offers an avenue to formalize groups into credit cooperatives.

This first-of-its-kind digital fintech sanduk group wallet, facilitated by a collaboration with M-GURUSH, South Sudan's main mobile money company, now reaches 1.6 million people in South Sudan.

Watch the video

From local experiments to a global value proposition

As the Labs move to contribute more deliberately to UNDP's R&D function (following a bottom-up R&D cycle described in this chapter), they have started to identify a pattern: over two-thirds of the Labs doing finance-related work focused on financial inclusion and relied on the use of digital tools, such as South Sudan's digital sanduk experiment.

The Labs then started to connect the dots which led to the creation of a unique value proposition: community-based approaches to saving, borrowing and paying are viable where traditional financial services are not, because they can leverage local knowledge and trust. Supporting, digitizing and connecting them to existing financial networks is the fastest and cheapest path to financial inclusion.

The UNDP South Sudan Accelerator Lab holds a group discussion with chiefs and stakeholders in Warawar village peace market to understand their community systems and needs. Photo: UNDP South Sudan/Buay Tut.

What did the Labs learn along the way?

The Labs' approach to financial inclusion is characterized by two key learnings:

1) digital tools are most inclusive when they are designed to support effective, existing local practices and local knowledge, such as the sanduk; and
2) digital instruments work well when delivered in proximity to community because the groups most underserved by finance – women, the elderly and low-income populations – can greatly benefit from in-person socialization to financial literacy.

The success of the sanduk initiative indicates that it is possible to extend the approach to neighboring countries in Africa.

It has the potential to provide access to credit and banking support for those who are traditionally unbanked, and thus holds the potential to lift women and informal laborers out of poverty.

■ ■ ■

The UNDP Accelerator Labs produced a toolkit that serves as a collection of documented resources. These resources are brief, country-specific cases describing how to facilitate digital and financial literacy and improve access to borrowing, saving, payments and insurance products for underserved populations. It is designed to empower champions of digital financial inclusion to adapt its ready-made resources to new contexts and reuse them.
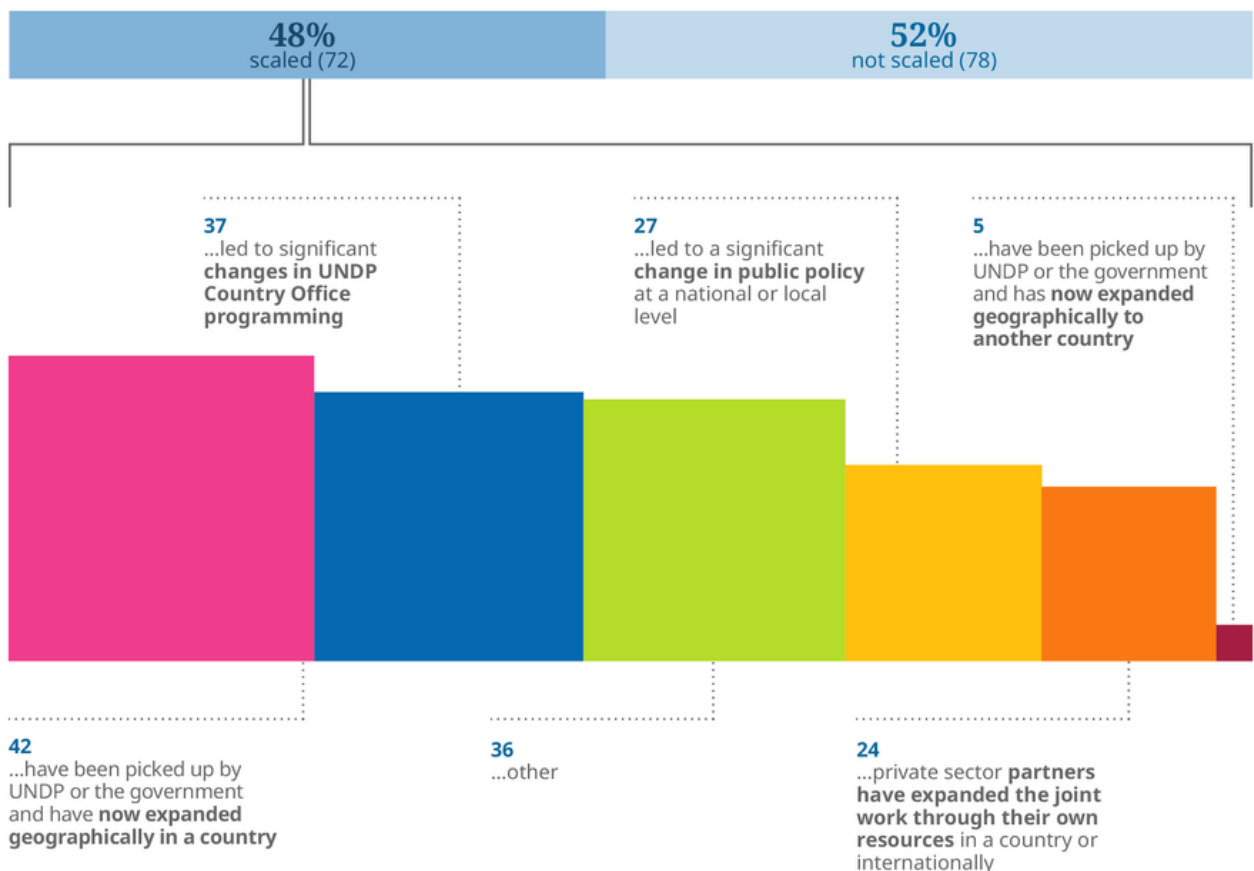
2.2. In-country scaling

In 2023, the Labs handed over a growing number of experiments to UNDP program teams or policy makers at local, national and international level, nearly **one out of two experiments conducted**. This trend illustrates the increased maturity of the Labs' work and their ability to unlock new avenues of scale.

By integrating innovations into government policies, programs and strategies, **43 percent of learning experiments resulted in institutionalized changes** at the national or local level. By collaborating with local governments and municipalities, **28 percent of successful experiments led to replication or expansion** across different locations in the country. Leveraging the specialized expertise and resources of partners within academia, civil society and the private sector enabled **the uptake of 16 percent of experiments** to benefit more people across wider geographical areas in the country or internationally.

Designing experiments with an emphasis on handover and scale enables the Labs to validate approaches, achieve greater development impact, catalyze systems change and mainstream innovations to reach more people, sustaining outcomes over the long term, thus driving national transformation.

In 2023, nearly 1 out of 2 experiments led by the Labs scaled

48%
scaled (72)

52%
not scaled (78)

37
...led to significant changes in UNDP Country Office programming

27
...led to a significant change in public policy at a national or local level

5
...have been picked up by UNDP or the government and has **now expanded geographically to another country**

42
...have been picked up by UNDP or the government and have **now expanded geographically in a country**

36
...other

24
...private sector **partners have expanded the joint work through their own resources** in a country or internationally

STORIES OF SCALE FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Informal market vendors like this woman experienced a 40 percent increase in daily sales while using the Jumia platform. Photo: UNDP Uganda.

Snapshot:

A Lab prototype evolves into tackling digital transformation for Uganda

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, small businesses in Uganda faced an existential challenge. Eighty percent of Uganda's private sector is informal, and 60 percent of these informal micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) risked going out of business. In response, the **UNDP Uganda Accelerator Lab** worked with Jumia Uganda and government partners such as the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives, to connect informal vendors to consumers through Jumia's e-commerce platform. To do so, they built the "Jumia vendor app" to enable digital payments and contactless *boda boda* deliveries.

UNDP chose Jumia as a partner to leverage its well-established platform, brand and logistical experience. But part of that experience included a failed attempt to scale a similar pilot in urban markets, due to the high cost of public goods investments.

This time, UNDP made critical, market-creating investments that Jumia couldn't – procuring smartphones, airtime and data for vendors, and hiring young people to help them use the technology and develop digital literacy skills.

Ultimately, **the pilot launched in seven markets and expanded to 10 in Kampala that enabled online trading. With support from the UNDP Chief Digital Office, the pilot also expanded to two other cities. There are now 4,000 vendors online, 60 percent of whom are women and youth. And these vendors have experienced a 40 percent increase in daily sales.**

But the Lab team recognized that scaling e-trade for MSMEs won't happen in a vacuum; it requires investing in a system of digital transformation. To continue the push for scale, the team is working on several interventions, including working with government partners on an e-commerce policy and strategic plan, and a digital transformation roadmap that will tackle key pillars such as skilling, e-services, security, infrastructure and big data.

■ ■ ■ **Read the "Lessons in scaling" case study.**

"Traveling like tourists" as part of the immersion visit to accurately map solutions for tourism in Madaba. Photo: UNDP Jordan/Ayah Younis.

Snapshot:
AI insights for the tourism sector in Jordan

In 2022, Madaba became the Arab Tourism Capital, attracting international visitors but facing low local attendance. In response, **UNDP Jordan powered by its Accelerator Lab** collaborated with Madaba's Tourism Directorate and the Municipality to boost tourism and the local economy.

The Lab mapped and analyzed tourism offerings yielding valuable qualitative insights, typically unavailable to decision makers, such as conducting a sentiment analysis of 70,000 TripAdvisor reviews. They conducted immersion trips to co-create tourist offerings with youth and other local stakeholders. Scaling efforts involve sharing insights with the government and expanding prototypes to other Jordanian governorates. Similar interventions in Aqaba city and discussions with municipalities in other regions are ongoing, highlighting UNDP Jordan's role in generating new actionable insights for tourism.

Participants checking on the quality of dried bananas from the solar dryer. Photo: TONIBUNG.

Snapshot:
Co-creating a Smart Solar Dryer for women entrepreneurs in Malaysia

As a winner of the Japan SDGs Innovation Challenge, the **UNDP Malaysia Accelerator Lab** received funds to address the economic recovery of Sabah, the country's poorest state, hit hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognizing the key challenge for rural entrepreneurs: lack of affordable and clean energy, the Lab collaborated with Penampang communities, alongside Japan's AGC Green Tech and TONIBUNG. Together, they co-created an affordable "Smart" Solar Dryer prototype, addressing market issues like high costs and inefficiency.

The open-source blueprint costs less than US$1,000, in contrast to existing solar dryers at around US$4,000, and its schematic design is openly available as a public good. Piloted successfully in Sabah, the initiative expanded to three more locations in 2023. The Lab is now developing a modular Smart Solar Dryer Prototype 2.0, with more capacity and higher energy efficiency, while training programs and scaling pilots support around 100 women entrepreneurs. The Smart Solar Dryer not only tackles energy challenges but empowers rural communities, turning produce into high-value products, contributing to sustainable economic development.

Digital access and upskilling is a foundational element of the National Digital Strategy of Trinidad and Tobago. Photo: Ministry of Digital Transformation, Trinidad and Tobago.

Snapshot:
Developing the digital identification system and supporting the national digital strategy in Trinidad and Tobago

The Trinidad and Tobago government sought UNDP's support for their objective of driving digital transformation. The **UNDP Trinidad and Tobago Accelerator Lab** conducted a Digital Readiness Assessment, which established baselines, benchmarks and milestones for digital development, and developed a Digital ID proof of concept in just three months.

This partnership led to an US$8 million investment, funded by CAF Development Bank, for UNDP Trinidad and Tobago to implement the National Electronic Identification System and digitalize critical government services. Another key achievement was the development and launch of the National Digital Strategy in collaboration with the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), a significant milestone in the country's digital transformation. This strategy not only addressed immediate digital challenges but also established a foundation for future digital infrastructure in the next 10 years, facilitating connectivity, shaping new industries and opportunities, and ensuring that public services can reach even the most remote areas.

Carta Serbica is one of the programs incubated through Returning Point. Through a change in national Decree, it allows foreigners of Serbian origin to for temporary residence and work permit, and experience living in Serbia.
Image: Returning Point

Snapshot:
From experimentation to reform: diaspora support in Serbia through innovative national policies

The **UNDP Serbia Accelerator Lab** incubated the Returning Point initiative, aimed at tapping into the vast potential of Serbia's four million diaspora members.

This initiative was a key part of UNDP Serbia's strategy to counter depopulation, focusing on helping individuals reintegrate into Serbia or connect with local opportunities from abroad. The pilot evolved from a Lab-supported program into an independent, financially self-sustained organization, setting a replicable model for diaspora engagement, and a close collaboration with national government, including the establishment of a new fast-track residency procedure and the introduction of diaspora-targeted loan programs.

Chapter 3

Paving the way for the creation of a global innovation commons for sustainable development

Output 3: The global learning network supports an SDG Innovation Commons driving public domain experimentation, inquiry and investments to unleash action on sustainable development.

To make progress toward the SDGs in an increasingly complex world, the need for open research and development (R&D) is clear. It fuels continuous exploration and experimentation and accelerates impact and learning, in partnership with other changemakers.

This is where the vision of the SDG Innovation Commons, backed by the UNDP Accelerator Labs, a Network of social innovation teams sourcing innovations from over 100 countries in the Global South – is starting to become a reality.

In 2023, the Network further evolved as a globally decentralized R&D function, articulating a unique "R&D for the SDGs" manifesto, opening up a catalogue of thousands of grassroots solutions and sharing open data and results of early experiments to pave the way for the creation of a global innovation commons for sustainable development.
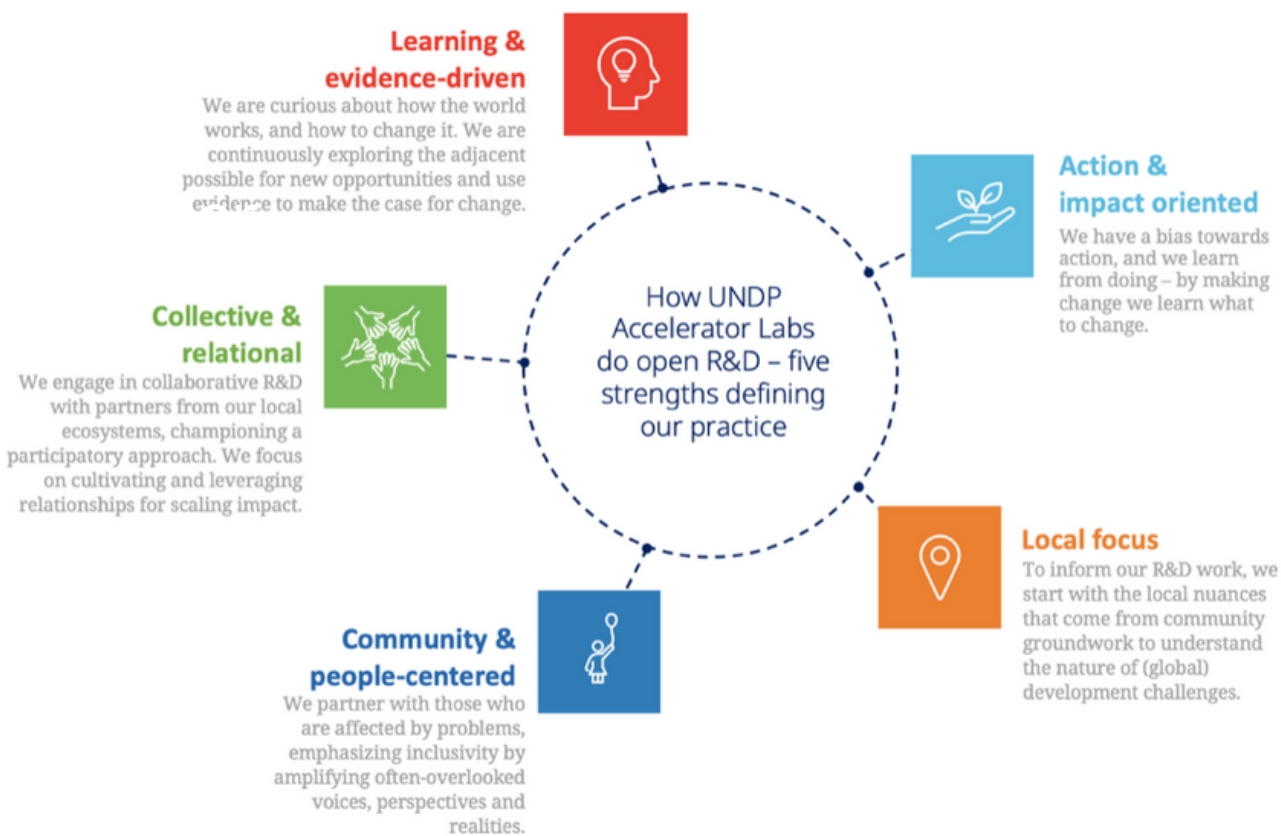
The Accelerator Labs' approach to an open R&D function rests on the understanding that development is not exclusive to the select few, but a common good that is created from the bottom up and facilitated by the people for the people.

3.1. Defining our approach to open R&D to support SDG acceleration

In 2023, the Labs Network has started to define what open R&D for sustainable development for UNDP means across all five regions — Africa, the Arab States, Asia and Pacific, Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean — and why UNDP and the ecosystem need it. The result of this reflection led to an activation strategy for open R&D anchored on five key values seen in the graphic below.

The UNDP Accelerator Labs' approach to open R&D for sustainable development

Learning & evidence-driven

We are curious about how the world works, and how to change it. We are continuously exploring the adjacent possible for new opportunities and use evidence to make the case for change.

Collective & relational

We engage in collaborative R&D with partners from our local ecosystems, championing a participatory approach. We focus on cultivating and leveraging relationships for scaling impact.

How UNDP Accelerator Labs do open R&D – five strengths defining our practice

Action & impact oriented

We have a bias towards action, and we learn from doing – by making change we learn what to change.

Local focus

To inform our R&D work, we start with the local nuances that come from community groundwork to understand the nature of (global) development challenges.

Community & people-centered

We partner with those who are affected by problems, emphasizing inclusivity by amplifying often-overlooked voices, perspectives and realities.

This activation strategy helps define the Network's way of doing R&D and provides a clear path to explore and scale with broader social innovation ecosystems. Open R&D can position UNDP at the cutting edge of key issues, enabling novel approaches to address development issues.

3.2. Acceleration campaigns to speed up learning and action on emerging and pressing development challenges

In 2023, the Lab Network ran targeted campaigns to speed up learning and action and generate cross-country value for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Firstly, they continued to build on the ***PeoplePowered* energy campaign** as a contribution to UNDP's Strategic Plan, which aims to mobilize partnerships for sustainable, reliable and affordable energy for 500 million people by 2025. Secondly, through learning devoted to **digitization in the informal economy**, the Network released new and open knowledge on how to forge a more inclusive economy for vulnerable workers in the Global South, many of whom are women.

The informal economy is the world's biggest employer: as many as 90 percent of workers in the lowest-income regions, are informally employed. In these regions, women are more likely to use digital tools in their businesses, and are more likely to own a fully informal business. Photo: iStock.

Snapshot:
Accelerator Labs' open research on digital uptake by informal entrepreneurs

The UNDP Accelerator Labs have detected an emerging trend: informal businesses across the Global South are embracing digital tools. This is important news because the informal sector accounts for 60 percent of the world's jobs, and as many as 90 percent in the lowest-income regions. This shift to digital could open new opportunities to learn about and support inclusion for vulnerable informal workers in the Global South, many of whom are women.

To make these results findable and reusable by development practitioners across the globe, the Labs prototyped tapping into data sharing standards in 2023.

They published a report called "How is the Digital Transformation Affecting Informal Businesses in the Global South?" and shared publicly the results of a survey on the use of digital tools by informal businesses conducted by the Labs in 13 countries – namely Bangladesh, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Fiji and Vanuatu, Guatemala, Haiti, Mexico, Morocco, Namibia, Peru, Syria and Uzbekistan.

The report and its dataset were published on a repository serving the global research community using open licenses (Creative Commons) and open standards (Data Package). To date, thousands of page views and downloads have been recorded, demonstrating the potential that **open repositories of insights and data** hold for inquiry, analyses and contributions from academia, governments, civil society and private sector partners.

3.3. Opening up a catalogue of grassroots innovation as a vehicle for scale

Since its inception, the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network has mapped more than 6,000 grassroots solutions locally, from which more than 3,700 are curated on a global Solutions Mapping Platform. While not all mapped solutions represent scalable products – some are knowledge artifacts or community practices – most of these are home-grown or community-led solutions that have never been codified, or applied elsewhere (Chapter 2, Ecuador deep dive, pp. 33-34). These customized solutions are often frugal and, given their proximity to the problem, hold specific insights that external designers might overlook.

As part of this evolution towards an open SDG Innovation Commons, the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network can **share openly 1,480 solutions** (40 percent of the 3,700 globally mapped solutions). To support the diffusion of such innovations, they will become freely accessible to an outside audience over the course of 2024.

Diversity and geographic distribution of solutions
mapped by the Network to date
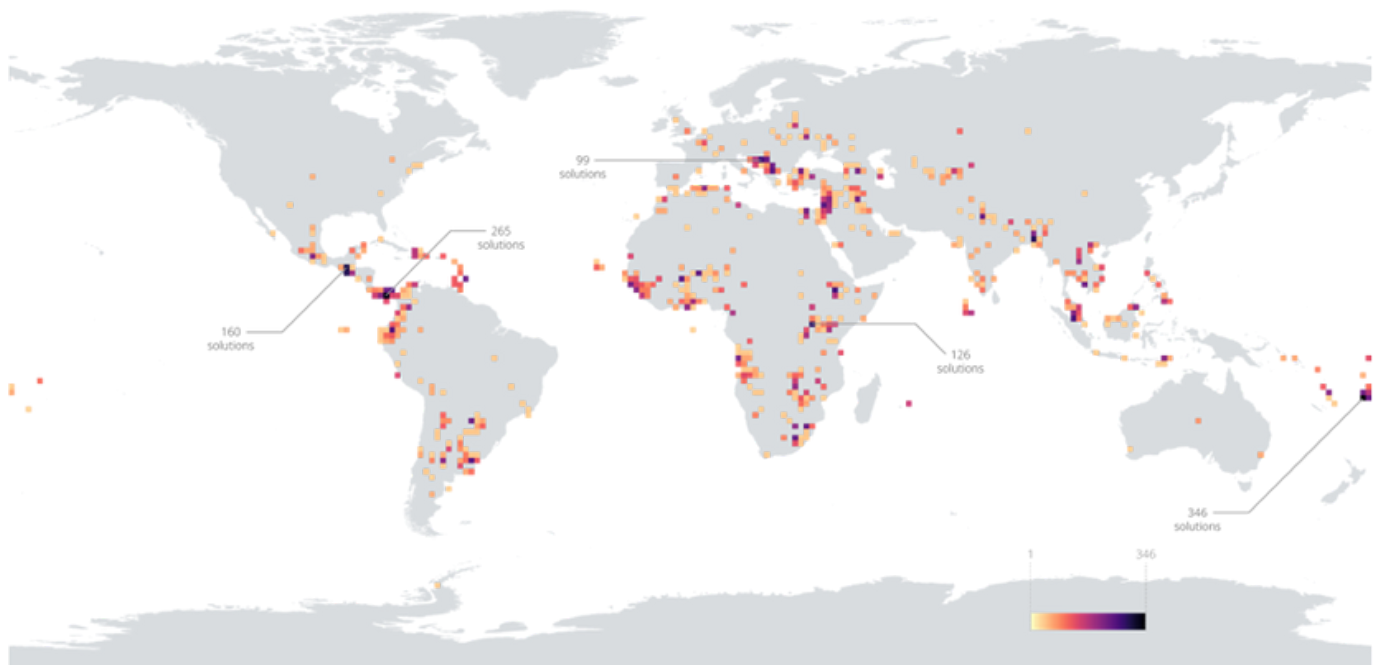
Heatmap of the +3,700 solutions revealing that **43 percent of solutions are identified in rural areas** – areas that usually have little agency in development practice. Darker areas in regions such as Central America, Eastern Europe and the Pacific Islands indicate higher solution density, while lighter areas in North America and Northern Europe indicate lower density.

María Casa has been a medicinal herb forager since she was 14 years old. Photo: UNDP Ecuador/Paulina Jiménez.

Deep dive:
Preserving ancestral knowledge in growing medicinal herbs in Ecuador

In the hustle and bustle of the busy market in Quito's San Roque, women *hierbateras* work around the clock to grow and sell medicinal plants like chamomile, anise, calendula and hundreds of others.

The methods that medicinal herb foragers and growers use to reap and to find these plants are from indigenous, traditional knowledge that has been handed down through the generations. The *hierbateras* currently have reason to worry about their precarious livelihood and their ancient practice. They fear the knowledge will disappear as younger generations seek other trades. They worry about the future of the market, which has been threatened by urbanization, and about disappearing plant varieties, as climate change disrupts the ecosystem.

The **UNDP Ecuador Accelerator Lab** learned firsthand from these women of the May Day Central Platform, the most important wholesale market in Quito for the commercialization of medicinal plants, and aided municipal authorities in making better policies surrounding the future of the market and the *hierbateras*.

The Lab worked with over 100 herb vendors, 30 students, alliances with academia, museums, the private sector and the municipality. The aim was to make the medicinal plant trade more resilient, amplify ancestral practices, reduce waste created in the marketplace, gather data on the herb trade and facilitate knowledge exchanges between innovators and the hierbateras on best practices for growing, dehydrating and selling the herbs. Finally, the Lab set out to create "blueprints" for innovations created to streamline plant production so that the learning can be scaled to other contexts.

The Accelerator Lab also crowdsourced **a catalog of over 100 medicinal herbs**, then had the list validated through traditional medicine men. As the first time this has been documented, the catalog preserves the traditional Andean medicine of Ecuador and helps the women showcase their plants at market for better sales.

Fanny Asimbaya receives fertilizer from organic waste.
Photo: UNDP Ecuador/Paulina Jiménez.

Innovation by design to improve livelihoods

The pilot interventions in Ecuador were designed with the people closest to the problems. *Hierbateras*, mostly women over 60-years-old like Fanny Asimbaya, had a say in the way that their problems were addressed, and the municipality could see immediate results in waste reduction, market organization and improvements all along the value chain, from the herb gatherers, to producers, farmers and sellers.

Visit Otros Mapas for more stories on the hierbateras.

Open-source DIY innovation: an irrigation solution for gardens on steep land

Image from the open-source blueprint of the irrigation system designed by Bryan Vargas.

Picture it: To water a 1,000-metre garden on a steep volcanic mountain takes three people a total of 15 hours of work. In summer, the garden loses half its crop. With the support of the Lab, Bryan Vargas, a 23-year-old innovator from the National Polytechnic University worked to help herb farmers improve irrigation techniques. He created an irrigation method that uses a humidity sensor to measure soil moisture and avoid excess water.

The farmers were able to reduce the time and effort spent watering and to increase the health of their yield. For example, on one plot, the person/hour requirement was cut in half and water consumption decreased by 24 percent, bringing in water efficiency and savings. Bryan's irrigation system is now available as an open-source blueprint providing a step-by-step guide to this low-cost solution for the SDGs.

Through experimentation, a grassroots solution in which the tsie balimo, or elegant grasshopper, is crushed and used as pesticide, has potential for wider application. Photo: Unsplash.

Snapshot:
Lesotho finds a nature-based solution for food security

Motseki Ratefane, a farmer based in the Mafeteng district of Lesotho near the border with South Africa, owns a 500-600 square meter plot of land where he grows a variety of vegetables like maize, spinach and cabbage. He developed his own innovative method of using crushed "elegant grasshoppers" as a natural pesticide to deter pests from his crops. The **UNDP Lesotho Lab** unearthed this solution when they realized that Motseki's crops were much healthier than other crops in the area. Together with the National University of Lesotho, the Lab confirmed that the crushed grasshopper solution far exceeds the speed and performance of commercially found pesticides.

This bottom-up and nature-based solution may have scaling potential in the Horn of Africa where these insects swarm across countries, reproduce rapidly, and pose a challenge to the region's food security while causing harm to farmers' livelihoods.

3.4. Early-stage results paving the way towards the SDG Innovation Commons

By sharing their work and insights out loud, and making the results and data gleaned from experimentation, exploration and solutions mapping available for free as a public good, the Accelerator Labs are building the database foundations for an open, globally distributed R&D capability for the Sustainable Development Goals.

Samamma of Bidekanne Village, winnowing seeds for seed basket storage. Photo: UNDP Data for Policy.

Samamma, farmer and innovator of a climate resilient seed storage

Samamma of Bidekanne Village in the Sangareddy district in the southeast region of Telangana, has been practicing traditional farming for over three decades. Samamma has been using a unique seed storage method that she created – bamboo baskets coated with a mixture of cow dung, neem leaves and cow urine – that has helped her and other farmers in her village store their seeds for up to a year before sewing. She has been growing over 100 crop varieties, but many were becoming extinct due to climate change and the lack of seed storage structures in the village.

"Seeds stored in these baskets remained safe and we could sow them after the rains receded and realize good profits. These seed baskets make us independent from the private seed companies and reduce the cost of seeds and our overall cost of cultivation."
*- Samamma*

Deep dive:
Building a digital public good for climate resilient farming in India

Samamma's practice of conserving indigenous climate resilient seed varieties was one of 25 climate resilient agriculture practices that the UNDP India Accelerator Lab and partners surfaced in 2023. Such community practices are identified on the ground using a methodology called Data Powered Positive Deviance, to support community-centric (bottom-up) policy making in agriculture.

Using what they learned in the field, the Lab initiated a collaboration with the State Government of Telangana to experiment with a digital commons capable of delivering agricultural intelligence on climate resilience and vulnerability at the village and farm level across all the 10 million hectares of land in the state.

Using an initial seed investment of US$20,000 and support from UNDP Asia's innovation team, the Lab formed partnerships with over 100 volunteering data scientists and 14 organizations (including research organizations like ICRISAT and Tilburg University) to build a data collaborative model to prototype the Data in Climate Resilient Agriculture (DiCRA) platform.
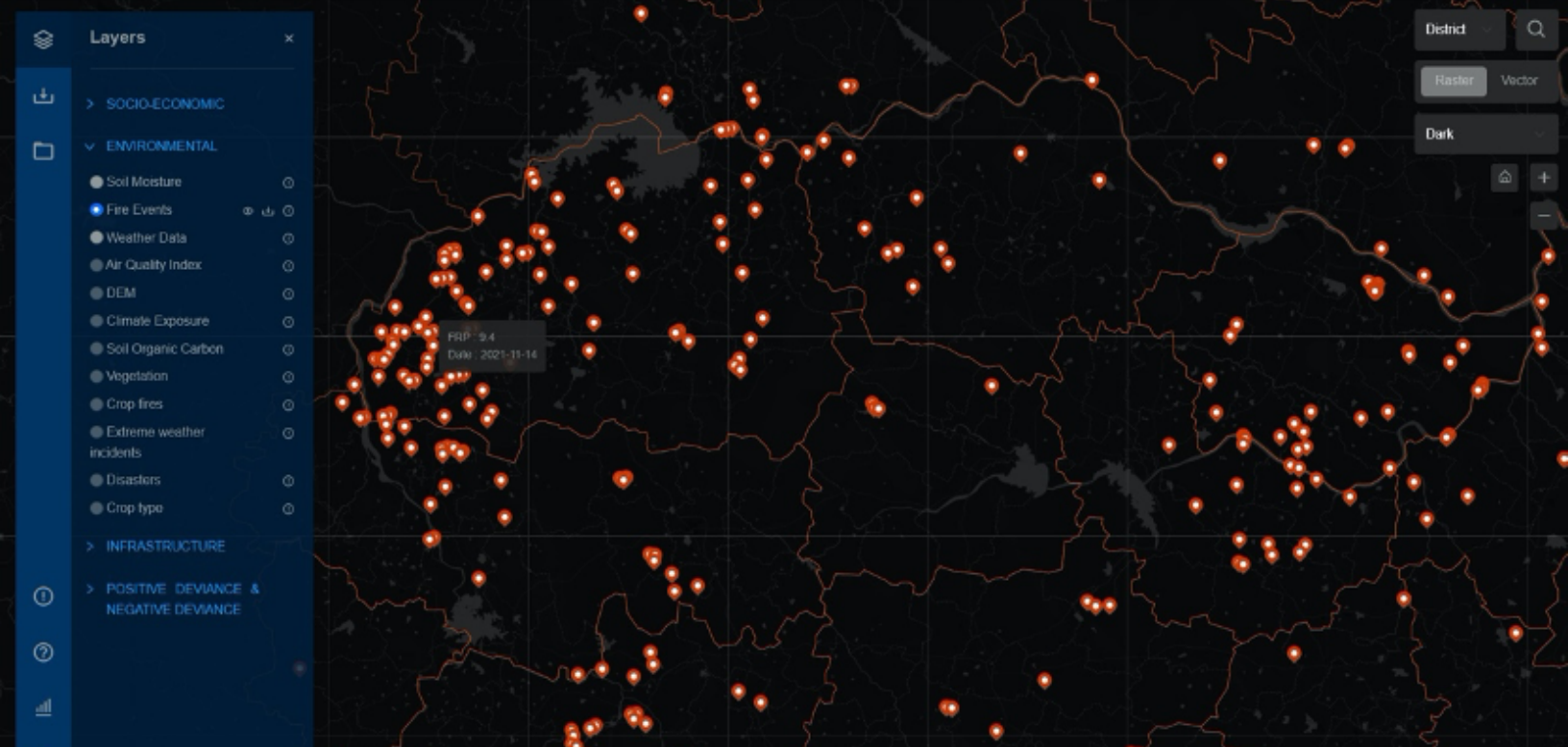
A public domain experiment

After rigorous evaluation, DiCRA was accredited as a first-of-its-kind **Digital Public Good for Climate Resilient Agriculture** by the Digital Public Goods Alliance. DiCRA leverages Artificial Intelligence, remote sensing, and pattern detection algorithms using open satellite data to assess the climate resilience of farms, providing about 20 agriculture parameters that help decode crop health, crop stress and soil conditions across 50 million hectares of agriculture land in the seven states of India.

DiCRA is guided by the digital public good principles of open access, open software, open code and open AI which make it easy to scale. It is "plug and play" for any other geography in the world. Through the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network, DiCRA has received scaleup interest from 10 countries in Africa, Asia and South America.

While the initial prototype serviced 10 million hectares of land, within a span of six months and the financial support of the Rockefeller Foundation and the Government of Japan, the Lab successfully scaled DiCRA from one state to seven states in India - extending its reach to 50 million hectares of agriculture land.

Recently, the Lab handed over DiCRA to the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the apex agriculture development bank in India, who intends to scale DiCRA country-wide across all 28 states and to use the data from the platform for data-driven policymaking and decision-making, including informing their climate portfolio of approximately US$150 million.

"We see the DiCRA platform as an enabler to support our role as the largest development bank in India, in an effective and efficient manner. In fact, we are now in the process of digitizing almost 100,000 farmer cooperatives so they can avail advisory service support"
– Shaji K.V, Chairman India's National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development

DiCRA works because it combines both top down and bottom-up approaches. The technology informs which geographies are positively deviant over long horizons of time while ethnography reveals positive deviant farmers and resilient agricultural practices so both can inform policies. By delivering valuable data-driven insights as open source, DiCRA is driving sustainability, collective action and long-termism in agriculture.

These insights are being used to inform the design of agriculture programs on climate resilience, directing more investment towards areas of high vulnerability while learning from successful resilient geographies and farms. DiCRA has proven its scalability, servicing climate action across vast geographies in India.

Visit the DiCRA platform

Chapter 4

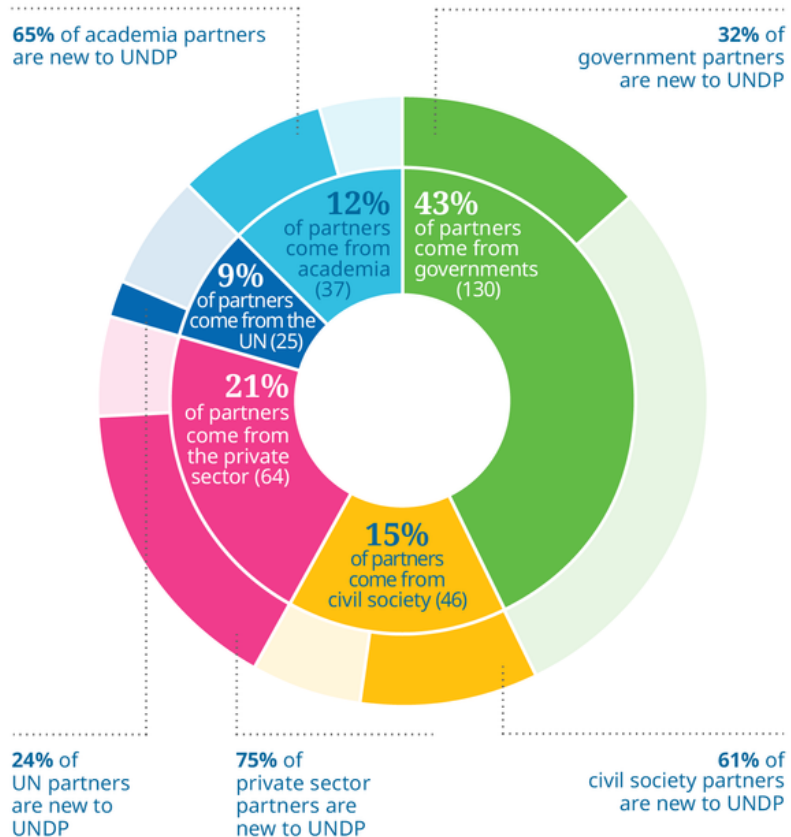# Partners, an engine for scaling the results of experiments

The UNDP Accelerator Labs are a strong convening power for UNDP and beyond, as they bring together a unique coalition of actors with a common vision to help spearhead new experiments, tap into novel data sources and experiential knowledge, test and develop prototypes and allow room for the R&D element of trial and error.

Since its inception, the Accelerator Labs Network has engaged with over **1,800 partners** at the global, national and local levels, demonstrating the Network's ability to attract and engage with unusual development and innovation actors.

In 2023, the Network doubled down on its engagement with mobile phone operators, energy companies, start-ups, banks and financial institutions, tech or digital products and services (e.g., drone or satellite imaging companies), academia and research institutes – both local and global – plus informal sector groups (for example, vendor associations, women's market collectives, waste pickers), social enterprises and innovation hubs.

Partners across the Network in 2023

To date, more than a third of all private sector partners are with new partners and nearly one out of two partners from civil society are new to UNDP.

65% of academia partners are new to UNDP

32% of government partners are new to UNDP

12% of partners come from academia (37)

43% of partners come from governments (130)

9% of partners come from the UN (25)

21% of partners come from the private sector (64)

15% of partners come from civil society (46)

24% of UN partners are new to UNDP

75% of private sector partners are new to UNDP

61% of civil society partners are new to UNDP

4.1. Positioning innovation for the SDGs alongside our founding investors

Discussing an agile, innovative future together at the Strategic Dialogue with Germany: high level representatives BMZ Minister Svenja Schulze and UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner, alongside BMZ and UNDP colleagues. Photo: UNDP Germany/Sebastian Wigele.

2023 German Strategic Dialogue Accelerating the SDG Agenda through innovation and digitalization

The UNDP Accelerator Labs Network was invited to the Strategic Dialogue UNDP-Germany in Berlin on May 8, 2023. Representatives from the UNDP Accelerator Labs from India, South Sudan and the Global Team took part in the session, "Accelerating the SDG Agenda through innovation and digitalization – Avenues for strategic engagement between BMZ's development agenda and UNDP's digital and innovation initiatives."

This was a unique opportunity to present South Sudan's digital financial inclusion story of scale (see "Deep Dive Facilitating financial inclusion for marginalized communities in South Sudan" in Chapter 2, pp. 23-24) and the use of Artificial Intelligence to combat air pollution in India as ways to derisk experimentation in sustainable development and model the future of development cooperation. The event was promoted on X (ex-Twitter) which gained 19,750 impressions.

Her Excellency Ambassador Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani welcomes a full house audience at the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar to the United Nations in New York. At her left, Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator and at her right, Ms. Sarah Ryglewski, the Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany. Photo: Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar to the United Nations.

On the path to breaking the scale barrier at the UNGA78 SDG Action Week with Qatar

Photo: Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar to the United Nations.

On September 16, 2023, the Permanent Mission of the State of Qatar to the United Nations, QFFD and the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network organized "Breaking the Scale Barrier: from SDG Innovation to SDG Achievement," a high-level event as part of the UN General Assembly 78 SDG Action Week in New York. This highly attended and dynamic event was hosted by Her Excellency Ambassador Alya Ahmed bin Saif Al-Thani and opened by UNDP Administrator Achim Steiner and the Minister of State to the Federal Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Ms. Sarah Ryglewski.

It gathered leading entrepreneurs, United Nations experts, government officials, local innovators and academia for a discussion on how open innovation can unleash new momentum for Agenda 2030. Speakers included Mr. Shavi K.V., chairman of India's National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), the largest Agricultural bank in India and partner in R&D. The UNDP India Accelerator Lab handed over the Data in Climate Resilient Agriculture (DiCRA) platform to NABARD (see "Deep Dive: Building a digital public good for climate resilient farming in India," pp. 36-37), who intends to scale DiCRA country wide. Frank Nagle, Assistant Professor at Harvard University Business School who teaches the Accelerator Labs as a case study spoke too. Lastly, UNDP Accelerator Lab teams from South Sudan, Lesotho and India presented first-hand knowledge of their work in the field.

Over 150 people attended in person, including Minister Shu Nakagawa, Head of Economic Section at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations. This event was promoted in various formats through UNDP Accelerator Lab's digital channels such as X (ex-Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram and YouTube which received a combined cross channel total of 54,475 impressions.

MINISTERO DELL'AMBIENTE
E DELLA SICUREZZA ENERGETICA

Presenting the Labs' work on collective intelligence for climate action to the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security

In October 2023, Buay Tut, Head of Exploration at UNDP South Sudan Accelerator Lab, discussed the work of the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network on climate action with Roberta Ronzitti, Director for Cooperation of the Ministry of Environment and Energy Security (MASE) and Francesco Corvaro, Italian Special Envoy for Climate Change on the sidelines of the Youth4Climate awards ceremony (photo to the left).

(Read about UNTAPPED: collective intelligence for climate action in chapter 1, pp. 13-14).

Minister Gilberto Pichetto Fratin, Ministry of Environment and Energy Security (MASE) meets with Buay Tut, Head of Exploration, UNDP Accelerator Lab South Sudan on the sidelines of the Youth4Climate awards ceremony.

The UNDP Accelerator Labs also amplified in their respective networks the call for submission for the Youth4Climate Challenge, an initiative led by UNDP in partnership with the Government of Italy aimed at implementing innovative approaches to drive climate action.

Accelerator Labs team members across 115 countries received the information and shared it in their local and national networks of innovators, those specifically involved in the areas of food and agriculture, energy, education and urban sustainability. Promotion for the event on X (ex-Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram reached 7,664 impressions.

4.2. Global knowledge partners

Through experimental and exploratory activities in 115 countries, the Network often spots leads for action that develop into emerging R&D priorities on a global scale. The Labs unearth potential research agendas for academic and private sector partners. For instance, they partnered with **Ikea Social Entrepreneurship and Ashoka** to look at the intersection between circular and informal economy, **Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs** to study mis- and disinformation, and collaborated with **Utrecht University School of Economics Entrepreneurship, MIT Sloan School of Management and University of Johannesburg** on the first internationally comparable study of household innovation on the African continent. (See "Uncovering the potential of informal innovation for the SDGs" in Chapter 1, p. 18)

Kickstarting the partnership with a learning circle on the contribution of informal workers to the circular economy at the Dela Summit, in Älmhult, Sweden. Photo: Ikea Social Entrepreneurship.

Snapshot:
Ikea Social Entrepreneurship and Ashoka: learning about the intersection of informal & circular economies

The Accelerator Labs partnered with IKEA Social Entrepreneurship and Ashoka to advance an R&D agenda on the role of informality in circular economies. The focus is to collectively learn how unregistered small-scale businesses and informal workers (who make up 85 percent of Africa's economy) contribute to **economic models that prioritize the continuous utilization of products and material**, rather than their disposal. Ashoka's community of over 4,000 leading social entrepreneurs from 95 countries and IKEA's network of co-workers across the globe, joined the UNDP Accelerator Labs to surface robust insights from social entrepreneurs and communities to design more circular supply chains. The partners organized two "learning circles" sessions in 2023, which brought together over 100 participants from different backgrounds (social entrepreneurs, IKEA co-workers, the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network), to codify insights towards a circular economy. The insights from the learning circles will be shared publicly in 2024.

Snapshot:
Partnering with Columbia University to fight against mis- and disinformation

The rapid and pervasive spread of mis- and disinformation across the globe threatens to erode our information ecosystems and disrupt progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. Master's students at **Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA)** and their faculty advisor, partnered with the Accelerator Labs to map interventions led by the United Nations and beyond to tackle online mis- and disinformation. The report includes recommendations on the role of the United Nations in combating mis- and disinformation in the Global South.

Read "Mapping and Recommendations for UNDP Efforts to Fight Against Mis- and Disinformation"

4.3. Co-creating experiments with the Japanese private sector

With the support and engagement of the Japan Cabinet Office and advisory of the Japan Innovation Network (JIN), the Japan SDGs Innovation Challenge has enabled **UNDP** to generate new insights to make progress on sustainable development challenges across seven countries. This has been achieved through collaborative experiments led together with private sector entities from Japan.

This partnership shows how matchmaking between development problems and private sector expertise can test out new ways of working and create market intelligence.

Swarms of quelea birds are threatening food security in Zimbabwe. Photo: UNDP Zimbabwe/Anesu Freddy.

Deep dive:
Using emerging technologies to tackle threats to food security in Zimbabwe

In 2023, the **UNDP Zimbabwe Accelerator Lab** partnered with Pegara, a Japanese start-up specializing in AI and automation, to test out ways to protect small grain production.

The red-billed quelea is a small brownish bird that is endemic to Africa. Queleas are the most populous bird on earth with around 1.8 billion birds estimated in the wild. They destroy around 95 percent of wheat globally. In Zimbabwe, the quelea bird is a major threat to food security as it damages small grains such as millet and sorghum. Unfortunately, the only way to control quelea birds is through spraying Fenthion, a chemical toxic to humans and other animals and plants.

A traditional means of controlling Quelea swarms with nets and hard work. Photo: UNDP Zimbabwe/Anesu Freddy.

From chasing birds away with drones…

The Lab team and Pegara testing the drone prototype to chase away quelea birds from fields. Photo: UNDP Zimbabwe/Anesu Freddy.

The Lab and Pegara conducted a series of field tests in partnership with Zimbabwe's Ministry of Agriculture and National Parks and Wildlife to find out the best deterrence mechanisms for quelea birds. After testing sounds, scattered lasers and drones, it concluded that drones were the most effective method to chase away quelea birds from fields.

Over a period of 10 months the team conducted six field missions which resulted in the development of a prototype called "Bird Shield." Bird Shield is a system which uses an AI-powered camera to automatically detect quelea birds and chase them from fields using drone swarms. Bird Shield would allow rural farmers to save 100 percent of time lost to scaring quelea birds and make significant savings on the amount of grain lost while preventing the use of Fenthion. The main obstacle remains the cost of Bird Shield which is too high for most farmers. Pegara is currently working with local drone companies to bring it down.

… to catching them with traditional nets

While they were in the field, the Lab team and Pegara came across a group of men who have been using homemade nets to capture quelea birds for years. Mapping this local knowledge led to a new focus area on working with the quelea catchers to improve their approach. Currently, due to limitations in net design and the bird-catching process, the men can catch a maximum of 50,000 quelea birds per night, which falls short of market demand as quelea is big business in southern Zimbabwe. Traders, mostly women, buy quelea at $1 for 50 birds and sell them fried at $1 for 8.

Over the course of 2023, the team continued data collection and training of the AI algorithm to improve its accuracy in detecting quelea swarms. They also started to collaborate with the University of Zimbabwe on R&D challenges to enhance the netting system, aiming to double the nightly catch of quelea. The Lab and Pegara plan to continue the scaling of the tested solutions in 2024 with the support of the Japan Cabinet Office.

From fish waste to high quality leather goods in Samoa

An experiment in Samoa is creating the means to transform fish waste into fish leather for wallets, purses and more. This collaboration between the **UNDP Samoa Accelerator Lab** and Think Sea Corp (Tototo Fish Leather Brand) tested how to turn fish waste into leather. This partnership experimented with using Samoa's fish skin waste as a new value chain and a new income stream for local fishing communities. Tototo spent a total of 50 days on the small island and worked with communities on fish leather production techniques, leather processing and business models to accelerate the commercialization of fish leather in Samoa for the Japanese market.

4.4. National and regional partners: from scaling knowledge to co-financing cutting-edge programs

From research institutes and other UN entities to members of the national and regional innovation ecosystems, multiple actors work together with the Labs to surface new data and intelligence that help inform and shape UNDP portfolios and programs. Notably, some of these led to substantial financial investments.

In 2023, the UNDP Accelerator Labs attracted and nurtured **302 new partners**. Almost **half of them are considered new** to UNDP and nearly a quarter are from the private sector.
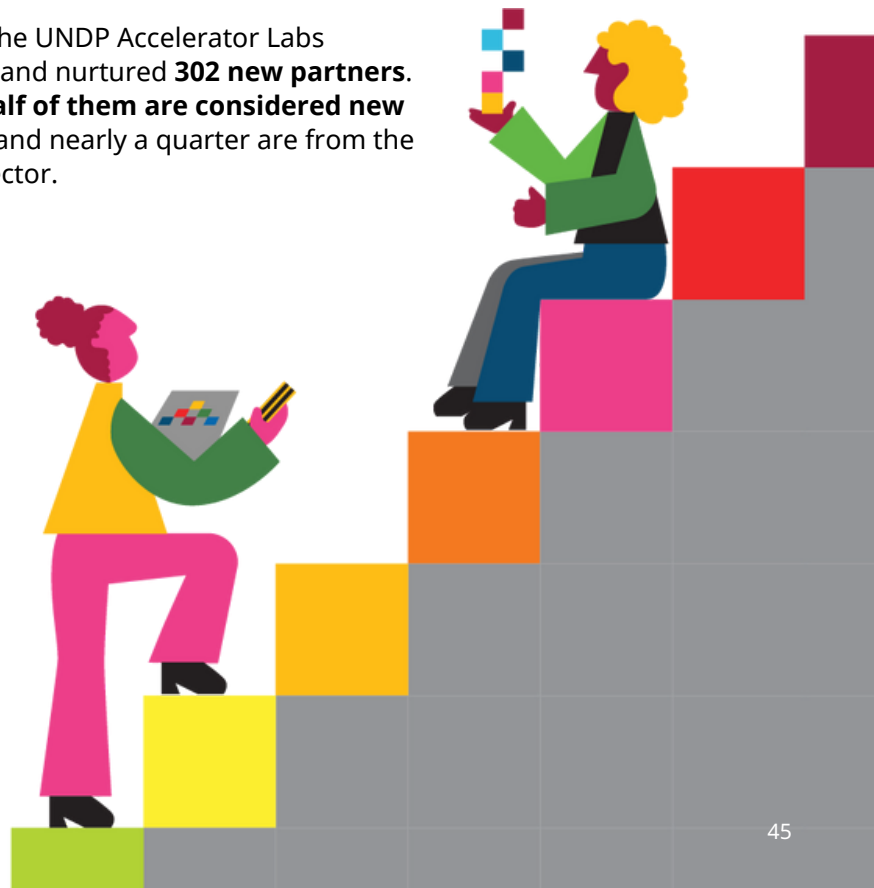
Shamar Ward and Jordanna Straker from the UNDP Accelerator Lab team facilitating discussions among the innovators of the Blue-Green Digital Innovation Challenge held in Grenada, July 2023. Photo: UNDP/Amana Hosten.

Snapshot:
Partnering with FAO: connecting local innovation ecosystems to improve food systems in the Caribbean

In 2023, the **UNDP Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Accelerator Lab** collaborated with the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Climate Resilient Agriculture Project (CRA) to convene the Blue–Green Digital Innovation Challenge which facilitated capacity building and dialog towards solving development challenges among grassroots innovators on the tri-island state of Grenada. During this challenge, the innovators were trained to pitch their solutions in agro-processing and agro-tourism. It offered opportunities for innovators to learn from each other, network and combine their solutions to move towards systems change.

Arafa Hamad Bakari is a 27-year-old trailblazer in Zanzibar with an innovative solution to compost solid food waste into organic fertilizer. She was one of the top 10 innovators emerging from the Blue Innovation Challenge run by the Zanzibar WasteX Lab. Photo: UNDP Tanzania.

Snapshot:
Collaborating with UNICEF Tanzania to explore futures where waste is a valuable asset

After winning the Greenshark Innovation Challenge in 2022, UNDP and UNICEF in Tanzania co-launched WasteX Lab to change perceptions of waste and drive the circular economy on the archipelago of Zanzibar.

UNDP Tanzania, powered by its Accelerator Lab, together with the State University of Zanzibar and UNICEF engaged with enterprises, predominantly led by youth and women, to design and implement solutions addressing the pervasive and systemic issues surrounding solid waste management in Zanzibar. The initiative combines human-centered design, behavioral science and digital technologies to foster peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, experimentation and business growth.

As a result of the technical and financial assistance provided through the initiative, 40 Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) have successfully generated a total of 1,070 green jobs, 59 percent of which are for women. The SMEs involved in this program specialize in the recycling and upcycling of both organic and inorganic waste materials to manufacture products such as plastic paving blocks, organic fertilizers and bio-briquettes, thereby contributing significantly to environmental sustainability and economic development.

Rita Anaful saw an opportunity to utilize sawdust waste to cultivate mushrooms. With her family-run business, she empowers ten women to retail the mushrooms in markets around the city of Kumasi, Ghana.
Photo: Young Africa Innovates (YAI).

Snapshot:
Youth in innovation ecosystems: A partnership with Mastercard Foundation in Africa

UNDP, powered by its Accelerator Labs, and the **Mastercard Foundation** have partnered to establish and implement a Young Africa Innovates (YAI) program in **Ghana and Nigeria**.

This US$25.8 million program will develop an innovative system to identify, test and scale youth-led solutions to spur economic growth. Thanks to its connection, direct access to and understanding of the local innovation communities, the Accelerator Labs are contributing to the Foundation's goal of integrating youth and often under-represented groups (including women and rural communities) into Africa's innovation ecosystems.

Constructing a Solar-in-a-Box unit. Image: Empower Energy Service Company.

Snapshot:
Innovation in crisis – Engagement with German Development Cooperation actors to bring solar power on the go in Sudan

In **Sudan**, the UNDP Accelerator Lab conducted experiments with the "Solar-in-the-Box" prototype since 2021 to fill gaps in digital and energy access. This solar-powered module provides energy to a mobile cellular connectivity tower, which can expand into a mini grid.

The success of the experiment resulted in a grant partnership agreement of EUR 2.5 million with the German International Cooperation (GIZ). As the prototype can be reconfigured for specific contexts, this partnership aims to support the recovery of micro and small enterprises owned by women in communities affected by conflict and scarcity. GIZ and UNDP Sudan plan to deploy Solar-in-a-Box in 2024 in three states, targeting 3,300 women. Scaling up this innovation involves private sector partners, including national mobile network operators and energy service companies. These units will power three "smart" facilities equipped with electricity and internet access, serving as safe spaces for peer-to-peer learning, digital literacy and business collaboration, thereby empowering women and displaced persons to rebuild and support their businesses.

Satellite data is used to identify waste bottlenecks in Pasig City.

Snapshot
Toward a systemic approach for the circular economy in the Philippines

The **UNDP Philippines Accelerator Lab** has applied a portfolio approach and systemic design to move towards a circular economy in the country, beginning with Pasig City. Waste, including plastic and other marine litter, is among the most pressing environmental issues in the Philippines. The country's waste generation has increased steadily and is expected to reach 77,776 tons by 2025, with Metro Manila generating the largest volume. This waste, particularly plastic waste, leaks into waterways. Changing this unsustainable status quo requires a dramatic shift towards sustainable production and consumption. This entails the transition towards a circular economy: where waste is avoided in the first place, properly managed and redirected back into the economy.

To start unpacking this complex issue, the UNDP Philippines Accelerator Lab collaborated with the Japan Manned Space Systems Corp. (JAMSS) as part of the Japan SDGs Innovation Challenge in 2021-2022.

The objective was to test new approaches to monitor marine litter leakage using remote sensing and improve how data is collected, analyzed and considered in policymaking and enforcement.

The work of UNDP Philippines on circular economy through a systems lens drew an additional investment of US$2.9 million from the Japan Supplementary Budget to the program "Accelerating Nationally Determined Contributions through Circular Economy in Cities (ACE)." This program entails the use of data analytics and policy support at national and subnational levels, implementing various systemic interventions for circularity in five cities, and deepening knowledge exchange. Systemic interventions include data innovations, behavioral change campaigns, investment in technology and equipment, and capacity building for entrepreneurs, local government officials and other circular economy actors.

In addition, the portfolio work of the Lab in tackling circular economy has attracted co-financing for UNDP Philippines via a EUR 60 million investment from the European Union, kickstarted through the Green Economy Program in the Philippines. This ambitious program will be implemented in 2024 by a consortium including UNDP, GIZ, Expertise France and the International Finance Corporation (World Bank Group), with UNDP responsible for implementing local circular actions.

Chapter 5

Out in Front: Global recognition of the UNDP Accelerator Labs

In 2023, the Accelerator Labs continued to leverage the potential of media content to increase its visibility and amplify its insights and results to influence, educate and inspire development practitioners and innovators worldwide.

Thanks to robust media coverage, on-going engagement and new experiments on social media (LinkedIn, X (ex-Twitter), Instagram Live, podcasts), and high visibility events (both in person and virtual), the UNDP Accelerator Labs shared their learning and embark a diverse global audience of millions worldwide on their journey of using R&D to navigate uncertainty on the road to Agenda 2030.

Visibility for and recognition of founding investors the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and the Qatar Fund for Development, along with Partners at Core for UNDP and action partners, the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, the Japan Cabinet Office and various supporters and knowledge partners, is a priority for the Accelerator Labs at both field and global levels. This translates into continuous efforts to strengthen it with high impact communication, on-going social media tagging and engagement opportunities.

5.1. Winning awards and telling multimedia stories

Snapshot:
for Tomorrow wins prestigious awards

The UNDP Accelerator Labs and Hyundai Motor Company partnered to launch *for Tomorrow: the Documentary* in 2020 to celebrate the transformative power of bottom-up innovation. In 2023, the film continued to be programmed at various festivals and received more than a dozen new awards.

The *for Tomorrow* initiative won the **2023 South by Southwest (SXSW) Innovation Award** in the Media category. This award recognizes outstanding projects, products and creative endeavors that advance innovation and improve communication.

for Tomorrow also won the **8th Shorty Impact Awards** in the following categories: Winner in Environment and Sustainability, Long Form Video; Finalist in Global Campaign; Gold Honor in Multi-Platform campaign; and the Audience Honor in Environment and Sustainability, Long Form Video, and the **Webbys' Anthem Awards** in the following categories: Gold in Awareness & Media Categories-Branded Content or Collaboration for Sustainability, Environment & Climate, and silver in Awareness & Media Categories-Film, Video, Television or Show for Sustainability, Environment & Climate.

The Annual South by Southwest (SXSW) conference, attended by over 250,000 people, bestowed their iconic award to for Tomorrow, March 2023.
Photo: SidLee/J. F. Légaré.

Learn more about *for Tomorrow: the Documentary* or watch the film on the f*or Tomorrow* YouTube channel or Amazon Prime.

Snapshot:
Storytelling with a purpose: the stunning short film Sumara Mare from Cabo Verde

As a means of survival for many women in the islands of Cabo Verde, illegal sand gathering for construction remains a common practice. The women wake at dawn and enter the ocean with just a shovel and a bucket to gather sand to sell. The **UNDP Cabo Verde Accelerator Lab** supported "Sumara Maré," a film that tells their story and shows the trade's impact on nature, their health and the economy. The message unfolds through a dance performance and voiceover by the women themselves. Sumara Maré was made possible by Africa Refocused, a collaboration between NEWF and the National Geographic Society, and it went on to win the Best Short Documentary at the London Pan African Film Festival.

Watch the trailer of Sumara Maré.

Snapshot:
Sharing learning through a multimedia glossary on informal transportation

Informal transportation modes are ubiquitous in the Global South, but very little about them is known. From boda bodas, brujitos, tuk-tuks, matatus or trufas, they are part of a wide range of informal transportation that move millions, employ hundreds of thousands, and support the sizable informal sector in urban economies. The Accelerator Labs in seven countries partnered with the Global Network for Popular Transportation, to create a multimedia glossary of local, informal transportation in their countries.

View the glossary and photo essay

A "Chicken Bus" in Guatemala City. Photo: UNDP Guatemala/Paola Constantino.

5.2. Showcasing the power of innovation and experimentation at leading events

Ana Djú, Head of Exploration at UNDP Guinea Bissau Accelerator Lab speaks at the LDC5 Youth Panel on "Putting Youth at the Forefront."

Snapshot
UNDP Accelerator Labs at the Least Developed Countries LDC5 Conference 2023 in Doha, Qatar

On March 5-6, 2023, the UNDP Accelerator Labs, which are present in 77 percent of Least Developed Countries (LDCs), shared experiments and their results from LDCs at the LDC5 Conference 2023 in Doha, Qatar.

Ana Djú, Head of Exploration, UNDP Accelerator Lab Guinea Bissau, represented the Labs at the LDC5 Youth Event: "Putting Youth at the Forefront" where she discussed their work on developing a series of Solution Clinics in partnership with BMW Foundation. These clinics have brought together solution holders from Guinea-Bissau, leaders from BMW Foundation and representatives of UN Agencies worldwide and has led to the emergence of trends and signals not previously apparent. Innocent Frederick Ejolu, Partnerships, Innovation, and Development Solutions Specialist for UNDP Uganda represented the Labs at the LDC5 Side Event on innovation and digitalization where he shared the success of the Lab's partnership with e-commerce company Jumia Food Uganda on digitalization for informal market vendors in Uganda.

The event was promoted through X (ex-Twitter) gaining 8,902 impressions.

Snapshot

UNDP Accelerator Labs at the International Conference on Innovation and Technological Advances for Sustainable Development (ITAS) 2023 in Doha, Qatar

L to R: Michael Phillips, Director, Applied Research, Innovation and Economic Development, University of Doha for Science and Technology, Ana Djú, Head of Exploration UNDP Accelerator Lab Guinea Bissau, Najla AlNaiger, Manager, Communications, Marketing & Communications Director, University of Doha for Science and Technology, Gina Lucarelli, Team Leader, UNDP Accelerator Labs, New York and Innocent Frederick Ejolu, Partnerships and Innovation Specialist, UNDP Uganda.

On March 1-3, 2023, the UNDP Accelerator Labs presented their results on "Experimentation and Innovation in Sustainable Development," at the International Conference on Innovation and Technological Advances for Sustainable Development (ITAS) hosted by the University of Doha for Science and Technology.

The panel members were Gina Lucarelli, Team Leader, UNDP Accelerator Labs, Innocent Frederick Ejolu, Partnerships, Innovation, and Development Solutions Specialist, UNDP Uganda and Ana Djú, Head of Exploration, UNDP Accelerator Lab Guinea Bissau. They discussed how the Network is tapping into local innovations and empowering experimentation for sustainable development.

The event was promoted through X (ex-Twitter), LinkedIn, and Instagram channels which received a combined cross channel total of 6,266 impressions.

UNDP Accelerator Lab Global Team at the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations in New York. From L to R: Eduardo Gustale, Monitoring, Experimentation and Learning Specialist, UNDP Accelerator Labs; Soledad Bauza, Coordinator, UNDP Accelerator Labs; Ambassador Thomas Zahneisen, Deputy Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations; Nikola Simpson, Head of Exploration, UNDP Barbados and Eastern Caribbean Accelerator Lab; Steve Utterwulghe, Director of Public Partnerships, UNDP; and Luisa Monse, Partnership Specialist, UNDP Accelerator Labs. Photo: UNDP Accelerator Labs/Amy Bennett.

Interactive Dialogue with UNDP Accelerator Labs at the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

On June 7, 2023, the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations in New York hosted an interactive dialogue for UN Permanent Missions, including Partners at Core for UNDP and potential new supporters.

The UNDP Accelerator Labs took the opportunity to share their journey and the vision for a new evolution that aims to create new value and encourage action-based learning. This involves connecting insights, data, finance, and grassroots solutions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The event was attended by representatives from the Permanent Missions of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Denmark, Korea, Spain, the United Kingdom and the European Delegation to the United Nations.

Promotion for the event on X (ex-Twitter) reached 4,154 impressions.

5.3. Generating prominent media coverage

Gina Lucarelli, UNDP Accelerator Labs Team Leader joins Washington Post Live to discuss digital financial inclusion and banking the unbanked, together with Tommaso Mancini-Griffoli, Deputy Division Chief at the International Monetary Fund.

She highlighted the Lab's work in South Sudan on digitizing an indigenous savings scheme (Read the deep dive on this achievement in South Sudan, Chapter 2, p.23) that has accelerated the financial and digital inclusion of women, youth and cross-border traders.

■ ■ ■ Watch the replay

Lorena Moscovich, Head of Experimentation for the UNDP Argentina Accelerator Lab participated in TEDxRíodelaPlata 2023 at the Movistar Arena, with 11,000 seats filled.

She shared their Lab's work with Citibeats on learning how Argentines perceive the massification of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT. She also highlighted how most of the public conversation about AI in Argentina revolves around the future of work and its impact on industries, education and environment. These insights were also featured in La Nación, an Argentine daily newspaper.

■ ■ ■ Watch the video

UNDP Accelerator Lab's Team Leader Gina Lucarelli and partner Shain Shapiro joined an episode of "WHO KNEW The Smartest People In The Room."
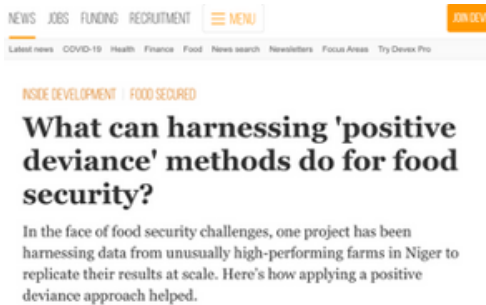
She shared how the UNDP Accelerator Labs together with the Center for Music Ecosystems is learning from music to rethink how to approach intellectual property rights. The Network is exploring how IP rights can be returned to local grassroots innovators while also being available to the world.

■ ■ ■ Watch the video
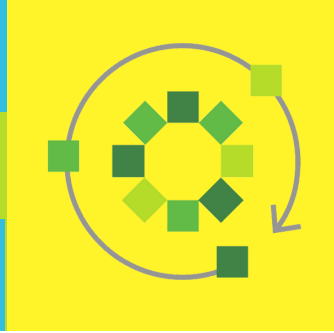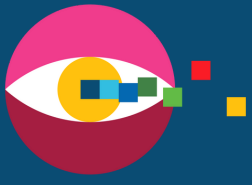
Forbes: Bridging The Digital Divide in The AI Era - The UNDP Way

UNDP's Chief Digital Officer, Robert Opp shared with Forbes how countries that don't have digital and increasingly, AI capacities, are being left behind. To address this challenge, he highlighted the UNDP Accelerator Labs and how the Network is empowering and upskilling government partners and innovation hubs, universities and grassroots innovators worldwide to keep up with the pace of change.

Devex: What can harnessing "positive deviance" methods do for food security?

Devex highlighted how the UNDP Niger Accelerator Lab together with the German International Cooperation (GIZ) are identifying "positive deviance" practices in Niger through engaging with over 170 individuals, including 70 farmers.

Kickstarting the partnership with a "learning circle" on the contribution of informal workers to the circular economy at the Dela Summit, in Älmhult, Sweden—a gathering of social entrepreneurs, IKEA mentors, strategy partners and learning partners are joined by colleagues from the UNDP Accelerator Labs. Photo: Ikea Social Entrepreneurship

Devdiscourse: IKEA Social Entrepreneurship, Ashoka, UNDP partner to focus on connection between informal and the circular economy

Devdiscourse highlighted the partnership of UNDP Accelerator Labs with IKEA Social Entrepreneurship and Ashoka on the informal economy and its connection with circularity. This partnership is looking at how unregistered small-scale businesses and informal workers contribute to economic models that prioritize the continuous utilization of products and material, rather than their disposal.

Gulf Times: Qatar affirms its foreign policy's deep rootedness in co-operation

The Gulf Times reported Qatar's reaffirmation of its commitment to the United Nations Development Programme and highlighted the remarkable results of their long-term strategic partnership. The article cited the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network as an example of how Qatar's contributions helped provide critical support for more than 100 countries, addressing global development challenges such as climate change, the future of work and digital transformation.

Ghana Business News: UNDP partners Mastercard Foundation on Young Africa Innovates (YAI) program

Ghana Business News reported a new partnership between the UNDP and the Mastercard Foundation to implement Young Africa Innovates (YAI), a program that helps integrate young people and under-represented groups into Africa's innovation ecosystems, in Ghana and Nigeria over the next two and a half years. YAI will tap into the Accelerator Lab Network to bring in a range of new approaches and rapidly generate insights. (Read more about this partnership in Chapter 4, p. 46)

Devex: How to build career expertise in data and information analysis

Jeremy Boy, Lead Data Scientist at UNDP Accelerator Labs was featured in Devex, discussing the challenges of data in global development. He highlighted a few of these challenges, from filling in the numerous data gaps related to SDG indicators, to making data intelligible for specific global development practitioners and audiences.

allAfrica: South Africa: One Million Informal Innovators Uncovered in South Africa

allAfrica shared the launch of "Making the Invisible Visible: Informal Innovation in South Africa" research by the UNDP Accelerator Labs, in partnership with Utrecht University, the University of Johannesburg and MIT Sloan School of Management, noting that "the potential for informal innovation and entrepreneurship to deliver novel solutions affordably and accessibly has been underexplored until now."

5.4. Social media coverage and experiments

Snapshot:
Sparking sharing with levity: a Network-driven crowdsourcing initiative for World Creativity and Innovation Day

For World Creativity and Innovation Day on April 21st, 2023 the Labs engaged audiences in a new way. They experimented with a bottom-up co-creation campaign called "Caption This," inviting the Network to craft their own captions and share their perspectives on innovation and creativity using the #InnovatorsUnite hashtag across social media. Inspiration for this came from the Labs' WhatsApp groups where team members share insights, questions, ideas and laughs.

Snapshot:
Hosting an Instagram Live

The launch event of the publication "Making the Invisible Visible: Informal Innovation in South Africa" was followed by an Instagram Live session featuring Siphiwe Zuma, an informal innovator featured in the report, who shared his entrepreneurial journey in creating an inclusive umbrella in South Africa.

This innovative approach supported the disseminating insights and strengthening of the innovation ecosystem in Africa.

Along with a global press release, this event was promoted in various formats through UNDP Accelerator Labs' digital channels such as X (ex-Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube which received a combined cross channel total of 42,676 impressions.

Watch the session.

Chapter 6
Looking ahead: A Global South-driven R&D capability for the SDGs

The way forward for the UNDP Accelerator Labs is converting our learning from experimentation in 115 countries into practical global action to move from SDG innovation to SDG achievement.

The aim is to move towards a distributed "Research and development (R&D) function within UNDP's Country Offices around the world to ensure continuous exploration and experimentation related to evolving sustainable development challenges," as per the recommendation of the 2021 Midterm evaluation.

As this report illustrates, the Labs Network has started to transition into an **open and global capability for R&D on the Sustainable Development Goals.** What began in 2019 as a temporary initiative to inject new ways of working into UNDP is now becoming the backbone of UNDP's R&D function, enabling UNDP to learn from women and men living in poverty and facing the effects of climate change to build out new solutions which reimagine development for the 21st century.

Many accolades are due to the UNDP Accelerator Labs' founding investors, the **Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany** and the **Qatar Fund for Development,** and the support from Partners at Core for UNDP, including the Italian Ministry of Environment and Energy Security and the Japan Cabinet Office as action partners – who believed in the power of exploratory work for the Sustainable Development Goals and to whom we look as we broaden partnerships for the next chapter towards open, global and distributed R&D through an SDG Innovation Commons.

2024-2025 foresees a deeper transition towards the **SDG Innovation Commons** (see chapter 3), a space for public domain experimentation to unlock progress on what is needed to reach the goals set in Agenda 2030. To usher in this transition, the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network will focus on **opening its platforms, solutions and experiments** so the knowledge, data and insights gathered will become available publicly. Opening up our data lays the foundation of an **SDG Innovation Commons Exchange Suite**.

In 2024, the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network will codify its approach to R&D and test out the distributed R&D Cycle (see chapter 2) to turn knowledge on emerging niches into global action that advances the Sustainable Development Goals, and navigates uncertainty on the road to Agenda 2030.

First, the network will build coalitions around **digital financial inclusion, food systems, circular economy and information integrity** as areas of emergent demand in the countries of the Global Majority and where we have a higher probability of driving systems change.

Second, the Network will also develop a toolkit of R&D practices that have emerged over the past five years in the Lab Network driven by the three roles of Heads of Exploration, Experimentation and Solutions Mapping. This will serve as documentation of the approaches to embed these practices in UNDP, attract public visibility and create a public repository of R&D approaches.

With open innovation as a scaling strategy, the corollary agenda is to integrate the R&D function, which has been modelled by the Accelerator Labs into UNDP. The Accelerator Labs have become core to the organization's capability for renewal in light of emerging circumstances, the complexity of operating environments and the need to evolve its organizational niche and value add as part of the effort to "reimagine development for the 21st century." The results of R&D thus far will inform UNDP processes to review progress towards its strategic plan (2022-2025), and look towards the final plan on the road to the SDGs.

Looking for a new round of partners

Sometimes it can be hard to find reasons for optimism when it comes to a fair and sustainable world. Here's one. Looking globally, the energy, solutions, networks and initiatives are actually vibrant, but they are not operating in concert or at scale. Connections, recombinations and handovers among partners is now no longer a luxury. SDG open innovation will be a priority in 2024 in order to unleash actionable partnerships, curated but not necessarily brokered by UNDP, to accelerate learning on what it will take to achieve the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Annex 1: Innovation methods commonly used by the UNDP Accelerator Labs

Source: Leurs, B. (2018, December 20) Landscape of innovation approaches: introducing version 2.
https://www.nesta.org.uk/blog/landscape-innovation-approaches-introducing-version-2/

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