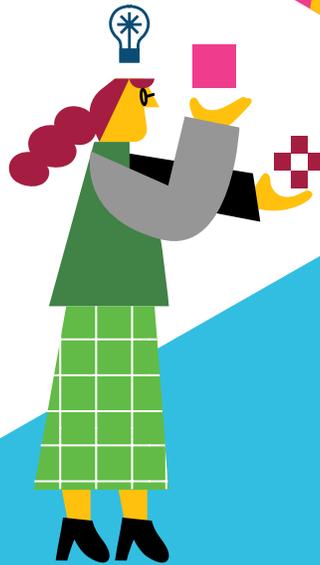
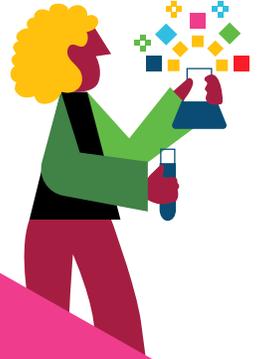




UN
DP

accelerator
labs



The Fast and the Curious

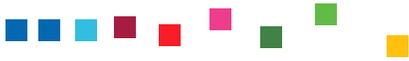
Our Story So Far

Co-building the Accelerator Labs as a joint venture with:



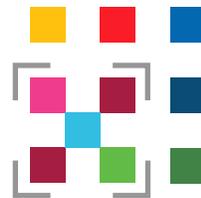
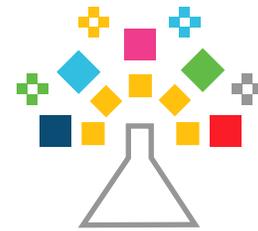
UNDP
Core
Partners

The Buzz



“We have the energy and spirit of a startup in the UN space.”

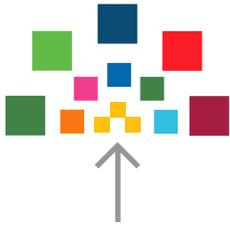
Swetha Kolluri
Head of Experimentation,
UNDP India Accelerator Lab



“Bringing dynamic innovation into big public bureaucracies is never easy, and there’ll always be plenty of resisters and cynics. It also looked risky setting up so many Labs at once without a strong supporting infrastructure. But without accelerated innovation there’s little chance of achieving the SDGs. The Accelerator Labs have made a good start, with a fantastic infusion of smart, committed people and a healthy focus on practical action.”

Geoff Mulgan Former CEO Nesta and now Professor at UCL





“Our ambition and our action needs to match the scale of the issues that we face. That’s why we’re launching 60 Labs at once.”

Achim Steiner
UNDP Administrator

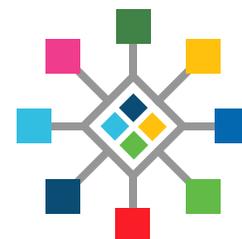
“Developing a portfolio of experiments around plastic pollution in Pakistan will help us act on many leveraging points including social, policy driven, technology-based solutions. We are keen to explore opportunities with UNDP’s Pakistan Accelerator Lab.”

Unilever CSR Team Pakistan



“I was born and raised in France from Malian parents. My wish was to live one day in Mali, to contribute to its development. I knew that the job was for me when two friends of mine shared the job with me – because they recognized me in it. And I have to admit, I recognized myself in it too.”

Countel Kanne Head of Solutions Mapping, UNDP Mali Accelerator Lab



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UNDP Accelerator Labs



Our Story So Far

UNDP set out in 2019 to build the world's largest and fastest learning network on wicked sustainable development challenges. In less than a year, we did just that. Today, 60 Lab teams covering 78 countries are now up and running within the United Nations, creating actionable intelligence and testing solutions with national partners.

UNDP is doing development differently because the speed, dynamics, and complexity of today's challenges are fundamentally different from even twenty years ago. We are creating a new capability for decision-makers to explore, experiment, and grow portfolios of mutually reinforcing solutions to tackle today's challenges.

The Accelerator Lab network is part of UNDP's broader efforts to expand the way the organization invests, thinks about and delivers development. Working with

climate change, poverty reduction and governance experts throughout UNDP, our 60 Accelerator Labs around the world are now testing new ways of working to address social and environmental challenges.

This report tells the story of how the network was built and how the Accelerator Labs are sensing, exploring and testing solutions to address major development problems. In 2020, COVID-19

In 2020, COVID-19 radically shifted our reality. We're seeing UNDP, through its Accelerator Labs, jump in, and pivot its work to adapt to this new context. Agile appears to be having a moment.

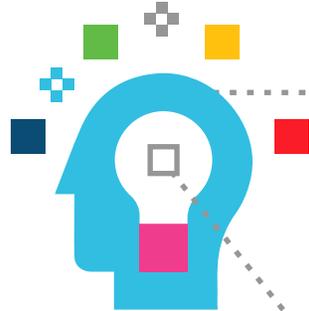
radically shifted our reality. We're seeing the Labs and innovation and digital teams throughout UNDP's global network jump in and pivot their work to adapt to this new context, in what many are calling "new normal." The way Accelerator Labs apply cutting edge behavioral insights, support real-time data and create future-proof policy advice is becoming an integral part of UNDP's contribution to the UN-wide response to this crisis.

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What do we bring to the development sector?

.....

60 UNDP Accelerator Lab teams covering 78 countries

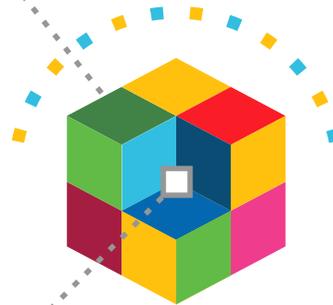


.....

accelerate learning
creating actionable intelligence and testing solutions

.....

strengthen capabilities
supporting decision-makers who explore, experiment, and grow portfolios

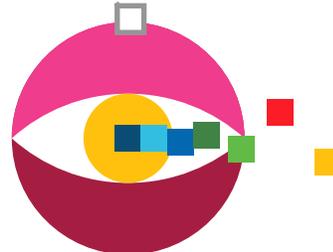


.....

adapt to change
expanding the way the organization invests, thinks about and delivers development

.....

what's next
scanning the horizon



Who We Are



The Accelerator Lab teams consist of individuals embedded at country-level within the global UNDP network.



UNDP Accelerator Labs

- | | | | |
|---|--|--------------|--------------|
| Algeria | Democratic Republic of Congo | Lesotho | South Africa |
| Angola | Dominican Republic | Libya | South Sudan |
| Argentina | Ecuador | Malawi | Sudan |
| Azerbaijan | Eswatini | Malaysia | Tanzania |
| Barbados, covering 10 Caribbean countries | Ethiopia | Mali | The Gambia |
| Benin | Fiji, covering 10 countries in the Pacific | Mexico | Timor Leste |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | Ghana | Morocco | Togo |
| Burkina Faso | India | Namibia | Tunisia |
| Cambodia | Iraq | Nepal | Turkey |
| Cape Verde | Jordan | Niger | Uganda |
| Chad | Kenya | Pakistan | Ukraine |
| Colombia | Lao PDR | Palestine | Uzbekistan |
| Congo | Lebanon | Paraguay | Vietnam |
| Cote D'Ivoire | | Philippines | Zambia |
| | | Rwanda | Zimbabwe |
| | | Serbia | |
| | | Sierra Leone | |
| | | Somalia | |



63%

have experience on **ethnographic research**



29%

can perform tasks related to **artificial intelligence and machine learning**



55%

have experience with **citizen generated data**



180 people



72%

are **brand new** to the UN system

serving **3.13 billion people**

7



68%

have experience with **prototyping**



65%

bring experience from the **private and nonprofit sectors, academia, and government**

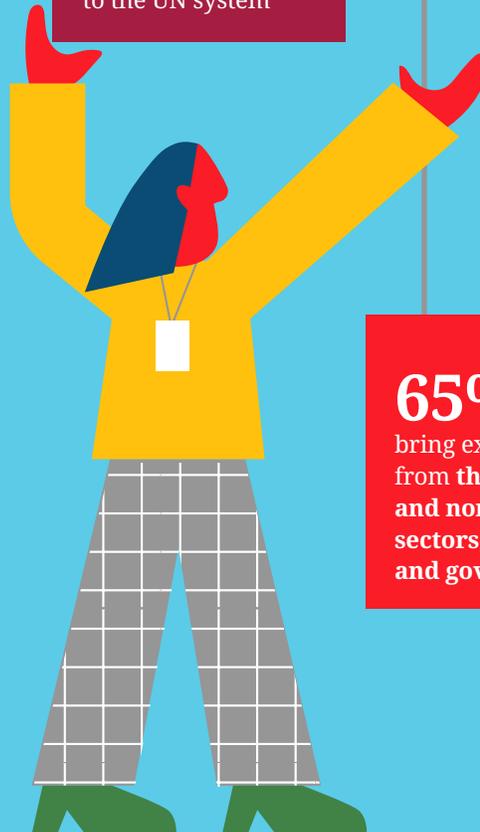


60 Labs



24%

are **repatriates**



We Accelerate Learning



We set out to test the hypothesis that a network of Labs can accelerate learning on what works and what doesn't when it comes to sustainable development. Our network builds on what we have learned from public sector innovation labs around the world – that operating in silos undermines the great work they do.

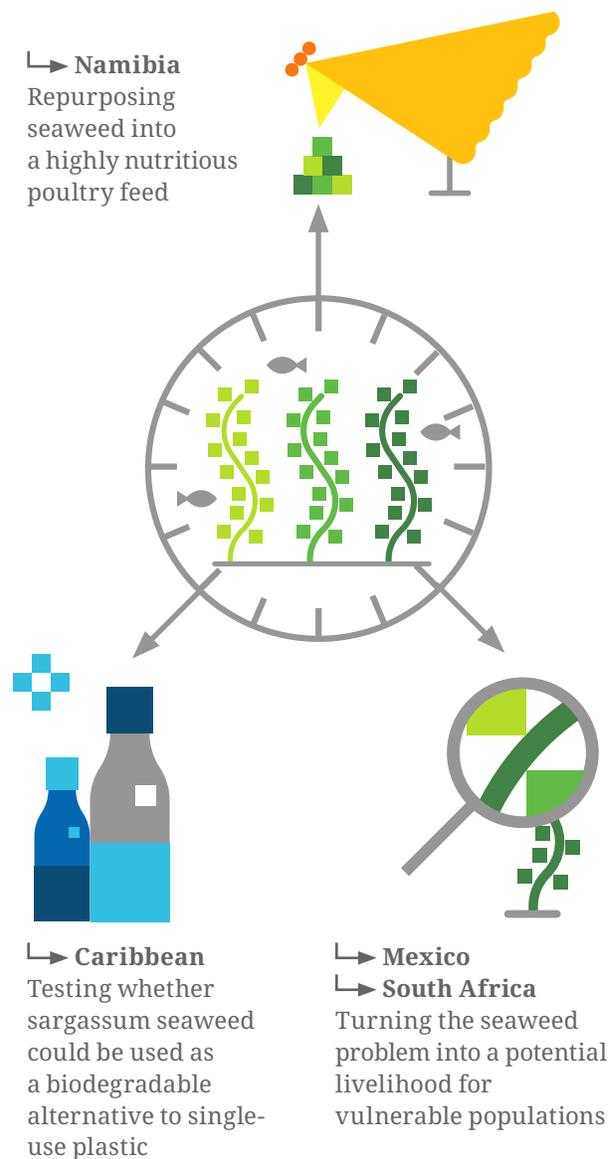
The UNDP Accelerator Labs are sharing actionable learning on a daily basis. As part of a globally integrated network, each Lab draws inspiration from solutions – both those generated locally and those identified by the network. They benefit from each other in real-time, creating powerful collective learning effects.

Messaging channels have emerged organically among the UNDP Accelerator Labs' team of explorers, experimenters and solution mappers across Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. We see the synapses of the network firing on multiple instant channels. This creates the opportunity to surface ideas that are on the horizon but not yet part of mainstream development and allows for new approaches to unfold across many different contexts in a low-risk way.

The Accelerator Labs are generating surprising learnings. For instance, people on the margins making ingenious use of secondhand materials may help design better recycling and waste management interventions for wealthier families that consume more. These and other insights about the informal economy are then being picked up by the 20 other Labs who are working on waste management.



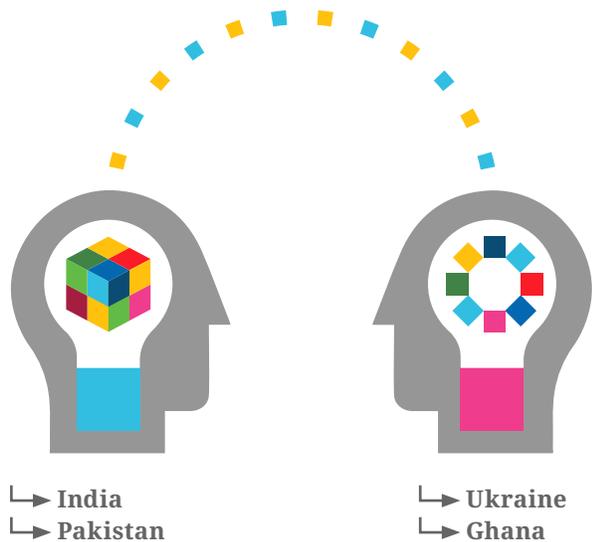
Learning exchanges are gaining momentum from the network effect



In Namibia, the UNDP Accelerator Lab is exploring partnerships with a company that is repurposing seaweed from the country's vast coast lines into a highly nutritious poultry feed. In the Caribbean, the UNDP Accelerator Lab is working with the Oasis Library to test whether sargassum seaweed could be used as a biodegradable alternative to single-use plastic. Mexico and South Africa are now also exploring what to do with the seaweed problem and whether it is possible to turn it into an asset. The UNDP Accelerator Lab Network is testing and refining tools and methods, all the while creating space for action and reflection on evolving development challenges.



Being part of an integrated network allows the UNDP Accelerator Labs in Ukraine and India to share learning and insights on air pollution.



The UNDP India Accelerator Lab’s work on air pollution takes cues from the team in Ukraine’s efforts to understand the practice of crop residue burning. The UNDP Accelerator Lab in Pakistan gains inspiration from the Ghana Accelerator Lab’s ethnographic and behavioral insights approach to the circular economy in Accra.

We bring unusual actors into development

The UNDP Accelerator Labs are driving unprecedented collaboration with UN Member States, and a range of knowledge and action partners. In the first months of getting a Lab up and running, they begin by mapping new actors in the innovation ecosystem.

This approach is designed so that the Labs do not displace, but become a part of, the development community, leaning on shared norms and ethics to guide partnerships. In addition to the private sector, academia and innovation foundation partnerships to increase the network’s capability, UN-wide partnerships are being designed to share data and technical expertise within the UN system on issues such as food security, women’s equality and employment for young people.

We multiply returns on investment

The Lab network is part of UNDP’s drive to make innovation a core way of working. The network builds on wider efforts including the Innovation Facility, serving as a vehicle for seed funding for innovations in UNDP since 2014. We have seen the return on investment in our Innovation Facility. For every dollar invested, UNDP’s innovation facility yields two dollars in return. We are thankful to investors who have enabled UNDP to accelerate the innovations around us, especially the inventions and coping mechanisms of people living in poverty or facing the effects of climate change.

How Did We Build an Amazing Team So Fast?



How does one inject social innovation into a \$5 billion public sector organization spanning over 170 countries? Finding people with the right skill set is the first step. As we planned and implemented a new type of search process, looking for brilliant leaders to join 60 country offices, this is what we found.

Unconventional job titles attract curiosity

Head of Exploration. Head of Experimentation. Head of Solutions Mapping. These titles were deliberate deviations from the analysts and specialists for which UNDP usually recruits. Out of the box titles seem to have worked: the type of people who ultimately joined the network are curious, spunky and ready to operate and create without edicts or instructions.

A social media campaign to recruit unusual candidates

We tapped into our global network of UNDP offices – and beyond – circulating bold and playful advertisements on Facebook and LinkedIn. We held open, interactive “Ask Me Anything” sessions that were then posted on YouTube, reaching over 4,500 potential candidates. The website set up for the UNDP Accelerator Lab recruitment received almost 1 million visits during the two highest months of activity during this enrollment phase. When we finally met in person, many new Lab teams had seen the video sessions and confirmed that this outreach and responsiveness piqued their interest.

Ultimately, the experiment paid off – we reviewed 8,000 applications for 180 posts in 60 developing countries, an application rate 8.5 times higher than similar level UNDP posts.



An application rate
8.5 x higher
than similar level
UNDP posts



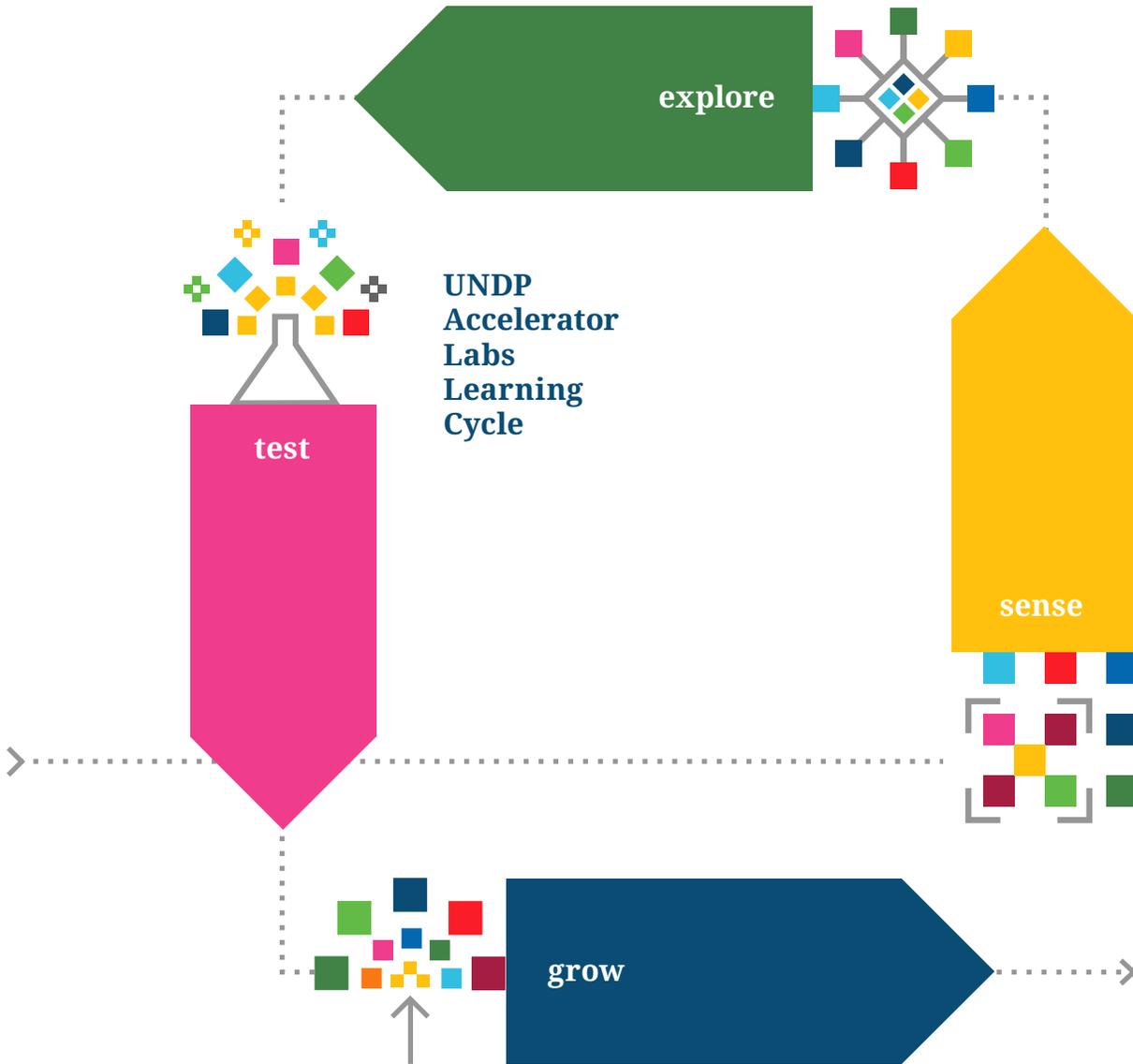


As part of exploration, UNDP Accelerator Lab in Democratic Republic of Congo engages people through games such as Mission 1.5 to explore the complex issue of climate change.

The Labs in Action



Accelerator Lab teams are helping UNDP and partners close the gap between the current practices of international development and an accelerated pace of change. To do this, the Labs are creating new service lines in development that are open-ended and safe to fail. The Lab network does this by iterating in a cycle of **sensing**, **exploring**, **testing** and **growing**.



sense is about understanding what are emerging challenges and opportunities in the local context and determining where we need to focus our attention.

explore is about better understanding the challenge and looking for solutions, particularly by looking at how citizens are already addressing these challenges and opportunities.

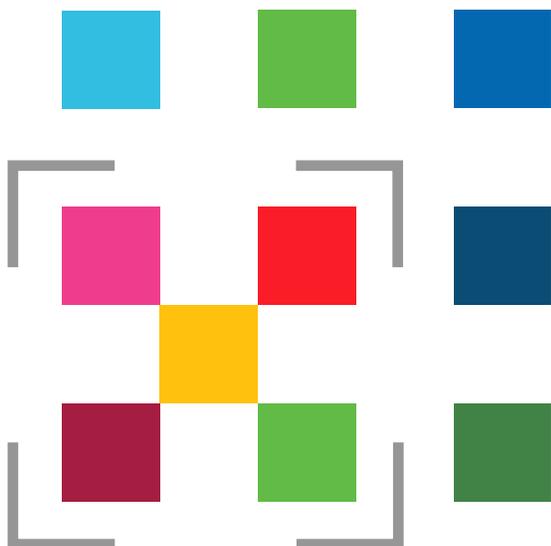
test is about designing a portfolio of potential solutions to intervene at multiple points in the system and continuously testing them until we are confident they can work.

grow is about handing over the portfolio of solutions, advocacy for policy change or spinning solutions off as private ventures.



Accelerator Lab teams participate in a mapping exercise during a bootcamp in Kigali, Rwanda.

Sense



We started the UNDP Accelerator Lab network deliberately focusing on acceleration: building on what exists, rather than assuming that not-yet-invented ideas or technologies are the cure to development ills. A focus on acceleration means seeing sustainable development as a complex, adaptive system, a problem with multiple actors involved, all changing in real time. Acceleration requires real time and participatory ways of making sense of what is happening.

As part of sensing, the UNDP Accelerator Labs map the ecosystems of actors related to their area of work. This often means they develop dynamic maps of sticky notes and lines drawn on whiteboards, where stakeholders are added as they are uncovered.



Sensemaking across the network

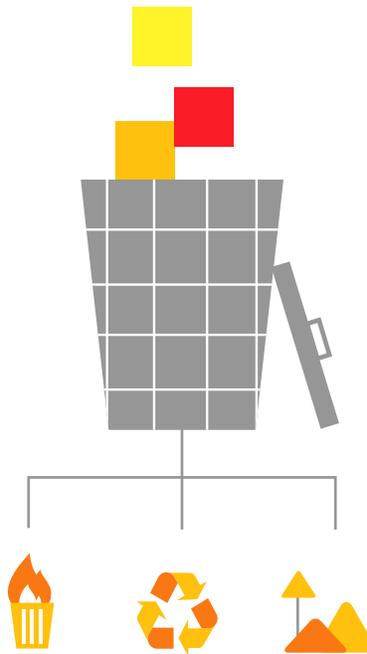


↳ Mexico

In Mexico, sensemaking identified how the UNDP Accelerator Lab team could play a constructive role as the government drives towards more citizen-centric communication and engagement.

↳ Lao PDR

In Lao PDR, the UNDP Accelerator Lab visualized the waste management stream and actors in Vientiane, breaking down the problem into smaller sub-systems such as open burning, recycling, and waste that ends up in the landfill, which are all interconnected but with different dynamics.



↳ Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, the Lab's focus on the informal economy emerged from a pattern identification exercise requested by the Office of the President. The ask was to help 22 ministries map and understand new avenues to support the government's Transition and Stabilization Programme 2018-2020. The UNDP Accelerator Lab team supported the full cabinet to use sensemaking to understand the patterns in how the reforms are experienced on the ground. This view shed light upon the people's trust and intent and delivery of reforms in an often-volatile environment disrupted by cyclones and power outages.

By using sensemaking, the UNDP Accelerator Lab helped the government understand the patterns in how transition and stabilization reforms are experienced on the ground.





A family works together to water seedlings to fight against desertification in Lake Chad.

.....

Sensemaking with donors and authorities is paving a way to more nimble, coherent and defined interventions in the Sahel

- ↳ The Sahel
 - ↳ Burkina Faso
 - ↳ Niger
 - ↳ Chad
 - ↳ Mali

The Sahel region faces several deep-rooted and interconnected development challenges that span across the borders of Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Mali. The UNDP Accelerator Lab network is helping to make sense of development patterns in this region together with the Ministry of Development and Planning of Niger and the Council of Ministers of the Liptako-Gourma Authority, the Government of Germany (BMZ), the Dakar Platform, the World Bank, the Sahel and West Africa Club of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Sahel Alliance.

As a service line of the Labs, sensemaking helped call attention to the need for cohesive action across several frontiers including insecurity in the region and the activities and livelihoods of its people, particularly the nomadic population who live in the border zones. As follow up to the sensemaking exercise, BMZ, UNDP and partners will develop a portfolio of experiments on the topics of energy, agriculture, and youth employment in the Sahel region.

.....

Moonshot Viet Nam

A zero-waste future for Da Nang

Poor waste management and waste disposal is one of the most pressing issues in Da Nang, Viet Nam. The city’s solid waste is surging by 17% annually, while its only landfill is almost full. UNDP Viet Nam’s Accelerator Lab has taken up the waste management challenge as part of a larger ambition towards a “zero waste” future, where there is no need for a landfill. While the Lab keeps this bigger goal in mind, they are starting with a fast-paced learning process to learn quickly about the system’s dynamics and to demonstrate results to build legitimacy with stakeholders. They started by diving into specific issues of household waste collection, as a vast portion of it ends up unsorted in landfills.

↳ Viet Nam

Below are learnings that the Viet Nam Lab gathered by using a ‘Solution Capture Card’ – one of the tools available in the Accelerator Labs’ toolkit.

The Viet Nam Lab is running small experiments in the field to test behavior change on domestic waste disposal and get a quick sense of what might work and what does not. They tested a variety of messages, through public information campaigns, spreading posters with different messages and providing apartment blocks with different bin designs. The prototype approach has helped the Lab and partners identify some flawed assumptions. For example, they had not considered contextual factors, like how waste collectors might not show up for a few days, and how this triggers people to stop separating waste because the bins were full. The team learned about people’s preferences, and also about competing views and evidence: “We found just as much counter evidence as supporting evidence for some of our ideas.”

When
2019

Where
Khue Trung,
Danang
UNDP
Vietnam

What/Who
A makeshift
scrap
collection
situation



Observations

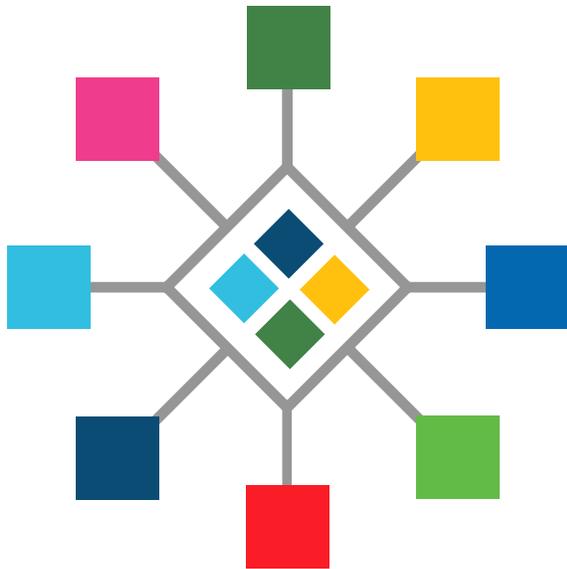
A bespoke ‘billboard’ in a street of Da Nang invites residents to call the waste collector (his phone number is painted on the board) if they have recyclable waste to dispose of or trade. This unique way of advertising waste collection services – making it easier to recycle – was a surprise to the Lab team.

Insights

This observation demonstrates the dynamics of a market-driven approach to informal waste management in Da Nang. It’s convenient for residents, since a waste collector can come to their houses and collect the unwanted items. It’s a valuable source of income for waste collectors who can sell it at a higher price at a waste collection center.



Explore



From collective intelligence to solutions mapping

Exploration is how the Labs pool knowledge and look to the horizon for what is coming next. The UNDP Accelerator Labs explore primarily through collective intelligence and solutions mapping.

The Labs are working with grassroots communities to identify innovators, entrepreneurs and makers who are actively addressing social and environmental challenges for themselves. These types of innovations are often home-grown solutions that have never been codified, applied elsewhere, nor taken to scale.

To tap into this potential, the Labs are exploring the field to connect with local innovators who are in search of potential solutions that will bring insights into delivery of the sustainable development goals.

These are the types of emergent, sometimes cobbled together, solutions that are often not seen by sustainable development experts. The Labs are building on local solutions to see where breakthroughs are possible.

Ethnographic approaches

↳ Democratic Republic of Congo

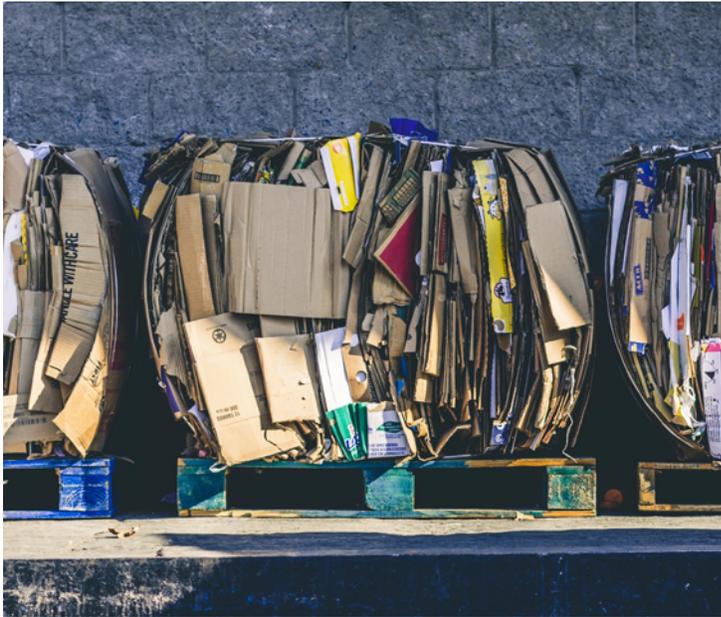
In Democratic Republic of Congo, the UNDP Accelerator Lab is working on a comprehensive database of solutions developed by local citizens. This “Atlas of Local Solutions” is the first of its kind in the DRC. The Lab has mapped more than 30 local innovations in DRC so far, including fish freezers to maintain stocks during transit, ecological charcoal bricks made from cardboard waste, non-electric ovens, and traffic robots in Kinshasa.

By taking an ethnographic approach, the Lab is stumbling upon potential solutions to broader development problems. One such story is how local solutions, with support, could reinforce large-scale efforts to reduce deforestation and possibly even gender-based violence. Specifically, the charcoal bricks being produced at a small scale could be tested and amplified to address deforestation as they are an alternative fuel source to firewood. Stretching the application, early tests are underway to see if this alternative energy source may also support efforts to reduce gender-based violence. In DRC, women are the ones responsible for collecting firewood and preparing meals for their families. During these collection trips, they are exposed to a risk of assault as they often walk alone. Could tapping into grassroots solutions help bring the energy source back home and also reduce the likelihood of violence for women? The Lab will find out.

Addressing resource scarcity

↳ Namibia

In Namibia, the UNDP Accelerator Lab has been mapping solutions to combat the country’s water crisis. The government has declared a national state of emergency because of ongoing and persistent drought. The Lab mapped community solutions, including repurposed seaweed found along the coast to produce poultry feed products. In a region where drought conditions compromise livestock productivity, farmers’ income and livelihoods, this innovative poultry-feed product is pivotal.



“With a solutions mapping approach, we are gathering diverse sources of information and inspiration from people solving their own problems in real time.”

Gina Lucrelli
UNDP Accelerator Labs Team Leader

One of the local solutions mapped by the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Democratic Republic of Congo includes turning cardboard waste into ecological charcoal bricks.

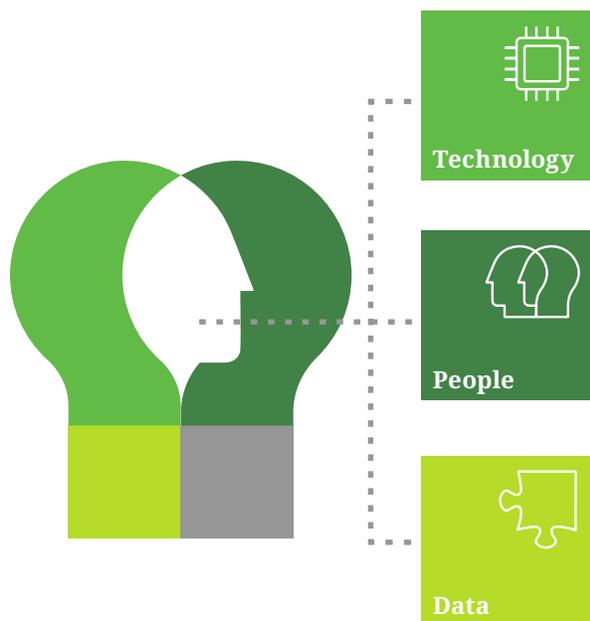
Could tapping into grassroots energy solutions reduce the need for women to search for firewood?



Multiple Accelerator Lab teams at UNDP, like in Namibia, are exploring the uses and effects of seaweed as useful resource for sustainable development solutions.

Becoming smarter together

Collective intelligence is the idea that a group of people is smarter together than any one individual person in that group. This is not a new idea. It builds on participatory planning, pooling knowledge and team creation processes dating back to the 20th century or earlier. What has changed is the advent of technology and mobile connectivity. This means that pooling knowledge has taken on a whole new meaning as more new data is generated that can help us unlock fresh insights in our world. The power of technology means that machines can now perform some of the functions of intelligence that humans are not so good at – such as processing large volumes of data.



Taking on complex development problems requires acknowledging at least two things about reality: it changes all the time and it is distributed among many actions and choices. So if we see sustainable development as a by-the-minute type of problem, to tackle it we need to diversify where we get our intelligence. The UNDP Accelerator Labs are tapping into alternative sources of data to better understand sustainable development problems in their countries.



UNDP India, through its Accelerator Labs, is using actionable intelligence and real-time data to crack down on polluting brick kilns.

Unlocking fresh ideas and insights through data diversity

↳ India

The Labs have started putting collective intelligence design principles into action by using real-time and novel data sources to better understand development problems. UNDP India's Accelerator Lab is using high resolution satellite data, spatial computing and machine learning algorithms to locate brick kilns in the Northern and Eastern states. As a major source of air pollution, the kilns are part of the reason why hundreds of thousands of people in the country face an elevated risk for cardiovascular and respiratory disease. The brick kilns also tend to rely on bonded labor. Building on research by Nottingham University, in the UK, the Lab team is developing and implementing a mobile app to capture the status of brick kilns in three districts of India. Using machine intelligence to identify locations of the kilns, the India Lab is working closely with the District Magistrates and the Pollution Control Boards to use this actionable intelligence to crack down on polluting brick kilns.

.....

Bringing unlikely parties together to understand sustainable development

↳ Uganda

It is not common for group discussions to bridge across society’s stratifications – such as between street vendors and the upper echelons of government. Yet this is exactly the type of inclusive collective intelligence that the UNDP Accelerator Lab network is tapping into to get a more real time understanding of sustainable development problems. Working with Nesta’s Center for Collective Intelligence Design, we are seeing Labs across the globe convening groups and individuals with different perspectives and ways of understanding, interpreting and problem solving. For example, UNDP Uganda’s Accelerator Lab began addressing deforestation issues by convening representatives from government and private companies managing natural resources. To understand the problem from multiple viewpoints, their analyses included the views of illegal loggers, firewood sellers, school officials, religious leaders and security agencies.

By meeting with community members, entrepreneurs, and local makers, the team in the Republic of Congo was able to map home-grown solutions that have never been codified nor taken to scale.



.....

Exploring the field to connect with local innovators

↳ Republic of Congo

In the Republic of Congo, the UNDP Accelerator Lab hit the road and embarked on a “Caravane de l’Innovation,” where they met with community members, entrepreneurs, and local organizations. The caravan spent more than three weeks covering 70 percent of the country. In Pointe Noir, for example, the team talked to an entrepreneur who found a solution for the ongoing electricity challenges found in off-the-grid rural parts of the country. Frustrated by the lack of light, he created a portable electric light solution using the chlorophyll and CO2 produced by plant leaves. In Dollisie, a local farmer created an innovative mobile peanut huller that cuts down on processing time for farmers. This machine boosts farmers’ yields and incomes by enabling greater production of the crop to take to market. Once these solutions are mapped, the next steps will be to test them out for broader application.



Partners and staff gather at the launch of the Accelerator Lab in Serbia.

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Moonshot Serbia

Understanding Depopulation with New Data

The UNDP Accelerator Lab in Serbia is using new sources of data to help the central government understand drivers of expatriation from the country. Upon request of the Office of the President, the Lab is using novel data sources including LinkedIn to assess where skills are being lost, where skills need to be imported, and what educational programs need to be designed to ensure skills exist in the country. The advantage of LinkedIn data is that it is updated frequently rather than through cumbersome government-led surveys. The Lab is deepening this research by establishing ways to ground the results obtained through the analysis of LinkedIn data and other data sources such as Google Trends.

Initial results indicate that the sectors in which Serbia is losing the most skilled workers include research, international affairs, and financial services, while some of the top skills include genetic engineering, medicine, dentistry, and artificial intelligence.

Furthermore, the Serbia Lab supports a ‘design studio’, bringing together leading experts to explore ways to create an environment that would encourage people either to stay in-country, or to stay actively invested in their home country while abroad. They are conducting rounds of ethnographic interviews with digital nomads and returnees on their motivation to move to Serbia in collaboration with the Digital Serbia Initiative and GRAD cultural center. The Lab is mapping national and international actors working on key topics around the complex theme of depopulation, spanning emigration, immigration, ageing, diaspora, population policy, reproduction, health, economic development, and local development. These insights are used in recently launched initiatives such as the movetobelgrade.com website that aims to incentivize digitally skilled workers to move back to Serbia.

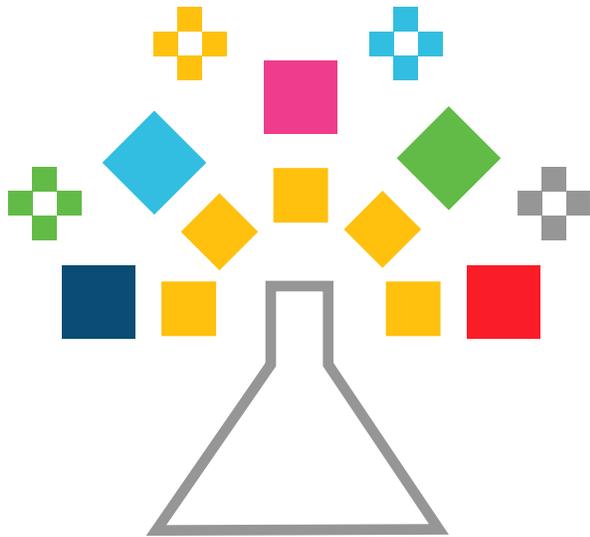
“We are reframing depopulation beyond the issues of migration and fertility, proactively adapting to the new demographic reality, to design a sustainable future where people can thrive.

Having gone through the exercise of building a portfolio on depopulation, we quickly identified the common underlying issues and were well-placed to respond on COVID-19.”

Francine Pickup
Resident Representative UNDP Serbia



Test



Testing is about small scale, low cost experiments to see how ideas look, feel and work. The Labs are experimenting in conjunction with government, civil society, and business partners, starting small while designing for scale. Experimentation teaches the Labs whether assumptions are accurate before deploying a proposed solution at scale. This deliberate practice is crucial, especially in the uncertain and volatile conditions that often dominate development contexts. The Labs are applying experimentation across a wide variety of sectors, as well as on emerging issues that tend to fall between sectoral gaps. By applying experimentation as a systematic process, the Labs allow learning to happen in a shorter time cycle of weeks or months instead of years.

In their first months, the Labs and their partners have identified pressing issues that reveal cross-border thematic trends. Interestingly, a third of the Labs have landed on waste management and the circular economy as a first challenge.

How does a cross-country portfolio of experiments on waste management emerge and learn? Colleagues in the UNDP Regional Innovation Center in Asia and the Pacific, along with the Alberta CoLab, a Canadian public sector innovation lab, are exploring the potential of circular economy strategies to optimize waste management between continents. By tackling the same challenge with similar methods, these

Labs have a common language and can learn together what works. This is an early glimpse of how a network of Labs working with multiple experiments can reveal how these issues might be common to different countries, and how they might be interconnected.

Experimentation begins at home

- ↳ Namibia
- ↳ Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ↳ India

Some of the Labs are testing out ideas in UNDP and the UN Houses first as a way to model how public sector experimentation can work. The Namibia team is testing out electric vehicles to reduce costs of ownership and exploring options for using the cars to provide energy backup during local outages. In addition, the Lab in Bosnia and Herzegovina is conducting an experiment that bans single use plastics in the UN House as a way to learn what works and what does not before scaling with national partners. Lastly, the UNDP India Accelerator Lab has landed a partnership to test out an air purification technology developed by a Singapore based startup. This technology has the potential to purify air up to a 1 km radius. The UN as a testing ground is a surprise twist that is occurring in the evolution of the network, and an interesting take on testing small before going big.

“At the Labs, we do not see ideas as solutions, but rather as testable hypotheses. The experimentation process helps us find out what works and what doesn’t.”

Ehsan Gul
Head of Experimentation,
UNDP Accelerator Lab Pakistan



Early exploration done by the UNDP Accelerator Lab in Ghana reveals recycling is already a known concept in the country. For instance, Nelplast ECO Ghana Ltd (picture above) turns plastics into pavement blocks. Experimentation allows UNDP Ghana to learn what works and what doesn't to accelerate existing circular economy activities.

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Injecting experimentation into development

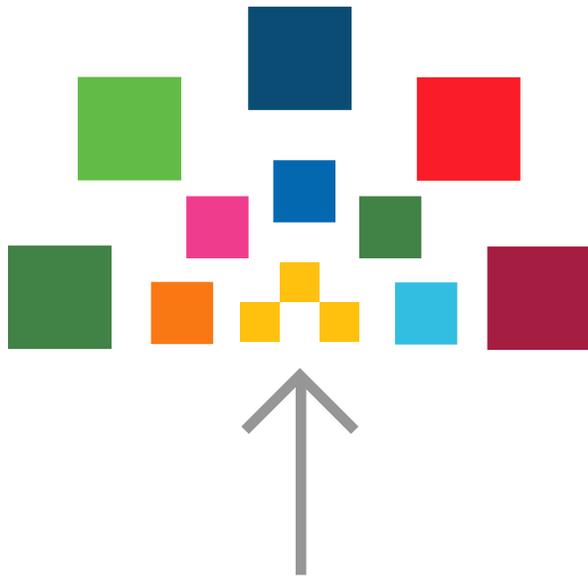
↳ Ghana

↳ Fiji

The UNDP Ghana Accelerator Lab team is using behavioral insight techniques to understand how individuals make personal decisions about recycling. Early exploration reveals recycling is already a known concept in Ghana. Some communities have always re-used items, including plastic bottles. To build on this local, informal foundation, the Lab is tracking the volumes of plastic deposited, and capturing perceptions about recycling services. The team has mapped three behavioral archetypes: those who only recycle when it is convenient, those who are triggered by social media to do so, and those who are eco-conscious. Based upon these archetypes, the Lab in Ghana is designing a set of behavioral nudges to encourage and accelerate the adoption of recycling practice in the communities.

The UNDP Pacific – Fiji Accelerator Lab has started with a micro-local perspective. They have experimented with ways to change students' plastic consumption in Solomon Island schools. Benefiting from lessons learned through prior UNDP innovation initiatives, the team conducted two A/B tests with school food vendors, in which they either provided re-usable bowls for a premium (refunded upon return of the bowl), or a monetary reward to students who brought their own containers. One result that clearly stood out was that Kindergarten and Primary School kids were eager to adopt the new scheme, bringing their own containers or purchase containers from the schools, while secondary school kids were more reluctant to bring their own containers as well as to forfeit purchases of junk food in single-use wrappings. What will happen to those kids who grow up with plastic-reducing schemes as “the new normal” – will they keep these habits as they turn into teenagers, and pay more attention to reducing waste than their secondary school classmates of today? The Lab is considering a retest two to three years down the road.

Grow



The Future

As we look at the speed of change around us, and the way many stubborn social and environmental problems morph into new (and usually more entangled) challenges, we're driven by the question – are there best practices for the challenges that we are now facing? The COVID-19 crisis feels like a time machine to the unknown. We're dealing with challenges that emerge and evolve. In order to be agile, we have to learn and that's what UNDP is trying to do.

When UNDP established the network of Accelerator Labs, we set out with an ambitious vision: to become the world's fastest learning network on sustainable development challenges. In this time of planetary crisis, when best practices don't always exist, we're more convinced than ever of the need for an agile network that learns what works and what doesn't for sustainable development problems.

Tsavo East National
Park Kenya, Africa.

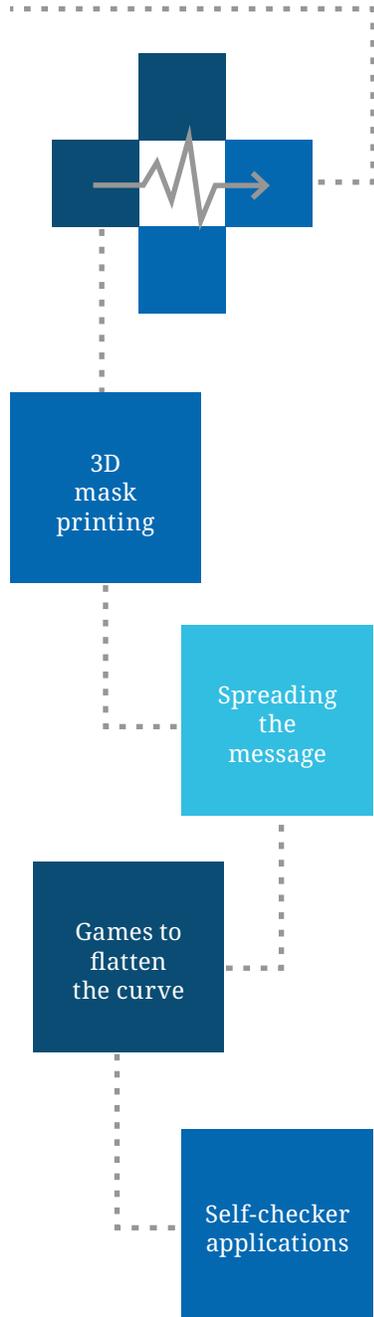


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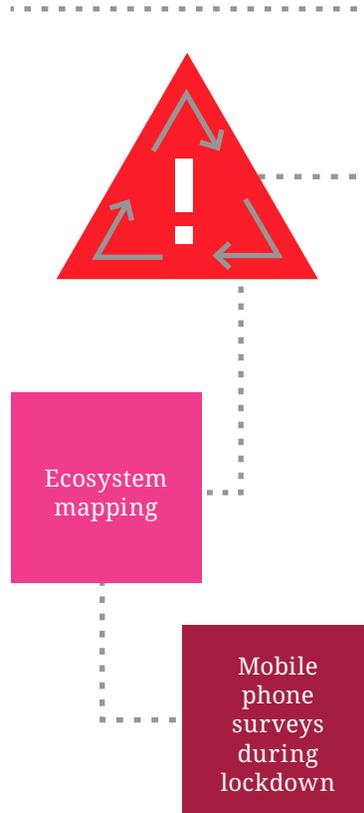
Emerging patterns in the COVID-19 context

How do the Labs help UNDP contribute to the wider UN response to the pandemic?

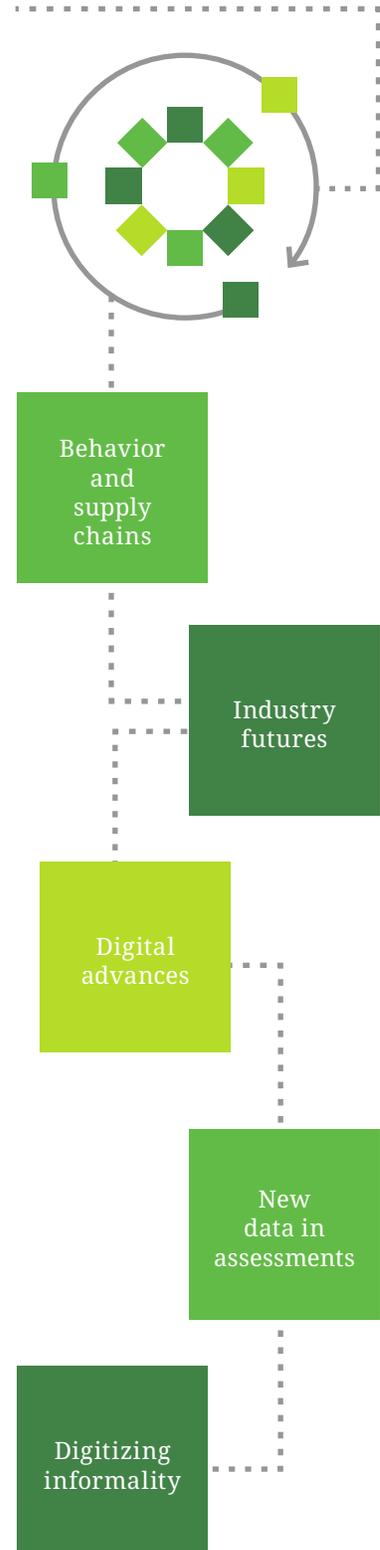
Health Systems Support



Crisis Management & Response



Social and Economic Impact



In 2020 we will focus on embedding, spreading and learning new ways of working within and beyond the UNDP Accelerator Lab network. We'll be embedding the accelerated learning cycle into Lab practice and into UNDP as the organization works with partners to respond to COVID-19 and beyond. We'll also be sharing the Accelerator Lab solutions, insights, and ways of working with partners on the ground as they prepare, respond and recover from the pandemic and its legacy. Our learning objectives for 2020 include:

Plans for scaling

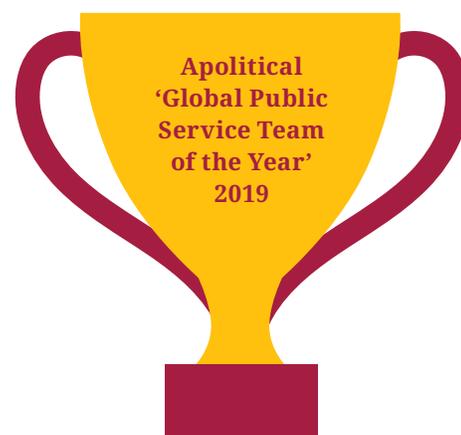
As solutions are mapped and new insights created, the Lab network will design for handover to ensure innovation becomes a regularized process of public sector renewal. A pipeline of sustainable development solutions will be available next year in order to anchor our plans for scaling. To put in place a strategy to grow the work of the Labs, the UNDP Accelerator Lab network is working with more mature labs, such as the SDG Innovation Lab in the Prime Minister's Office in Armenia and the Citra Lab in Sri Lanka to develop tools to support handover and spinoffs. A team from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs has designed a scaling strategy as a capstone project of the Master's in Economic Development degree. The refinement of an ethical framework will also support scaling by de-risking experimentation, new technologies and work with vulnerable communities.

Reinventing Knowledge Management, Monitoring and Evaluation

In 2020, we will strengthen the sensory network to follow what the network is learning, so that we can act upon what works well and what doesn't. The next horizon will require a balance between setting directions in the network and following where it leads. This is an area that will require the re-invention of knowledge management and organizational learning to make it more accessible to the public and able to keep track of new models, methods and technologies.

Balancing quick wins with larger moonshot missions

In 2020, we hope to learn more about how to strike a balance between demonstrating that the Labs are here for action, while lining up partnerships for larger systems change. This will require accelerated action and creating deliberate spaces for reflection. The portfolio approach will be critical to redesigning systems such as employment and entrepreneurship markets, waste management systems and citizen engagement. In 2020 we will build on the experiments underway to create portfolios of experiments that take on systems learning and innovation for broader impact.



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In 2019, the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network has been awarded Global Public Service Team of the Year in the category 'Evidence-Based Policy' by Apolitical.

“I am convinced that more countries across multiple development contexts can benefit from the UNDP Accelerator Lab model. Now is the time to grow: UNDP is planning the expansion of the network to 30 additional countries.”

Achim Steiner
UNDP Administrator



The Buzz



“I have lived abroad for the past 11 years – in Shanghai, London and Geneva. I heard about the Accelerator Labs when a few of my friends forwarded me the job description. They were excited to share it with me as they previously never heard of vacancies for a social anthropologist in Ukraine. I am inspired by the opportunity to apply my professional skills to develop human-centered solutions in my home country.”

Oleksiy Moskalenko

Head of Solutions Mapping, UNDP Ukraine Accelerator Lab

“We must not lose any more time if we are to achieve the SDGs. We need the commitment and ideas of all players within society so as to find new ways of approaching food security, climate change mitigation, decent work and sustainable urban development. That is exactly what the UNDP Accelerator Labs have set out to do. Staff are working in 78 countries to develop new ideas; they are drawing on the energy of young people and start-ups and sharing their knowledge with others across the world in order to solve global challenges through their joint efforts. We need to make faster and greater strides towards the SDGs, otherwise those goals will not be achieved by 2030. That requires of us not only innovations but also considerably greater investment on the part of the international community than has been seen to date.”



Dr Gerd Müller

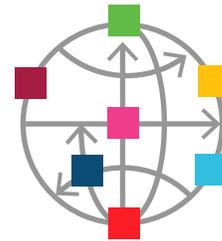
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany



“Our Accelerator Labs are showing that disruptive query and ‘messy’ analytics can lead to new ideas and actions needed to tackle the tough challenges to sustainable, peaceful progress. Are we now ready – with governments, private sector, civil society and partners – to take some of this to scale through policy and investment choices that have to look very different from what we know today?”

Kanni Wignaraja

UN Development Programme (UNDP) Assistant Administrator and Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific



“The grassroots approach adopted by the Labs emphasizes the importance of exploring socially acceptable and locally-sourced solutions that will make addressing 21st Century development challenges more effective and efficient. By taking a leap of faith in investing the first 20 million dollars, we have been able to enhance our delivery towards our international commitments in the Middle East and Africa regions.”

Khalifa bin Jassem Al-Kuwari

Director General of the Qatar Fund for Development

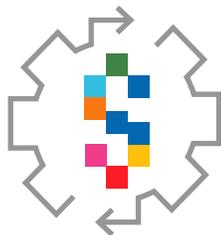
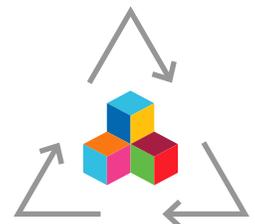


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accelerator
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Co-building the Accelerator Labs as a joint venture with:

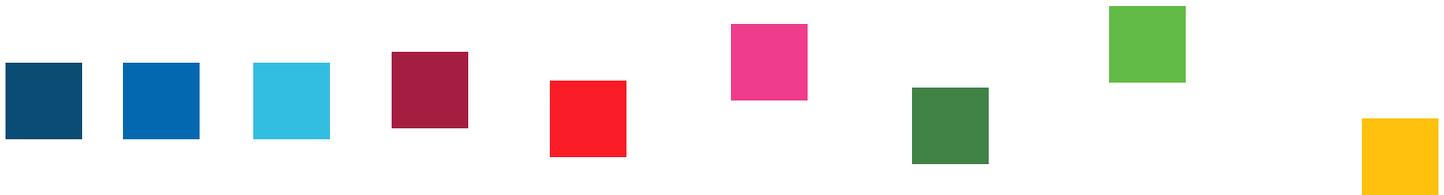


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The UNDP Accelerator Labs are thankful to our founding investors: the Federal Republic of Germany and the Qatar Fund for Development. Additional support is provided by the Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Tutela del Territorio e del Mare. We are actively looking for more partners to enable the evolution of the UNDP Accelerator Lab network.