

# SDG Lab Annual Report

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# Overview

2022 was a dynamic year for the SDG Lab. The first quarter was shaped by the departure of the SDG Lab's founding Director, Nadia Isler, signaling the first shift in the leadership of the Lab since its inception. In parallel to this development, the Lab team commenced a significant process: the articulation of its third project and funding phase for the three-year period 2023-2024-2025. Work on this important activity was influenced by the results of an external evaluation exercise in December 2021, which provided valuable insights, conclusions, and recommendations on the future work, focus, and role of the SDG Lab in the years to come.

An important shift in 2022 was the increased mobilization of the Geneva SDG Community. With the return of in-person gatherings, the

Community was able to re-engage through new formats, such as monthly Community Coffees, as well as the hosting of the first Annual Meeting in more than two years. Furthermore, thanks to new levels of energy and focus, individuals from the Community took part in specific thematic activities concentrated on sustainable finance, digitalization, and data for the SDGs.

Preliminary work to explore these areas enabled the Lab in the second half of 2022 to develop dedicated workstreams aimed at unpacking how the Geneva ecosystem can contribute to better capitalizing on digitalization and data as SDG accelerators for impact at country level.

The Lab's active engagement with Member States, represented in Geneva by Permanent Missions to the UN, equally provided



opportunities for the team to contribute to international policy dialogues on key issues such as the climate crisis and broader sustainability.

The last quarter of 2022 was marked by the positive news of the renewed commitment by the Swiss Confederation to continue funding the SDG Lab for its next three-year phase. The announcement of a core contribution to the Lab provided a substantial reaffirmation of its key role within the International Geneva ecosystem and a signal that the SDGs remain a central pillar of multilateralism.

During the last weeks of 2022, the SDG Lab welcomed the arrival of its new Director, Ms. Özge Aydoğan, who comes to the team with more than 13 years of experience as an international development professional. Prior

to joining the Lab, Ms. Aydoğan worked with the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs where she served as an advisor and programme manager with the Multilateral Affairs, United Nations, and Multilateral Development Banks Section. The interim leadership period was led by the Lab's Edward Mishaud who guided the transition phase for over seven months.

Taken together, the SDG Lab is proud of its results, growth, and impact in 2022. The team looks forward to building on the solid foundations that have been set last year, with 2023 representing the kick-off of a new phase of ideas and action for the global goals, the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda, and broader sustainability initiatives.





Geneva, as the European headquarters of the UN, and host to over 40 international organizations, and almost 700 NGOs, has a unique ecosystem of actors working on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

The Geneva SDG Community is a dynamic network of individuals operating in this unique ecosystem. The SDG Lab convenes this network to mobilize the expertise and capacity of Geneva-based actors to address current issues in SDG implementation through collaboration. A key ingredient of the network approach is creating a space with high trust where members can exchange in an informal manner.

## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE GENEVA SDG COMMUNITY IN 2022 INCLUDE:

### Community Coffees

A monthly informal meetup series called Community Coffees was launched with the objective to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing among actors within the Geneva SDG Community. In addition to serving as a networking venue, these events enabled the Lab team to identify potential partners, explore new themes and trends related to SDG implementation, and stay up to date on the priorities of Geneva-based organizations. Nine Community Coffees were hosted in total, bringing together some 200 people from academia (26.1%), UN agencies (23.5%), NGOs (21.4%), private sector (11.5%), other international organizations (6%), and government (4.7%).

As the Geneva SDG Community enters a mature phase with greater demand for more activities with tangible outcomes, the SDG Lab has begun experimenting with convening subsets of the community focused on SDG implementation

challenges. Based on feedback from members, collected through focus groups and a survey, three thematic ‘lenses’ have been identified: SDG data, digitalization, and sustainable finance. The decision to concentrate on enabling structures and frameworks rather than specific SDGs is in line with the Lab’s core mission, namely, to champion an integrated approach for action.

### Digitalization

The SDG Lab convened two informal stakeholder meetings and two workshops on digital transformation for the SDGs. Following the first workshop (at Building Bridges Week), a second workshop was organized in December to understand how the Geneva ecosystem could ensure SDG centred utilization for impact. Participants, including Member State representatives, worked to identify what role these actors can play in that transformation. As an outcome of the workshop, a participatory guide was developed on how to strengthen collaboration on digitalization for SDG impact. The guide reflects a collective intelligence exercise of workshop participants that, among other aims, helps to provide a fresh outlook on tackling well-known challenges.

### SDG data

As an outcome of the April Community Coffee on SDG Data Challenges, the SDG Lab engaged in a sustained dialogue with the Global Governance Centre at the Geneva Graduate Institute and Deloitte Switzerland on how to enhance knowledge exchange across SDG indicator sub-communities. This dialogue resulted in the launch of the Geneva SDG Data forum, an informal platform for individuals and organizations to share SDG data knowledge through a series of data ateliers on data, monitoring, and accountability. The launch of this initiative builds on two successful SDG Lab-organized workshops held during the 2021 edition of Building Bridges Week on how to measure the social dimension

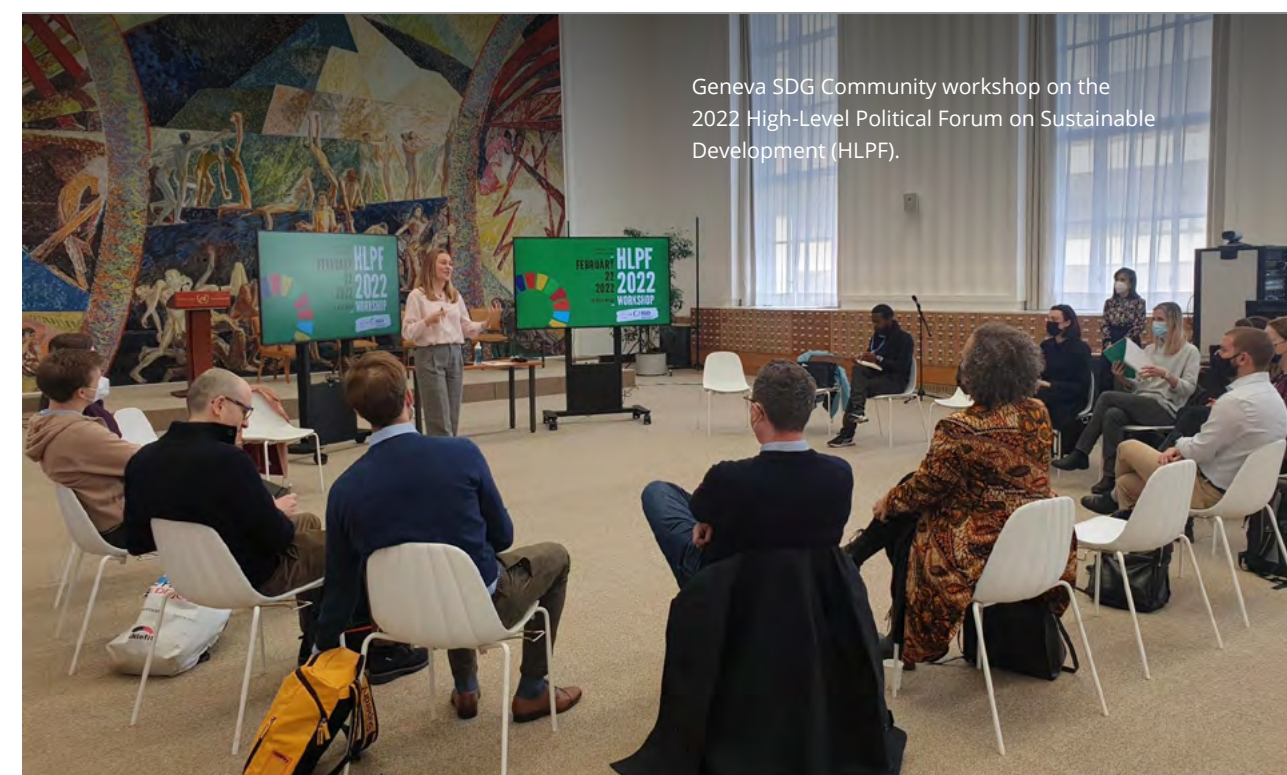
of sustainable finance, which was a precursor for the Lab’s presence in the SDG data space.

### Annual Meeting of the Geneva SDG Community

The Annual Meeting of the Geneva SDG Community was the first large-scale in-person meeting of the community since before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Hosted at the Palais des Nations, the objective of the meeting was two-fold: to bring new and old members together for a physical meeting following two years of mainly virtual interactions, and to showcase to members the actual community that they are a part of and the wealth and diversity of knowledge, skills, and expertise they collectively possess. A key activity involved having participants map the different roles they play in SDG implementation. Reflections on the exercise pointed out how more profound connections among SDG actors – and the understanding of the different roles they play – could enhance the achievement of the Global Goals.

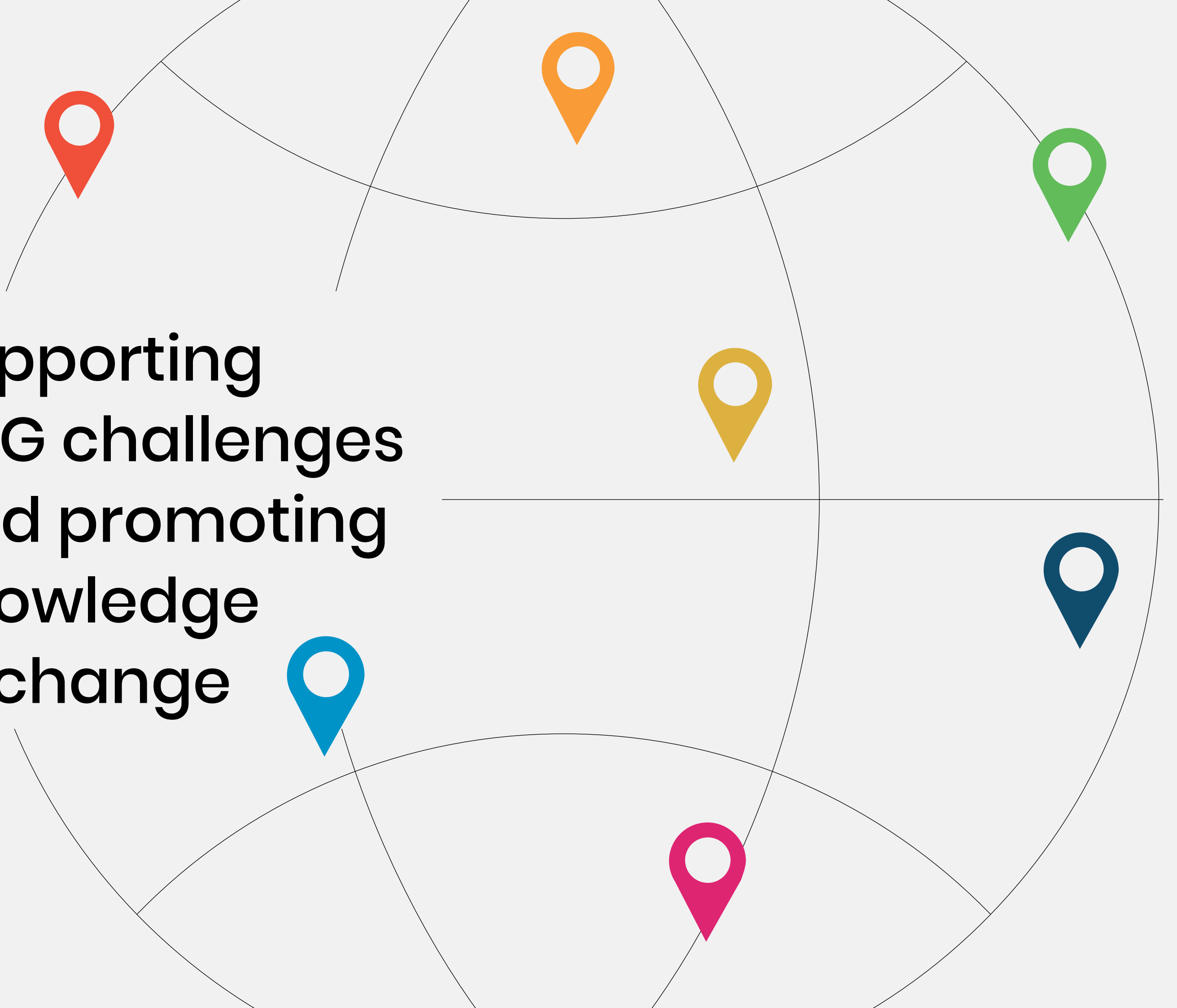
### Needs Assessment on a cross-sector collaboration space in Geneva

The SDG Lab and IISD, in collaboration with Impact Hub Geneva, conducted an analysis of how a physical collaboration space in the Nations district in Geneva could encourage better collaboration for the SDGs. In this study, 70% of survey respondents indicated that more opportunities for networking outside their respective fields would help their organization enhance collaboration for the SDGs. Respondents and interviewees noted that the Nations district, which has a high density of international organizations, including the European headquarters of the UN, and NGOs would benefit from spaces for community gatherings and informal events that could enhance creativity and innovation. It is hoped that this report will provide more insight for actors interested in furthering scenarios on a potential collaboration space for the SDGs in Geneva.



Geneva SDG Community workshop on the 2022 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

**Supporting  
SDG challenges  
and promoting  
knowledge  
exchange**





## High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development 2022

The SDG Lab and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) continued its annual activity of providing an analysis of the main messages and topics related to the HLPF, offering a pre- and post- summary on this flagship UN stocktaking event.

### In 2022, the SDG Lab organized:

- a workshop for the Geneva SDG Community on preparing side events at the HLPF;
- a community coffee before HLPF to connect and share insights before the opening of the Forum;
- ‘HLPF All You Need to Know’ two-pager summarizing main messages from key reports coming out in advance of HLPF2022;
- two webinars on the main themes and issues of the Forum, in partnership with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and other stakeholders, unpacking expectations and summarizing proceedings and main challenges. Some 540 participants joined the webinars, and the recordings were viewed 7400 times. Feedback underscored the benefit of such webinars in creating spaces for a global conversation to happen that fosters greater inclusivity and knowledge sharing on the SDGs.

### Enhancing member state engagement:

Building on a continuum of increased interactions between the SDG Lab and governments, the team focused on developing new and nurturing existing relationships with Member States through their interest in the Lab’s thematic workstreams. Proactive outreach, regular communications, and invitations to participate in events helped to further anchor the Lab’s role as a SDG point of contact for Member States.

- In July, and at the initiative of the **Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands**, the Lab organized an informal briefing for Permanent Missions. The team introduced to Ambassadors and other officials the Lab’s experimental and ecosystem approaches to foster SDG partnerships. Examples were shared of its role in incubating innovative partnerships, including the Building Bridges sustainable finance movement.
- In the lead up to **COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt**, and together with the International Labour Organization, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, and the Permanent Mission of Egypt, the SDG Lab co-hosted a high-level panel discussion, Delivering the Promise of a Global Just Transition, as part of a COP27 High-level Event Series. The series focused on unpacking several climate action elements: financing adaptation efforts, supporting a ‘just energy transition’ of developing countries, and ensuring innovative finance solutions serve national developmental plans. Given its 360-overview on the interlinkages between climate action and sustainability, the SDG Lab team’s contribution helped to focus and direct the discussion on issues related to means of implementation, such as financing.
- As the key convener of the Geneva SDG Community, the Lab continued to support Permanent Missions in navigating the diverse Geneva ecosystem of SDG practitioners. Through its overview of SDG initiatives, the Lab connected the **Permanent Mission of Thailand** with forward-looking Swiss start-ups offering circular products and services to showcase their innovations at Thai National Day celebrations, which the Mission dedicated to circular economy principles.

- As a member of the **UN G20 Working Group**, the Lab participated in the inception meeting for India’s upcoming presidency of the G20 in 2023. The Lab used the platform to present its methodologies and approaches to spur collaboration and to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental). The Lab has reached out to the G20 sustainable finance working group, led by UNDP, to explore possible contributions from the Lab’s Geneva perspective.



SDG Lab Member State briefing hosted by the Permanent Mission of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

# Accelerating sustainable finance for the SDGs





## Building Bridges Week (BBW) 2022:

In the lead up to and throughout the 2022 edition of Building Bridges Week, the SDG Lab kept the SDGs at the center of this Geneva-born sustainable finance movement—by underlining the importance of the SDGs as an investment framework and ensuring geographic diversity of views and voices, particularly from the Global South.

- Team members were active at the operational and strategic levels by sitting on Building Bridges key committees (communications, operations, and leadership), as well as in preparatory workstreams related to SDG Lab events and supporting the broader Building Bridges team with strategic positioning, communications, and outreach.
- In addition to curating two workshops — one on “Demystifying Risks to SDG Investments in African Markets” and a second on “Digital Transformation of the Finance Sector”, which was co-created by members of the Geneva SDG Community — the SDG Lab supported AlphaMundi and UNDP in jointly organizing a high-level panel on “Investing for Change in Africa”. The Lab’s contribution centred on bringing perspectives from the sustainable finance landscape in Kenya and Ghana where its Pipeline Builder initiative was piloted. (A full recap of the SDG Lab’s participation in Building Bridges is available on the SDG Lab website).
- Building on two stakeholder meetings on the topic of digitalization for the SDGs hosted in 2022, the SDG Lab, together with the CyberPeace Institute, UN Women, UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR), and IISD, co-hosted a workshop exploring the opportunities and risks associated with digitalization for SDG implementation. To

ensure equitable achievement of the SDGs, participants agreed that digital governance and partnerships, digital literacy and education, and a just digital framework for proper inclusion of marginalized segments of society are needed to minimize digitalization risks and reap the benefits of a digitally transformed financial system.

- With the help of the Lab, UN Geneva Director-General Valovaya, shared her insight on what’s at stake for the finance community as it shifts towards sustainable investing, in an article published in the special second anniversary print edition of Geneva Solutions, published in collaboration with Le Temps.
- Building on the vision of having Building Bridges go beyond Switzerland and include the Global South, several steps were initiated during the year. Notably, the Lab worked with the Building Bridges team to explore a potential joint visit of the leadership of UN Geneva and Sustainable Finance Geneva to Nairobi in 2023 to meet with representatives of the city’s financial and sustainable development communities. As home to the UN’s headquarters on the African continent and an influential economic hub, Nairobi has an ecosystem comparable to Geneva’s and where a joint sustainable finance initiative could take root, building on existing initiatives lead by the SDG Partnership Platform Kenya.

## Pipeline Builder:

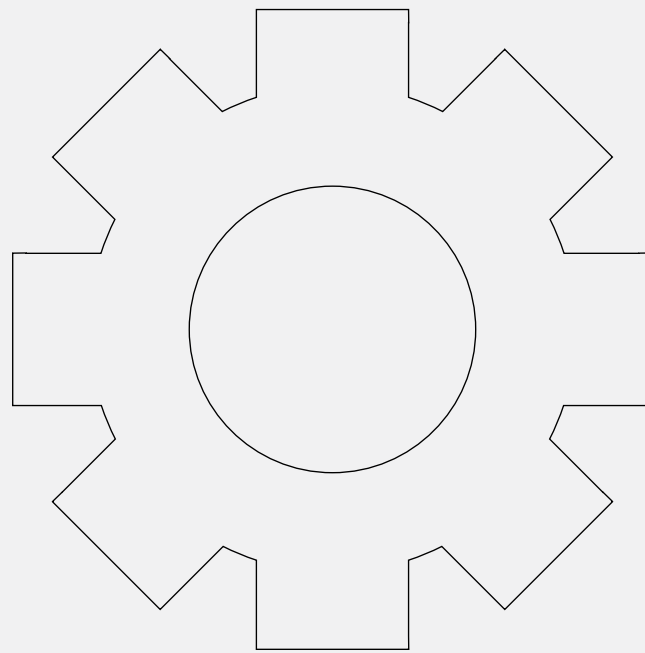
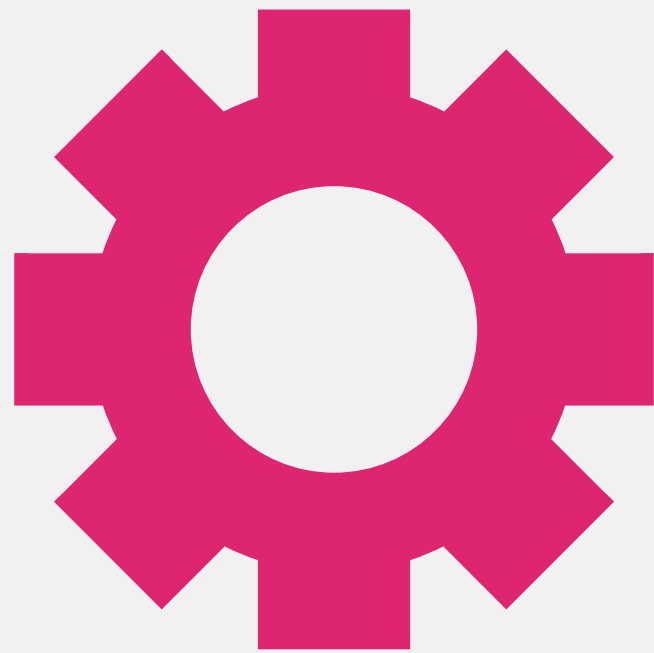
The Pipeline Builder project concluded in October 2022 after two years of incubating the initiative in Ghana and exploring leads in other emerging economies. A key milestone of the project was the successful fielding of SDG-aligned and bankable projects and funds on a third-party investors’ platform as well as progress on a “Fund of Funds” for Ghanaian SMEs. In 2023, the latter

activity will be furthered thanks to grant funding through the Swiss Government’s SDG Impact Finance Initiative (SIFI), which was launched at the 2021 edition of Building Bridges. The grant will enable the development of a study to assess the feasibility of a USD 250 million fund of funds structure to mobilize domestic and international institutional investments into SDG-aligned SMEs in the West African country.

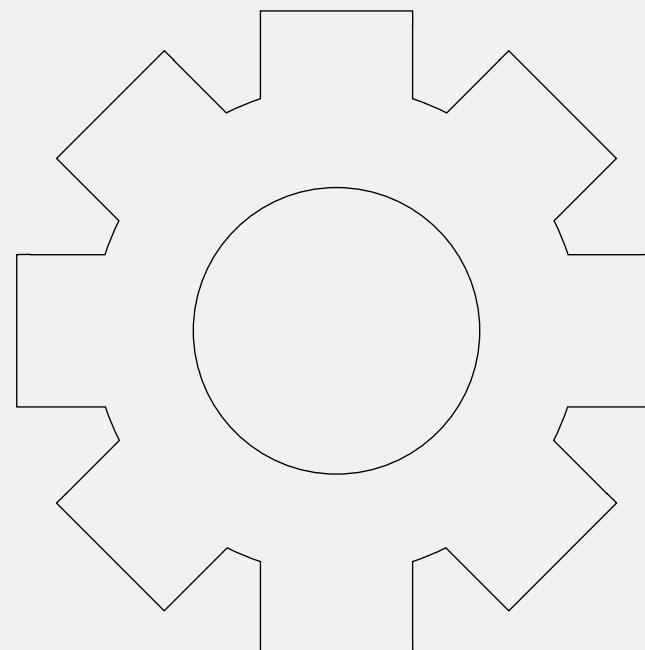
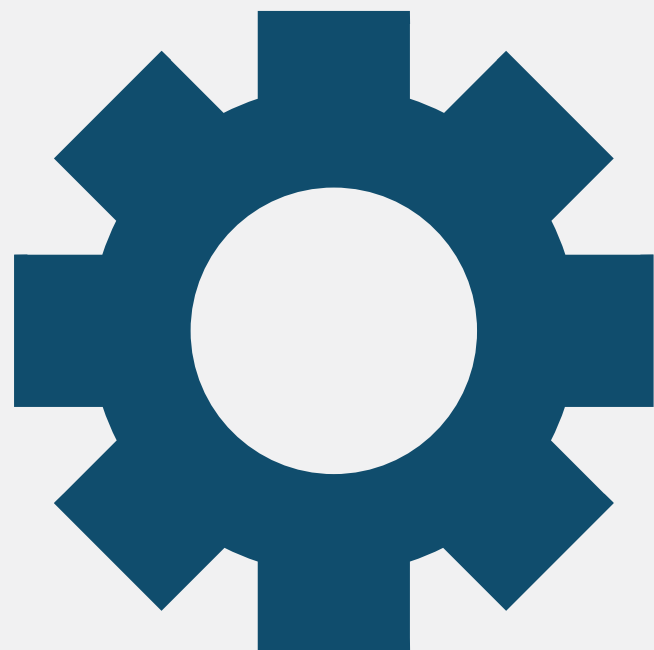
- At Building Bridges Week, the Pipeline Builder team organized a hands-on workshop that

brought together around 60 entrepreneurs, investors, and government officials, among others, in a dynamic and interactive exchange on national investment conditions, challenges, and opportunities in African markets. The workshop concluded with participants proposing and voting on concrete priority areas and solutions to accelerate SDG-aligned investments on the continent over the next five years.





# Management and Operations



## **Phase III articulation**

With the support of its primary donor, the Swiss Confederation, the Lab kickstarted in early 2022 its next three-year planning phase through internal workshops and consultations with external partners. The process was informed by the results of the external evaluation exercise, which concluded in December 2021. The insights of the evaluation provided invaluable perspectives and recommendations on future focus areas and the overarching role of the SDG Lab in contributing to the SDGs.

## **Administrative hosting**

Considering recommendations from the external evaluation and the need to maximize resources for its next phase, Lab management switched administrative hosting from UNOPS to UN Geneva, effective January 2023. While the SDG Lab has been embedded in the Office of the Director-General since its creation, the move will further anchor its presence within UN Geneva.

## **Resource mobilization**

Diversifying funding, expanding activities, and engaging more partners in its work are key considerations for the Lab. In late 2022, the Lab engaged an external advisor specialized in resource mobilization and partnerships to support the team in bolstering its capacities in these two areas. The short-term assignment afforded the Lab the opportunity to scope and better align its offerings to potential partners.

# 2022 in numbers

**364 people  
from  
213 organizations**

make up the Geneva SDG community,  
a dynamic network dedicated to delivering  
the Sustainable Development Goals.

**296**

people subscribed to the Geneva  
SDGs chat, a social messaging  
app where information about  
resources and events relating to  
the SDGs is shared.

**4650**

profile visits of the  
Lab's LinkedIn profile.

**70,000**

visits of the  
Lab's Twitter account.

**18**

in-person and virtual  
briefings on the  
Sustainable  
Development Goals  
were offered to

**975**

people, including  
diplomats, students,  
and representatives  
from the private sector.

# List of major events

Date	Event
22 February	Geneva SDG Community High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2022 Side-Events workshop, in collaboration with UN Library and Archives Geneva
17 March	Geneva Trialogue of the Geneva-Tsinghua Initiative: Open Innovation for Education Panel
31 March	Geneva SDG Community Coffee: the Art of Community Building, in collaboration with ImpactHub Geneva
28 April	Geneva SDG Community Coffee: Partnering to address SDG Data Challenges, in collaboration with the Graduate Institute of Geneva and UNITAR
5 May	Geneva SDG Community Coffee: Youth in Climate Action, in collaboration with the Graduate Institute of Geneva, UNICEF, YOUNGO, and CliMates
9 June	Conférence annuelle de la Fédération Genevoise de Coopération: SDG Lab presentation on SDG Progress
13 June	EPFL Showcase 2030: SDG Lab presentation “It Takes a Village – Innovative Ways of Fostering Collaboration for the SDGs”
16 June	Geneva SDG Community Coffee: Connecting in advance of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2022, in collaboration with the Graduate Institute of Geneva, UNRISD, and UNECE
1 July	Virtual informal briefing on Pre-HLPF: ‘All You Need to Know’ for Permanent Missions and Geneva SDG Community Members, in collaboration with IISD, UNDESA, Cepei, and A4SD
4-15 July	60th UN Information Service Graduate Study Programme: SDG Lab Working Group moderation and presentation
18 July	Virtual briefing on post-HLPF 2022, in collaboration with IISD, Cepei, and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES)
21 July	Briefing for Permanent Representatives in Geneva, hosted by the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands, Ambassador Paul Bekkers
26 July	Inception meeting between the Indian G20 Team and the UN G20 Working Group
1 September	Presentation on sustainable finance and Building Bridges and panel discussion on the role of International Geneva in implementing the SDGs in collaboration with the Executive Programme of the Graduate Institute, UNDP and UNIDO
18 October	Presentation to new diplomats as part of the UN Geneva induction programme
19 October	“Delivering the Promise of a Global Just Transition” panel discussion as part of the pre-CO27 series of events in collaboration with UNCTAD, ILO, and the Egyptian Permanent Mission in Geneva
1 December	Circular economy initiatives showcase at the National Day of Thailand
1 December	“Digitalization for the SDGs: Ecosystem approach” workshop





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