

Reimagining Development through a Global Learning Network



2021 Annual Report



accelerator
labs



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



UNDP
Core
Partners

“Our flagship initiative – now active in 115 countries – has influenced UNDP’s organizational culture to become more agile in the face of uncertainty. We saw this ability to pivot during the pandemic. Thanks to the visionary support of Germany and Qatar, the UNDP Accelerator Labs Network was able to create new capabilities to reimagine and help drive development for the 21st Century.”

Achim Steiner

2022 UNDP Executive
Board Meeting

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The Accelerator Lab Network at a Glance

Investing in innovation takes a particular kind of foresight and a willingness to reach beyond what is already known to achieve greater heights. It is no different in our global quest to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in time. Thanks to our founding investors, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ), and the Qatar Fund for Development (QFFD), the UNDP Accelerator Lab Network is moving the needle forward toward these Goals in a new way – by creating and sharing insights to learn what works and what doesn't in sustainable development. In 2019 we embarked on a journey from launching and testing the Network as “the fast and the curious” to demonstrating our value, while we witnessed the Network evolving.

In 2021, we can reflect on a jam-packed year of furthering the Lab Network's role in achieving the SDGs and surfacing first-of-their-kind ideas on how we can work towards systems transformation. A deeper understanding of the challenges unearthed from the Network indicates that we are tapping into the groundwater of sustainable development.

In 2021, 273 “Labbers” with unusual skillsets, enriching **#nextgenundp**, continued to explore, test, experiment and disseminate learning.



Our Accelerator Labs were continuously creating new insights into sustainability problems by searching for local solutions and forging partnerships to make breakthroughs on complex global challenges. After proving the Network's value as an agile enabler to the COVID-19 crisis response in 2020, this year allowed the Accelerator Labs to unfold their enormous potential: by increasing the use of **new data sources** such as citizen data, open data and social network data to diversify how sustainable development problems and solutions are understood. By using **innovative methods** such as behavioral insights, collective intelligence and solutions mapping the Labs and their partners better understand the issues at stake and can help governments that are grappling with multiple development challenges.

To date, UNDP Accelerator Labs have documented over 2,000 grassroots-led solutions worldwide covering all 17 SDGs, addressing issues such as waste management and food security, and exploring untapped opportunities in the circular economy, digital transformation and education.

The Accelerator Labs' ability to operate outside a vacuum enabled UNDP to partner with entrepreneurs, young innovators and artisans in local settings who are actively addressing the local needs of their communities.



By doing that, the Accelerator Labs have established **more than 1,000 different partnerships** since 2019 for their learning, and **88 percent** of the Labs are working with partners that are new to their Country Offices.

“The UNDP Accelerator Lab Network is an ambitious experiment and is already a success. It was launched as a deliberate disruption to the usual way that UNDP operates, and to increase the credibility of UNDP as a partner of choice for 21st century sustainable development challenges. It is both a unique organizational intervention at a national level as well as one working at a global scale, learning across a network of development practitioners across the world.”

- Midterm Evaluation 2021

This Annual Report highlights how far we’ve come in 2021 and what progress we’ve made toward our three main objectives (as per the results framework established in the UNDP Accelerator Labs Project Document). It also highlights some leading cases, innovators, stories and initiatives from the dynamic Network’s workstreams, and some of the crucial key findings of the 2021 Accelerator Labs project, the independent Midterm Evaluation, which will lead to shaping the future iterations of the Lab Network.



The Accelerator Labs and the SDGs: Accelerating the Journey

The UNDP Accelerators Labs are producing meaningful insights that increase our knowledge and improve development interventions targeted toward the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. In fact, in 2021, **the Accelerator Labs addressed 152 different development challenges, covering all 17 SDGs.** While most Labs work on SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities and SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, over this past year we have seen a diversification of the SDGs that the Accelerator Labs are helping to address. For example, 29 new learning initiatives throughout the Network are focusing on SDG 5: Gender Equality and 46 new initiatives on SDG 13: Climate Action.

SDGs per Lab

		21 Labs worked toward this SDG	With a focus on youth entrepreneurship, the UNDP Somalia Accelerator Lab is working alongside SIMAD University to experiment with new ways to overcome the barriers that prevent young entrepreneurs from registering their small businesses and accessing formal financing mechanisms.
		10 Labs worked toward this SDG	With the Institute of Natural Resources, the UNDP South Africa Accelerator Lab is running three different prototypes for sustainable gardens to address food insecurity and nutrition in vulnerable households.
		27 Labs worked toward this SDG	The UNDP India Accelerator Lab , along with the University of Nottingham, developed an artificial intelligence platform to identify air pollution hotspots in key cities and are helping regulators target non-compliance.
		13 Labs worked toward this SDG	Along with the Systems Thinking Association and Boğaziçi University, the UNDP Turkey Accelerator Lab developed a climate literacy program for children which they are testing with the Darussafaka School in Istanbul with the goal of scaling it to the rest of the country with UNICEF.
		21 Labs worked toward this SDG	The UNDP Ecuador Accelerator Lab is working together with partners, including UNFPA and UN Women to address gender-based violence. Family victims of femicide in Ecuador employ social cartography to memorialize victims, reveal injustices and identify alternative social justice mechanisms.
		6 Labs worked toward this SDG	The UNDP El Salvador Accelerator Lab , together with the Ministry of Tourism, is collecting and disseminating water quality data from the coastline and rivers to help the government take action. For example, the Ministry is now issuing alerts for tourists when water quality hits critical levels of pollution.

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