Draft Concept Note and Programme
Science Day 2025: Unlocking Tomorrow's Solutions, Today

Location: United Nations Headquarters, Conference Room 3, New York & live broadcast

Date and time: 15 July 2025 from 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM EDT

Organized by: International Science Council (ISC), Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), and UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).

About Science Day 2025

Science Day 2025 marks the third edition of a shared initiative convened by the International Science Council (ISC), the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in the margins of the United Nations High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF). It offers an open, informal, and independent space for dialogue between the scientific community, policy-makers, UN agencies, and a broad range of global actors. Designed to foster exchange across disciplines and sectors, Science Day has become a recognized platform for identifying where science is contributing to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and where more integration, support, and innovation are needed.

This year's edition, held under the theme "Unlocking Tomorrow's Solutions, Today", builds on the momentum of the two previous events (2023 and 2024) while responding to a moment of growing urgency. As the international community approaches the final stretch of the 2030 Agenda, there is widespread recognition that progress across many of the SDGs remains alarmingly slow. This is especially true in areas related to means of implementation – including financing, capacity, and institutional coordination. Science Day 2025 provides an opportunity to take stock of these challenges, while highlighting how science – particularly when it is transdisciplinary, inclusive, and attuned to local realities – can help overcome them.

As with earlier editions, this year's Science Day will showcase innovative tools, insights, and practices that support evidence-informed, integrated, and participatory decision-making. But it will also open space for forward-looking reflection. While implementation of the current SDGs must remain a global priority, early thinking is beginning around the shape of a future sustainable development agenda. Science Day 2025 aims to contribute to that conversation – ensuring that science, in all its diversity, is not only part of the analysis of today's challenges but also part of co-designing the pathways ahead.

This edition will thus serve both as a strategic stocktaking moment and a platform for 'horizon scanning' – grounded in practice, yet ambitious in scope. It will explore how science is supporting SDG implementation today, where systemic gaps remain, and what kinds of science-policy collaboration will be needed to advance sustainable development in the years to come. It will also consider the complex global context in which this future must be navigated – marked by political fragmentation, financial uncertainty, and strain across multilateral institutions – and how science can remain a credible, trusted, and adaptive partner amid these dynamics.

2025 areas of focus/objectives

Science Day 2025 is structured around three interrelated objectives:

1. **Accelerating SDG implementation through transdisciplinary science**

The complexity of today's challenges calls for knowledge that cuts across disciplines, sectors, and geographies. The event will showcase how transdisciplinary approaches, which integrate natural and social sciences with local, Indigenous, policy-maker, and practitioner knowledges, are helping to accelerate progress on SDG implementation, especially when deployed through collaborative partnerships. This includes the use of novel tools, data platforms, dashboards, and emerging technologies that aim to inform policy decisions more effectively – while also raising important questions about accessibility, equity, and governance in their deployment.

2. **Confronting the gaps in means of implementation**

Many of the barriers to SDG progress are not due to a lack of knowledge, but a lack of support for the science-policy interface. Science Day 2025 will look at where the 2030 Agenda is falling short in terms of the means of implementation, and explore how targeted support to science systems, innovation ecosystems, and cross-sectoral interfaces could help close those gaps.

3. **Science and the future of sustainable development**

As the world begins to consider what comes after the SDGs, Science Day 2025 will open space for forward-looking reflection. The event will explore the kind of science, collaboration, and governance models that may be needed to support the future of sustainable development – recognizing that this process must start now, even as implementation of the existing goals must urgently go on. It will also reflect on the broader global context in which this future must be imagined – one shaped by geopolitical tensions, financing constraints, growing inequalities, and multilateral fatigue – and explore how science can help navigate these complexities while remaining solution-oriented and inclusive.

Looking ahead

As we move into a decisive period for the 2030 Agenda, Science Day is poised to grow into a critical platform for rethinking how science informs global cooperation for sustainable development. The 2025 edition not only builds on the insights and relationships established in previous years but also responds to a shared recognition: achieving the SDGs will require renewed approaches to collaboration, stronger interfaces between science and policy, and a clearer commitment to enabling conditions for action.

In that spirit, Science Day 2025 is not just a moment of reflection, but an invitation: to reaffirm the value of scientific knowledge as a public good, to strengthen the means by which it informs decision-making, and to begin imagining the systems and partnerships needed for the decades ahead. It is a space to unlock solutions, today – and a platform to co-create the pathways to tomorrow.

Programme overview (fully tentative)

I. 10:00 – 10:15 | Opening remarks

Speakers: [Add your speaker or facilitator suggestions below]

Ideas:

- Co-chair of the Group of Friends on Science for Action (Recommend India or South Africa)
- Amb. Carlos Fuller, Permanent Representative of Belize to the UN (former meteorologist)
- Amb. Héctor Enrique Vasconcelos y Cruz, PermRep of Mexico to the UN?
- Amb. Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of Morocco to the UN?

Notes for speakers:

- Speakers are encouraged to reflect on **practical experience**, **regional perspectives**, or **institutional challenges** they have encountered.
- We welcome diverse entry points—but each intervention should **connect to the broader purpose** of accelerating SDG progress and reimagining science's role in global cooperation.
- Please avoid simply reiterating the SDG diagnosis; the audience is familiar. Focus instead on **insights, tensions, or provocations** that help frame the sessions that follow.

The following guiding questions are designed to help orient opening speakers around the **purpose**, **urgency**, and **strategic framing** of Science Day 2025. Each speaker may bring a different lens—policy, diplomacy, science, equity—but all are invited to touch on one or more of the following themes.

1. Why now?

- What makes this moment—midway through 2025—particularly urgent for rethinking the role of science in sustainable development?
- How should the science-policy interface evolve in the final stretch of the 2030 Agenda?

2. What kind of science, and for whom?

- What kinds of scientific approaches are most needed to accelerate SDG implementation?
- How do we ensure that scientific tools and insights are accessible, trusted, and responsive to local contexts and diverse knowledge systems?

3. What are the structural or political barriers to effective science-policy collaboration?

- Are we doing enough to support the conditions—financing, institutions, incentives—for science to inform policy?
- What practical steps can governments or intergovernmental institutions take to close these gaps?

4. What role can science play in shaping the future of global cooperation?

- As we begin thinking beyond 2030, what kinds of science-society-policy partnerships will be needed to navigate emerging risks, shifts, and transitions?
- How can science contribute to more inclusive, anticipatory, and adaptive forms of global governance?

5. Why does this dialogue matter?

- What are the stakes of getting the science-policy relationship right—or failing to?
- How can platforms like Science Day help unlock real collaboration, not just more conversation?

A facilitator will also introduce:

1. What is Science Day 2025 trying to achieve?

Reinforce that this is a *problem-solving and horizon-scanning* space.

- We will hear from:
    - Concrete cases of science in action.
    - Leaders who are working to reconfigure the science-policy ecosystem.
    - A diverse audience of scientists, knowledge-holders, policy-makers, [etc.], with insights, frustrations, and new ideas.

2. Introduce the three objectives as thematic pillars

Each will be picked up again in the next sessions—this is just planting the seed.

1. **Accelerating SDG implementation through transdisciplinary science**
    - Emphasize practical, embedded, co-produced knowledge.
    - Think: partnerships, data tools, integration across sectors.
2. **Confronting gaps in the means of implementation**
    - Spotlight the science-policy infrastructure: capacity, funding, coordination.
    - Ask: Are we giving science the conditions to succeed?
3. **Science and the future of sustainable development**
    - Go beyond 2030: What new agendas, risks, and tools must we anticipate now while continuing to maintain a focus on accelerating progress toward the SDGs?
    - Include the voice of youth, Indigenous knowledge-holders, emerging issues, and political realism.

3. Set the tone for audience engagement

- Make explicit that this is *not* a passive event.
- Encourage short, direct interventions, especially in Q&A and reflections.
- Invite reflection on: What does *my sector/institution* need to do differently based on what I hear today?

II. 10:15 – 11:45 | Case studies – Science in Action

Speakers and case studies: [Add your speaker and case study suggestions below]

Confirmed:

- [ISC] GYA case study to be presented by Yensi Flores-Bueso, topic TBC
- [ISC] Mary Blair to present case study from International Center for Reindeer Husbandry, precise topic TBC
- [ISC] A case from Germany's national dialogue between scientific advisory councils to inform the 2025 Voluntary National Review, emphasizing how science-policy interfaces are being used to inform national reporting (Marianne Beisheim, Annekathrin Ellersiek)

- [ISC] Pamela McElwee will present a case study on the IPBES nexus assessment report that addresses the interlinkages between biodiversity, water, food, health and climate (https://ipbes.net/nexus-assessment).
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Reached out and TBC:

- [UNDP-Spain VNR] Experience sharing on science in national reporting (interest, speaker and case study TBD)
- [SDSN-Nigeria VNR] Experience sharing on science in national reporting (interest, speaker and case study TBD)
- [SEI-Columbia SDG implementation] (interest, speaker and case study TBD)
- [SDSN?] Examples of novel data tools or digital platforms that have enhanced (or challenged) evidence use in national or regional SDG implementation efforts.
- [DESA – PR of The Gambia to be invited to present case study on STI for SDGs Roadmaps from joint JRC/The Gambia project]
- [UNDP - Potential SDG Push case studies from Nigeria and a country in the LAC region]

Duration: 90 minutes

Proposed structure: 6 to 8 case studies, 10 minutes each (5 min presentation + 5 min moderated response/Q&A)

Objective: Demonstrate in concrete, diverse, and pragmatic ways how science – and in particular transdisciplinary approaches – is being used to accelerate SDG implementation, overcome barriers in means of implementation, and prepare for future sustainable development challenges.

Overall session structure

Time	Element	Description
10:15–10:20	**Intro by facilitator**	Sets up the session. Explains the format and connects back to the three objectives. Frames audience expectations: short, sharp, applied cases with discussion.
10:20–11:30	**6 to 8 case studies**	Each gets 10 minutes: 5 min presentation + 5 min moderated Q&A with 1 pre-identified respondent or the audience. Aim for global diversity and thematic range.
11:30–11:45	**Potential group discussion / synthesis**	Facilitated discussion across cases. May include cross-cutting observations, a few live audience interventions, and bridge to the high-level panel.

Criteria for case study selection

Each case should:

- Clearly illustrate one or more of the **three Science Day objectives**.
- Be **translatable**—even if context-specific, it should offer insights or methods that others can use.

- Preferably be presented by someone **directly involved** (not just reporting on it).
- Reflect **regional, sectoral, and epistemic diversity** (geography, type of science, Indigenous/local knowledge, digital tools, etc.).
- Include both **successes and honest barriers**.

Potential categories for balance (as per first ideas above):

- Government–science integration (e.g. VNRs, national coordination platforms)
- Science for local implementation (e.g. climate adaptation in urban or Indigenous contexts)
- Tools and technologies (e.g. data platforms, foresight methods)
- Institutional reform or innovation in science-policy mechanisms

Standard format per case study

Time: 10 minutes total

1. **5-min presentation** (strict timekeeping!) **with guiding questions:**
    - What problem or implementation challenge were you addressing?
    - What kind of scientific or knowledge-based approach was used—and who was involved?
    - How did the science-policy interface function in this case (formal/informal, continuous/ad hoc)?
    - What concrete results or shifts occurred?
    - What structural barriers did you face—and how were they (or weren't they) addressed?
    - What lessons or tools from this experience might others apply in their contexts?
    - (Optional) Looking forward, what would need to be different for this kind of work to have broader impact?
2. **5-min Q&A or response**
    - Either a pre-identified respondent (e.g. policymaker, UN actor, youth rep), or open floor (with moderation).
    - 1–2 focused questions. Purpose is not discussion for its own sake, but to draw out implications.

Facilitator role and synthesis (11:20–11:45)

Facilitator tasks:

- Keep cases on time.
- Draw thematic threads across cases as they unfold (e.g. shared challenges in institutional uptake, role of youth voices, common digital infrastructure gaps).
- Encourage cross-case reflection: "We heard X from Colombia and Y from Nigeria—what's the common thread here?"

Optional closing round (1 min per speaker):

- Ask each presenter: "What's one thing you wish was better understood about your work?"

- Or: “If you had one new resource or institutional lever to improve your impact, what would it be?”

III. 11:45 – 12:15 | High-level panel discussion

Speakers: [Add your speaker suggestions below]

Confirmed:

- **Robbert Dijkgraaf, President-elect, International Science Council**
- **Ed Carr, US Centre Director, Stockholm Environment Institute**
- **Astra Bonini, Chief of Integrated Policy Analysis Branch, Division for Sustainable Development Goals, DESA**
- **SDSN to add**
- **UNDP to add**

Ideas only (TBD):

- **Ayaka Suzuki, representing UNSG’s Scientific Advisory Board?**
- **Prof. Tshilidzi Marwala, Under-Secretary-General, Rector of the United Nations University?**
- **See MS above (GoF SfA Co-chairs, Belize, Mexico)**
- **Serbia? Morocco?**
- **Daniel Goroff, Vice-President, Sloan Foundation**

Title suggestion (optional): From Practice to Policy: Rethinking Science for Global Implementation

Objective: To draw on the insights from the case studies and reflect on their broader implications for how science can more effectively support SDG implementation, navigate political and structural barriers, and inform future governance agendas. An overarching question could be: How do we go from promising examples to lasting change? How do we rewire our systems so that science is not only produced, but applied, at scale—and in time?”

Session format

Time	Segment
11:45–11:50	Facilitator sets the stage: synthesize key case study insights, introduce panelists, outline focus of the discussion.
11:50–12:20	Guided discussion among panelists (2–3 rounds of focused questions). Panelists may be asked to reflect directly on earlier cases.
12:20–12:28	1–2 audience questions or comments (optional and moderated).
12:28–12:30	Facilitator wrap-up and transition to closing reflections.

Design principles

- This session should **build on** the case studies, not just operate in parallel.

- Avoid open-ended diplomatic platitudes—focus panelist prompts tightly.
- Panelists should be asked to speak to specific tensions or opportunities (e.g. political resistance, institutional inertia, competing knowledge systems).
- Encourage **interaction between panelists**, not just a series of monologues.

Potential guiding questions for panelists

Panel objective recap: To elevate insights from the case studies into a broader political and institutional reflection. The panel is not a restatement of the problem—it's a chance to explore what's blocking systemic uptake of science, and what structural changes or future shifts are needed.

- **Round 1 – Where and how is science making a difference?**

This round draws on the first concept note objective and early case study reflections.

Guiding questions:

- Where have you seen **transdisciplinary science** make a measurable impact on SDG progress? What conditions made that possible?
- What **types of science-policy collaboration** are working—and why?
- Are there examples where scientific evidence changed a policy trajectory? What made the difference—data quality, relationships, institutions?

- **Round 2 – Facing the systemic barriers**

This round aligns with the second and third concept note points: means of implementation and governance frameworks.

Guiding questions:

- What are the key **structural or political barriers** to integrating science into decision-making at scale?
- How can governments and institutions **better support science as a means of implementation**—especially in low-resource or politically fragile contexts?
- What institutional or cultural reforms are needed to make **co-production** and **participatory science** more routine?
- **Optional:** We heard in the case studies that even where science is strong, uptake can be weak. Why is that still the case, and how do we shift the incentives?

- **Round 3 – Anticipating what's next**

This round leans into the foresight and governance elements of the concept note.

Guiding questions:

- Looking ahead, what **lessons from SDG implementation** should shape the architecture of a post-2030 development agenda?
- As **emerging technologies, data platforms, and decision-support tools** evolve, how do we govern them responsibly? Who gets to decide what counts as "evidence"?

- In an era of **political strain and financial fragmentation**, how can science remain a **trusted, strategic actor** in global cooperation?
- **Optional:** The future of sustainable development will be shaped as much by how we govern science as by what science we generate. What are the governance principles we need to build now?

- **Round 4: Cross-cutting questions (for facilitator to use flexibly)**

These can be used to provoke sharper insights or close a round:

- What's one **blind spot** in how we're currently organizing the science-policy interface?
- What's one **practical step** multilateral actors could take in the next 12 months to improve the science-policy ecosystem?
- What is a **non-negotiable** feature of science's role in the next iteration of global development goals?

Audience interaction (optional, 8 mins)

- Use a QR code for participants to submit questions during the case study session.
- Facilitator selects 1–2 audience questions that bring in underrepresented perspectives (e.g. civil society, youth, local knowledge).

IV. 12:15 – 13:00 | Closing reflections and further audience exchange

Speakers: [Add your speaker suggestions below]

- [See MS suggestions above]
- [Is there a place yet for a young/ECR scientist? If not, perhaps closing reflections or discussant?]

Objective: To synthesize insights from the case studies, panel discussion, and audience input; create a sense of closure and momentum; and identify concrete next steps or provocations to carry forward into the HLPF process and beyond.

Structure

Time	Segment	Purpose
12:15–12:20	Facilitator synthesis	Tie threads from case studies and panel together under the three Science Day objectives
12:20–12:45	Audience reflections (2–3 inputs)	Highlight any perspectives not yet heard; include youth, local knowledge, practitioner, etc.
12:45–12:57	Short closing interventions (2–3 co-conveners or discussants)	Final thoughts, calls to action, or insights that look ahead
12:57–13:00	Final remarks and thank you	Facilitator closes with tone-setting conclusion, future directions

Facilitator synthesis (5 mins)

Frame this as *"what we heard today, and what it demands of us."* Use the **three objectives** to structure synthesis:

1. **Accelerating SDG implementation through transdisciplinary science**
    - Highlight a case or panel insight showing how this worked—or how systems blocked it.
2. **Confronting the gaps in means of implementation**
    - Emphasize institutional or funding barriers raised in discussion. Perhaps point to innovations (e.g. new partnerships, country-level reforms).
3. **Science and the future of sustainable development**
    - Reflect on ideas about post-2030 planning, governance, or anticipation. Draw on both case studies and panel if possible.

Audience reflections (10-15 mins)

Purpose: To open the floor briefly and meaningfully. While the audience will be engaged throughout, this should feel like part of the programme, not an afterthought.

Format options:

- Pre-identify 2–3 audience members (ECR, Indigenous representative, civil society voice, or someone who submitted a compelling live question).
- Ask them to offer **a 1-minute reflection**: a provocation, insight, or challenge.

Final reflections by co-conveners or designated discussants (10 mins)

2–3 speakers, each with a couple of minutes.

Possible roles:

- One co-convenor (e.g. ISC or SEI)
- One senior UN or multilateral actor (e.g. DESA, UNDP)
- One "bridge" voice (e.g. youth leader, Indigenous scientist, local government rep)

Suggested talking points:

- What is *one insight* or tension they're taking forward?
- What's *one area for follow-up or continued collaboration* (event, report, initiative)?
- What does **Science Day 2025 signal** for the broader HLPF process?

Final facilitator close (2 mins): Focused, optimistic, action-oriented. Avoid "thank you to all our partners" lists—thanking should be short and tied to next steps.