

Innovation

Learning to scale up
new solutions



NEW SOLUTIONS TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

For example, imagine a world in which innovative solutions transform health-care access for **2 billion people in rural and remote areas**.²⁵ With stronger innovation capacity, United Nations entities can support Member States in **transporting medications and blood transfusions with delivery drones**, facilitating virtual consultations between midwives and pregnant women on digital apps and **extending point-of-care diagnostics to isolated communities**.

WHAT BUILDING INNOVATION CAPACITY MEANS

Fostering innovation capacity is about **learning to generate, test and scale up novel ideas, processes, products or services that create value**. It requires supportive and inclusive environments, open minds and diverse skills. Innovation cultures embrace challenges as opportunities to design ground-breaking sustainable solutions.

WAYS IN WHICH INNOVATION EXPERTISE CAN IMPROVE THE UNITED NATIONS...

- Enhancing advanced **security training** of United Nations personnel through immersive **virtual reality**.
- Reducing the 1.2 million tons in annual United Nations system **carbon emissions**²⁶ with alternative energy and **circular economy** solutions.
- Improving digital and physical **access to health care** for United Nations personnel and people in **remote areas**.

AND SUPPORT MEMBER STATES IN...

- Facilitating **digital participation** in United Nations-supported **peace processes** in local languages and dialects.
- Opening **access to markets and credit** for female entrepreneurs with **peer-to-peer platforms**.
- Using **hydroponics** to grow food in order to improve **food security** where fertile soil is scarce.



Learn more about United Nations
system innovation initiatives

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WHY WE NEED TO SHIFT

LIMITED REACH

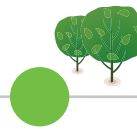
In the late twentieth century, innovation was sometimes erroneously seen as primarily business-orientated, with the role of the public sector understated. However, there is now a **profound understanding that public sector-led innovation is integral in driving societal advancement**, in particular for the most marginalized. In many countries, public investment in innovation and in research and development is on the rise – alongside **a better understanding of grass-roots, inclusive and low-cost forms of innovation**. The United Nations system network, spanning 4,000 locations worldwide, offers unique opportunities to extend the global reach of innovation.



WHERE WE ARE NOW

SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS

Since 2018, the United Nations system has made substantial progress in building its innovation capacity. **Innovation teams are present in 90 per cent of United Nations entities, with 60 per cent implementing dedicated strategies**. Approximately **60 per cent of entities can support Member States** in building local innovation ecosystems, and 115 countries are already working with the United Nations system on new solutions. Globally, development assistance for innovation **has grown tenfold in the past decade** to almost \$3 billion but is still only 1 per cent of total flows in 2022.²⁷



OUR GOAL

FAST AND SUSTAINABLE SCALE-UP

Our vision is an **agile United Nations innovation ecosystem capable of rapidly and sustainably scaling up novel solutions that benefit everyone, everywhere**. Stronger innovation abilities will yield **better outcomes**, including a sharper focus on users, greater access to novel solutions, more creative cultures, faster adaptation, leaner processes, stronger partnerships, better support for Member State innovation ecosystems.

Our approach **spans the full innovation value chain**, from the identification of challenges to the generation, experimentation, incubation, acceleration and scale-up of ideas – leveraging our ability to convene and connect globally. **This shift will be amplified by key enablers**, such as robust innovation leadership, diverse teams, cultural change, strategic partnerships, enhanced financing mechanisms and our global innovation network. By integrating these elements, we embed innovation in our DNA, turning ideas into real solutions, in particular for those who are historically overlooked and underserved by traditional approaches.

State of play: United Nations system entities with...

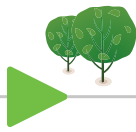


0.7%

of \$350 billion in official development assistance is allocated to innovation annually²⁸

55%

women in the innovation community of practice²⁹



HOW WE AIM TO CHANGE

ADAPTING CULTURES AND CAPABILITIES

IMPROVE OUR OFFER TO MEMBER STATES

- Make **innovation approaches integral to United Nations programmes** and projects.
- Identify promising solutions on the ground and help to **scale up or adapt them to underserved regions**.
- Assist in **building national innovation ecosystems**, with a focus on women innovators.

NURTURE INNOVATION CAPABILITIES

- Develop a **diversified portfolio approach to innovation**, encompassing a range of use cases.
- Strengthen **innovation methods along the value chain**, from idea generation (e.g. in hackathons) to prototyping (e.g. pilot versions for early feedback) to the roll-out of basic product versions, with the goal of continuous improvement.
- Leverage **new technologies to support all steps in the innovation process**, including three-dimensional printing (e.g. to produce prototypes), augmented or virtual reality (e.g. to test new solutions and collect insights) and artificial intelligence (e.g. to help simulate performance in different environments).
- Prioritize **high-impact innovations that benefit marginalized regions and groups**, including women, girls and others left behind – in ways that responsibly manage risks and potential harms.
- Foster the **sustainable scale-up of proven solutions** via multi-stakeholder partnerships, knowledge-sharing, grass-roots investments, multi-partner funding instruments, capacity and policy support or other methods.

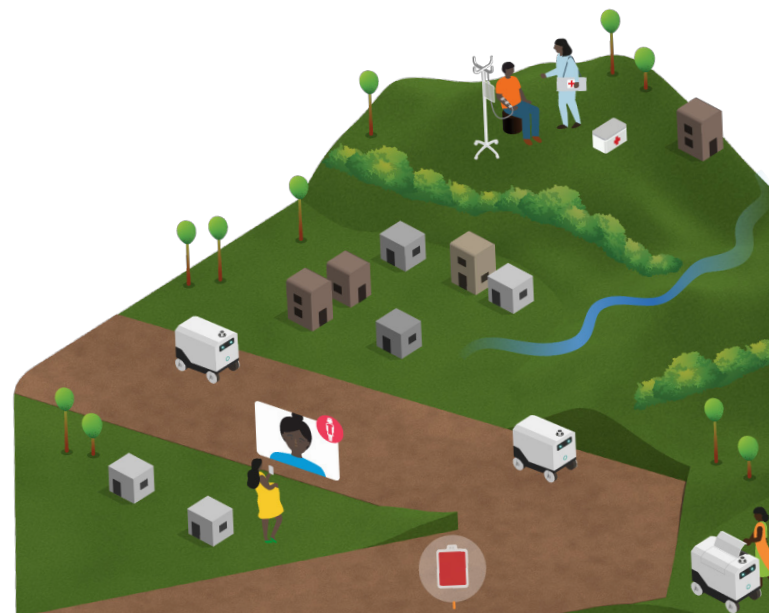


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SHIFT FOUNDATIONS AND CULTURES

- **Leadership.** Offer strong internal leadership to empower innovators.
- **Culture.** Foster open cultures that encourage experiments and accept setbacks as learning opportunities.
- **Training.** Enhance training in critical skills, such as creativity, problem-solving and collaboration.
- **Joint centres of excellence.** Establish geographically diverse and gender-balanced innovation teams to support change, prioritizing women leads.
- **Capacity.** Allocate staff time, internal resources and incentives, in particular to support women and other underrepresented innovators.
- **Networks.** Strengthen our global innovation network to facilitate learning from sister organizations.
- **Partnerships.** Build partnerships with non-United Nations innovation communities to diversify solutions.
- **Technology.** Integrate new technologies to facilitate the innovation process, from idea generation to scale-up.
- **Metrics.** Develop indicators to assess innovation readiness.





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