



# HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

## High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

### Side Event

## Implementing the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport

11 July 2024 | 13:15 – 14:30 | New York City & Online

### Summary

*In 2023, the General Assembly resolution 78/148 “Strengthening the links between all modes of transport to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals” called, among others, for closer UN cooperation on transport, a UN Decade of Sustainable Transport (2026-2035), and a Third UN Global Sustainable Transport Conference, and the celebration of the next World Sustainable Transport Day on 26 November 2024. The Member States also requested United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to develop an Implementation Plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport, in collaboration with the UN Regional Commissions and in consultation with the Member States, the United Nations system and all other relevant stakeholders.*

*The High-level Meeting on Sustainable Transport, held on 17 April 2024 at the United Nations Headquarters, provided the first opportunity for the full membership of the United Nations to provide ideas and inputs to the Implementation Plan of the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport. The Meeting was part of the Sustainability Week, organized by the President of the General Assembly. The side event on 11 July 2024 provided a more informal opportunity for all stakeholders to consider how the Implementation Plan could best advance sustainable transport and the implementation of the SDGs.*

1. The meeting was opened by **Ms. Astra Bonini**, Chief of the Integrated Policy Analysis Branch at the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). Ms. Bonini stressed that the side event provided an opportunity for Member States and relevant stakeholders to consider how the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport and its associated Implementation Plan could best advance sustainable transport and its contributions to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It would provide a platform to share experiences from other UN Decades and selected examples from sustainable transport efforts undertaken by Member States so far. The event would pave the way for consultations with the Member States and other stakeholders later in 2024 and 2025.
2. **Mr. Claver Gatete**, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), while acknowledging the significant contribution of transport to greenhouse gas emissions, stressed its critical role in supporting economic growth, trade, and employment, and its broader role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He emphasised the importance of creating a sustainable, integrated intermodal transport system with resilient infrastructure, especially in African countries; ensuring a just and equal transport system that leaves nobody behind. Partnerships between landlocked and transit countries were highlighted in promoting intermodal transport, alongside regional initiatives from the ECA, such as the Single African Air



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Transport Market and the Trans-African Highway. The ultimate goal is to create a socially inclusive and sustainable transport system in the continent that addresses climate change challenges.

3. **Ms. Tatiana Molcean**, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), highlighted ECE's long history of promoting transport sustainability through legal instruments negotiated by governments. ECE currently oversees 61 legal instruments addressing various aspects of sustainable inland transport, including road safety, a core focus area of ECE. ECE contributes to road safety through its various legal instruments, such as the construction and inspection of vehicles, regulations on rest times for professional drivers, and the transport of dangerous goods.
4. Ms. Molcean also presented the Strategy on Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Inland Transport, which was adopted by ECE's Inland Transport Committee (ITC) in February 2024. The Strategy aims to transform the approach to inland transport globally and set a medium- and long-term course towards carbon neutrality by 2050, based on the 61 United Nations legal instruments under ECE's purview. Although not legally binding, this Strategy provides a framework for progress. She emphasised the need for collaboration and technical assistance to support countries in implementing the Strategy, which include ASI approach of avoiding inefficient transport, shifting to low and zero-carbon modes alongside with promoting intermodal transport, and improving vehicles and infrastructure. Lastly, she presented ECE's eLearning Platform – LearnITC, an online capacity-building tool to help Member States move towards sustainable transport and improve trade connectivity. To date, there were over 700 enrolments from 90 countries on the platform.
5. **Mr. José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs**, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), highlighted the underdevelopment in Latin America's transport infrastructure, which has impeded economic integration and intraregional trade, particularly in South America. This region's vast geography, including the Amazon and Andes, poses significant challenges for transport connectivity. In addition, the region is also increasingly affected by climate shocks, such as the drought impacting the Panama Canal, which requires multinational solutions.
6. Mr. Salazar emphasised the importance of enhancing transport and logistical infrastructure to facilitate trade and improve international competitiveness. He advocated for intermodal transport system to enhance efficiency and reduce environmental impact. He illustrated the deficiencies in Central America, where trade heavily relies on the Inter-American Road, as well as the logistical challenges in the Caribbean, where transportation is costly and complex. Mr. Salazar stressed the role of international organisations in promoting cooperation, providing technical assistance, and fostering regional integration. He highlighted the need for innovative financing options and mobilising resources to address these challenges, and that only collaborative efforts would lead to concrete actions for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport.
7. **Ms. Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana**, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), highlighted the need for transforming the transport sector to be more sustainable, especially in light of strong projected growth of transport demand over the next decades. Through regular Ministerial Conferences on Transport since 2006, ESCAP



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has been facilitating 5-year Regional Action Programmes tailored to specific needs of the region and aligned them with global goals. These Programmes also supported two Decades of Action for Road Safety and other collaborative efforts to address sustainable transport, such as the Almaty and Vienna Programmes of Action for Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The current Regional Action Programme includes a comprehensive vision for the region that addresses equally objectives for economic growth, environmental protection and social development.

8. Ms. Alisjahbana also shared that the implementation of the Regional Action Programme will be reviewed at the forthcoming 8th Committee on Transport in November, highlighting the progress in several areas. She explained that the Committee will discuss, among others, guidelines for designing socially inclusive transport policies which consider the specific needs of vulnerable transport users, such as persons with disabilities, women, older persons and low-income households. The use of digital technology for smart cities, emphasising the role of efficient and resilient transport systems, was also discussed.
9. **Mr. Jean Todt**, UN's Special Envoy for Road Safety, then intervened. He emphasised the critical importance of road safety and the progress made since the launch of the First Decade of Action for Road Safety in 2011. According to the latest World Health Organisation's Global Status Report, road traffic fatalities decreased from 1.35 million annually to 1.19 million. While this indicated progress, it is still far from the second decade's goal of halving this number by 2030.
10. Mr. Todt highlighted that countries worldwide have committed to a multifaceted approach to road safety through the five pillars of the Global Plan: road safety management, safer roads and mobility, safer vehicles, safer road users, and post-crash response. Mr. Todt also acknowledged the challenges. Some regions, especially low- and middle-income countries, have not seen the anticipated reductions in fatalities and injuries. These countries face persistent challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of traffic laws, and limited access to emergency medical services. There is a notable disparity in safety between urban and rural areas, and targeted interventions are needed for vulnerable road users like pedestrians, cyclists, and motorcyclists. He also stressed the urgent need for action in countries with high road crash rates, particularly in Africa, where road fatalities are the highest in the world and are costing 2.5 per cent of the continent's gross domestic product (GDP).
11. Mr. Todt called for integrating road safety into the broader context of sustainable development, promoting sustainable urban mobility and investing into cleaner technologies to mitigate congestion and reduce emissions. Mr. Todt then presented recent positive efforts, including a new UN resolution on road safety tabled by Morocco and adopted with the support of 57 Member States. This resolution calls for accelerating and increasing efforts to apply the Global Plan, making road safety a political priority, and ensuring its relevance in the SGGs agenda. He also noted the upcoming 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Morocco next February. In conclusion, Mr. Todt expressed confidence that by working together, the global community can achieve significant progress in road safety.
12. **Mr. Nhan Tran**, Head of Safety and Mobility in the Department of Social Determinants of Health in the World Health Organisation (WHO), highlighting the key points and challenges of promoting



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sustainable transport within the context of the Second Decade of Action for Road Safety from 2021 to 2030. He began by acknowledging the progress made during the first decade but emphasised that there is still much to be done. One of the successes of the first decade was fostering a sense of community among road safety advocates. However, he cautioned against viewing road safety solely as the responsibility of road safety professionals. Instead, he stressed that sustainable transport affects numerous stakeholders across different sectors, including for example, the environment and health sectors.

13. Mr. Tran argued that road safety should be closely linked with sustainable transport, as the latter's advocates already support measures beneficial to road safety. He cited the example of Paris' aspiration to build a 15-minute city, driven by social well-being and connectivity rather than just sustainable transport, underscoring the need for inclusive approaches that engage diverse stakeholders such as urban planners.
14. He also addressed the challenges posed by entrenched interests that oppose sustainable transport initiatives, particularly in countries with car-centric systems. Mr. Tran emphasised the importance of long-term investment and systemic change in achieving sustainable transport. He noted that this requires not only implementing new systems but also undoing existing ones that are heavily car-centric. This "de-implementation" process presents significant challenges and requires careful negotiation both nationally and internationally. This is where the UN could support in helping Member States to negotiate and move towards a more sustainable transport system.
15. **Mr. Minoru Takada**, Deputy Director of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), then provided insights into the achievements and significance of the UN Decade of Sustainable Energy for All between 2014 and 2024. In particular, this initiative played a crucial role in shaping SDG 7 in 2015, which focuses on ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. The Decade of Sustainable Energy for All also had a decisive impact on global energy policies and strategic directions, facilitating the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through the efforts of Member States.
16. Mr. Takada highlighted that the Decade filled an institutional gap as there was no dedicated UN agency for energy. It became a platform for Member States to commit to SDG 7, fostering high-level dialogues, including the 2021 Secretary-General's Global Roadmap, for accelerating SDG 7 action. It catalysed actions and commitments around SDG 7, including providing a platform to align the efforts of multiple UN agencies. The Energy Compacts, one of the 12 high impact initiatives, was exemplified as a result of this unique platform. Over 200 commitments worth more than \$1.43 billion were made. This multi-stakeholder engagement included participation from businesses, civil society, youth, government at national and regional levels, as well as international organisations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNICEF, providing visibility and momentum for various energy-related initiatives.
17. Lastly, Mr. Takada encouraged stakeholders to leverage the Decade to achieve substantial progress by 2030 and beyond, emphasising the value of such initiatives in connecting various stakeholders and driving coordinated global action.



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18. **Mr. Pena Atageldiyev**, First Secretary of the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan, highlighted that the focuses of the Decade should be on five key areas: safety, clean vehicles and fuels, access and mobility, trade and efficiency, and financing and investment. Mr. Atageldiyev emphasised the importance of prioritising safety, proposing investments in infrastructure such as dedicated cycle lanes, improved pedestrian paths, and advanced traffic management systems to protect vulnerable road users.
19. Promoting clean vehicles and fuels is another critical area. Mr. Atageldiyev suggested stimulating the adoption of electric vehicles through tax breaks or rebates, supported by a network of charging stations. Other alternative fuel options such as hydrogen fuel cells and biofuels should also be explored. Provision of public transport services through low-carbon means, particularly in underserved communities, was also stressed. These include expanding service coverage, utilising electric buses, and other micro-transit services, all of which aimed to improve the accessibility of transport for all.
20. Mr. Atageldiyev also discussed the importance of optimising trade and efficiency through intelligent infrastructure projects, with a view to streamlining freight movement using data analytics and route optimisation to reduce congestion and ensure efficient delivery. Intermodal transport should also be promoted.
21. Mr. Atageldiyev acknowledged all the above measures for building a sustainable transport network require significant investment. Innovative financing mechanisms beyond traditional government funding, such as public-private partnerships, carbon pricing, and green bonds should be considered to attract new capital.
22. Finally, Mr. Atageldiyev informed the meeting that the Group of Friends of Sustainable Transport (GFST), launched by the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan to the United Nations in 2022, had welcomed Qatar and the Philippines as their latest members. This GFST serves as an informal platform to maintain a wide multilateral dialogue on promoting safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all in supporting sustainable economic growth, improving the social welfare of people and enhancing international cooperation and trade among countries. Mr. Atageldiyev encouraged other Member States to join this platform.
23. Mr. Atageldiyev announced that Turkmenistan would be hosting international celebrations for the World Sustainable Transport Day in November this year. This will provide another platform for Member States to discuss important issues surrounding sustainable transport.
24. **Mr. Kavish Bisseswar** from the Netherlands emphasised that sustainable transport is crucial for achieving the SDGs. As a small and densely populated country, the Netherlands has grappled with sustainable transport challenges for decades, particularly in the recent transition to electric vehicles, which put pressure on the energy grid. Another issue faced by the Netherlands is ensuring a just transition to electric vehicles and making electric vehicles affordable for all.





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25. Mr. Bisseswar then discussed how climate change disproportionately affects the poor and vulnerable, highlighting the need for equitable solutions. Many transport challenges are cross-border, underscoring the importance of international cooperation. The UN Decade for Sustainable Transport should aim to address these common challenges and promote sustainable transport modes. With transport accounting 23 per cent of carbon emissions and the projected increase of 79 per cent in passenger demand by 2050, imminent actions are required. The global community agreed at COP28 to reduce fossil fuel dependence, presented an opportunity for innovation and prosperity provided a just and equitable transition is made.
26. As Chair of the ITC, the Netherlands highlighted the ITC's role as a global forum for cooperation and regulation in inland transport. With 61 conventions covering railroads, inland waterways, and customs procedures, the ITC helps address connectivity bottlenecks and promotes sustainable transport. Its new decarbonisation strategy aims to guide countries towards sustainable pathways and emission reductions. Mr. Bisseswar reaffirmed their commitment as the Chair of the ITC to ensure all countries benefit from the ITC's expertise and framework, and invited attendees of the meeting to the next ITC meeting in February in Geneva.
27. **Mr. Joao Carlos Parkinson de Castro** from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Brazil emphasised transport's critical role in poverty reduction, inclusive growth, and achieving the SDGs. When discussing the challenges in providing efficient and affordable transport, Mr. Castro highlighted the issue of congestion in cities, which significantly affected the city's GDP.
28. Mr. Castro then discussed Brazil's increasing adoption of electric vehicles, noting a substantial rise in sales, particularly driven by investments from Chinese manufacturers like BYD. He also highlighted the growing trend of cycling in Brazilian urban areas, with significant expansions in cycle paths and the adoption of electric bikes by companies like the Brazilian Post Office and e-commerce platforms.
29. Furthermore, he mentioned political support through the creation of a parliamentary forum advocating for cycling infrastructure in major cities. Mr. Castro stressed Brazil's commitment to sharing its experiences and best practices to support developing countries in scaling up sustainable transport. He acknowledged the substantial investments required for such initiatives but emphasised the importance of reducing congestion and carbon emissions through innovative approaches.
30. **Mr. Jan Hoffmann**, Chief of the Trade Logistics Branch of the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) discussed the challenges and strategies related to transport in international trade in the context of sustainable development. He highlighted that while maritime transport contributes only three per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, these emissions have risen by 20 per cent over the past decade despite efforts to improve energy efficiency. This trend is particularly concerning for smaller and least developed economies, which are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts and mitigation efforts in transport.
31. Mr. Hoffmann therefore emphasised the need for a global economic measure to internalise the externalities of emissions from shipping, ensuring a level playing field with a polluter pays



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principle. This measure could support vulnerable economies in adapting to sustainable transport practices. Mr. Hoffmann also stressed the necessity of financial support for developing countries to achieve decarbonisation in line with higher income countries, mitigating how disproportionately affected they are by climate change mitigation measures. He underscored the interconnectedness of international shipping networks and the importance of ensuring equitable standards across all nations.

32. Finally, Mr. Hoffmann mentioned some practical measures to reduce maritime transport costs and enhance sustainability, including customs automation, port management improvements, and the development of trade and transport corridors. These steps would contribute to achieving the UN's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transport while fostering global investments in sustainable international freight transport.
33. **Mr. Chen Chen**, Director of the Transport Sector Office at the Asian Development Bank (ADB), explained the importance of sustainable transport in tackling climate change. It has always been one of ADB's core businesses to promote sustainable transport in Asia and the Pacific region. Notably, ADB President Masatsugu Asakawa announced in 2021 that ADB would fully align its operations with the Paris Agreement by 1 July 2023 for sovereign operations, and 1 July 2025 for non-sovereign operations. ADB has also increased its climate financing ambition significantly, aiming to deliver \$100 billion from 2019 to 2030. From 2018 to 2023, ADB had already committed over \$30 billion towards climate finance. In the transport sector, ADB has been a major contributor to climate finance, committing around \$12.5 billion, which represents approximately 40% of its total climate finance. Looking ahead, Mr. Chen emphasised that the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport would enhance awareness and opportunities in Asia and the Pacific, crucial battlegrounds in the fight against climate change.
34. Mr. Chen proposed several recommendations for the implementation plan of the Decade of Action. Firstly, he advocated for impactful innovations. Electromobility, autonomous driving and low-emission technologies have drastically changed the landscape of transport in recent years. Actively promoting and pursuing innovative technologies would provide potential of achieving breakthroughs in moving towards sustainable transport.
35. Secondly, Mr. Chen stressed the importance of enabling policy frameworks in three areas, namely: (i) regulatory supports such as fuel efficiency standards, emission reduction (ii) financial incentives, such as subsidies for electric vehicles and renewable energy, as well as research and development into new technologies, and (iii) infrastructure investments policies to accommodate sustainable transport modes. Mr. Chen highlighted the complementary and multiplier roles of public and private sectors in financing sustainable transport initiatives.
36. Thirdly, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, tailored to the diverse capacities and resources of stakeholders, were also identified as crucial by Mr. Chen. He highlighted ADB's collaboration with the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) on the Asia Transport Outlook initiative, underscoring the potential for regional cooperation in advancing sustainable transport goals.



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37. Lastly, Mr. Chen underscored the need for sustainable transport to maintain visibility and relevance on the global agenda. He proposed a comprehensive communication strategy as part of the implementation plan to ensure sustained global attention to this critical issue. ADB believes that sustainable transport can only be achieved through collective efforts and collaboration with stakeholders globally.
38. **Mr. Jens Hügel**, Senior Adviser at the International Road Transport Union (IRU), emphasised the critical role of environmentally friendly transport in the economic and social development of countries. He noted that transport is essential for achieving all the SDGs. Drawing from past experiences, he shared three lessons learned and proposed three actionable recommendations.
39. Firstly, Mr. Hügel highlighted, that successful initiatives over the past decades all had clear goals, milestones, and Key Performance Indicators or implementation indicators. He stressed the importance of having specific targets and measurable outcomes to guide progress effectively. Secondly, he underscored the significance of translating global goals into regional implementation plans, under the guidance of the Regional Commissions. This approach allows for leveraging regional knowledge and pragmatic solutions, making it easier to address local challenges and opportunities. Thirdly, Mr. Hügel noted that multi-stakeholder partnerships were crucial for success. Effective dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders, including the Regional Commissions and the private sector, were key components of achieving meaningful progress.
40. Based on these lessons, Mr. Hügel made three recommendations for action. First, he proposed that the number of ratifications and implementations of UN Transport Conventions be used as measurable KPIs for the Decade. He suggested setting a target of 100 ratifications and 50 countries implementing these conventions within the decade. Second, Mr. Hügel recommended focusing on CO<sub>2</sub> emission savings by using widely accepted approaches such as the Green Compact. This method combines short-term pragmatic measures with long-term goals, including the phase-out of fossil fuels, to drive sustainable transport initiatives. Third, he called for the establishment of a multi-stakeholder forum (the UN Sustainable Transport Collaboration UNSTC) led by UN DESA, bringing together the Regional Commissions, Member States, intergovernmental organisations, the private sector, and civil society representatives to facilitate comprehensive discussions and actions towards sustainable transport.
41. **Mr. Xie Hui** from the Global Sustainable Transport Innovation and Knowledge Centre (GSTIKC) took the floor to present three proposed actions. Firstly, he highlighted the annual Global Sustainable Transport Forum, organised by the Ministry of Transport in China. This forum had its first session in 2023, while the second session is scheduled for September this year. Mr. Xie suggested that the forum could provide a platform for countries and stakeholders to discuss sustainable transport issues, and support the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport by facilitating global dialogue.
42. Secondly, Mr. Xie proposed the promotion of global sustainable transport best practices. He suggested organising an annual event to select and disseminate exemplary sustainable transport





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practices. Sharing these practices at significant meetings and venues would allow countries to learn from each other and implement effective sustainable transport solutions.

43. Thirdly, Mr. Xie proposed establishing an innovation award for sustainable transport. Recognising innovation as crucial for advancing sustainable transport, he suggested setting up a Global Sustainable Transport Innovation Award. This award would honour individuals or organisations that significantly contribute to sustainable transport through innovative technologies and practices. He acknowledged that such a programme would require a UN General Assembly resolution but believed the Implementation Plan for the UN Decade of Sustainable Transport could include this initiative.
44. **Ms. Joo Hyun Ha** from the International Union of Railways (UIC) provided a statement as input to the meeting, explaining UIC's commitment in supporting the UN Decade of Action for Sustainable Transport. Ms. Ha highlighted that rail transport, being the least emissions-intensive mode of passenger transport, plays a crucial role in reducing overall emissions. The UIC is developing several initiatives to support the development of implementation agenda of this Decade of Action.
45. Firstly, the UIC is working on Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) templates for rail, public transport, and active mobility (walking and cycling) in collaboration with the International Association of Public Transport (UITP) and the Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport (PATH) Coalition. These templates aim to guide countries in incorporating sustainable transport modes into their climate action plans.
46. Secondly, the UIC is exploring climate finance instruments, particularly carbon credit markets, and their opportunities for the rail sector. This is particularly relevant for developing countries, as these instruments can generate revenues to support operational costs, build the financial case for projects, and help de-risk investments. Additionally, the UIC had developed materials for COP28 that laid the foundation for these workstreams.
47. **Ms. Katrin Luger**, Chief of the Transport Research and Policy Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), provided a statement as input to the meeting, emphasizing the importance of transforming the global transport landscape to ultimately help reduce poverty and inequality and leave no one behind. Echoing the comments made earlier by the Executive Secretary, she explained ESCAP's work to ensure that transport is accessible and inclusive and does not leave the most vulnerable transport users behind, such as persons with disabilities, women, older persons and low-income households.
48. Ms. Luger highlighted that the most vulnerable users have limited access to existing transport systems and often find them unsafe and unfit for their specific travel behaviours. With continuous support from the Member States, ESCAP has developed a set of guidelines, which provide greater transport accessibility for all. The guidelines are structured along 4 categories and include, (1) the need to systematically collect and analyse relevant data, in order to identify the most effective approaches to social inclusion per the needs of each vulnerable user group; (2) the mainstreaming of social inclusion in public transport; (3) the integration of transport innovation



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for social inclusion; and finally, (4) enhanced capacity building and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of the social inclusion measures undertaken.

49. At the end of the meeting, Ms. Bonini thanked participants for their important and valuable inputs and noted that the event would be followed by more formal consultations with all key actors.

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