

Reflection on the UN SDG Moment: High Hopes for Youth Leadership, Local Collaboration to Scale-up SDGs

Merly Barlaan
September 18, 2026

Anaïs Taffin
WFWPI Intern and UN Youth Representative



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres at the opening of the SDG Moment

New York - The 2026 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Moment held at the United Nations General Assembly at the New York Headquarters on September 18, 2026 was another call to action, rather than an enumeration of accomplished SDGs.

It fit neatly within its attributed theme "Together, We Can Do It," as it recounted what was still yet to be accomplished, with the SDGs' formal deadline of December 31st, 2030 rapidly approaching.

The 2026 UN SDGs Report indicated that of the 139 targets attributed to the 17 SDGs, only 36 percent are currently on track or making moderate progress, with nearly half of them advancing too slowly, and with 15 percent falling below their 2015 baselines.

The speakers' overarching feeling of hope lay within the youth and future generations who will enable this action. They expressed how young peoples' ambitions and initiatives are inspiring, and the 2026 SDGs Moment showcased this by bringing forth youth who are currently taking concrete action towards advancing the SDGs.

The panel discussion "Unlocking Possibilities for People and Planet" showcased young women who were already leading initiatives. Mariam Solika explained how she empowers young voices by sharing success stories and developing hope driven media on her platform "The Good News" with the goal of translating this optimism into action.

Charitie Ropati, a member of the UN Secretary General Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change, advocates for Indigenous human rights, and climate rights through protecting land, water, and sovereignty.

Nevertheless, these youth leaders share the concern that not enough is being done, that promises and commitments are being neglected, and that actions are falling behind the frameworks set on global stages and words presented at global forums.

Two representatives of the Young Leaders for SDGs, Suzuka and Adelin, took the floor stating: "Across peace, health, education, climate, decent work, and economic opportunity, young people are leading, organizing, putting forth change and showing what is possible. [...] To the leaders in this room and around the world, you made this promise [of reaching the SDGs]. We are asking you to keep it."

Although a lot of faith, admiration and responsibility is being placed on the shoulders of young leaders, the youth still expect world leaders, governments, NGOs, and businesses to do their part and take the drastic action that is needed to reach the SDGs by 2030. That the responsibility should not solely rely on the incoming generations.



Panelists of the forum on Bridging Divides

As a WFWPI intern and UN youth representative, I recognize the importance of storytelling, which the 2026 SDGs Moment highlighted frequently, to spread hope for a better future, empower peoples' voices, and inspire action.

However, we urgently need to be taking action on a larger and more immediate scale, as the hope,

inspiration and gravity of the situation is already present in peoples' minds. While the 2026 SDGs Moment showcased a few success stories amongst a myriad of 'call-to-action' speeches, I hope that the 2027 SDGs Moment spends all three hours recounting the accomplishments and breakthroughs of people in reaching the SDGs.



The writer at the UN SDG Moment

We could look at farmers in the Philippines who are transitioning to permaculture and regenerative agricultural practices, to the youth who are taking action to fight climate change in their own communities, to government officials who are helping pass policies to enable women to receive an education, and so on.

Many of these achievements are already underway through the support of NGOs.

WWFPI, for instance, is actively implementing projects that support the realization of the UN global peace and development agenda, by leading interactive environmental sustainability projects, empowering women, or fostering youth leadership programs. These initiatives need to continue, be scaled up and supported to ensure their success in helping to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

As the opening SDGs Moment video presented explicitly "We are building on foundations laid over 10 difficult years" and, with 2030 just four years away, it is a necessity to "make every remaining year count for people, for the planet, for peace, for everyone."

In summary, the 2026 UN SDGs Moment displayed a strong sense of global agreement, hope and desire to act to reach the SDGs by 2030 through accelerated action, while also demonstrating concrete solutions being enacted by governments, NGOs, businesses and youth