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All hands on deck for the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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The UN's Sustainable Development Goals have become a focus point for global calls for action, challenges, competitions and other idea-producing initiatives all over the world.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations member states in 2015, provides a blueprint for prosperity for people and the planet.

At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, spur economic growth – while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests.

The UN SDG programme has incorporated the most urgent and grave issues that mankind can no longer ignore, and has therefore become a great focus point for globally spread calls for action, challenges, competitions and other idea-producing initiatives all over the world.

These are held annually by both the UN agencies themselves and independent organisations – as long as the ultimate goal is to contribute to developing and establishing those projects and ideas that will be helpful on the way to achieving the global welfare.

The UN's own SDG Action Campaign has been running the UN SDG Action Awards since 2018, which have been identifying and celebrating changemakers across the world who have been re-thinking ways to drive progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Mobilise, inspire, connect

The Awards seek initiatives that mobilise, inspire and connect people to drive action towards a more sustainable future on a healthy planet – those that are flipping the script and rethinking how we live and what progress and development look like. This year the Awards also seek individuals – Changemakers – that inspire and empower others through their actions.

Last year, the Awards received over 2,000 applications to the three application categories from more than 140 countries. The 2022 programme is still in progress.

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Another SDG-focused competition is from a private philanthropic initiative, BE OPEN, and it is one year younger. Unlike the Action Awards, every year the competition chooses to focus on one particular goal; the current one is called “Design to Nurture the Planet” and offers five cash prizes of a total 15,000 euros, awarded by the foundation for proposing a solution to the global food crisis. Due to quite specific criteria and expectations of feasibility the competition imposes on its participants, it allows for a more pragmatic selection of projects.

This is year three of BE OPEN’s involvement with running competition programmes that collect ideas and advance the SDGs. Each year is dedicated to one goal: previous programmes focused on SDG11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG12: Responsible Consumption and Production.

As with the UN SDG Action Awards, selecting the finalists and awardees of the core prizes is done by an international jury, while there is another prize awarded via an open online vote.

The objective of the competition is to recognise and promote leading projects developed by the younger creative generation that are able to tackle the tasks set by the SDG programme; to produce new ideas with the potential for true impact.

