



UNITED NATIONS  
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

## UNIDO BRUSSELS *Report*

### UNIDO Lab Debates at the European Development Days 2021

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*Strategic Partnerships and Innovative Solutions  
for a Greener and Inclusive Transition*



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**JULY 2021**

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#### **Acknowledgements**

This report was prepared under the overall guidance of Patrick J. Gilabert, Head of the UNIDO Liaison Office and Representative to the European Union Institutions and OACPS secretariat, by the UNIDO Brussels Office.

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Graphic Design: UNIDO Liaison Office in Brussels. This document may be freely quoted or reprinted but acknowledgment is required. The full report is available online at [www.unido.org](http://www.unido.org) Original: ENGLISH

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The [European Development Days](#) (EDDs), organized by the European Commission (EC), is Europe’s leading global forum on international development since the year 2006. Bringing the development community together, the EDD serves as a participatory platform to share ideas and experiences inspiring new partnerships and innovative solutions to the world’s most challenging issues. In this context, the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the EDDs under the overarching theme “The Green Deal for a Sustainable Future” took place virtually on 15-16 June 2021.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), once again, contributed to the EDD. With more than 19,000 participants and 300 speakers from over 160 countries engaging with the young leaders and high-level attendees, the EDDs 2021 focused on 2 main topics: a **green economy for people and nature** and **protecting biodiversity and people**. The UN held a virtual stand at the EDDs Global Village, which successfully showcased innovative projects and ground-breaking reports on sustainable development. Among the 100 sessions, more than 90 interactive project stands, including lab debates, programme overview and special events, UNIDO co-organised three lab debates inspiring new partnerships and innovative solutions to achieve a greener and more inclusive transition for people’s well-being and a healthy planet for the next generations.

The lab debate on “[the SWITCH to Green Experience with SMEs establishing circular business models](#)” presented how the EU, in partnership with the UNIDO and SWITCH Teams,

promotes circular business models in partner countries through the SWITCH programmes and contributes to decent jobs creation and positive environmental impacts. The discussion specifically focused on how to build new partnerships to globally support the EU priorities on the circular economy, leaving no one behind.

Then, the lab debate titled “[Can the Future of Skills be Green and Gender-Inclusive?](#)” explored how to deliver sustainable and inclusive skills development programmes and how the future of skills can become greener and gender-inclusive. The panel addressed the effects of private-public partnerships in engaging champions in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) on female participation in male-dominated sectors.

Finally, the lab debate “[To solve Water Scarcity, Every Drop of Knowledge Matters](#)” showcased the [H2O Maghreb](#) project in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, the world’s most water-scarce area, sharing experiences and best practices to draw on synergies between private and public sectors and to overcome the water challenges by using innovative technologies and developing necessary skill sets.

In a nutshell, all three sessions confirmed the significance of building new partnerships and cooperation to globally support the international efforts in building greener and more inclusive societies and economies. While challenges remain especially in areas suffering from conflict, most subject to climate change, and hit the hardest by the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was deemed essential to bring together all stakeholders for sustainable and inclusive transitions. Furthermore, the power of innovation and technology, the switch to circular economy models, as well as the importance of education and learning for skills, should be considered as levers to maximize gender equity, environmental protection, and economic prosperity for all, making sure that no one is left behind.

*The new article of three lab debates can be viewed [here](#).*

# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EDD</b>	European Development Days
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>IEA</b>	Institut International Eau & Assainissement
<b>INTPA</b>	Directorate-General for International Partnership
<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>MSMEs</b>	Micro, Small and Medium-sized enterprises
<b>ONEE</b>	Office National de l'Electricité et de l'Eau Potable
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium-sized enterprises
<b>TVET</b>	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
<b>UNIDO</b>	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
<b>UNOPS</b>	United Nations Office for Project Services
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>USD</b>	U.S. Dollar

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# AGENDAS

**Lab Debate I:** Building New Partnerships to Globally Support EU Priorities on the Circular Economy: The SWITCH to green experience promoting circular business models in key value chains

**EDD Studio/Channel:** Green and Circular Economy

**Date:** 15 June 2021

**Time:** 13:00 to 13:45

**Co-organizers:** UNIDO, Switch2Green, SwitchMed, SwitchAfricaGreen, SwitchAsia

**Moderated by** Jens Kristian Noergaard

**Speakers:** Carla Montesi, Nilgün Tas, Jana Zilkova, Houda Mrouche and Saif Eddine Laalej, Vivian Ahiayibor

**Lab Debate II:** Can the Future of Skills Be Green and Gender-Inclusive?: How the public and private sectors are teaming up to empower young female champions in technical and vocational trades in Africa

**EDD Studio/Channel:** Green Economy-Related Education and Training

**Date:** 15 June 2021

**Time:** 16:20 to 17:05

**Co-organizers:** UNIDO, SDG Watch Europe, ETF, WorldSkills, Nortec

**Moderated by** Chika Oduah

**Speakers:** Li Yong, Bernardo Calzadilla-Sarmiento, Cesare Onestini, Euphrasia Mulenga

**Lab Debate III:** To Solve Water Scarcity, Every Drop of Knowledge Matters: Innovative, sustainable, and scalable solutions in the MENA region

**EDD Studio/Channel:** Water and Sanitation

**Date:** 15 June 2021

**Time:** 17:20 to 18:05

**Co-organizers:** UNIDO, UNOPS, Festo, USAID, IEA

**Moderated by** Portia Persley

**Speakers:** Nader Imani, Muna AL-BANNA, Virpi Stucki, Abderrafii Mardi

# LAB DEBATE I: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO GLOBALLY SUPPORT EU PRIORITIES ON THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY



Organised by



The project lab - Building new partnerships to globally support EU priorities on the circular economy, showcased implementation of circular business models in the EU SWITCH programme. It was organised by the SWITCH to Green Facility, on behalf of the European Commission Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA), together with the regional SWITCH-Asia, SWITCH Africa Green, and SwitchMed Programmes, the United Nations Environment Programme, and UNIDO. It explored the benefits of the circular economy transition, discussing aspects like a rethinking of our current business practices, the impact a green transition can have on job creation and employment opportunities, and the need for international partnerships and frameworks that can support such a transition.

In her opening remarks, **Carla Montesi**, Director at the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), introduced the EU's ambition to promote circular economy at the global level, including through the [SWITCH programmes](#) which have been at the forefront of EU's support to the green transition. Indeed, the EU funded SWITCH Programmes in Asia, Africa and the Mediterranean region have created numerous opportunities for SMEs to establish circular business models. She noted that the [EU Circular Economy Action Plan](#) and the [Global Alliance on Circular Economy](#) reaffirm the European ambition to promote circular economy programs in Europe and across the world through international cooperation.

**Nilgün Tas**, Deputy Director of UNIDO Department of Environment, summarised by saying, "The SWITCH to [Circular Economy Value Chains project](#) provides sustainable value chain management as a drive and model for scaling up circular economic approaches through private sector led partnerships". She noted that the project targets policymakers to improve the business environment, build the capacity of value chain actors, and scale up circular business practices. She also stressed the positive consequences of green transitions on competitiveness and opportunities for MSMEs to access new markets and develop green trade.

**Jana Zilkova**, Head of Mission at Caritas Czech Republic in Mongolia, noted that their work primarily in the construction and recycling sector has achieved substantial progress over the last decade thanks to the EU support and [SWITCH Asia](#) programme. For her, one of the most important factors for success is to ensure an appropriate level of understanding among all stakeholders as "it is impossible to achieve any sustainable solutions without working together on the solutions". Implementation of circular economy practices is not a straightforward process. This highlights the importance of bringing together all stakeholders and engaging them in the circular economy transition. This includes policy makers, and the private sector, but also consumers, academia and importantly the informal sector.

**Houda Mrouche and Saif Eddine Laalej**, Founders of [Zelij Invent](#), presented the SwitchMed pilot: Transformation of plastic waste into eco-friendly construction materials in Morocco. They highlighted the need to present business's success stories and rely on role models to inspire new actors to join circular economy programmes. In their opinion, circular economy transitions may positively impact the labour market in the construction sector. However, a successful transition will depend on the development of skills for workers.

Giving an overview of Ghana's situation, **Vivian Ahiayibor**, Managing Director at City Waste Recycling Limited, mentioned that Ghana has faced such challenges related to inadequate knowledge on green best practices as well as lack of capacities. However, she highlighted

that the [SWITCH Africa Programme](#) has contributed to creating new jobs and business opportunities in both formal and informal sectors. For example, the SWITCH project in Ghana created and sustained about 500 jobs in waste management, including in repair and manufacturing. She also addressed that the programme unlocked new job opportunities for associations, women's groups, and churches in the region. In this context, she stressed the significance of the programme in providing green opportunities, especially for women.

To conclude, this debate showcased how the EU supports circular business models in partner countries through the SWITCH programmes with a specific focus on how SMEs develop and contribute to creating decent jobs while also addressing environmental impacts. Participants fed into the debate their experience and insights regarding the policies, resources and investments required to make circularity work for people, regions and cities as envisioned under the [EU Circular Economy Action Plan](#).

There are still plenty of challenges to be addressed such as a lack of capacity of SMEs to implement Circular Economy practices, access to green finance (in particular for MSMEs operating upstream supply chains), and better awareness of existing technologies and access to them. Thus, support is needed to overcome this, for example in the form of technical assistance, access to funding and sustainable investment schemes, and improved standards and regulation favouring companies which are making the right choices for implementation of Circular Business Models. Last but not least, all panellists agreed that whatever the support, it should make sure that no one is left behind.

*The recording of the session can be found [here](#).*

## LAB DEBATE II:

# CAN THE FUTURE OF SKILLS BE GREEN AND GENDER-INCLUSIVE? : HOW THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS ARE TEAMING UP TO EMPOWER YOUNG FEMALE CHAMPIONS IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL TRADES IN AFRICA



# #edd21

Meet the speakers



**Chika Oduah**  
Moderator



**Li Yong**  
Director General UNIDO



**Dr. Bernardo Calzadilla-Sarmiento**  
Managing Director UNIDO

#EDD21 - Can the Future of Skills be Green and Gender-Inclusive?

June 15 | 16:20 (CEST)



**Euphrasia Mulenga**  
WorldSkills Champions Trust



**Cesare Onestini**  
Director ETF



The second lab debate, moderated by Chika Oduah, explored the effects of private-public partnerships engaging champions in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) on female participation in male dominated sectors. Speakers raised awareness on the importance of women’s involvement in technical trainings to promote greater equality and economic prosperity for all.

In his opening speech, **UNIDO Director General Li Yong** highlighted the importance of sustainable and inclusive skills development programs to achieve the goals of the [Decade of Action](#). He illustrated that on the one hand “the global economy will lose up to 18 percent of

its GDP due to the impact of climate change if no action is taken”. He reiterated that, on the other hand, closing the gender gap in the workforce will add up to USD 28 trillion to the global GDP. Clearly, demand-oriented, people centric, skills development programs are vital to address the challenges of climate change and achieve inclusive and sustainable development. He concluded his speech by addressing the crisis of COVID-19 as an opportunity to accelerate the provision of greener and more inclusive technical education to build a skilled work force and reduce the job skills global mismatch.

**Bernardo Calzadilla-Sarmiento**, UNIDO Managing Director in Directorate of Digitalization, Technology and Agribusiness, stated that “jobs are changing, meaning skills for jobs are changing as well”. This implies a risk of widening the skills gap which, for him, “punishing women unequally”. For this reason, closing the skills gap also means closing the gender gap. His speech addressed the importance of demand-oriented and people-centric skills development programs in closing jobs skills mismatch and gender inequality. He concluded by calling for public-private partnerships to accelerate technical and vocational training programs.

The intervention of the Director of the European Training Foundation, **Cesare Onestini**, highlighted the necessary gender responsive national policies for green transition. He reiterated that since environmental degradation is not gender neutral, we need gender responsive policies to address environmental challenges. He also highlighted the private sector’s catalyst role in promoting multidimensional policy approach towards increasing women’s participation in the jobs of the future, including green jobs.

**The last panelist, Euphrasia Mulenga**, WorldSkills Champions Trust Representative for Africa, shared her personal experiences as a woman working in aircraft engineering, a male dominated sector. She showcased best practices and lessons learned of TVET projects in attracting female participants.

*The recording of the lab debate can be viewed [here](#).*

## LAB DEBATE III: TO SOLVE WATER SCARCITY, EVERY DROP OF KNOWLEDGE MATTERS: INNOVATIVE, SUSTAINABLE, AND SCALABLE SOLUTIONS IN THE MENA REGION



The world's most water-scarce region is the MENA region, where more than [60% of the population has little or no access to drinkable water](#). It faces the challenge of sustainably developing its infrastructures and managing water resources amidst growing scarcity, due to a rapidly growing population and urbanisation. Effectively overcoming the water challenge starts with ensuring a skilled workforce and resource-efficient water management.

In this lab debate, distinguished panelists demonstrated the power of innovation and technology to increase the efficiency of learning, by taking the example of the project H2O Maghreb's innovative and modular training programme. They shared experiences across the MENA region, drawing on synergies between private and public sectors to leverage the use of innovative technologies and the development of necessary skill sets. They also shared best practices including on health and safety for sustainable water management practices and resilient infrastructure while enhancing female participation.

**Nader Imani**, Executive Vice President for Global Education at Festo Didactic, addressed how technical education should anticipate solutions to global challenges, be more resilient, match the skills demand and supply, and secure jobs in a green economy. He also mentioned how to use advanced technologies and innovation in supporting education efficiency and building return on investment in education for all pointing to [SDG#4 quality education](#). For him, [SDG#17 partnerships for the goals](#) and especially with bi- multilateral development agencies, are needed to elaborate common development agenda for mutual benefits.

The next speaker, **Muna AL-BANNA**, Regional Infrastructure Lead of UNOPS Middle East Regional Office, shared some challenges in the MENA Region relating to existing water and sanitation infrastructures. Amongst many factors, rapid population growth, urbanization, climate change impact, lack of funding, and old management policies and strategies for the financial management of infrastructure, eventually lead to uncontrolled water losses. She stressed that most of the SDGs imply infrastructure improvements. When it comes to gender equality, infrastructure plays a crucial role, both protecting women and accelerating their empowerment. Above all, she urged to work on improved strategies, upstream planning, and develop decentralized policies for communities in the MENA Region to address the water sector's needs.

**Virpi Stucki**, UNIDO Chief of Rural Entrepreneurship, Job Creation and Human Security Division, emphasized the importance of understanding water from a holistic perspective and of recognizing that many sectors are competing on the same and finite resource. Though projects such as [H2O Maghreb](#), the concept of Integrated Water Resources Management is turned from theory to practice. She also argued that partnerships are key to long-term sustainability and that part of the success of H2O Maghreb results from the diversity of its partners. This project has also substantially contributed to gender equality and job creation, given that on average 75% of the students of H2O Maghreb were female and the project is contributing to a higher share of skilled women employable in Morocco's water sector.

Finally, **Abderrafii Mardi**, Director of National Office of Electricity and Potable Water (ONEE), argued that while investments in infrastructure are important, investment in human capital development is even more significant. In his opinion, the key to the success of any water project is first and foremost a matter of developing skills. He also highlighted that the H2O Maghreb project was made possible through the collaboration with UNIDO and the assistance of national experts as well as internal IEA trainers. In this context, he mentioned that the successful experience of the H2O Maghreb project deserves to be shared and replicated in other contexts that experience similar challenges and constraints.



The panelists shared their experiences and best practices from across the MENA region in terms of establishing skilled manpower and resource-efficient water management to overcome the challenges of sustainable water infrastructure investment and service delivery. The H2O Maghreb training approach on water and wastewater management was featured as a model to effectively support the water sector through public and private sector, and opportunity to be scaled up in the MENA region and Africa.

*The recording of the lab debate can be found [here](#).*

# VIRTUAL UNITED NATIONS (UN) STAND AT THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

In addition to the 3 lab debates, UNIDO was also represented in the virtual UN stand in the “[Global Village](#)”, EDD’s virtual networking platform to share innovative projects and ground-breaking reports.

The UN Brussels Team, under the leadership of the UN Coordinator in Brussels, collaborated in the weeks ahead of the European Development Days to produce joint documents, which is a good example of the One UN approach to engage with European partners.

In addition to UNIDO, the UN family participated with several sessions and contributions including from UN Secretariat FAO, ILO, IOM, ITC, ITU, OHCHR, UNCDF, UNDESA, UNDP, UNDRR, UNECE, UNEP, UNESCO, UNOPS, UN-Habitat, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UN Women, WFP and WHO.

The UN page in the global village included the [video](#) “The United Nations: working globally and in the countries for a green and sustainable future” and a link to the [page](#) “Support Sustainable Development and Climate Action”.

**Nine background documents** were available in the Global Village:

1. The UN Family at the EDD (download [here](#))
2. UN Sessions at the EDD (download [here](#)), including the 3 UNIDO lab debates
3. UN Reports on EDD themes (download [here](#)), including 4 flagship reports from UNIDO
4. UN Summits, Fora and Conventions (download [here](#)), including the Vienna Energy Forum
5. UN – EU Selected programmes and projects (download [here](#)), including 6 UNIDO projects
6. Selected UN videos interactive tools and additional resources (download [here](#)), including 9 links to UNIDO resources
7. UN Comprehensive response to COVID (download [here](#))
8. UNGA Declaration on UN at 75 (download [here](#))
9. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (download [here](#))

This page was therefore an opportunity for UNIDO to showcase flagship reports related to the Green Deal, some key projects, resources, and benefit from the high visibility of the EDD towards external partners such as policymakers, business leaders, and civil society.

**UN & EU,  
Working together for  
People and Planet  
#RecoverBetter**



 UNITED NATIONS  
BRUSSELS  #edd21 15-16 June 2021

## ANNEX I – BIOGRAPHIES OF SPEAKERS



**Jens Kristian Noergaard** is Technical Key Expert for SWITCH to Green Facility. He provides technical assistance for the elaboration and implementation of the [SWITCH to Green Flagship Initiatives](#) of the European Commission.



**Carla Montesi** is currently Director at the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships ([INTPA](#)). She is responsible for the Directorate "Green Deal, Digital Agenda" since September 2018.



**Nilgün Taş** is Deputy Director of the Department of Environment at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization ([UNIDO](#)) and Chief of the Industrial Resource Efficiency Division. She also leads UNIDO's cross-departmental team for Circular Economy.



**Jana Zilkova** is Head of Mission of the [Caritas Czech Republic in Mongolia](#). She is a performance-driven professional with more than 10 years of experience in the international and non-governmental environment.



**Vivian Ahiyibor** is Managing Director at [City Waste Recycling Limited](#). The company offers complete solutions for waste management, including waste segregation, waste haulage, waste recycling and waste disposal.



**Houda Mrouche** is Founder of [Zelij Invent](#), the first Moroccan manufacturer of ecological construction products. She works for the transformation of plastic waste into eco-friendly construction materials.



**Chika Sandra Oduah** is a journalist who has worked as a television news producer, correspondent, writer, and photographer. She is currently a correspondent for [Vice News](#).



**Li Yong** is the Director General of the [UNIDO](#). He has an extensive career as a senior economic and financial policymaker. He played a key role in China's cooperation with multilateral development organizations, such as the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank.



**Bernardo Calzadilla-Sarmiento** is Managing Director in the Directorate of Digitalization, Technology and Agribusiness at [UNIDO](#). He holds a master's degree in industrial and process organization and a PhD in economics, from the University of Business Management and Economics of Vienna.



**Cesare Onestini** is the Director of the European Training Foundation ([ETF](#)). He combines a background in education and training policy with extensive experience in policy development and management at the highest level in the European Union.



**Euphrasia Mulenga** is an aircraft engineer and WorldSkills Champions Trust Representative for Africa at WorldSkills.



**Portia Persley** is Chief of Global Strategy and Leadership Division in the Centre for Water Security, Sanitation and Hygiene at [USAID](#). She manages operational and strategic policy guidance for implementing USAID's contributions to the Water for World Act and U.S. Government's Global Water Strategy.



**Muna Al Banna** is Regional Infrastructure Lead of [UNOPS](#) Middle East Regional Office with more than 30 years of engineering experience, including solid water engineering and management, water and sanitation network engineering, project management, environmental engineering, and infrastructure design implementation.



**Virpi Stucki** is Chief of Rural Entrepreneurship, Job Creation and Human Security Division at [UNIDO](#). She oversees the division's interventions on improving the income and employment opportunities for women, youth, and crisis-affected populations.



**Abderrafii Mardi** works for l'Office National de l'Electricité et de l'Eau Potable ([ONEE](#)) based in Rabat, Morocco. He is the coordinator of the international Institute for Water and Sanitation of ONEE.



**Nader Imani** is Executive Vice President Global Education at [Festo Didactic](#) SE, steering global education projects in TVET and Academia addressing socio-economic challenges and in charge of the management of Festo Didactic in Africa.

## ANNEX II – EDD IN IMAGE



