Open letter to the United Nations and world governments in regard to the *Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow* (September 2024), and the draft outcome document of the summit, *Pact for the Future*

Prepared by the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community, RealKM Cooperative Limited, and Knowledge for Development Partnership (K4DP)

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We urgently need to apply multiple knowledges to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

We, the undersigned of the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community, RealKM Cooperative Limited, and Knowledge for Development Partnership (K4DP), urge the United Nations and its Member States to acknowledge the critical role of multiple knowledges (encompassing local, tacit, experiential, community, and Indigenous knowledge) in achieving Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The international community must urgently recognize the significance of multiple and diverse knowledges for sustainable development, or the SDGs risk failure.

Preamble

Agenda 2030 and the SDGs serve as a universally-agreed road map to bridge economic and geopolitical divides, rebuild trust, and restore solidarity in the international community. According to the UN Secretary General, António Guterres, unless there is action now, the 2030 Agenda will become 'an epitaph for a world that could have been' (United Nations, 2023, p. 2). The upcoming [Summit of the Future: Multilateral Solutions for a Better Tomorrow](#), scheduled for 22-23 September 2024 in New York, will see the international community recommit to the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. The draft outcome document of the summit, [Pact for the Future](#), proposed by

the governments of Germany and Namibia (2024), seeks to accelerate existing commitments and respond to emerging challenges.

Our call

The *Pact of the Future* emphasizes action on social protection, decent jobs, education, gender inequality, and digital inclusion. However, addressing a fundamental flaw in the SDGs is crucial for the 2024 Summit's success. This flaw lies in the failure of world leaders and the SDGs to recognize the pivotal role of multiple and diverse knowledges and their management in sustainable development (Cummings et al, 2018).

Our understanding of multiple knowledges is pluralistic and inclusive, encompassing local, tacit, experiential, community, and Indigenous knowledge (Brown, 2007), in addition to the already recognised knowledge created through more formal scientific, academic, governmental and other establishment channels. These pluralistic and inclusive knowledges have been overlooked in the main SDG roadmap (UN, 2015) and again in the *Pact of the Future* draft outcome document. While not denying the role of science, technology, and innovation in achieving the SDGs, we argue that multiple knowledges in all their rich diversity are necessary to address the complex challenges facing the international community, such as climate change, food insecurity, and poverty. Multiple knowledges not only takes the knowledge of all stakeholders into account, it provides better knowledge for better decisions. This perspective has significant implications for the governance of international development and the food systems transformation agenda, recognizing that local communities and national governments should lead, particularly those in the global South who are bearing the brunt of the collective failure to invest in the SDGs (UN, 2023).

Without harnessing the transformational power of multiple knowledges, further efforts toward the ambitious 2030 Agenda will be largely unsuccessful. A simple step to embed and recognize the contributions of multiple knowledge in sustainable development is the formal adoption of the *Agenda Knowledge for Development* (Brandner & Cummings, 2017). Developed as a response to the neglect of multiple knowledges in the original SDG roadmap, this Agenda of 14 Knowledge Development Goals (KDGs) complements the SDGs and fosters the development of pluralistic, inclusive knowledge societies. We argue that the *Agenda Knowledge for Development*, launched at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 3 April 2017, should be adopted as a living document so that it also reflects changing understandings of knowledge related to decolonization, such as epistemic justice, anti-racism, Indigenous and local knowledge, diversity in knowledge management, new knowledge partnerships and new knowledge practices (Boyes et al., 2023). National,

international and sectoral knowledge agendas, partnerships and coalitions are already supporting these efforts.

We call on all actors to recognize that knowledge and knowledge management are of key importance to the achievement of the SDGs and Agenda 2030, and to adopt the knowledge-based goals of the Agenda Knowledge for Development.

Signed by members and associates of the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community, RealKM Cooperative Limited, and Knowledge for Development Partnership (K4DP), as listed at [Signatories to open letter to UN and world governments: Summit of the Future & Pact for the Future](#)

Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev)

The KM4Dev community of practice has 5000+ members working as practitioners, policy makers and researchers in knowledge and its management in international development. It has been in existence since the year 2000. It is run by a core group of 20 rotating members. www.km4dev.org

RealKM Cooperative Limited

RealKM Cooperative Limited promotes and supports evidence-based knowledge management by publishing articles sharing high-value research and case studies. It has more than 8,000 subscribers and followers, published over 2,000 articles, and received more than two million article views. www.realkm.com

Knowledge for Development Partnership (K4DP)

K4DP is an international non-government organization, based in Vienna, Austria. With partners from all over the world, K4DP aims to localize and implement the global *Agenda Knowledge for Development*. www.K4dp.org

Representatives of the above organisations can be contacted through their respective websites.

Specific comments on the Pact of the Future

Our specific comments on the [Pact of the Future](#) draft outcome document, submitted by the three organizations individually on 12 February 2024:

Comments on the **Chapeau** section (pages 1-4, Paragraphs 1-18)

The Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community, RealKM Cooperative Limited, and Knowledge for Development Partnership (K4DP) strongly welcome the references to knowledge in the second paragraph in the 'Pact of the Future' document. However, we are still seeing a fundamental flaw in the Pact, also evident in the SDGs, which is that world leaders and the Agenda 2030 fail to recognize the pivotal role of diverse, multiple knowledges and their management in sustainable development. These multiple knowledges are pluralistic, encompassing local, tacit, experiential, community, and Indigenous knowledge; they are the knowledge of local people and communities. While not denying that science, new technologies and innovation have an important role in achieving the SDGs, multiple knowledges are also necessary to address complex challenges, such as climate change, food insecurity, and poverty. Multiple knowledges not only take the knowledge of all stakeholders into account, they provide better knowledge for better decisions. This perspective has significant implications for the governance of international development, recognizing that local communities and national governments should lead, particularly those in developing countries who are bearing the brunt of climate change and extreme poverty.

Language proposals to specific paragraphs in bold

6. Today, we pledge a new beginning in international cooperation with a new approach. We will cooperate to manage risks and harness opportunities for the benefit of all, guided by the principles of trust, equity, solidarity, and universality. We will collectively strive for a world that is safer, more peaceful, more just, more equal, more inclusive, more sustainable, and more prosperous. **This includes new approaches to multiple knowledges and their management in sustainable development. Recognising the importance of local, tacit, experiential, community and Indigenous knowledges is fundamental to addressing complex challenges.**

9. Human rights can never be fully upheld unless they are also enjoyed by all women and girls, and conflicts will not be resolved, and sustainable development will not be attained, without the full, equal and meaningful participation of women at all levels. We reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and accelerating action to achieve gender equality, women's participation and the empowerment of women and girls in all domains and to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls. **We recognise that women's**

inputs and knowledge are key to sustainable development, and we commit to making women's voices heard and listening to what women have to say.

We propose a new Paragraph 9 (renumbering current Paragraphs 9 and 10):

9. Re-affirming the United Nations' commitment to Article 17 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we also recognise that access to knowledge and epistemic justice - whose knowledge is heard and how communities are listened to - are also key aspects of human rights and processes of self-determination.

12. Environmental crises pose the most pressing and serious threats to the sustainability of our planet and the well-being of its present and future inhabitants and have disproportionate effects on developing countries and we will redouble efforts to implement our commitments in United Nations intergovernmental agreements. **We recognise that local and Indigenous people, and their knowledges, have an important role in resolving these crises.**

14. We commit to strengthening digital cooperation and harnessing the potential of science, technology and innovation for the benefit of all humanity. We will accelerate the use of science and digital technologies to help us to realize the 2030 Agenda, including through the transfer of technology on mutually agreed terms to help close the digital and innovation divide. We resolve to implement our shared commitments for an open, free, secure, inclusive and human-centred digital future. We commit to ensuring that new technologies are shaped in ways that are human-centred, reflect universal human values and protect the planet, including through the Global Digital Compact annexed to this Pact. **While recognising the importance of science, technology and innovation, multiple knowledges of diverse stakeholders are equally necessary to address the complex challenges facing the international community.**

17. Through the steps set out in this Pact, we aim to realize the vision of a multilateral system that is more effective, more trusted, more inclusive, and better equipped for the challenges, opportunities and capacities of the present and the future. As such, we reaffirm the intergovernmental character of the United Nations, while also committing to ensuring that a diverse range of actors beyond States contribute to efforts to address global challenges. We commit to reforming of the intergovernmental organs of the United Nations, including the Security Council, so that they can deliver on their mandates in a changing world, and to strengthening the human rights pillar of the Organization. We agree to new ways to improve our response to global shocks and expanded ways of measuring human progress so that human and planetary well-being are not overlooked. We will pursue more equitable and effective global economic governance, including through reform of the international financial architecture.

Finally, we will foster the peaceful and sustainable uses of outer space for the benefit of all, increasing international cooperation in this rapidly changing domain. **Local communities and national governments should be in the lead, particularly in developing countries, many of whom are bearing the brunt of climate change and extreme poverty.**

Comments on **Chapter I: Sustainable Development and Financing for Development** (pages 4-7, paragraphs 19-45)

Although we recognise and applaud Agenda 2030 as the key global policy document, we have established with academic research and observation that it does not sufficiently cover knowledge, and that it provides economic and technical perspectives on knowledge, ignoring multiple knowledges. To address this shortcoming, K4DP and KM4Dev developed the *Agenda Knowledge for Development*, together with many other colleagues from the UN and other stakeholders. The 14 Knowledge Development Goals in this *Agenda Knowledge for Development* were specifically designed by our community of experts to identify the knowledges that are needed for Agenda 2030 but which were missing. This includes local and Indigenous knowledges but also the knowledge of development agencies and knowledge as cultural heritage and expression. This *Agenda Knowledge for Development* was launched at the Knowledge for Development Partnershi[p Conference at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on 3 April 2017. If the Pact can adopt this Agenda (see language proposal for Paragraph 26), it can go a long way to putting knowledge back into the SDGs.

Language proposals to specific paragraphs in bold

24. We reaffirm our commitment to leave no one behind in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda; to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights without discrimination; to achieve universal and quality education, and to take targeted and accelerated action to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and remove all legal, social and economic barriers to achieve gender equality. We reaffirm that achieving gender equality, empowering all women and girls, and the full realization of their human rights are essential to achieving sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth and sustainable development. **These human rights include access to knowledge and equal opportunities to participate in all societal knowledge processes. Knowledge of stakeholders should be recognised and their voices heard in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda.We acknowledge knowledge management as a key component of successful partnerships for the goals and the importance of strong local and global knowledge ecosystems.**

25. We welcome the call by the Secretary-General for a rescue plan for people and planet, centred around strengthening governance and institutions for sustainable

and inclusive transformation, prioritizing policies and investments that have multiplier effects across the Sustainable Development Goals and securing a surge in financing for the Sustainable Development Goals and an enabling global environment for developing countries to invest in a sustainable future for their people and the betterment of our common humanity. **This will include greater attention to the knowledge and insights of all stakeholders, providing better knowledge for better decisions. This perspective has implications for the governance of international development because local communities and national governments should be in the lead.**

We propose a new Paragraph 26 to follow Paragraph 25:

26. We will recognize multiple knowledges in sustainable development by formal adoption of the *Agenda Knowledge for Development*. Developed as a response to the neglect of multiple knowledges in the original SDG documents, this Agenda of 14 Knowledge Development Goals (KDGs) complements the SDGs and fosters the development of pluralistic, inclusive knowledge societies. Launched at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 3 April 2017, this Agenda will be adopted as a living document so that it also reflects changing understandings of knowledge related to decolonization, such as epistemic justice, anti-racism, Indigenous and local knowledge, diversity in knowledge management, new knowledge partnerships and practices.

30. We commit to achieving a world in which humanity lives in harmony with nature, to conserving and sustainably using our planet's marine and terrestrial resources, including through sustainable lifestyles, and sustainable consumption and production, to reversing the trends of environmental degradation, to promoting resilience, to reducing disaster risk, and to halting ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss. We will conserve and sustainably use oceans and seas, freshwater resources, as well as forests, mountains and drylands and protect biodiversity, ecosystems and wildlife. **This will recognise the local knowledges of communities and their important role in sustainable development.**

Comments on **Chapter II International Peace and Security** (pages 8-13, paragraphs 46-90)

We appreciate the references to the importance of developing a culture of peace, as well as to the importance of upholding cultural rights and heritage as part of obligations to protect human rights. The Pact would be strengthened by making clearer references to safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity, and protecting artists and cultural rights defenders from threats and attacks. Similarly, we underline the need to maintain focus on the protection of cultural heritage in the face of insecurity. We also consider that the emphasis on new technologies should be

amended to recognise that 'new' technologies are not always the best way of reaching all people and that the emphasis should be on inclusive technologies. We also argue that there should be reference to preventing genocide and epistemicide which we propose in the language section below.

Language proposals to specific paragraphs in bold

55. We agree to strengthen the protection of civilians, including in populated areas of conflict zones and enhance mechanisms to mitigate harm to civilians. We also commit to investigate alleged violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law and ensure accountability of perpetrators. **This will involve strengthening the protection of marginalized communities and all peoples from genocide and epistemicide, developing interventions which will intervene in the early stages of genocidal actions. This will represent a re-commitment to the Genocide Convention, the first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948.**

71. We acknowledge the important role of peace operations in advancing peacebuilding action and we reaffirm the centrality of partnership and engagement with regional and subregional organizations, and other partners, to comprehensively address peace and security challenges. **These peace operations will develop consultation bodies with local communities and other stakeholders to listen to their lessons and perspectives on peace operations.**

85. We acknowledge that the accelerating pace of technological change necessitates ongoing assessment and holistic understanding of new and emerging developments in science and technology impacting international peace and security, including through misuse by non-State actors, including for terrorism. **We also recognise that the emphasis should be on inclusive technologies to leave no-one behind.**

89. We commit to strengthening oversight mechanisms for the use of data-driven technology, including artificial intelligence, to support the maintenance of international peace and security. We also commit to developing norms, rules and principles on the design, development and use of military applications of artificial intelligence through a multilateral process, while also ensuring engagement with stakeholders from industry, academia, civil society and other sectors. **This will also involve consultation with local communities and local stakeholders.**

Comments on **Chapter III Science, Technology and innovation and Digital Cooperation** (pages 13-14, paragraphs 91-102)

This chapter places a considerable emphasis on economic-technical perspectives on knowledge and largely ignores pluralistic perspectives of knowledge which can support inclusive knowledge societies. There is also an assumption in Paragraph 91 that rapid technological change can lead to 'faster achievement of the 2030 Agenda' but what is the evidence for this statement? Without strong policy development which truly makes sure that no-one is left behind, new technologies are probably less able to help people suffering from extreme poverty and will only serve to make the rich even richer. The global community needs inclusive technologies, some of these may be new but others, like radio, for example, are not. Although we also applaud the greater emphasis on scientific evidence (Paragraph 92), it is well known that policy is determined by political pragmatism rather than the search for evidence as climate and COVID deniers have taught us. We do, however, welcome the emphasis on transdisciplinary research because of its approach to co-creation of diverse knowledges (Paragraph 92). This chapter also assumes that the gender digital divide is one of the most serious problems facing the global community while not demonstrating how it can address the serious, systemic inequalities affecting women and girls. [1166 characters].

Language proposals to specific paragraphs in bold

92. We undertake to increase the use of science and scientific evidence in policymaking. We recognize that solutions to complex global challenges call for cross- and trans-disciplinary collaboration and a strong science-policy-society interface in order to build trust in science. We encourage the United Nations system to take an active role in forging closer links with national and multilateral science advisory bodies to optimally leverage science, technology and innovation for the Sustainable Development Goals. We welcome the establishment of the Secretary-General's Scientific Advisory Board. **However, we need to ensure that the emphasis is on inclusive technologies which leave no-one behind, not only new technologies, and that many of these technologies may be older ones, such as radio. We also need policies that ensure that these technologies are tailored to alleviate extreme poverty and not make the rich even richer. Given that trickle down economics has been discredited, new policy interventions are needed.**

93. We note with deep concern the existing disparities between developed and developing countries in terms of conditions, possibilities and capacities to produce new scientific and technological knowledge and to generate innovation. **This disparity requires urgent international attention from UNESCO and other UN agencies.**

96. We recognize the need to mobilize and scale up the means of implementation, including financing, for science, technology and innovation, especially in developing countries, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. **This also requires a re-**

evaluation and integration of multiple knowledges, including local and Indigenous knowledges.

101. We call upon the United Nations system to support the efforts of developing countries to develop and strengthen their national science, technology and innovation ecosystems. To facilitate these efforts, we welcome the Secretary-General's vision to work towards a UN 2.0 to increase the effectiveness of the Organization through enhancing capabilities in data analytics, digital transformation, strategic foresight, and results orientation. **We welcome the Secretary-General's vision to work towards a UN 2.0 to increase the effectiveness of the Organization through enhancing capabilities in data analytics, digital transformation, strategic foresight, knowledge management, library services, and results orientation. This also urgently calls for the re-centring of multiple knowledges in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Comments on **Chapter IV: Youth and Future Generations** (pages 14-15, paragraphs 103-115)

We recognise that content around future generations in general will come in the context of the Declaration on Future Generations, but underline our belief that any effort to imagine an inclusive, sustainable, desirable future depends on the participation of young people. Although we generally welcome this chapter, we feel that it does not recognize the importance young people could have in the transformation of our societies or their perspectives on the global challenges that the world is facing, such as climate change, where they are often showing leadership. We would like to see greater emphasis on the transformative role of young people, and supporting them in this dynamism with greater changes proposed to the governance systems from which they are currently excluded. We would also like to see recognition of the role of networks for young people. There is also a failure to recognise the knowledge of young people and the potential of professional networks, like KM4Dev, which support capacity building of young people across the globe.

Language proposals to specific paragraphs in bold

We propose a new Paragraph 104 to be placed between current paragraphs 104-105:

104. Young people have considerable knowledge and capacities, and can make an enormous contribution to the international community. We need to introduce governance systems which recognise their role and their leadership, as they are the ones who will determine the future, and support governance structures which give them more power to bring about change. Networks and communities of practice can support young people's own efforts at building their capacities.

Comments on **Chapter V: Transforming Global Governance** (pages 16-20, paragraphs 116-148)

We welcome the emphasis on building stronger and more effective structures at the international level to deliver on the commitments set out above, and in particular the reference to strengthening the UN human rights system to ensure enjoyment of cultural rights. We do believe that reference to effective knowledge management systems, in the context of UN 2.0 and beyond, would also be powerful here. We would also like to see more reference to the role of young people and local communities.

Language proposals to specific paragraphs in bold

119. We will continue our efforts to enhance ways in which the General Assembly can further contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security and enhance its coordination with the Security Council, with full respect to existing mandates. **We would particularly want to see governance structures which include young people and marginalized groups**

130. We also resolve to further strengthen the United Nations human rights system with the aim of ensuring effective enjoyment by all of all human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, as well as the right to development. We reaffirm that the international community must treat all human rights in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis. **Access to knowledge and epistemic justice should be further integrated into the framework of human rights.**

134. We welcome the development of measures of progress on sustainable development that complement and thus go beyond gross domestic product. These measures should recognize what matters to people, the planet and the future**, and these measures need to be developing in a participatory and inclusive manner.** We recognize this as a critical step in deepening and making effective our commitment to sustainability in all its dimensions, fighting inequality and promoting resilience in an era defined by more frequent and intense shocks.

139. We reiterate the need to broaden and strengthen the voice and participation of developing countries in international economic decision-making, norm-setting and global economic governance. **This is of utmost importance as these countries are bearing the brunt of climate change and extreme poverty. We also recommit to open and transparent, gender-balanced and merit-based leadership selection in international institutions which should also address inequality in access to such positions with policies of diversity, equity and inclusion.**

Sources

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