

How to Achieve the SDGs: The SDSN Framework

A Statement from SDSN's Leadership Council



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By Members of the SDSN Leadership Council

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Overview

This statement, issued by Members of the Leadership Council of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), builds on the work of the SDSN's Secretariat and its global programs, as well as the work of its 1,900 member institutions, spanning all world regions.

The grim reality is that at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs are far off track. At the global level, averaging across countries, not a single SDG is currently projected to be met by 2030, with the poorest countries struggling the most. And global cooperation has ebbed as geopolitical tensions have risen. In response to this situation, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has urged world leaders to come together at the 2023 SDG Summit in September to deliver a "Rescue Plan for People and Planet."¹ SDSN offers the following recommendations to accelerate progress over the remaining seven years to 2030, and to set even more ambitious targets to be achieved by 2050 under the SDG framework.

As the world's nations prepare to meet in September to review the progress the world has made so far towards achieving the SDGs, at the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, SDSN emphasizes six areas for immediate action.

I. Most urgently, UN Member States should adopt an **SDG Stimulus**, to close the massive financing gap faced by many developing economies. As called for by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres,² the SDG Stimulus plan has five main components:

1. Increased funding from the multilateral development banks (MDBs) and public development banks (PDBs) to low- and middle-income countries, linked to investments in the SDGs;

2. Enhancement of relief for countries facing debt distress;
3. Expansion of liquidity by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and major central banks;
4. Empowerment and expansion of the specialized global funds; and
5. Expansion of private philanthropy with a focus on ultra-high-net-worth individuals.

II. UN Member States must endorse a deep and overdue reform of the **global financial architecture**. SDSN identifies six priorities for this reform:

1. Greatly increased funding for national and subnational governments and private businesses in the emerging economies, especially the low-income countries (LICs) and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs), to carry out needed SDG actions;
2. Revision of the credit-rating system and debt-sustainability metrics to facilitate long-term sustainable development;
3. Revision of the liquidity structures for LICs and LMICs, especially regarding sovereign debt, to forestall self-fulfilling banking and balance-of-payments crises;
4. Creation of ambitious, internationally-agreed criteria for sustainable finance that are mandatory for all public financial institutions in high-income countries (HICs), middle-income countries (MICs), and LICs alike.
5. Alignment of private business investment flows in all countries with the SDGs, through improved national planning, regulation, reporting, and oversight.
6. A reform of current institutional frameworks and development of new and innovative mechanisms to improve the quality and speed of deployment of international cooperation, and the monitoring of progress in an open and timely manner.

1. General Assembly Economic and Social Council, *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet*, Report of the Secretary-General, Special Edition, May 2023. <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/SDG%20Progress%20Report%20Special%20Edition.pdf>

2. *United Nations Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus to Deliver Agenda 2030*, Feb 2023. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/SDG-Stimulus-to-Deliver-Agenda-2030.pdf>

- III. All UN Member States should adopt long-term **sustainable development pathways** that provide a stepwise and medium- to long-term approach to guide their sustainable development policies, not only to 2030 but to 2050, with particular focus on gender equality, social inclusion, and the principal of 'leave no one behind'. We are facing a long-term set of challenges: resolving them must be the global priority for a generation to come. SDSN recommends that national pathways should include six key transformations:³
1. Universal quality education and innovation-based economy: a massive increase in investments in quality education and in science and technology innovation systems;
 2. Universal health access and coverage: an expansion of health coverage to ensure universal access to both preventative and curative services;
 3. Zero-carbon energy systems: the transition by 2050 of energy systems to net-zero emissions;
 4. Sustainable ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilience: the transition to sustainable land use, healthy diets, and resilience to ongoing climate change;
 5. Sustainable cities: urban infrastructure and services to ensure productive, safe, inclusive, and healthful cities for a world that will be around 70 percent urbanized in 2050;
 6. Transformation to universal digital access and services: actions by governments at all levels to ensure universal access to digital services including online payments, finance, telemedicine, online education, and others, while ensuring privacy and online safety.
- IV. All UN Member States should present, at regular intervals, their national SDG frameworks in the form of **Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**. To date, 188 of the 193 UN Member States have already presented VNRs. Five countries (Haiti, Myanmar, South Sudan, the United States, and Yemen) have yet to do so, and should prepare to do so with urgency.
- V. All UN Member States should recommit to **peaceful cooperation**, in the service of the SDGs and all other multilateral agreements. Current geopolitical tensions are hindering SDG achievement and diverting financial and human resources away from sustainable development. Global spending on armaments, estimated at US\$2.2 trillion in 2022, dwarfs financing for the SDGs and climate change. SDSN calls on all nations to renounce violence, live within the United Nations Charter, and settle conflicts through diplomacy, especially through the UN Security Council.
- VI. UN Member States should commit to accelerating SDG progress to 2030, and to setting even more ambitious **SDG targets to 2050**, incorporating the recent Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework and the High Seas Treaty.
- The report that follows offers SDSN's update on the state of the SDGs at their mid-point, highlighting the growing dangers of adverse environmental, social, and economic "tipping points" and identifying key ways that the global community can and should accelerate SDG progress.

3. Sachs, J.D., Schmidt-Traub, G., Mazzucato, M. et al. Six Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. *Nat Sustain* 2, 805–814 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0352-9>

Introduction

The SDGs are facing strong headwinds. Despite significant efforts in some places, national governments on all continents have fallen short in integrating the SDGs into national policies and public investments. Moreover, societal polarization, populism, and growing geopolitical conflict are hindering the global cooperation needed to achieve the SDGs. Civil society, including academic institutions, is becoming more constrained in the midst of intensifying political tensions. The international financial architecture is failing to channel global savings to SDG investments at the needed pace and scale.

We emphasize that achieving the SDGs rests on five pillars of good governance:

1. Preparing long-term SDG pathways to guide public policy;
2. Ensuring SDG financing at the necessary scale and timing;
3. Promoting global cooperation and reducing geopolitical conflict and tension;
4. Supporting innovation to broaden social inclusion and environmental sustainability;
5. Regular reporting on SDG progress and performance.

The SDGs are not only a public policy framework; they are an ethical imperative. They are grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which celebrates its 75th anniversary this year. The SDGs are based on its core premises; that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights . . . and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood,” and that “it is essential to promote the development of friendly relations between nations.”

As the Universal Declaration makes clear, and the SDGs make explicit, social justice and sustainable development require the full realization of the rights of all people. This includes equality of opportunities for girls and women (SDG 5), respect for the rights and voice of Indigenous peoples around the world, and a much larger role for young people, who will face the consequences of our (in) actions throughout the 21st century.

The UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is dedicated to finding and amplifying practical solutions to achieve the SDGs and closely-related global goals (such as the Paris climate agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework). We emphasize that all these global goals are interrelated and must be achieved together. Members of the SDSN Leadership Council offer the following assessments and recommendations to the UN Member States, the United Nations Agencies, international finance institutions, business, and civil society, based on more than a decade of research, measurement, advising, and partnerships across the world.

Dire shortfalls in meeting the SDGs

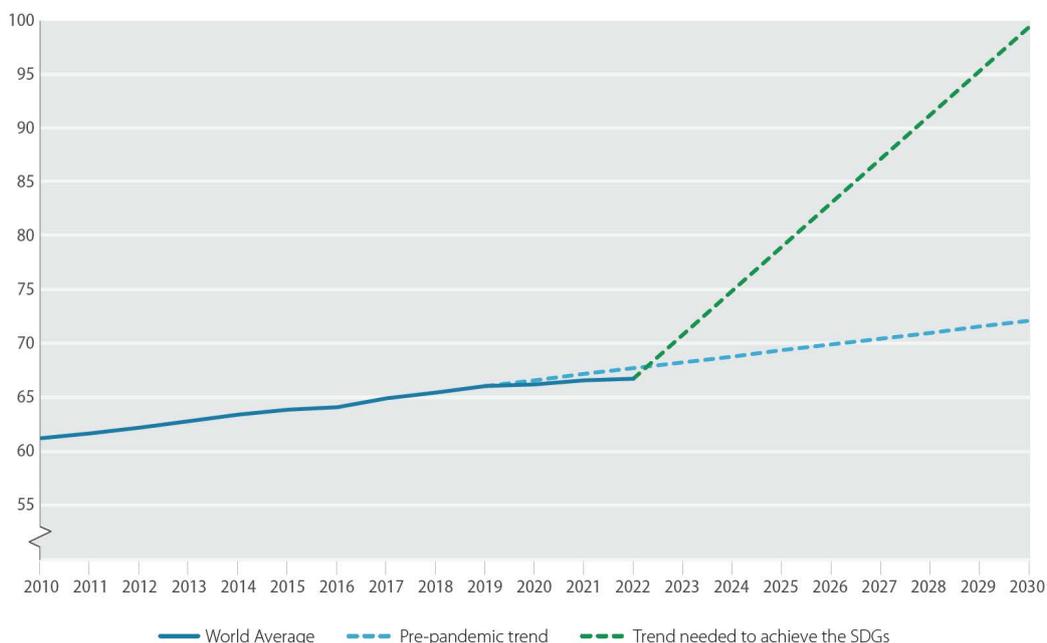
The SDGs are seriously off track (Figure 1.1). SDG progress was already very slow in the five years to 2020. According to the annual SDG Index, global achievement of the SDGs rose only slightly, from 64 percent in 2015 to 66 percent in 2019 – far too slowly to meet the goals by 2030, and with highly uneven progress within and between countries. Then with the onset of the pandemic, progress stopped. As of 2022, the global SDG Index is below 67%. At current trends, based on simple projections, there is a risk that the gap in SDG outcomes between HICs and LICs will be wider in 2030 (29 points) than it was in 2015 (28 points). This means that we are at risk of losing a decade of progress towards convergence globally (Figure 1.2). The multiple geopolitical crises in the world today will no doubt place further obstacles on the path to 2030. If we look at each of the 17 individual SDGs, not a single SDG is projected to be met at the global level.

The world is also seriously off track to meet the Paris agreement climate targets and SDG 13 (Figure 1.3). Global warming as of 2022 stood at 1.2°C, with warming continuing at more than 0.3°C per decade.⁴ At this rate, the likelihood of overshooting 1.5°C, even within a decade, is very strong. According to the UNEP *Emissions Gap Report 2022*, current policies put the world on track

4. Hansen, James et al. 2002. *Earth's Energy Imbalance and Climate Response Time*. <http://www.columbia.edu/~jeh1/mailings/2022/EarthEnergyImbalance.22December2022.pdf>

Figure 1.1

SDG Index world average: pre-pandemic trend and trend needed to achieve the SDGs by 2030



Note: Pre-pandemic trend corresponds to the extrapolated annual growth rate over the period 2015–2019. See Part 2 for further details.

Source: Authors analysis

to reaching a disastrous 2.8°C warming by 2100.⁵ Current Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) targets, if implemented, would still lead to around 2.4°C warming by 2100. Even taking the net-zero pledges of many countries into account, best-case scenarios given current pledges would lead to around 1.8°C warming by 2100.

Biodiversity targets (SDG 15 and targets agreed under the CBD) are also at grave risk. All dimensions of biodiversity, including species abundance, species diversity, and the functioning of ecosystems, are under threat. It has been announced that the current loss of species rate is 1,000–10,000 times more than the natural extinction rate. A combination of land-use change (e.g., dramatic increases of tropical deforestation), global warming, and pollution are driving more and more species, including entire families and orders of species, towards mass extinction. At the same time, Indigenous peoples who

have been safeguarding and stewarding these resources for millennia are facing greater threats than ever.

Water scarcity affects more than 40% of the world’s population. An estimated 1.8 billion people depend on drinking water contaminated by human waste. Unsustainable water management practices, including chemical discharges into water supply systems for irrigation, affect the functioning of ecosystems services.

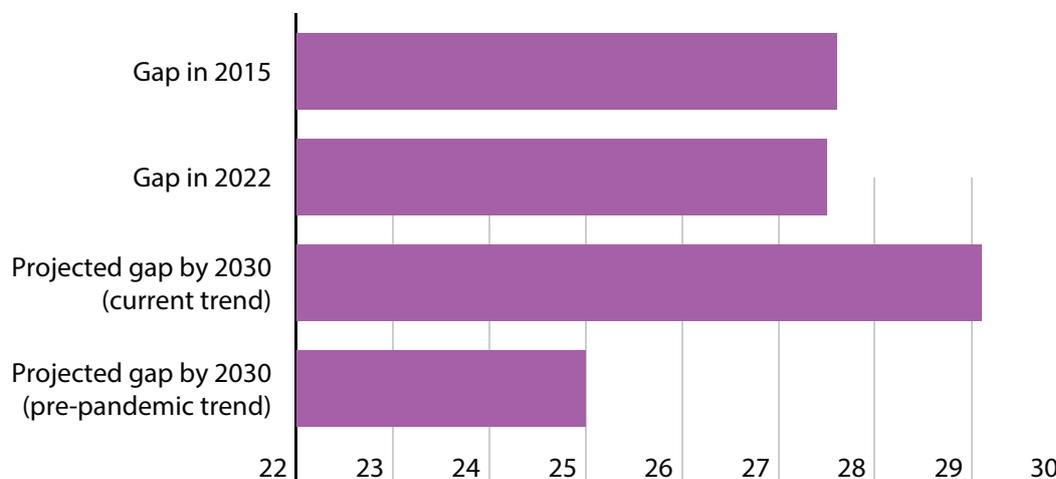
Global resource consumption assessments for rare earth elements are critical. Although reserves of these elements do not exist in concentrated clusters – which make them inefficient for mining – certain countries are quite dominant in this field, producing 98% of the world’s supply. As demand for rare earth elements is increasing tremendously, their scarcity is becoming more evident.

Ocean goods and services (SDG 14 and the High Seas Treaty) are at severe risk due to full- to over-exploitation

5. UNEP. 2022. *Emissions Gap Report*. Available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022>.

Figure 1.2

Observed and projected gaps in SDG Index score between HICs and LICs (in perc



Note: Projected gap by 2030 is based on extrapolation of annual growth rate on the SDG Index over the period 2019-2021.

Pre-pandemic projected gap is based on an extrapolation of SDG Index annual growth rates over the period 2015-2019.

Source: Authors analysis

of nearly 90% of global fish stocks.⁶ The crises facing our oceans are unabated, multidimensional, and complex. These crises include the destruction of fisheries through over-fishing and the deployment of destructive technologies (such as ocean trawling); the destruction of coastal wetland ecosystems; the mass pollution of estuaries through fluxes of nitrogen and phosphorus (causing eutrophication) and other chemical pollutants; acidification of the oceans (with an increase of 30% over the last 50 years due to rising atmospheric concentrations of CO₂⁷); pollution of the high seas (including plastic waste and microplastics in marine food chains); the slowdown of ocean circulation due to climate change; explosions of invasive marine species due to increased shipping facilities; and rising sea levels (including the growing possibility of a rapid, multi-metre sea-level rise caused by the disintegration of parts of the Antarctic and Greenland ice sheets). Inland fisheries are also experiencing similar challenges.

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit raised many urgent concerns around improving the sustainability, affordability, and quality of food across the world (SDG 2). Overall, the Food Systems Summit highlighted the need for an integrated and global approach to addressing food systems challenges, including food security, rural development, the reduction of food waste, transparency along the value chain, sustainable diets, and the fight against climate change.

Providing quality education (SDG 4) for all children is perhaps the single most important key to achieving sustainable development in the long term. The UN General Assembly's Transforming Education Summit held in September 2022 was a critical meeting to spur national and global efforts to transform education to give all people the skills and knowledge to end poverty, protect the environment, and build peaceful and inclusive societies.⁸ And yet, the truth remains that hundreds of millions of children are either out of school entirely or receiving such an under-funded and under-resourced education that they are failing to achieve basic literacy and numeracy even after several years of education.

6. The World Bank. 2017. *Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals*. <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgateatlas/archive/2017/SDG-14-life-below-water.html>

7. Smithsonian Institution. 2018. *Ocean Acidification*. <https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/invertebrates/ocean-acidification>

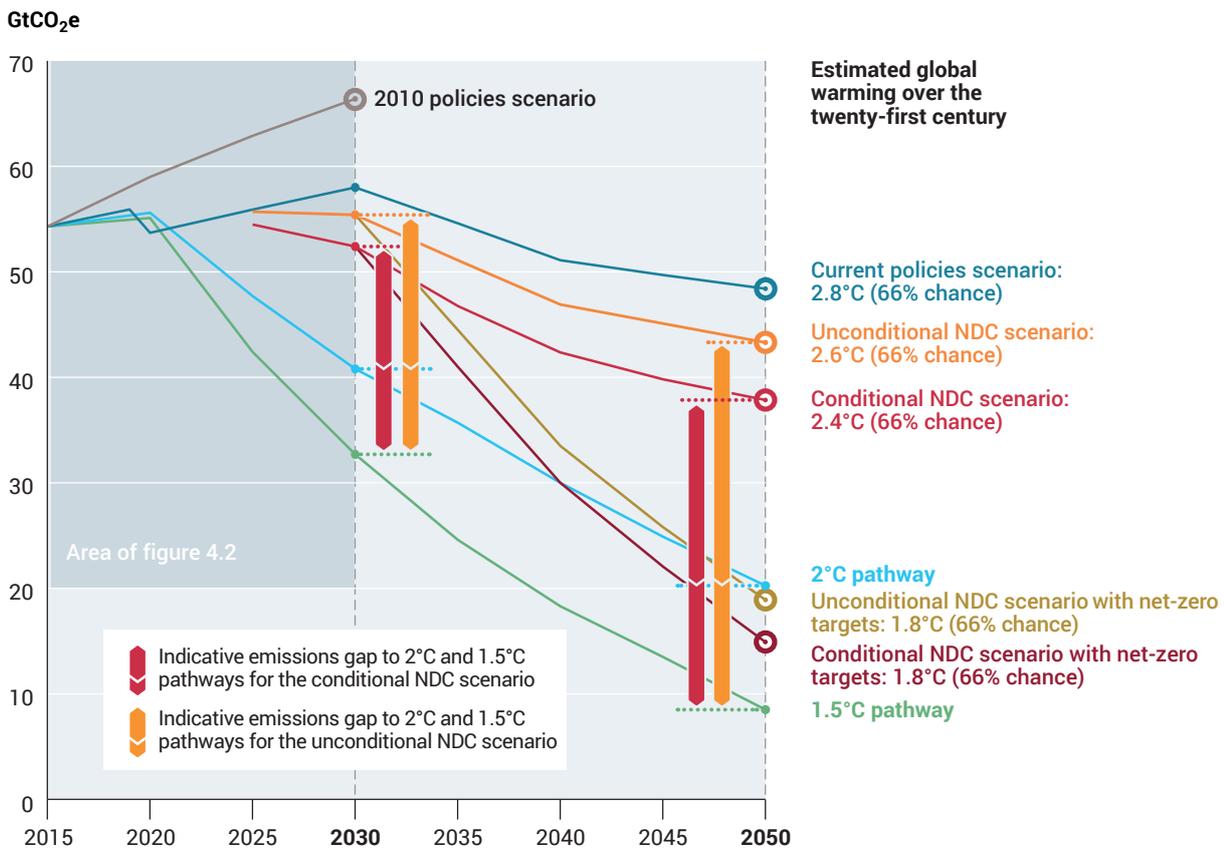
8. UN Transforming Education Summit, 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit>

Planetary boundaries and geophysical tipping points

Humanity is eroding the biological and physical resilience of Earth's physical systems by transgressing environmental limits that endanger their functioning: the "planetary boundaries" that regulate the Earth system. The latest scientific assessments indicate that six of the nine planetary boundaries have been breached. **The scientific evidence points to global risks well beyond climate change, including the loss of biodiversity and ecological functions, changes in natural land use configuration, overuse of both green and blue water, overloading of nitrogen and phosphorus, and widespread chemical pollution.**

One of the most ominous aspects of this rampant, and still uncontrolled, heedlessness is the likelihood of reaching multiple dire tipping points in the Earth's physical systems. Scientists have identified a large number of extremely dangerous potential tipping points, with linkages and dependencies across the different planetary boundaries. Tipping points are characterized by a non-linear response to gradual human forcings. Human-induced global warming could hit several tipping points that may in turn lead to further feedbacks (amplifications) of the warming. For example, as the Earth warms, sea ice melts, reducing the reflectance of solar radiation back into space and accelerating the warming. Similarly, melting permafrost in the Tundra could release massive stores of CO₂ and methane, leading to rapid further warming. Another

Figure 1.3
Projected global warming under alternative policy scenarios⁹



Source: UNEP, Emissions Gap Report 2022

tipping point would be the collapse of the world's rainforests due to warming (and associated drying) in the Amazon, Congo, and other tropical regions, which would release a massive new load of CO₂ into the atmosphere. Others include slowing or stopping the global ocean (thermohaline) circulation, and significant loss of coral reefs.¹⁰ Each of these potential tipping points would lead to global disaster on an unprecedented scale.

The interconnected environmental, social, and health challenges can be characterized as a planetary health crisis, caused by human activities such as industrialization, urbanization, deforestation, and the burning of fossil fuels. The consequences of inaction in the face of this crisis are significant and far-reaching, affecting both the natural systems that sustain life on Earth and the well-being of human societies.

Grave dangers of social tipping points

Unless the SDGs are actively pursued, geophysical tipping points combined with technological disruptions could ignite disastrous social conflicts within and between nations. We must therefore acknowledge the real risk of negative "social tipping points" beyond which peaceful governance and co-existence breaks down, as it did in World War I and World War II.

We firmly believe that international cooperation together with the achievement of the SDGs is the best preventative to this dire and growing risk, and represent an opportunity to create positive social tipping points: for example, through equal access to high-quality education (SDG 4), and by fighting all forms of inequalities, including income and wealth inequalities (SDG 10).

9. UNEP. 2022. *Emissions Gap Report*. Available at <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022>.

10. David I. Armstrong McKay, et al., Exceeding 1.5°C global warming could trigger multiple climate tipping points. *Science* 377, eabn7950 (2022). DOI:10.1126/science.abn7950

We see across societies that inequalities are rising. Environmental crises weigh most heavily on the poorest and most marginalized individuals. At the same time, technological advances such as artificial intelligence and robotics have the potential to eliminate many working-class and professional jobs. The COVID-19 pandemic also severely depleted trust in governments. Many societies, and not only the poorest ones, are facing increased crises of governance, marked by political and social instability, general strikes, and a further loss of public confidence in government. Although all governments are in principle committed to economic justice as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to the SDG tenets of 'leave no one behind' and 'reach the furthest behind first', too few are living up to these commitments, especially as powerful groups block adequate public support for weaker groups.

In her 2022 report on the SDGs, E. Tendayi Achiume – UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance – noted that racism and racial discrimination are key barriers to sustainable development, and called attention to the failure of some States to collect disaggregated data on race, ethnicity, indigeneity, and migration status in the context of the 2030 Agenda. She noted however that, while disrupting the dynamic of racially discriminatory underdevelopment may require a greater transformation than is possible at this moment, the SDGs held untapped potential to advance both development and non-discrimination. The report's recommendations include calling for more racially-disaggregated SDG indicators and for dialogue with stakeholders on how to use these indicators to better allocate resources and prioritize the inclusion of marginalized peoples.¹¹

The geopolitical situation today is certainly the most conflictual in decades, perhaps since World War II. The rise of China has led to great tension between it and the

11. Achiume, T. E. (2022). *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals and the fight against racial discrimination*. Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. A/HRC/50/60 (13 June–8 July 2022), available from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/ahrc5060-2030-agenda-sustainable-development-sustainable-development>.

United States, and much of the world is trying to adjust to the strains between these two major economies. The disastrous war in Ukraine has further destabilized and divided the world's nations. There are calls in many countries to increase military budgets, even as the SDGs are woefully underfunded at home and internationally. New records on global military spending were reached in 2022, totaling US\$2.2 trillion, even as the most basic social services were under grave stress in many countries.

Economic tipping points could accompany or be triggered by environmental, social, governance, and geopolitical tipping points. Banking failures are a prime example of an economic tipping point: the national economy deteriorates to the point where a financial crisis is triggered, in turn pushing the economy into a massive downturn. This was seen in the Great Depression of the 1930s and the Great Recession of 2008. Similarly, extreme poverty can lead to a collapse of tax revenues, followed by government bankruptcy and further economic collapse, a syndrome that now threatens dozens of poor countries.

Investing in the SDGs

Despite this ominous news, the SDGs are still achievable. None of their objectives are beyond our reach.¹² Yes, the world is off-track, but that is all the more reason to double-down on the goals, rather than surrendering to human-made shortfalls in achieving them. Our future remains in our hands.

At their core, the SDGs are an investment agenda. In the most basic terms, the world must devote an increased portion of current output to building up sustainable capital assets for the future, and must deploy such assets effectively. Sustainable capital assets are long-lasting capital resources that can enable the world to meet the agreed goals of economic well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability. The world must both shift its current investment patterns and increase the overall investment flow in order to build the future we want.

12. Sachs JD, Schmidt-Traub G, Lafortune G., 2020. Speaking truth to power about the SDGs, *Nature*. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02373-7>

Development practitioners have identified eight major kinds of capital assets:

- 1. Human capital:** The skills and health of a productive citizenry, supported by universal health access and coverage, quality education, shared data and knowledge, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and the appreciation of cultural diversity.
- 2. Infrastructure:** Energy production and distribution, land and sea transport, telecommunications, digital information services, public buildings (e.g., schools and hospitals), and safe water and sanitation.
- 3. Natural capital:** The capacity and healthy functioning of ecosystems, to be protected by ending human-induced climate change, protecting biodiversity, sustainably managing freshwater resources, and eliminating toxic pollutants.
- 4. Innovation capital:** The stock of intellectual property and data resulting from public and private research and development, creative cultural works, and responsibly governed and managed emerging technologies.
- 5. Business capital:** Goods and services of true social value derived from utilizing the machinery, buildings, information resources, and other capital assets that underpin business productivity.
- 6. Social capital:** Social trust and pro-social values, good governance and justice, freedom of speech and the press, trusted scientific capabilities, and international cooperation.
- 7. Urban capital:** Spatial human settlements, notably in urban areas, that drive and support productive and creative interactions across the other seven capital assets.
- 8. Cultural capital:** Appreciation of the diversity of cultures, value systems, languages, the traditional knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples, and artistic expressions.

These capital assets are complementary; that is, they work together in a mutually-supportive manner. A business cannot be productive if its workers lack skills and health, or if there is no electricity, piped water,

transport, or digital access. A society cannot function peacefully if there is a breakdown of social capital. A city cannot function without water. Challenges such as decarbonization cannot be met with existing technologies alone, and so depend on continued innovation and scientific research, especially in countries where investment is low. There is no hope of achieving global food security for more than eight billion people unless Earth's natural capital is protected. And there is no hope for global peace unless there is respect for, and investment in, cultural capital and cultural diversity.

To achieve the SDGs, the world must invest boldly, amply, and consistently in all eight kinds of capital. These investments must involve both governments and corporations. For example, while business capital is mainly the purview of the private sector, human capital is mainly the purview of the public sector. Governments too must take the lead in protecting natural capital, while civil society especially must promote social and cultural capital, including mutual understanding across cultures and nations. Infrastructure capital and innovation capital tend to be financed roughly equally by the public and private sectors. For example, governments tend to finance power transmission grids, while the private sector tends to finance power generation. Governments generally finance basic scientific research, while businesses focus on applied R&D.

Parallel to investing in the SDGs, the world needs to stop investing in activities that threaten planetary boundaries, destroy human and natural capital, and harm social cohesion. Curtailing the extraction and use of fossil fuels is of paramount importance. To curb harmful investments, regulatory measures, including fair and sustainable taxation and the dismantling of unsustainable subsidies, need to be an integral element of the SDG investment agenda.

In 2022, the United Nations Secretary-General appointed a High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism, with a mandate to develop a list of concrete, actionable recommendations to improve international cooperation and advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Board's 2023 report lists six areas for action that are directly aligned with the SDGs and SDSN's

recommendations: rebuilding trust in multilateralism, safeguarding our planet and its people, scaling up and improving the efficacy of global finance, improving data systems and their governance, and promoting peace.¹³

Failures (and some successes) of national SDG governance

The most important level of decision-making remains the nation-state. Nation-states hold the primary responsibility for achieving the SDGs. They are members of the United Nations and the signatories of United Nations treaties. They hold juridical responsibility for implementing treaty agreements and the rest of the United Nations architecture, including the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the SDGs. National governments must ensure both the domestic implementation of the SDGs, including the reduction of negative spillovers, and international implementation by building a global governance and financial architecture that delivers the SDGs. Crucially, national government must also work with subnational governments to implement the SDG agenda at the local level, including sustainable urban infrastructure, delivery of social services, and ensuring safe communities.

Virtually all governments of the world have embraced the SDGs in principle. 188 of 193 UN Member States have submitted VNRs for comment by the other nations. Only five countries, notably the United States, Haiti, Myanmar, South Sudan, and Yemen, have never presented VNRs. Four of these countries are wracked by violence and poverty. The case of the United States stands as a glaring exception.

The Nordic countries and European Union have shown considerable support for the SDGs. So too have many developing countries in the G20. However, many governments of developing countries have made

13. High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB), 2022. A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future, <https://www.highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough>

Failures (and some successes) of national SDG governance

only low to moderate SDG commitments, although of course these countries have also not received the financing needed to support the Goals.¹⁴ In many cases, national SDG strategies remain disconnected from core government policies and priorities. These are some of the findings of SDSN's annual (2023) survey on government efforts and commitments for the SDGs, which is conducted in close cooperation with our global network of experts and practitioners. Of 74 governments analyzed, we see large differences in terms of government efforts and commitments (see Part 3).

The greatest responsibility for achieving the SDGs and safeguarding the planetary boundaries lies with the G20 members. These countries represent more than 80% of global GDP, around 70% of the world's forests, more than 60% of the earth's population, and more than 50% of its landmass. The G20 countries account for 90% of global lignite and coal extraction and more than 60% of global oil and gas production.

The United States, as the world's biggest economy in terms of GDP at market prices and its biggest oil and gas producer, has a responsibility both to itself and to the rest of the world to immediately embark on an ambitious transformation towards the SDGs, as well as towards other global climate and biodiversity goals. With the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, the Biden government announced its intention to reduce carbon emissions by roughly 40 percent from 2005 levels by 2030, although there are growing concerns that outcomes will lag behind these goals, due in part to the legislation's lack of an agreed national financing strategy other than tax credits. This and other policy measures fall short, however, of the scope and ambition of the SDGs. Overall, the United States has so far shown very little commitment to the SDGs. We call on the United States to formulate an SDG action plan and to present a VNR to the High-Level Political Forum.

The European Union – the world's second-largest economy and its major lignite producer – has produced

the European Green Deal (EGD), which is exemplary in many regards. Many EU member states demonstrate a high or moderate SDG commitment. The EGD embraces an EU-wide set of goals, timelines to 2050, and financing strategies across major dimensions of the SDGs: energy decarbonization, climate resilience, circular economy (to cut pollution), sustainable agriculture (the "farm-to-fork" strategy), digital access, and innovation. EU-wide financial resources, notably the EU Recovery and Resilience Facility, were mobilized to support the EGD. The European Regional Development Fund, which provides the EU cohesion funds, is also directed towards the EGD. The Horizon Europe program and EU Missions in Horizon Europe catalyze the EU's efforts to stimulate innovation and identify concrete solutions for the EGD. However, the EGD and EU policies at large lack a comprehensive alignment to the SDGs, politically agreed targets for many SDG indicators, and clarity on how to achieve the SDGs.

The EU has also highlighted the strategic role of the private sector in achieving the SDGs, by implementing a new directive asking companies to publish sustainability reports and, in particular in the food sector, by promoting the "Code of Conduct on Responsible Food Business and Marketing Practices", a tool for setting out the actions that agri-food companies can voluntarily commit to in order to tangibly improve and communicate their sustainability performance. SDSN's Europe SDR emphasizes the importance of living up to the ambitions of the EGD and the SDGs, both inside the EU as well as in the EU's foreign actions, despite the multiple crises faced.¹⁵ In July 2023, the EU is set to present its first Union-wide voluntary review at the United Nations. This presents a good opportunity for the EU to send a strong message to the international community, and to demonstrate its commitment to and leadership on the SDGs.

China, as the world's largest economy in purchasing-power-adjusted terms and its biggest coal producer, intends to implement the SDGs by integrating them into its medium and long-term national development strategies, such as its five-year plans. China has already presented two VNRs to the HLPF (2016 and 2021). The

14. Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Bermont Diaz, L., Kloke-Lesch, A., Koundouri, P., Riccaboni, A. (2022). *Achieving the SDGs: Europe's Compass in a Multipolar World. Europe Sustainable Development Report 2022*. SDSN and SDSN Europe. France: Paris. <https://eu-dashboards.sdgindex.org>

15. *ibid.*

14th five-year plan referred to the 2030 Agenda mainly in the context of international cooperation. Recently, China has reiterated its support for the SDGs, such as in greening its Belt and Road Initiative and launching the Global Development Initiative as a worldwide effort. A key measure for China will be the explicit integration of the SDGs' domestic and international implementation into the 15th five-year plan (2026–2030).

Some other G20 countries have shown weak commitments to the SDGs in recent years. Many of the poor performers, such as Brazil, recently elected new governments that have staked out a far more ambitious position vis-à-vis the SDGs. We urge all G20 governments to show the leadership required of them.

Most of the low-income and lower-middle income countries, home to more than the half of humanity, face major challenges in achieving most of the SDGs by 2030. Many of them lack an adequately high SDG commitment, and almost all lack access to the necessary financial means to implement the SDGs.

At the midpoint of the 2030 Agenda, all countries, poorer and richer alike, should use the half-way momentum to self-critically review and revise their national strategies, using the principles of the 2030 Agenda (transformative, integrated, inclusive, leaving no one behind) as a yardstick. Across the globe, we need to leave the comfort zones of political leaders and question the obstacles of outmoded ideologies, habits, and weak governance. We also need responsible business leadership leaving their comfort zone to establish SDG-compatible business models and appropriate business governance.¹⁶

16. Leisinger, Klaus M. *Integrity in Business and Society*, CRT publications, Minneapolis, United States, December 2021.

Failures of global governance

Achieving the SDGs will require a transformative global approach. Yet current methods and mechanisms for implementing the Agenda largely reflect pre-2015 world realities and are far from meeting the universality and transformative ambition of the SDGs. Four basic failures stand out: First, implementation is largely left to the national level and on a voluntary basis, without effective multilateral enforcement mechanisms in place. Second, developed countries are not being held to account, neither for their adverse spillovers, nor for ensuring adequate flows of financing for sustainable development. Third, the rules governing trade and international finance are not geared towards the SDGs. For example, globalized trade rules for 'cleantech' could accelerate the energy transition and offer protections to workers, however such rules have not been negotiated or agreed upon. Unifying international business ecosystems could similarly improve industrial supply chains, particularly by leveraging artificial intelligence. And fourth, national governments typically lack 'vertical' coordination with subnational governments for SDG implementation.

Both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement established mechanisms to encourage and monitor their implementation by nation-states. However, experience so far with VNRs and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), respectively, demonstrate that these mechanisms – despite some progress – have not delivered the effort necessary to achieve global goals. Even the progress on consistent national reporting on SDG indicators is inadequate. There are no assessments or recommendations by the respective secretariats or decision-making bodies on the adequacy or further enhancement of national implementation, let alone measures of enforcement. This is especially important for those SDGs where national (non-)compliance has significant externalities for the global community and avoiding threats to the planetary boundaries. There are lessons to be learned from international agreements in other fields like trade, human rights, or international peace and security; these can be translated and refined to support sustainable development.

Failures of the global financial architecture

The “global financial architecture” (GFA) refers to the complex system of public and private finance that channels the world’s saving to the world’s investment. The GFA includes multilateral institutions (for example, IMF and World Bank), national and local budgets, public borrowing and debts, and private equity and debt financing. Financial institutions that intermediate savings and investment play a key role, including national and multilateral development banks (publicly owned banks that borrow from capital markets to on-lend funds to public and private entities), sovereign wealth funds, private-sector banks, insurance funds, pension funds, asset management funds, venture capital, credit rating agencies, and others.

The global financial architecture falls short in the following six ways:

1. Deep, chronic, and crippling under-investment in virtually all low-income countries (LICs) and lower-middle-income countries (LMICs). In 2022, Investment per person in the LICs averaged a meagre US\$175 per person, compared with US\$11,535 per person in the HICs. (Table 1.1). In fact, investment as a share of GDP was lower in the LICs (20.9%) than in all other income categories. The poor are consequently languishing in poverty.
2. Most LICs and LMICs (and many small-island developing states [SIDS], including those that are UMICs) lack the credit ratings to borrow on acceptable terms (Table 1.2)
3. LICs, LMICs, and SIDS are highly vulnerable to self-fulfilling liquidity crises and balance of payments crises, making it nearly impossible for these countries to implement a long-term sustainable investment strategy.
4. HICs are able to mobilize vast financial resources very quickly, as seen during the 2008 financial crisis, the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine. Yet they are not prepared to mobilize such resources for global sustainable development, despite the urgency and previous promises regarding development assistance and climate financing.
5. Private capital markets continue to direct large flows of private saving to unsustainable technologies and practices, delaying decarbonization of the world’s energy system and underpinning destruction of the world’s ecosystems.
6. International cooperation is trapped by bureaucratic institutional frameworks that reduce the speed, efficacy, and efficiency of funding to meet the SDGs, and that fail to provide the framework for large-scale SDG financing.

It is widely recognized that the world needs to overhaul the GFA. Such an overhaul should address the failures above and aim to achieve six objectives:

1. Greatly increase funding to national and subnational governments and private businesses in the emerging economies, especially the LICs and LMICs, to carry out the needed investments.
2. Revise the credit rating system and debt sustainability metrics to facilitate long-term sustainable development.
3. Revise liquidity structures for LICs, LMICs, and SIDS, especially regarding sovereign debts, to forestall self-fulfilling banking and balance-of-payments crises.
4. Create ambitious and internationally-agreed upon criteria for sustainable finance that are mandatory for all public financial institutions in HICs, MICs, and LICs alike.
5. Align private business investment flows in all countries with the SDGs, through improved national planning, regulation, reporting, and oversight.
6. Reform current institutional frameworks and develop new, innovative mechanisms to improve the quality and speed of deployment of international cooperation, and monitor progress in an open and timely manner.

Table 1.1

Global Population, Investment, and GDP by World Bank Income Category (% of World Total)

	Population	Investment	GDP
LIC	8.0%	0.4%	0.5%
LMIC	43.2%	11.9%	10.7%
UMIC	32.7%	37.4%	28.5%
HIC	16.1%	50.3%	60.3%

Source: IMF World Economic Outlook, October 2022

Table 1.2

Credit Ratings by Income Category

	Number of UN Member States	Countries with a Moody's rating	Countries with an investment-grade rating	Countries with an investment-grade rating, %	Population with an investment-grade rating, %
LIC	28	9	0	0.0%	0.0%
LMIC	54	36	3	5.6%	52.8%
UMIC	52	40	10	19.2%	70.2%
HIC	59	52	45	76.3%	98.3%
WORLD	193	137	58	30.1%	60.5%

Source: Moody's and World Bank (2023)

SDSN's strategy to achieve the SDGs

Overhauling global governance mechanisms and the global financial architecture is fundamental to unlocking needed investments for sustainable development and ending non-sustainable practices. The GFA includes not only strictly financial mechanisms, but also public policies regarding budgets and regulation. Moreover, public policies must be pursued at all levels: globally through treaties such as the UNFCCC; regionally, such as through the European Union, the African Union, and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); nationally, through national plans and budgets; and

locally, at the provincial and city level, including through city networks. The GFA also requires alignment of the private sector with the SDGs, brought about through regulation, incentives (such as tax incentives or carbon pricing), and management practices.

The SDG policy agenda is complex. The SDGs call for lasting, long-term, directed change. For governments to combine the objectives of economic development, social inclusion, transparency, energy decarbonization, climate adaptation, water resources and sanitation, biodiversity conservation, digital access, gender equality, circular economy, over-harvesting, universal

health access and coverage, and universal (pre-primary, primary, and secondary) high-quality public education, is daunting. These challenges are far more complex than the typical aims of government. They are long-term, technology-based, and capital intensive, replete with technological and political uncertainties, inherently a blend of public and private actions, and in need of coordinated investments and planning with neighboring countries.

SDSN puts a great emphasis on long-term national planning, to coordinate public investments, regulations, and incentive structures over a time horizon of 20-30 years. Our special emphasis is on *pathway analysis* to help governments and business design long-term investment plans. For that reason, the SDSN first pioneered the concept of “Deep Decarbonization Pathways” in the lead-up to the Paris Agreement, to show governments how they could plan their energy investments during the time period 2015-2050. The SDSN’s initiative contributed to the concept of Long-term Low-Emission Development Strategies (LEDS) built into the Paris Agreement (Article 4.19). All countries are to prepare and submit long-term LEDS for submission to the UNFCCC. SDSN also launched the Global Climate Hub to continue this work.¹⁷ SDSN is also leading global efforts, in cooperation with the Food and Land Use (FOLU) Coalition and other partners, to define long-term sustainable food and land-use pathways via the Food, Agriculture, Biodiversity, Land-Use, and Energy (FABLE) Consortium.¹⁸ SDSN has joined the Group on Earth Observations (GEO)¹⁹ as a Participating Organization, supporting the efforts of this voluntary intergovernmental community to focus national, international, and private sector investments in Earth observations on urgent SDG needs.

17. SDSN Global Climate Hub. Website. Accessed May 16, 2023. <https://unsdsn.globalclimatehub.org>.

18. Mosnier, A., Schmidt-Traub, G., Obersteiner, M. et al. How can diverse national food and land-use priorities be reconciled with global sustainability targets? Lessons from the FABLE initiative. *Sustain Sci* 18, 335–345 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01227-7>

19. *Earth Observations*. Available at: <https://earthobservations.org>

Long-term investment plans are essential for national success in meeting the SDGs. SDSN has recommended six inter-related long-term transformations:²⁰

1. Universal quality education and innovation-based economy
2. Universal health access and coverage
3. Zero-carbon energy systems
4. Sustainable ecosystems, sustainable agriculture, and climate resilience
5. Sustainable cities
6. Transformation to universal digital access and services

Each of these challenges will require large-scale public and private investments to mid-century, technological transformation, and a sound financing strategy. None can be solved by the private sector alone; indeed, governments will have to take the lead to design policy and financial frameworks within which business can profitably invest and innovate. The *Sustainable Development Report 2023* identifies five levers to be deployed to bring about the necessary transformations: governance, economy and finance, individual and collective action, science and technology, and capacity building. The development of financing strategies could be supported by using the methodology of integrated national financing frameworks, which are already being developed in more than 80 countries globally.

Planning for the long term, however, illuminates the global financial architecture’s Achilles heel. While the high-income countries (HICs) and upper-middle income countries (UMICs) can and should, in principle, finance these transformations via a combination of budget outlays, public-sector borrowing, and private financing (equity and debt), this is surely not true of the low-income countries (LICs) and the lower middle-income countries

20. Sachs, J.D., Schmidt-Traub, G., Mazzucato, M. et al. Six Transformations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. *Nat Sustain* 2, 805–814 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0352-9>

(LMICs). Careful research by the SDSN and the International Monetary Fund has revealed the very large financing gap facing nations in the poorer half of the world.²¹

According to IMF estimates in 2019, the financing gap facing 57 low-income developing countries (LICs and LMICs that are eligible for IMF concessional financing) to cover very basic investments in health, education, power, roads, and water and sanitation was in the order of US\$300 billion to US\$500 billion per year.²² Even the most basic economic needs are currently out of reach for roughly half the world. And these IMF estimates do not yet begin to include the full costs of energy decarbonization, climate adaptation, losses and damages from climate-related disasters, digital access, or urban infrastructure. Adding in these extra needs, the global SDG financing gap is perhaps US\$1 trillion per year, or roughly 1% of gross world product (GWP) at market prices. As a rough rule of thumb based on work by SDSN and the IMF, the LICs need roughly 20% of their GDP in increased SDG investment outlays while the LMICs need roughly 10%, though precise amounts vary by country.

To make sure that existing financial resources and the required additional resources are used for sustainable investments, international finance institutions must fully incorporate achieving the SDGs and safeguarding the planetary boundaries into their core mandates, and monitor these regarding all countries, poorer and richer alike. Global infrastructure programs like China's Belt and Road, the EU's Global Gateway, or the United States' Build Back Better World initiatives must be much better aligned with the SDGs and coordinated with each other.

21. Gaspar, Vitor et al. 2019. Fiscal Policy and Development: Human, Social, and Physical Investment for the SDGs. IMF Staff Discussion Note. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/Staff-Discussion-Notes/Issues/2019/01/18/Fiscal-Policy-and-Development-Human-Social-and-Physical-Investments-for-the-SDGs-46444>

22. *ibid.*

The urgent need for an SDG Stimulus

In his opening address to the UN General Assembly on September 20, 2022, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called on the G20 to launch an “SDG Stimulus” to offset the deteriorating market conditions faced by developing countries and to accelerate progress towards the SDGs and the Paris Climate Agreement.²³ SDSN provided the Secretariat of a High-Level Informal Working Group for the SDG Stimulus (HLIWG),²⁴ that made the case for an SDG Stimulus of an additional US\$500 billion per year by 2025 of SDG finance. The SDG Stimulus plan recommended by the High-Level Working Group and introduced by SG Guterres last February²⁵ has five main components:

1. Increased funding from the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) and Public Development Banks (PDBs) to developing countries, linked to investments in the SDGs, a need echoed in the 2023 report of the High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism²⁶
2. Enhancement of the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI) and debt relief for countries facing debt distress
3. Expansion of liquidity by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and major central banks
4. Empowerment and expansion of the specialized global funds
5. Expansion of private philanthropy, with focus on ultra-high net worth individuals

23. Guterres, A. *The Secretary-General: Address to the General Assembly*. New York, 20 September 2022. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2022-09-20/secretary-generals-address-the-general-assembly>

24. The High-Level Informal Working Group is co-convened by Ms. Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations and Professor Jeffrey Sachs, University Professor, Columbia University. Members: Dr. Amar Bhattacharya, Brookings; Mr. Navid Hanif, UN DESA; Dr. Homi Kharas, Brookings; Dr. Mahmoud Mohieldin, United Nations; Mr. Remy Rioux, AFD; Dr. Rajiv Shah, Rockefeller; Mr. Achim Steiner, UNDP.

25. United Nations Secretary-General. 2023. *SDG Stimulus To Deliver Agenda 2030*. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/SDG-Stimulus-to-Deliver-Agenda-2030.pdf>

26. High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism (HLAB), 2022. *A Breakthrough for People and Planet: Effective and Inclusive Global Governance for Today and the Future*, <https://www.highleveladvisoryboard.org/breakthrough>

The urgent objective of the SDG Stimulus is to address – in practical terms and at scale – the chronic shortfall of international SDG financing facing the LICs and LMICs, and to ramp up financing flows by at least US\$500 billion by 2025. The most important component of the stimulus plan is a massive expansion of loans by the multilateral development banks, backed by new rounds of paid-in capital by HIC members. Working together with the IMF and the MDBs, the emerging countries also need to strengthen their debt management and creditworthiness by integrating their borrowing policies with tax policies, export policies, and liquidity management, all to prevent future liquidity crises. The G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration noted another important point, which is the need to expand and enhance innovative financing mechanisms, including blended finance, as well as improving transparency and mutual accountability.

It is also vital to share fairly and globally the burden of financing for human-induced adaptation and losses and damages (L&D) among responsible countries, and to respond to the needs of vulnerable countries and small island developing states (SIDS).²⁷

Enhanced global governance for the SDGs

The SDGs are not yet properly incorporated into global governance. Systems coherence, and ultimate success in meeting the SDGs, leads us to the following recommendations:

1. All United Nations agencies should put the SDGs at the centerpiece of their strategies, programs, and reporting.
2. The World Bank and the other MDBs should put the SDGs at the center of their financing strategies, performance reviews, and reporting.

27. Sachs et al. 2021. The Decade of Action and Small Island Developing States: Measuring and addressing SIDS' vulnerabilities to accelerate SDG progress. https://irp.cdn-website.com/be6d1d56/files/uploaded/WP_MVI_Sachs%20Massa%20Marinescu%20Lafortune_FINAL_cVeeBvmKSKYYs6Oyih.pdf

3. The IMF should build its national reviews (Article IV), debt sustainability framework (DSF), and country programming around the public policies and financing needed for national success in achieving the SDGs.
4. The G20 should organize its financial cooperation, reporting, and metrics around the reform of the GFA, as needed to achieve the SDGs.
5. All UN Member States should present VNRs at least once every three years. It is especially urgent that the five countries that have not yet presented VNRs should do so no later than 2024.
6. United Nations agencies, multilateral organizations, and Member States need to increase investment in, and coordination of, national and international data and statistical systems and scientific capacity to assess SDG progress and support sustainable development decision making and investment, including disaggregated data by region, social stratification, and other criteria as helpful.

Regional cooperation and sustainable development

One of the consistent findings of the SDSN is that SDG success requires strong cooperation at the regional level. Neighboring countries share ecosystems (rivers, forests, fishing zones, wetlands) and must cooperate to protect them. Strong regional partnerships are needed to achieve regional objectives. The great seas, such as the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, are under severe threat from chemical and plastics pollution, and must be protected by all countries whose rivers feed these seas. Moreover, regional cooperation is needed to promote technological and social innovations. For example, the Mediterranean region is a hot spot for climate change, threatened also by urbanization, economic pressures, and geo-political crises. Nonetheless, it is recognized as the birthplace of the "Mediterranean diet," with an

agri-food sector with the potential to meet the increased demand for healthy, sustainable foods in the future.

Transport, zero-carbon power, and digital (fiberoptic) backbones depend on regional-scale grids. For all of these reasons and more, neighboring countries must cooperate deeply to build infrastructure and share data and knowledge, and to implement sustainable development policies. Regional international policies and agreements should be based on available scientific knowledge.

SDSN calls for, and is actively supporting, the development of similar regional-based sustainability plans with associated financing. SDSN is closely following and supporting the EU's endeavors to achieve the SDGs, *inter alia* by the EU's European Green Deal. The EU Green Deal has great potential to bring about transformation both within the EU and beyond, including the larger European and Mediterranean region, and even Africa. SDSN is working with the ASEAN Secretariat and member states to help develop the ASEAN Green Deal, introduced in 2022 under the ASEAN Presidency of Cambodia. SDSN is supporting the African Development Bank to develop a strategic plan to accelerate Africa's sustainable development, with the aim of the African Union achieving high-income status and sustainable development by 2063, the 100th anniversary of the Organization of African Unity. SDSN is working with the Amazon Basin nations, through the Scientific Panel of the Amazon, to develop a regional strategy for the conservation and sustainable development of the Amazon. In that capacity, the SDSN is also supporting new partnerships between the rainforest countries of the Amazon Basin, the Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia for a global financing mechanism to protect all three tropical rainforest regions. Protection and sustainable management of rainforest ecosystems through related standardization will support their impact assessment on a global basis.

The sub-national level

Provincial, metropolitan, and city governments are typically at the front line in achieving the SDGs. Nearly 60 percent of the world population now lives in urban areas, and that proportion is likely to rise to at least 70 percent, and probably higher, by mid-century. Moreover, cities constitute at least 85 percent of total world output and energy use. What happens in cities will determine the future of the world, and the success or failure in sustainable development.

Local governments have the front-line responsibility for implementing universal health systems, places in school for all children, safe water and sanitation, public transport services, adequate housing, and physical safety in the local environment (from crime, toxic wastes, and natural hazards). This is why mayors and city councils around the world have rallied to the SDGs, even if their local leadership is sometimes under-appreciated and under-noted because national governments tend to hold the limelight at the United Nations, with the MDBs, and in the media.

Cities face one other chronic problem. While they are largely responsible for service delivery, it is national governments that, by and large, collect revenue to fund public investments and social services. Cities are therefore caught between front-line responsibility and back-of-the-line access to the necessary public financing.

SDSN recognizes this gap in the practical means of implementation of city governments, and is currently working with the major urban think tanks and global urban networks (including the C40 and ICLEI) to address the challenge of sub-national financing of the SDGs. This initiative will be launched in Paris in during the June Summit for a New Global Financial Pact.

Global peace as the prerequisite for sustainable development

SDG 16 recognizes the vital role of peaceful and inclusive societies, and SDG 17 underscores the need for global outreach and cooperation to achieve the Goals. Peace and global cooperation must not become mere slogans. They are ever more vital to human survival in an age when both nuclear weapons and environmental devastation threaten the very survival of humanity. We recall in this context the powerful truth spoken by United States President John F. Kennedy more than 60 years ago, when he declared, “The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life.” Peace and global cooperation mean nothing less and nothing more than choosing the end of human poverty over the end of human life.

We take note of the dire warning of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, which recently moved the hands of its Doomsday Clock to just 90 seconds from midnight, the closest to Armageddon in the Clock’s 76-year history; “largely (though not exclusively) because of the mounting dangers of the war in Ukraine.” We commend global leaders who “oppose the use of or the threat to use nuclear weapons”²⁸ and urge all sides to follow this call.

Had the negotiations underway in March 2022 between Russia and Ukraine been successfully concluded, countless lives would have been saved and the devastation of Ukraine’s cities would have been spared. The world would have escaped the current tumult of soaring food and energy prices and other financial dislocations. We would not be even closer to nuclear Armageddon.

International relations scholars have powerfully described the “tragedy” of great power conflict. They warn that the jostling for power – or hegemonic domination – ends in tragic wars. We cannot afford such a tragedy in our world today. The world is indeed very different now, as we live under the threat of nuclear war, and even nuclear annihilation. We need not only technological know-how, but also diplomatic know-how, to respect global diversity and to settle international disputes peacefully.

28. Xinhua. 2022. Xi meets German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. <https://english.news.cn/20221104/f544bca38c33443186d3de8b3d0a9a27/c.html>

The continuing efforts of the SDSN

The SDSN was created in 2012, soon after the Rio+20 Summit which mobilized the world’s universities, think tanks, and national laboratories on behalf of the SDGs. SDSN’s mission was fourfold: scholarly research, educational innovation, and partnerships, convening power, and outreach to the public. We are proud of our efforts since 2012 in these four areas.

The SDSN is now a global network of more than 1,900 member organizations, mainly universities, organized in 53 national and regional chapters. The SDSN convenes global university leadership on behalf of shared activities to support sustainable development. In 2022, hundreds of university presidents brainstormed and shared best practices in aligning their institutions with the SDGs. SDSN membership continues to grow rapidly, and new national and regional chapters are regularly launched.

We aim to ensure that institutions of higher learning and public policy research centres in all 193 UN Member States are actively part of the SDSN. The SDSN’s flagship educational initiative, the SDG Academy, directly reaches hundreds of thousands of learners each year, with an expanding provision of free, world-class educational offerings. In 2023, the SDSN is working with universities around the world to launch further low-cost master’s degrees in sustainable development, in an effort to dramatically increase the number of students reached each year.

SDSN is working closely with the UNESCO SDG 4 High-Level Steering Committee on these two major issues, via Mission 4.7 through an SDG Academy Partnership with the Open Education Resources Recommendation team at UNESCO.²⁹ The International Commission on the Futures of Education recognizes that open education resources are essential for supporting students, educators, and young professionals on their education for sustainable development (ESD) journeys.³⁰ The UNESCO Recommendation on open education resources was endorsed by all Member States in November 2019. In September 2022, at the

29. *Mission 4.7*. Available from: <https://www.mission4point7.org>

30. UNESCO, *Futures of Education*, International Commission. Available from: <https://en.unesco.org/futuresofeducation/international-commission>

Transforming Education Summit in New York, the United Nations Secretary-General announced a number of global initiatives. One of them is the International Financing Facility for Education.³¹ Another is the Gateways to Public Digital Learning project³² to ensure equitable access to and resources for digital learning.

The SDG Academy³³ is also building partnerships around professional training to upskill employees and make them future-ready for implementing the SDGs and Paris Agreement. Ideally, at every stage of life, individuals should understand how they coexist in harmony with people and the planet. We may not wish to harm people, or our common home, but all of us must “go back to school” and learn how to create positive linkages to people and nature in everyday activities, at home and at work. SDSN will endeavor to support professional training and lifelong learning across all sectors.

Another key dimension of the SDSN’s work is supporting governments, at all levels, to understand the implications of policy choices and to make evidence-based and forward-looking decisions. SDSN engages in a wide range of intergovernmental processes, including the G20, G7, UNFCCC, CBD meetings, and World Health Assembly. These fora are critical to encourage international collaboration, promote peace, and implement the recommendations contained within this document, in particular on SDG finance. SDSN remains at the disposal of all stakeholders to analyze pathways and scenarios, and to leverage knowledge to make sound decisions.

All UN Member States and United Nations agencies can count on the continued efforts and energies of the SDSN around the world to support all governments, businesses, and civil society to embrace and align with the SDGs on sustainable development.

31. Guterres, A. Secretary-General’s remarks to the Press on the International Finance Facility for Education [as delivered], 17 September 2022. <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/press-encounter/2022-09-17/secretary-generals-remarks-the-press-the-international-finance-facility-for-education-delivered>

32. United Nations, *Gateways to Public Digital Learning*, 19 September 2022. <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit/gateways-public-digital-learning>

33. SDG Academy. Available from: <https://sdgacademy.org>

Sustainable development to 2030 and 2050

The tasks of sustainable development – ensuring material human well-being and security, social inclusion and justice, environmental sustainability, and global cooperation to secure peace and sustainable development – are not just tasks to 2030. They are the preeminent tasks of the coming generations, enshrined in several documents including the *2030 Agenda* (2015) and UNESCO’s *Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations* (1997). They are the work of the 21st century.

We conclude by underscoring the vital, life-affirming importance of four key international agreements: the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Climate Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Framework for Biodiversity, and the High Seas Treaty. These are signal achievements of humanity, to have come together across all nations to adopt a common set of challenges. As we have emphasized in this statement, our major challenge today is matching these soaring ambitions with the means to achieve them, most importantly, the financial resources and regulatory conditions for the investments needed to achieve these goals.

At the mid-point of the SDG agenda, we are far off target. Yet we have gained ground. Almost all governments have committed to adopting SDG-based action plans; technologies have advanced that can support the goals (such as green energy, green transactions, green jobs, Earth observations, and artificial intelligence); and there is growing regional cooperation to achieve the goals on the ground, through shared investments, knowledge, and policies.

Achieving the SDGs requires more than “normal politics”. Governments are only now learning how to design integrated strategies that address economic, social, and environmental objectives in tandem. Governments are only now mapping out pathways to mid-century to meet crucial energy, healthcare, and education objectives, among others. Governments are only now establishing R&D funds to promote breakthroughs in key technologies that will expand their power and

reduce their costs. Governments are only now building the digital platforms and data networks that integrated strategies will depend on. And governments are only now, many years late, turning their attention to the chronic and deep shortcomings of the GFA.

Sustainable human development is a multi-dimensional process. The balance between the ecological, economic, social, and cultural spheres, together with political, ethical, and cultural aspects, must be nurtured. Open sharing of data and knowledge across these dimensions is essential to building trust and cooperation. People of good will must choose and act coherently in their private and in their professional lives to further the common good.

For these reasons, we end our message with two urgent and timely calls for action:

First, that UN Member States, at the 2023 SDG Summit and the 2024 Summit of the Future, recommit boldly, strongly, and proactively to the SDGs, accelerate progress to 2030, and adopt even more ambitious SDG targets and objectives to mid-century, also incorporating recent international agreements on oceans and biodiversity. As the aims of the 2030 Agenda are ever-evolving, and linked to many processes, we call on academia, civil society, and business to develop proposals on how this agenda can be enhanced and enforced in the decade(s) to come.

Second, UN Member States, starting with the G20 meeting this September in India, should adopt an SDG Stimulus to accelerate progress towards the SDGs by 2030 and enhance global governance for enforcing the implementation of the SDGs by all countries.