



**Yalla, time for collaboration, big problems-solving and action!**

Our vision is to make Sustainable Business a Choice for companies and organizations around the world



***“If I had an hour to solve a problem I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.” (Albert Einstein).***

Well, after 55 minutes ... and 43 years of dilly dallying, between the moment it was first formulated in Stockholm [1] in 1972 until last month in New York where a set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was adopted... world leaders have finally got down to business to solve “the most complicated problem the world has ever faced” [2] : how to ensure prosperity for all (not for some) in an ever expanding world population and world economy in a finite planet with ever shrinking natural resources.

Building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which enabled some progress, particularly in the areas of health and poverty, SDGs – spanning the next 15 years – set out a much more interconnected framework, essentially around 5 big ideas: people, planet, prosperity – ie a vision of prosperity that fulfills people’s potential, dignity, equality and respects our natural environment while tackling the urgent issue of climate change – peace (as there can be no sustainable development without it) and partnerships, to strengthen global solidarity, and achieve all this in an accountable and collaborative way, with the inclusion of public-private stakeholders and citizens at a global and local levels.

This all sounds very nice, **but why believe this is not just more empty talk? And supposing it is real, how can we practically contribute at a local level, in our private or professional capacities, to these 5 minutes ... and 15 years of sustainable development action?**



One of the most exciting aspects of SDGs, differentiating it from other international agendas, is its inclusiveness: many of the actors, otherwise remote or absent from such processes (that would be us, citizens, everyday professionals) are given a front row seat at the negotiating table ... quite a change. Take the climate negotiations, with 195 delegations performing the “*negotiation by exhaustion*” ritual behind closed doors for the past 21 years (exhausting the rest of us along the way), keeping their cards to their chest until the last second like it was some kind of poker game, to finally reach the lowest common denominator compromise... Now, imagine a climate summit that would no longer be confiscated by politicians and diplomats but where scientists, engineers, researchers, business leaders, entrepreneurs, civil society representatives would be IN the negotiating room. Imagine all these actors putting their minds and working together to get us off this crazy uncontrolled climate change path ... this is the kind of inclusiveness and collaboration that SDGs enable.

Is that going to be enough to create a political will and bring real change? Read one of the co-instigators of the SDGs, Prof. Sachs: “*Remember that our leaders are the followers, they’re often the last to move! To create movement requires the public telling them: “you signed on to the global goals, we don’t care so much about your (re)election frankly, we care about our children, safety, well-being, we’re the higher priority!” Whether a concerned citizen, a student, a business that needs to be more sustainable, raise your voice, get on twitter, say how important the SDGs are, learn them, champion them. And then the politicians will listen.*” A reminder that the global goals are ours. The world leaders have promised to deliver them? Let’s hold them to that promise. If we do, there is no guarantee of success but we may have a historic opportunity to achieve what decades of international negotiations have so little delivered (be it on arms, climate, trade...): genuine collaboration, problem-solving and actual progress towards a fairer, safer, more sustainable world.

## What is the role of business in all this and how can it contribute?

It's not a secret that when it comes to problem-solving, they bring enormous financial & non-financial capabilities to the table: capacity for innovation and scaling solutions for a start. Consider the role of technology innovation in drastically reducing the Malaria epidemic through long-lasting insecticides-treated bed nets or rapid diagnostic tests, how MOOCs, e-mentoring or e-tutoring platforms are revolutionizing access to education, how micro grids of solar panels bring modern energy services to rural areas of Africa, enabling the connected households to prepay units of electricity through their phones... These and countless examples are testament to the ability of private sector companies to drive and propagate social progress through technology, innovation, knowledge, their capacity to leverage resources and partnerships, all decisive levers in order to realize the big goals.

With public awareness on social and environmental issues at an all-time high, sustainability has become a powerful brand differentiator in terms of image, loyalty and trust. For better or for worse, as the VW scandal sadly reminded us. As a recent [GlobeScan SustainAbility Leaders survey](#) shows [3] : expectations for the private sector to be a full part of the solution have never been so strong either. **SDGs offer a timely opportunity for the private sector to not only redefine its role as a force of greater good but evidence its actual contributions to solving the world's most pressing issues.**

How? Not by integrating all 17 goals in their strategy ... but by perhaps considering how your business activities align with the goals and which opportunities exist, through them, to influence policies, national visions, or to create a better enabling environment for your business to grow.

Finally and perhaps most crucially, SDGs shout for all of us (businesses, government, NGOs, academia, civil society) to be better at collaborating with each other, build "*partnerships 2.0*", ie ones delivering transformative change and creating opportunities and shared value along the way.

**None of this is easy ... but with 5 minutes left to fix global issues we all share, there is no time for further procrastination ... yalla, let's do it together!**

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[1] First UN summit on the environment, watch the speech by then Swedish PM Olof Palme, which could almost entirely be copy pasted in today's terms <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dGIsMEQYgI>

[2] In the words of renowned economist Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, instigator of the Sustainable Development Goals

[3] The private sector comes as the 2<sup>nd</sup> type of actor whom people think should take the lead on the Sustainable Development agenda, while the % of people who think governments should take the lead is decreasing. The expectation for multi stakeholders – multi sectorial partnerships is also on the increase

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**Sustainability Knowledge Group** is a global advisory firm dedicated in creating value for businesses through **strategic advisory** and **training solutions**.

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