A collection of Thought Pieces and Blog Posts on Sustainability

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The Latest News and Trends in Sustainability in One Place

Dear Readers,

We, at Sustainable Knowledge Group, are committed to supporting our clients and all professionals interested in Sustainability and Sustainable Development.

In 2020, the Insights section of our website hosted the latest thought pieces and insights we developed. Through thirty-three unique blogs, we presented the latest news around Sustainable Development Goals, legislation, trends, advancements and best practices related to Sustainability, CSR, ESG and Sustainable Development. We also highlighted the impact of COVID-19 in the world of business and sustainability.

We invite you to read the 2020 edition of "**A collection of Thought Pieces and Blog Posts on Sustainability**" and share it within your community of practice.

Enjoy the reading!

Sustainability Knowledge Group

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

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Who Wants an Award? Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility (CSR) Awards explained

Nowadays companies and organizations are obliged to adopt and integrate the principles of sustainable development and sustainability into their business models, strategies and everyday operations. The approach of companies and organizations depends on their core operations and their key economic, social and environmental impacts and stakeholder pressures. Their efforts to be transparent about their sustainability performance and to incorporate effectively Sustainable Development Goals in their strategy and business models can receive recognition in the form of an award. However, many organizations are still in doubt about many aspects regarding Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility awards. Here, we try to answer some of the frequent questions posed by our clients regarding recognition and awards.

Q: Is there a perfect point in time when a company can start to consider applying for an award?
A: There is not the right or wrong time when a company or organization can apply for an award. The only precondition is that an organization has made at least their first steps on sustainability! There are awards that recognize the good performance of novices, first-time reporters and mature, high sustainability performing organizations.

Q: Are awards PR gimmicks or there is a certain value attached to them?
A: Even though there is a good PR attached to the giving and receiving of an award there is quite some value beyond PR attached to it, related to core strategy. During the preparation phase, an organization can notice certain areas for improvements, address them in timely manner and make an overall improvement of its sustainability performance. It can realize good sustainability performance, and case studies that worth further enhancement, communication and investment even if not used as part of an award application. An award represents recognition for the hard work of employees and is a great motivator for staff involved with Sustainability and CSR activities and therefore boosts staff morale and commitment. Moreover, an award can enhance internal communication within an organization.

Q: How do organizations choose an award to apply for?
A: Organizations need to consider the type of the awarding body and check its credibility. They need to take into consideration the criteria based on which every organization is assessed, the transparency of the process followed and the reputation of judges. Companies should carefully look which aspect of their sustainability strategy corresponds to a certain area of an award (social, environmental, etc.). We now see the rise of awards focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adoption. Keep in mind that is of utmost importance to choose awards that have industry recognition or credibility.

Q: What are the benefits of winning an award?

A: Winning an award can have numerous benefits for an organization. First, it brings recognition both globally and locally, and can enhance the trust relationship between the company and its stakeholders. It reinforces an organization's expertise and contributes to its competitive advantage and credibility. Also, it rewards the organization's choices, decisions and actions and more important, the hard work and efforts of its employees.

Q: What do we need to be aware of regarding award's submission?

A: Do your research! Not all awards are created equal. Be sure to apply for and be associated with an awarding body that is reputable. In addition, there is a risk of greenwashing while promoting a received award and organizations need to be aware how to communicate their recognitions in order not to trigger negative publicity. Some awarding bodies organize information sessions for the applicants; do not miss them!

Q: What if I do not win the award, I am applying for?

A: When it comes to awards, we can say that it is all about the journey and not the destination. Applying for an award requires hard work and is part of a learning curve that can only bring benefits to your organization. The process of applying for an award can showcase the weak spots within the various internal processes that should be worked on so the organization can be more successful. Also, applying for the award, even if not winning one, allows your organization to benchmark itself against the competition and that would point the areas that need to be improved in near future.

The million-dollar question: Should we apply for awards?

We strongly believe that awards can boost your organization's reputation, making you stand out from peers and competitors. Prestigious awards can give team morale a boost by highlighting team and individual achievements. If your organization is young, winning awards can signal to the world that you have become the important "player" and help to prove your credibility. If your organization is well-established, awards not only showcase your heritage, but also prove you're active and innovative. Applying for an award, is all about preparation and dedication! Break a leg!

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Sustainability and Environmental Justice in Europe: Closing the Gap

European Union (EU) environmental policy has brought many positive changes and largely contributed to the protection of the environment and public health across Europe. The EU and national governments have been setting and updating their objectives to "protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, turn the EU into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy, and safeguard EU citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing". It could be said that EU citizens benefit from some of the highest environmental standards in the world. Yet, the questions whether environmental justice exists in Europe and whether there is even distribution of environmental health hazards across Europe, still exist. The "Unequal exposure and unequal impacts: social vulnerability to air pollution, noise and extreme temperatures in Europe" report, issued by the European Environment Agency (EEA) warns that there are significant regional differences in social vulnerability and exposure to environmental health hazards across Europe and that the health of Europe's most vulnerable citizens remains disproportionately affected by these hazards, despite the significantly improved Europe's environmental quality.

The key findings of the EEA report
The report assesses inequalities in the exposure to and health impacts of selected environmental health hazards (air pollution, noise and extreme temperatures) on European society and discusses how these are addressed in policy and practice. The key findings prove that the uneven distribution of the impacts of air pollution, noise and extreme temperatures on the health of Europeans closely reflects **the socio-demographic differences** within the society and that there are **prominent regional differences** in social vulnerability and exposure to environmental health hazards across Europe:

- The elderly, children and those in poor health tend to be more adversely affected by such environmental health hazards than the general population (i.e. they are more vulnerable)
- Groups of lower socio-economic status (the unemployed, those on low incomes or with lower levels of education) also tend to be more negatively affected by environmental health hazards, as a result of their both greater exposure and higher vulnerability
- In many European countries, the disproportionate exposure of lower socio-economic groups to air pollution, noise and high temperatures occurs in urban areas
- Regions with lower average socio-economic status and higher proportions of elderly people in southern and south-eastern Europe experience greater exposure to ground-level ozone and high air temperatures
- Wealthier sub-national regions tend to have higher average levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO2), mostly because of the concentration of traffic and industrial activities in these locations. However, it is still the poorer communities that tend to be exposed to higher local levels of NO2, as shown by studies at finer spatial scales

In addition, the report emphasises that these inequalities are not fully addressed by current policy and practice and even though the links between social vulnerability and environmental health hazards are acknowledged in [The 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP)](#), the air quality and noise directives and the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change, these policies do not explicitly require specific actions from the Member States to reduce inequalities in exposure and vulnerability. Moreover, the report states that due to the ongoing and projected changes in European society (for instance, the rapid ageing in many western and southern countries or the continuing economical differences between the East and the West), the inequalities in social vulnerability with regard to environmental health hazards will likely persist or even increase.

What should be done?
The environmental quality in Europe has been steadily improving over recent decades. Yet, these improvements have not been distributed equally and environmental health hazards impacts are more present in the countries and regions where income and education are lower and unemployment rates higher than European averages. Thus, the report suggests some steps and actions that need to be undertaken so the spatial and societal inequalities in vulnerability and exposure to the environmental health hazards will be reduced:
•Enhancing the coherence between EU policies in terms of human health, climate change and air pollution agendas in the EU policy framework may help to address the inequalities in environmental impacts
•At the local level, multiple policy areas from welfare policies to urban design can help to reduce the vulnerability and exposure of the population
•Improving spatial coverage and higher resolution of socio-economic data, establishing methodological approaches and addressing the gaps in knowledge on the distributional impacts of noise and the combined effects of multiple environmental health hazards would enhance future assessments of the links between societal inequalities and environmental quality

United in Diversity
EU has designed policies and strategies, so Sustainability, prosperity and better living conditions are achieved in every Member State and in the countries that are on their way to join the European Union. Even though EU environmental policy has recorded impressive results during the recent decades, the societal inequalities still exist. *In varietate concord* (United in diversity) is the motto of the European Union, implying "how Europeans have come together, in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages". The reduction of inequalities in exposure to environmental health hazards falls under Sustainability and prosperity as well. There is no such thing as "prosperity for some citizens", there is only "prosperity for all of them".

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Green Buildings – Climate Change Heroes for a Sustainable Future

With the current state of our climate, rapid change to reduce resource consumption and carbon emissions across all industries has never before been more urgent. Why not start with buildings? Given modern lifestyles, moving about from home to work to cafes, supermarkets and more, people are spending approximately 90% of their time indoors. Addressing buildings not only supports efforts to address climate concerns, it also provides an opportunity to impact the people who inhabit them.

The buildings and construction sector currently contributes nearly 40% of global energy related emissions. While this is a concerning figure, it indicates the sector's high potential for climate change mitigation by reducing its emissions and increasing its energy savings.

Green Buildings to the Rescue

Business as usual in the building and construction industry is changing, and that change is coming in the form of Green Buildings. Green Buildings are not only good for the planet by reducing resource needs and environmental impact, they are also good for people and profit. They prioritize responsible use of resources and provide healthier indoor space for the building occupants, and because of their effective design and energy and water savings, Green Buildings result in lower operating costs.

By incorporating factors that support increased productivity and overall better health such as improved thermal comfort, air quality, natural lighting, and acoustics, Green Buildings have been shown to result in fewer sick days and reduced absenteeism.

Overall, Green Buildings share a number of the following features:

- Efficient use of energy, water and other resources
- Incorporate the use renewables, such as solar
- Use of sustainable and sustainably sourced materials
- Reduction of pollution and waste
- Provides healthy indoor environment
- Considers the local climate and socio-cultural factors
- Highly efficient, sustainable buildings are not just a nice-to-have, they are a must-have and are quickly becoming the standard for design and construction, with many building codes across the globe becoming more stringent to ensure sustainable building practices.

How "Green" is your Building? Using Green Building Rating Tools

Certification offers a level of transparency and verification on the degree of sustainability of a building. It also serves as guidance to the developer and/or owner, offering options and methods to meet Green Building targets.

Rating systems support the building process by outlining standards or specifications required to ensure a project meets a minimum level of performance. There are numerous rating systems and certifications available for implementation, and a comprehensive list is provided on the World Green Building Council website [here](). The two most common and internationally implemented rating systems are:

1) [LEED]() (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design), which was developed and is operated by the US Green Building Council, is present in 165 countries. It has [60,000 buildings]() certified and another [45,000 registered]() worldwide.

2) [BREEAM]() (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method), which was the first sustainability assessment method developed for buildings and has been implemented in over 80 countries and has issued over [570,000 certificates]().

Less internationally recognized, but just as important, are the numerous local rating systems that have been developed to suit the local context in which they are operated. The [Estidama]() Pearl Rating System in the United Arab Emirates is one example of this, where the system includes sustainability, social, economic and cultural pillars specific to the Arab region. Another example of localized rating systems are those of the [Indian Green Building Council](), who operates over 20 rating systems that have been developed based on the Pancha Bhootas, the five elements of nature, and are applicable to all climate zones of India.

Ratings and certification systems, the terms often used interchangeably, consider the building as a whole and assesses sustainability aspects of the building design and its construction and operation. They go beyond national regulation and building codes. By establishing both mandatory and elective criteria, their application enforces a minimum set of requirements and encourages applied innovation, efficient building performance, responsible sourcing and disposal of materials. The most common components of Green Building rating systems include:

• Site planning and design
• Indoor Environment
• Materials
• Energy
• Water
• Waste

Rating systems are available for new construction as well as existing buildings with some even focusing specifically on interiors or renovation, making rating systems diverse and applicable to a building of any type and at any stage. While some address single buildings of various types (such as commercial, residential, etc), others extend beyond the individual building to address communities and neighborhoods.

Direct and Indirect Benefits

Benefits of Green Building come for both the building owners and their occupants in the form of:

• Higher market values,
• Reduced running costs,
• Healthier indoor environments, and
• Reduced and more efficient use of resources.

Certified buildings repeatedly demonstrate reduced carbon footprint, reduced utility consumption and reduced waste to landfill. Best results come when all stakeholders of the building and construction process come together during the planning and design stage. With everyone on board and aware of their respective roles in achieving the certification goals, the implementation and certification processes can be smooth and efficient resulting in the optimum outcome.

World Green Building Council has recently launched a case study library of successful projects that have reaped the benefits of implementing Green Building practices, and both LEED and BREEAM also make case studies available highlighting their certified projects. These case study libraries show us that Green Buildings aren't limited by geography or a country's economic status, and the concerted efforts that bring them to fruition deliver benefits for people and planet.

What Next after Certification?

Rating systems evolve as new standards and technologies are introduced and they are often updated to ensure the highest levels of sustainability remain targeted. Once certified with a Green Building rating, efforts should not stop there. Buildings should be maintained and operated as designed, to ensure the targeted performance and the saving potential are achieved, and that the building continues to perform at its highest efficiency. Most importantly, building occupants must commit to behavioural changes and habits that support resource efficiency, healthy indoor and outdoor environments, and comfort and wellbeing. Green Buildings provide us with the technology and the tools, but it is the people within them that determine their full potential and effectiveness.

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Generation Z & Sustainable Development: A promising future

During the last two year, the media has been obsessed with Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teenage environmental activist on climate change whose campaigning has gained international recognition. The unprecedented activism coming from a teenager says a lot not only about Greta herself but also about the generation she belongs to. Generation Z, or Gen Z for short, is a generation that has succeeded the Millennials and represents people born from 1995 to 2010. These young people have already proved they are able and ready to mobilize themselves for the causes they believe in. This generation values individual expression, avoids labels and believes profoundly in the efficacy of dialogue to solve conflicts and improve the world while relating to institutions in a highly analytical and pragmatic way. So, what are their views about sustainable development and factors that determine the realization of Sustainable Development Agenda?

Generation Z stand on sustainable development
The recent global climate strike that gathered hundreds of thousands of young people around the world to protest government inaction on the climate crisis shows that these young people have strong feelings about the environment and are ready to take a bold action to trigger the change. Moreover, they are now adding pressure for action in 2020 by demanding system change from world leaders and more accountability from carbon-intensive industries. Therefore, this activism showcases that Gen Z trust in governments, the media and big business to behave sustainably is relatively low. The survey that consulted nearly 5,000 Post-Millennials, aged 18-25, in 20 countries across the Middle East & North Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia and Sub Saharan Africa about sustainability, has found that:

- Youth say climate change will be biggest threat to the world within a decade.
- Young people are keen to take on more responsibilities to find solutions to climate change.
- Government regulations are necessary, but youth want corporations to take equal responsibility.
- Youth are doing more to be 'green'.
- Youth are prepared to boycott companies which are not sustainable.
- Behavioral change is needed to help renewable energy investment.
- Education is seen as critical in making the world more sustainable.
- Germany, Canada, the US and the UK are perceived as clean tech leaders – with Emirati youth confident in their own country's green track record.
- Youth believe that solar and wind energy are priorities for the future.
- Young people in frontier countries (Jordan, Kenya and Nigeria) are more committed to creating a sustainable future.

These findings indicate that the Gen Zers are not only aware of the environmental issues the world is faced with but also, they consider the issues of poverty, inequality, unemployment and economy equally important and they view them as the ones that will grow increasingly relevant over their lifetimes.

Gen Zers' call for companies to stick to sustainability

The awareness of the Gen Z about environmental, societal and economic issues is an emergency call to companies to transform their business model and integrate sustainability principles in their everyday operations and business strategy. Gen Zers are more ready than Millennials to act and take responsibility to correct mistakes made by previous generations and this implies that they can go so far to boycott companies which are not sustainable. Moreover, they are ready to leave differences aside to mobilize around causes they believe in and they view consumption through the ethical lenses. The attitudes and behaviors of Gen Z should be acknowledged by companies since this generation constitute their present and future customers.

What to expect from Gen Z in near future?

Activism, braveness, and awareness about the current global issues of Gen Z is a sign that this generation could be the one that can and will push the world towards a sustainable future. Their dissatisfaction with incremental changes that past generations have been made is evident; their demand for more fundamental and focused systematic changes prove that they strive for real change and not just empty promises. After all, they are the ones who will bear the brunt of all today's global issues and they deserve a bright future.

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Australia's Bushfires – Sustainability, SDGs and beyond

"Climate change is real. It is happening right now..." these were the words spoken by renowned actor, producer and environmentalist Leonardo Dicaprio at the Oscars in 2016. This is evident even today as fires rage in the bushlands of Australia in what is recorded as one of the worst wildfires in the country. These massive bushfires were a result of a period of a long drought and record-breaking temperatures that worsened the annual "fire season". This event has repercussions across the community, environment, and economy and is a sustainability issue that requires urgent attention, awareness, and action. Businesses and governments understanding the gravity of the situation are seen to align themselves with the Paris Climate Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)- with a commitment to take action on the interdisciplinary global issues facing us today. It is important to address the impacts on an immediate basis and ultimately the source, i.e, the role of climate change in intensifying such occurrences across the globe

Bushfire Impact

SDGs 13 and 15, "Climate Action" and "Life on Land" call for the protection of natural environment, trees and biodiversity on land and urge us to take action on climate change. Increasingly trees are being adversely affected by human activity and extreme weather. According to the UN Environmental Programme (UNEP), over 18 million hectares of forests have been burned, destroying over 2,800 homes amongst other structures, leading to human fatalities and killing over a million animals as a direct result of these devastating fires in Australia. Consequences of the fire include large areas of lost habitat, adversely affecting wildlife, exacerbating the global situation of declining wildlife species. The smoke and air pollution from these bushfires have affected the air quality across neighborhoods and cities near affected areas in Australia, affecting the health of residents. The economic impact on the country from such incidents ranges from health costs, infrastructure damage and impact on industries such as farming and tourism. Moreover, UNEP highlights that the bushfires have emitted 400 tons of carbon dioxide, equivalent to the annual emissions of Australia in just over 3 months. This will augment the already increasing issue of climate change, cited as the source of these bushfires in the first place.

Climate Change's Role

Research by the World Economic Forum indicates that the raising high temperatures in Australia can be accounted for by global warming as, within the past century, this increasing trend has led to higher frequency and intensity of such fires. While over a century ago, the temperatures within most parts of Australia fluctuated within 1°C above average, in recent times the temperature in certain states touched highs of above 3°C above average. Additionally, over time the fires have been appearing earlier and stronger than the usual "fire season". The annual fires are due to a combination of the

drying of the forests and woodlands from the summer sun and ignited by lightning strikes, accident or deliberate initiation from arson. Such incidents and climate change impacts are not exclusive to affecting only certain parts of the globe.

Repeating Patterns

Australia has not been the only victim to such an incident, in 2019, the Brazilian Amazon saw an 80% increase in fires from the previous year with over 76,000 fires burning across the forest as per a National Geographic report. The fires in the Amazon have also shown a direct correlation to the mass deforestation and a yearlong drought observed in the area. With increasing temperatures predicted under business as usual, scientists predict more extreme fire behavioral patterns in the times to come. With repeat of a similar Amazon fire pattern in Australia, there is a strong movement for individuals, civil society, corporates and the government to consider the impact of climate change and take action towards mitigation.

Australia's Action on Climate Change

Australia is one of the 187 Parties which has ratified the Paris Climate Agreement with a commitment to take action on climate change. The Department of Agriculture, Water and Environment reports that Australia has set a target to make a 26-28% reduction in its emissions compared with 2005 levels by 2030 as per its commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement. According to the Department's report, this calls for a 50-52 % reduction in emissions per capita between 2005 and 2030. With a long-term commitment by the country to mitigate climate change, it is integral to understand and respond to the urgent need for climate change and its impact such as the bushfires with political, corporate and individual action.

The impacts from climate change are environmental, social and economic as the impact includes physical and natural capital disruption. Climate risks have the capability to affect a range of socio-economic factors such as disruption to livability and workability; food production; physical assets and infrastructure and natural capital. It is therefore integral for us as individuals to move towards a more sustainable lifestyle: by choosing sustainable travel methods, making conscious purchase decisions, buying more local food and demanding businesses for sustainable products. Businesses of tomorrow are also required to adopt sustainable business models and work towards the SDGs. Governments are required to lead the change through legislation and subsidies for renewable energy and fossil fuel alternatives to make real progress in achieving the Paris Climate Agreement target of limiting global temperatures increase to within 2°C of pre-industrial levels by 2030. Overall, a collective action is required in order to ensure our planet is protected from the climate risks affecting us today and in the future.

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The IPCC' Special Report on Climate Change and Land: Your Questions Answered

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. Its recent climate change and land report, is the response to the 2016 Panel decision to prepare three Special Reports during the Sixth Assessment cycle. This report is the first one with land as a central focus and it addresses "greenhouse gas (GHG) fluxes in land-based ecosystem, land use and sustainable land management in relation to climate change adaptation and mitigation, desertification, land degradation and food security". Once the summary for policymakers was released, the IPCC also released the full technical 1,4000 page report, plus supplementary materials.

Q: What is the composition of the technical report?
A: The report consists of seven chapters with each chapter providing an in-depth analysis of one of the aspects of the climate change and land inter-relation. Chapters are: Framing and Context, Land-Climate Interactions, Desertification, Land Degradation, Food Security, Interlinkages between desertification, land degradation, food security and GHG fluxes: Synergies, trade-offs and Integrated Response Options, Risk management and decision making in relation to sustainable development. It also includes two chapters with Supplementary Material.

Q: What does the report say about land-climate interactions?
A: Land and climate affect each other, and the report addresses their interactions. The report notes that climate change can affect the land through both gradual changes in temperature and rainfall patterns, as well as changes in the "distribution and intensity of extreme events". Yet, the report pinpoints three processes in which climate change exerts a direct pressure on land causing its degradation: "coastal erosion as affected by sea level rise and increased storm frequency/intensity, permafrost thawing responding to warming, and increased burning (of wildfires) responding to warming and altered precipitation regimes". Still, the land also contributes to climate change. Namely, the land plays a key role in storing greenhouse gases and according to the report, the land absorbed 30% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions from 2008-2017. But it can also be a greenhouse gases (GHGs) emitter. The report confirms that the leading cause of GHG release from the land comes from human activity and that the major driver of CO_2 release is deforestation and other types of vegetation loss, while the major driver of methane and nitrous oxide emissions is agriculture.

Q: How does climate change affect food security?

A: The report focuses on the effects climate change has on food security and confirms that "changes in extreme weather and climate have negative impacts on food security through regional reductions of crop yields". The report says that on average over recent decades, around 10% of cereal production has been lost globally because of extreme weather events. In the chapter five, the report says: "Observed climate change is already affecting food security through increasing temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and greater frequency of some extreme events. Increasing temperatures are affecting agricultural productivity in higher latitudes, raising yields of some crops (maize, cotton, wheat, sugar beets), while yields of others (maize, wheat, barley) are declining in lower-latitude regions." The report also warns that the impact of climate change on food yields is expected to worsen in coming decades.

Q: What are the possible solutions?

A: Chapter six of the report assesses response options that could be used to address the land challenges (climate change mitigation, adaptation, desertification, land degradation, and food security). These response options fall into three broad categories (land management, value chain, and risk management). Yet, the applicability of these solutions is region and context specific and "while many value chain and risk management options are potentially broadly applicable, many land management options are applicable on less than 50% of the ice-free land surface". The report takes into consideration 40 specific responses to these issues. Eight of these options yielded medium to large benefits for all of the land challenges being considered (increased food productivity, improved forest management, reduced deforestation, increased soil organic carbon content, enhanced mineral weathering, dietary changes, reduced post-harvest losses and reduced food waste); Sixteen response options have large adaptation potential (>25 million people benefit), without 4 adverse side-effects on other land challenges. Moreover, the report emphasises that these response options are linked and that the feasibility of response options is limited due to economic, technological, institutional, socio-cultural, environmental and geophysical barriers. The report calls for coordinated action across a range of actors, including business, consumers, land managers, indigenous and local communities and policymakers to create enabling conditions for the adoption of response options.

The objective of the IPCC is to provide governments at all levels with scientific information that they can use to develop climate policies. IPCC reports are also a key input into international climate change negotiations. In this recent report, IPCC clearly states that actions can and need to be taken in the near-term, to address desertification, land degradation and food security while supporting longer-term responses that enable adaptation and mitigation to climate change. These include actions to build individual and institutional capacity, accelerate knowledge transfer, enhance technology transfer and deployment, enable financial mechanisms, implement early warning systems, undertake risk management and address gaps in implementation and upscaling.

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Sustainability and CSR in India: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Following China, India is the second most populated country in the world. Prior to late 1980s, India's economic development was sluggish and slow with the annual growth rate around 3.5% from 1950s to 1980s and per capita income growth of 1%. Yet, in the mid-1980s India started the process of economic liberalization and introduced fundamental reforms since 1991 that made the country progressed towards a free market economy. These reforms have enhanced the country's economic development and today India is the world's third largest economy in purchasing parity terms.

Facts

Nevertheless, the economic growth has not been equally distributed and has been one of the key causes of the degradation of the environment. Namely, the top 0.1% of earners in India captured a higher share of total growth than the bottom 50%, with the top 1% receiving more than the middle 40%. When it comes to environment, the country's key challenges are air pollution, waste and access to water. Indian cities make up 10 of the top 20 globally for annual PM2.5 concentrations and one in eight deaths in India in 2017 was attributable to air pollution. Also, it has been estimated that 62 million tons of urban solid waste in India is produced each year, of which, 80% is indiscriminately disposed of at dumps. Moreover, India is faced with extreme water crisis and it has been estimated that 600 million people in India face high to extreme water stress. Moreover, India is the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases (GHGs), after China and the US. However, despite all these issues the country is faced with, India has taken serious measures to tackle the sustainability issues and pledge to do even more regarding sustainability and sustainable development.

India's progress regarding sustainable development until today

India as still a developing country has taken many measures to tackle and resolve its key sustainability issues.

According to the 2019 global Multidimensional Poverty Index, over 640 million people across India were in multidimensional poverty in 2005/2006 and that fell steeply to slightly more than 365.55 million by 2016/2017 – an impressive reduction of 271 million with strong improvements in areas such as "assets, cooking fuel, sanitation and nutrition". This achievement can be attributed to the governments' ambitious initiatives and measures to tackle the issue of poverty by improving living standard such as improving electricity access. For instance, 70% of the population had electricity access in 2007 and that increased to 93% by 2017. Also, between 2006 and 2016, India reduced deprivation in nutrition from 44.3% to 21.2%, child mortality dropped from 4.5% to 2.2%, people deprived of cooking fuel reduced from 52.9% to 26.2%t, deprivation in sanitation from 50.4% to 24.6%, those deprived of drinking water reduced from 16.6% to 6.2%.

When it comes to addressing environmental issues and climate change, India has enacted laws and made pledges to support the Paris Agreement. The present legislative framework is broadly contained in the umbrella Environment Protection Act 1986, the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the Water Cess Act, 1977, and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. The National Environment Policy that was adopted in 2006, has set the objectives to address the key environmental challenges: Conservation of Critical Environmental Resources, Intra-generational Equity: Livelihood Security for the Poor, Inter-generational Equity, Integration of Environmental Concerns in Economic and Social Development, Efficiency in Environmental Resource Use, Environmental Governance, and Enhancement of Resources for Environmental Conservation. The policy objectives indicate that sustainable development is its underlying principle. Moreover, India's national climate action plans set three major goals—increase the share of non-fossil fuels to 40% of the total electricity generation capacity, to reduce the emission intensity of the economy by 33 to 35% by 2030 from 2005 level, and to create additional carbon sink of 2.5 -3 billion tons of CO_2 equivalent through additional forest and tree cover. In this respect, India recently became the third largest solar market in the world, following on from ambitious target set by the government in 2015. Also, when it comes to the emissions intensity of GDP, India has brought it down by 21% below 2005 levels by 2014. At this average annual rate of 2%, it is likely that India will meet its Paris goal nearly a decade ahead of 2030.

The role of business should not be underestimated in addressing sustainability challenges in India. Research from the Reporting Exchange shows that there are 31 ESG reporting provisions in India and over 60% of the Indian reporting provisions are mandatory. Environmental matters make up the most common reporting area in India, with 87% of reporting provisions considering environmental issues. In 2013, India updated its Companies Act to introduce Section 135, which requires companies to establish a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) committee of the board, develop CSR policies, spend 2% of profits on CSR causes and report on these activities.

India to play a greater leadership role in the global arena
India has already shown leadership in combating climate change and meeting the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs), as is reflected in many of its developmental schemes, programs and initiatives. As the country that has undergone rapid economic growth and the one that has the second largest population in the world, there is no doubt that India's success will be central to the world's collective ambition of ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity, as well as for achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Food Waste: How does it Affect Global Sustainability and how to Reduce it

Global food waste is a chronic issue that has tremendous financial, environmental and ethical implications. That food waste is a serious problem the world must deal with..... yesterday: an estimated 1.3 billion tons of food (one third of all food produced for human consumption) is wasted globally each year, while world hunger is on the rise and 1 in 9 people is undernourished. The financial costs of food wastage are substantial and amount to about USD 1 trillion each year. Also, the food that is lost and wasted each year accounts for an estimated 8% of annual GHG emissions, consumes a quarter of all water used by agriculture, and requires an agricultural area the size of China. In addition to the above, throwing away food is considered by many as unethical.

What is food waste?
The production and distribution of food in an ever more networked world indicate a long journey from farm to table through which food is lost or wasted at every stage. Even though "food waste" and "food loss" are commonly used terms, they do not have the same meaning:

- **Food loss** refers to food that is lost along the food supply chain from harvest up to, that is in earlier stages of production such as harvest, storage and transportation.
- **Food waste** occurs at the retail and consumption levels and refers to food that is fit for human consumption but thrown away, often at supermarkets or by consumers.

In developing countries food waste and losses occur mainly at early stages of the food value chain and can be traced back to financial, managerial and technical constraints in harvesting techniques as well as storage and cooling facilities. On the other hand, in medium- and high-income countries food is wasted and lost mainly at later stages in the supply chain where the behavior of consumers plays a critical role.

How to reduce food waste?
Reducing food loss and waste is critical to tackling the environmental and social issues. Reducing food loss and waste can help the fight against climate change and can aid in creating zero hunger world. The importance of reducing food loss and waste can be seen in a way how this issue is integrated into the Sustainable Development Agenda. Namely, Sustainable Development Goal 12 is designed to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns while Sustainable Development Goal 2 is designed to tackle the issue of hunger and end it.

In this respect, the Global Action Agenda has been designed to aid the reduction of food loss and waste and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 that is to halve per capita global food waste at the retail and consumer levels and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, including post-harvest losses by 2030.

The Global Action Agenda is designed to guide businesses, governments, civil society, and other actors in the food supply chain who can play a role in tackling food loss and waste, individually and collectively.

The Agenda proposes "a simple but effective "Target-Measure-Act" approach to reducing food loss and waste" that should be adopted and implemented by governments and companies:

1. **Set targets**: Targets set ambition, and ambition motivates action. Governments and companies should therefore adopt an explicit food loss and waste reduction goal aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 12.3—a 50 percent reduction by 2030.

2. **Measure your food loss and waste:** Quantifying food loss and waste within borders, operations, or supply chains can help decision-makers better understand how much, where, and why food is being lost or wasted. Governments and companies should therefore start to measure their food loss and waste and monitor progress over time.

3. **Take action**: Reducing food loss and waste at scale will require numerous actors in the food supply chain to implement a variety of context specific interventions. Governments, companies, farmers, citizens, and others should immediately get moving on implementing their respective to-do lists.

The importance of reducing food waste
Reducing food loss and waste can help meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, contribute to the Paris Agreement on climate change, and sustainably feed the planet by 2050. Yet, the realization of this objective will require the mobilization of all actors through the whole process of food production and distribution. Goals of resolving the issue of food loss and waste and ending hunger go hand in hand and can be managed together successfully. And it all comes down to our personal responsibility and individual actions: What does each one of us do, to combat food waste? A small action can make a big difference!

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Sustainable Mobility: From Future Trend to Necessity

In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, when the extraordinary technology advances are changing almost every aspect of our everyday life, sustainable mobility has recently become a topic largely discussed. Mobility, as a process of having access to various high-quality modes of transport, has started being transformed in a way to become sustainable; autonomous, electric and/or shared are three technological revolutions that represent this transformative wave that impacts mobility nowadays.

Why do we need sustainable mobility?
Rapid urbanization and the spread of private vehicle ownership have caused cities and transport becoming main contributors to climate change. Residents of just 100 cities account for 20% of humanity's overall carbon footprint and roughly one third of an urban resident's footprint is determined by that city's public transport options and building infrastructure. And the alarming fact is that over half of the world (55%) live in urban areas today, and that number is growing: according to the UN, two-thirds of global population will live in cities by 2050. Apart from being one of the main contributors to climate change, transport is one of the biggest causes of pollution in cities.

Sustainable mobility in Europe
It could be said that the three most prevalent sustainable models of mobility are electric, automated vehicles and sharing modes of transport. Today, sales of electric cars amount to 2%, but the sales are likely to rise to around 20% and 40% in 2025 and 2030 respectively. Also, the upcoming EU and national regulations and funding should accelerate the process of electrification, while manufacturers have made announcements indicating that their global production in terms of models will perhaps exceed the 2030 targets. When it comes to automated cars, they are rarely used and have been operating for a couple of years only in controlled areas. However, it is still early to talk about the spread use of automated vehicles especially given the fact that many uncertainties remain regarding their regulation, ethics, and public acceptance. Sharing mode of mobility, in terms of shared rides in trains and buses dominated the transport sector until mid-20th century. Yet, owning a car has been a prevalent in the second half of the 20th century and especially in the 21st century. Even though sharing model of mobility provides high utilisation and affordable price, people are reluctant to give up the luxury of enjoying the private space of their cars.

There is no doubt that Europe is making more room for sustainable mobility and is decisive to green the transport sector. The electric bus sales volumes surged in 2019, and while in 2018 the European electric bus market increased of 48% compared to 2017, in the first nine months of 2019 there has already been a + 100% registrations.

Also, there are many local initiatives to embrace sustainable mobility as the one undertaken in Pontevedra, a Spanish city, where 300 000 square meters of space in the centre were converted into a pedestrian area. Although, the initiative was faced with some opposition, it brought many benefits such as the reduction of traffic fatalities, and the reduction of CO_2 emissions by 70%.

Sustainable mobility in China

As China's economy grew from 178 billion USD in 1978 to around 12 trillion USD in 2017, its transport sector also has undergone profound changes. If car ownership is taken into account, the figures are outstanding. Namely, while the entire country of China had under 20,000 registered private cars in 1985, in July 2018 Chinese consumers purchased more than 60,000 cars each day. China as the world second largest economy, has been constantly investing in its transport system and it has constructed the world's largest High-Speed Rail (HSR) and highway networks, built the world's largest metro systems and is destined to overtake the United States (US) to become the largest civil aviation market by 2022. With all these developments, China's transport system was the third largest emitter of CO_2 emissions in 2016. However, China is developing "disruptive mobility innovations and has become somewhat of a cauldron of innovation in the development of New Energy Vehicles (NEVs), Intelligent and Connected Vehicles (ICVs), Shared Mobility and digitalized transport innovations". Moreover, recently, the car-sharing, e-hailing and bike-sharing industries have seen eruptive growth. A major driver of shared mobility in China has been the large amount of funds that have flowed towards the development of the sector and between 2013 and 2017, the Chinese shared mobility market has attracted more than 160 billion RMB (around 21 billion EUR) in investments, with 81.7 % of funds being directed into the ride-hailing market and 11.2% into the bike-sharing segment.

Future or Present of Sustainable Mobility

Electric vehicles, shared mode of transport bike sharing, e-hailing are all part of the wave of sustainable mobility. Sustainable mobility is both our present and our future. And its development will depend on the readiness of people to give up comfortable ride in their "4-wheels toys".

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The Other Side of Coronavirus – Social Responsibility (CSR) of Businesses and Organisations

Guest article by Theodoulos M. Makriyiannis
Vice Chairman of Cyprus Network for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR Cyprus)
Head of Corporate Social Responsibility at Cyta

We are undoubtedly going through very difficult times. It is a period of uncertainty, fear, insecurity, instability, reluctance, awkwardness, with questions about the present and the future. This has a multilevel effect on the personal, family and work life of almost all people.

During the past few weeks, we have witnessed the efforts of several Organisations and companies, especially those in the service sector, introducing various schemes and telecommuting tools in order to endure their operations as far as possible, while others have suspended their operations until further notice. **These conditions test the strengths of Organisations and businesses**, the financial structures of the state, but above all they test the strengths of workers and their families.

In an article published on the 12th of March 2020 on "Coronavirus – with opportunity comes responsibility", Mr. David Marsh, Business Continuity Manager at Gamma Telecommunications PLC in the UK, states that "My concern is for the smaller organisations without the skill resilience and I recall a BCI Video entitled the "time is now" and it is very true of what is happening now". As quoted in the Video, "In an uncertain world, companies with **Business Continuity Plans** have an advantage. When the clock is ticking, they are ahead of the game. If there ever was a time where resilience is needed, time is now".

As Mr. Marsh explains, focusing on good health and well-being can have a huge positive impact on employees, business culture and day-to-day performance.
Along with increasing support for employees to manage non-occupational diseases, it is clear that wellbeing strategies that address work-related causes of health, such as stress, should be a key priority for Organisations when reviewing business continuity plans.

In his article "How to Prevent Loneliness in a Time of Social Distancing", published on the 12th of March 2020 at the website of the acclaimed Scientific American magazine, Mr. Kasley Killam, states that "with increasing numbers of people isolated because of quarantine and social distancing, COVID-19 is not the only public health threat we should be worried about—**loneliness is one as well**".

As noted in the article, while scientists are rushing to understand how the coronavirus works, researchers have long understood the toll that social isolation and loneliness take on the body. People who do not feel connected to others are more likely to catch a cold, experience depression, develop heart disease, have lower cognitive function and live a shorter life. In fact, **the long-term harm caused by loneliness is similar to smoking or obesity.**

In January 2020, a [nationwide survey in the US](#) found that 79% of Gen Zers (Generation Z – those born in the mid-1990s to mid-2000s), 71% of Millennials (born between 1981-1996) and 50% of baby boomers (born between 1946-1964) feel lonely. As the article states, even without the isolating from Coronavirus, most of the population already suffers from poor social health. The obvious cause of this problem is technology and social media.

However, [recent research by the Harvard School of Public Health](#) has shown that the problem is not the time spent on social media and technology, but how it is used and that everyone can benefit from developing digital habits that support meaningful human connections, especially now that it may be our only option until the pandemic is over. As stated in Mr. Killam's article, "now is the perfect time to practice using technology in socially healthy ways", giving several examples.
Therefore, it is commonly understood that in this era, psychosocial risks and particularly depression, is one of the major problems faced by Organisations and businesses.

As reported on the [World Health Organization website](#), depression is a common illness worldwide, with more than 264 million people being affected, while close to 800.000 people die due to suicide every year. In addition, suicide is the second leading cause of death in 15-29-year-olds.

Based on all the above, and in the light of the actions taken to implement the United Nations' [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) (in particular target 3.4 to promote, inter alia, mental health and well-being), all Organisations and businesses within their Corporate Social Responsibility, take concrete and effective measures to protect employees and their families.

As already mentioned, focus on good health and well-being can have a **huge positive impact on employees**, business culture and everyday performance, with consequent creation of appropriate conditions for ensuring business continuity.
Moreover, offering good practices for psychological support for employees and their families can play an important role during the Coronavirus outbreak. This can be achieved by designing and implementing specific **employee-centred strategies**, taking into consideration the particularities someone must deal with, as a result of the consequences of quarantine i.e. a mother or a father, being responsible for the education of their children and / or the care of the elderly.

The Cyprus Psychological Association (CYPSA) can play an imperative role in this effort. Some good practices are the preparation of specific guidelines for organisations/businesses by CYPSA on how to inform their personnel, as well as identify, address and protect employees and their families in need of assistance.

In addition, CYPSA and its Members, showing their own Social Responsibility, could provide online psychological support with reduced fees to any organisation or business interested in covering the cost of their staff and family members for as long as the pandemic lasts.

Summarizing all the above, it is clear that the resilience of Organisations and businesses is strongly intertwined with the strategies they choose to implement to manage their business continuity. Strategies, which have a very important role to play (the most important being their mental health) in health and wellness issues for both the staff as well as their families. There are many ways to manage the crisis. But it is up to each organization and business to make the right choices by focusing on their people.

In a crisis like the one we are going through today, most of the organisations and businesses will suffer significant losses. But the crisis will sooner or later pass and there will be winners and losers. And the winners will not be the ones who will temporarily choose to maximize or safeguard their profits. **Winners will be those who choose to support their staff as much as they can**, even if it means a significant loss of revenue or their reserves. Winners will also be those Organisations and businesses that activate their Corporate Social Responsibility mechanisms and choose the path of solidarity and selfless offer to the state, our fellow human being and the society in general.

The choices are there, and everyone is invited to make their own. **Theodoulos M. Makriyiannis**

CSR Cyprus was established in November 2016 in the form of a non-profit association (number 4583) and is the national Operational Network of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Cyprus. The main objective of the Network is to promote, develop and implement CSR and promote it both to the business world and to the social environment with an ultimate goal of achieving a balanced profitability and sustainable development

Guest article by Theodoulos M. Makriyiannis
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Your 4 step Guide to post-lockdown Personal Success

Currently, there is a flurry of conversation online about self care practices as a result of the global Covid-19 pandemic. The personal effects to mental health have been significant and the world wide web has been quick to pump out a plethora of guides and online courses to help overcome personal stresses.

For many, a more practical approach right now is what is most helpful. Self care practices are vital at a time like this. However, they aren't necessarily enough to help us to navigate the current circumstances in a fuller capacity.

At **Sustainability Knowledge Group**, we believe wholeheartedly in the power of overcoming – no matter the circumstances. It is the foundation of our work and the baseline to how we approach business with you. This applies not only to the current circumstances, but to every area of our Sustainability work. We help you flourish.

Recently, our team came across this powerful image online. It has recently gone viral and we wanted to harness its power, sharing it as a guide for you to draw motivation from.

We were inspired – and we very much hope you will be also.

Here is your 4 step guide to placing yourself in the best possible position during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond:

Step 1: Fear Zone

If your mind is busy with concern right now, then you aren't alone. You might be avoiding important e-mails, forwarding on scaremongering statistics, or panic purchasing online.

Your fear may even be manifesting itself in a 'fire-fighting' approach to business, where you are diving into a multitude of tasks at one time to feel as if you are coping.

Simply ignoring these feelings won't help you to overcome them ultimately. In order to remove fear, you must first acknowledge it. Take note of your impulses and allow your true feelings to surface. You will remove much of the venom in order to then make far clearer minded choices moving forwards.

Step 2: Learning Zone

In order to truly learn, we must allow ourselves to reflect upon the information that has been imparted to us. Right now, there is an extraordinary amount of noise coming from news desks on a near constant basis. Consuming too much of this can cloud your thinking and negatively affect your approach to daily tasks in your work and home life. It is simply not sustainable!

To power up your personal education, stick to trusted and reputable news sources. Limit your consumption whenever you become overwhelmed. Switch off notifications from unnecessary or irrelevant apps you might have been using before lockdown to reduce your reactivity.

By doing so, you will clear your mind of negativity leaving space for far better ideas to form.

Step 3: Growth Zone

Shock can leave us numb. But at this stage of the world events, we have a better idea of the situation and its effects. We may not have a definite idea of what the short or long term future will hold, but we do have the power to take back control of the present moment.

In fact, this mindful method of staying in the present could be the element you were missing out long before the virus arrived into our lives.

Try offering the services and skills you most enjoy to others in your network. It can be volunteering to disseminate food to vulnerable communities, or simply make a phone call to people you know are alone. Not only will it keep you feeling you are in progression, you never know what new connections or opportunities could arise from doing so.

Furthermore, learn to appreciate what you already have access to in your life. What is important to you? Maybe value more things that were taken for granted. This will greatly enhance your perspective on how to navigate forwards once the pandemic events eventually come to pass.

Step 4: Action Zone

Right now, everything is not as it once was. By trying to force your old habits, projects and interests into this entirely new environment you will only end up frustrating yourself. Embrace the changes that have occurred by injecting some positive action into the situation. Its impressive how this step is connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

You don't have to single handedly change the world. It's all about partnerships (SDG 17). You can make significant difference to those around you by supporting them in a variety of ways. You could donate financially to a cause that is making a lot of difference right now, like Health (SDG 3), support women who have been affected by the pandemic (SDG 5). Consider offering your skills for free to those who would not otherwise be able to access education (SDG 4). Or you could spend time being creative with those you are in home quarantine with, to boost the collective mood. Volunteering for an online "human lending library" is a fantastic way to share your skills and expertise in a positive and progressive manner. We hope that this could be something that brings you a huge amount of joy and might even become something you take forwards, beyond the limitations of lockdown.

A Unique set of Circumstances

It's important to remember that these are unprecedented times we are living in. None of us could have prepared for the impact the pandemic would have. It is important to embrace the situation as the unique set of circumstances that they are. Avoid the temptation to cross compare the "before" with the "after".

Like any other crisis we have faced in life in human history, this is certainly not a permanent situation. Additionally, some of the most inspiring examples of community spirit and business adaptability have grown from this. This too, shall pass.

Take each day as it comes, applying the guide steps from this article as you navigate your way. Development is not linear, and your experience will vary. This is natural to the process and something to embrace both now and post-lockdown.

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5 Ways to Support Your Team Overcome Post Lockdown Trauma

During the past few months, your team has been through an extraordinary amount of change. Not only have they been juggling remote working with home quarantine life, but the work they usually do has likely transformed too. This is a time for adjustment and opening our minds to how the world might look from here on in.

As we tentatively begin to emerge from lockdown, it's imperative that we do all we can to empower our colleagues to continue the collective healing we are all working through. Yes, we have been shaken. We can all agree that businesses have been drastically challenged. Of course, there have been personal loss beyond true measure.

But this too shall pass – and as it does, we need to pull together in powerful new ways.

Five steps to power up the process of overcoming beyond lockdown:

•**Recognise the situation for what it is.** We cannot – and should not – ignore the events of late. If you try to do so, you will only end up frustrated. Ensure your approach isn't tone deaf by staying open minded to how your colleagues might be feeling right now, and what they might be going through beyond your immediate knowledge. It's important to validate the feelings and experiences of your team at this point of events. Remain mindful of what is appropriate right now. Focus on the positive, but don't negate the enormity of was has been happening. Open communication is key and should be encouraged not only temporarily, but as a continual future practice within your company.

•**Create healthy spaces for colleagues to communicate.** Some colleagues may have been personally affected by losses in the family as a result of the virus. Many more have likely battled relationship challenges, financial difficulties, and personal trauma of varying kinds. Ensure that your human resources team are up to speed on how to support those who might be struggling. Creating opportunity for counselling could be beneficial. Where possible create formal channels to encourage your team to seek professional help and make sure you cover the expenses. If you already offer internal coaching or mentoring schemes, make sure that colleague ensures they check in on their designated mentoring/coaching partner regularly in the working week. Doing so will allow space for each person to offload without fear of judgement. It could help bring your team together in innovative and empowered ways you hadn't considered.

•**Resist the temptation to rush.** We are all feeling frustrated at not being able to work as we normally do. Many of us have felt cooped up at home and we are raring to get going again. But running forwards in a fire-fighter mindset won't help matters. You will only make rash decisions that lead to further delay or financial loss. Take time to consider that is best for your company on an ongoing basis from here, loosening your grip on your concept of how things "should" be. You might be surprised what new ideas could develop from doing so.

•**Keep staff informed as the situation progresses.** Currently, the national and global circumstances are constantly changing and developing. Equip your team with the tools they will need going forwards from this point in time. The [World Health Organisation (WHO)](#) is releasing detailed updates regularly which you can use to educate your staff on upcoming plans of action and best practices in terms of hygiene and safety. Ensure you use the appropriate information that is available to you. Using good quality sources and communicating relevant information to your team will reassure your colleagues enormously as they return to their roles.

•**Make allowances for one another.** This step is probably the most important of all, so pay close attention here. Is your secretary usually much more conscientious, but you are noticing that they are now a little scattered? Or are you finding that those Zoom meetings are a little less productive than they once were? Be patient. We have all been through an ordeal recently and none of us are quite feeling ourselves. Encourage one another as you venture forwards together, letting go of small annoyances that aren't beneficial to address. Reiterate the company ethos and remind your team how valuable they really are. Doing so will be much more effective than focusing on fleeting failures.

Embrace the five powerful steps
Unaddressed trauma can be highly debilitating in the short and long term. This applies both personally and in the context of business. Without tending properly to a wound, it will only be more painful and take much longer to heal than necessary. By embracing these five powerful steps, you will be harnessing the power of personal care to power up your professional staff team as you emerge from these difficult events and eventually move on from them. The fact that you are here reading this article demonstrates that you genuinely care about your team. You came here to find new ways to take care of the team and the business you care about most. This, above all, is the most important element of all in your overcoming toolkit. This alone is your foundation to build from. It might seem as if you'll be in a state of professional recovery from the personal implications of the virus forever. But don't lose hope. You have got this far, and you shall continue. From here, take the necessary steps listed in this article, taking your time as you do so.
You are already doing your best – now take this guide toolkit, and level up!
Your team will be so glad you did – as will you.

Linked to the following Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs):

1. Sustainable Development Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
2. Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
3. Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
4. Sustainable Development Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
5. Sustainable Development Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

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5 Links Between COVID-19 and Climate Change

It was only 11 months to go to the COP26 conference when COVID-19 "sneaked" into Wuhan in China, and our lives. Along with Italy, the UK was preparing to hold the United Nations Climate Change Conference 2020 in November in Glasgow, Scotland but, due to COVID-19 pandemic, it is now postponed indefinitely. COVID-19 and climate change –are they linked, and if so, how?

We have identified five possible links between COVID-19 and climate change (COVID-19 is a type of coronavirus and the terms are used interchangeably here).

Coronavirus and climate change are linked to the natural environment
Climate change can be described as a range of natural phenomena such as air temperature, warming oceans, sea ice and extreme weather events. Human elements such as mass migration will come as a result of climatic variations.

Coronavirus infests many animals but COVID-19 is a coronavirus that is found in bats. Then, pangolins act as an intermediary before it infects to humans. Many of the infectious diseases, including SARS and HIV, which were transmitted by animals to humans, came out of the natural environment. According to The Guardian the degradation of the natural world, the exploitation of the natural environment, as well as the manipulation of species is the cause of this pandemic and the humans hold the responsibility.

Coronavirus and climate change affect everybody
Climate change causes extreme weather events. In the past, many events such as flooding (e.g. Bangladesh and Indonesia) and droughts (e.g. Algeria and Chile) happened in the developing world. In the last two years, events such as flooding (e.g. UK) and wildfires (e.g. Australia and California in the US) occurred in the developed world too, which shows that climate change has no barriers.

In April this year, COVID-19 infected Prince Charles and PM Boris Johnson. They both survived. Many others, including celebrities, high profile individuals, along with doctors and nurses have unfortunately died as the Coronavirus has no barriers and shown no deference to celebrity or social status. The pandemic has impacted millions around the world; over 411,000 people have died due to complications from COVID-19.

Coronavirus and climate change test the health systems

In December 2019, the unusual situation sparked off in Wuhan in China and WHO, in February 2020, warned that this could be a global pandemic. Many leaders did not adequately listen to that message. Now, five months later, world leaders of the developed world, try to make things right. Around the world, the coronavirus pandemic tested the largest public health threat of the century, climate change and COVID-19 has tarnished even the most advanced health systems. According to Josh Karliner, the International Director of Program and Strategy for Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), we are living in a moment when two major global threats, a worldwide pandemic and the climate crisis, have suddenly converged: "Both are health emergencies, but of different kinds. With one, disease spreads like wildfire. And with the other, if you will, wildfires spread disease".

Coronavirus can have positive climate effects

In China, the coronavirus outbreak made people stay home, their travel reduced and the heavy industries that they worked came to a standstill and this amounted to the reduction of emissions 25%. In Europe the emissions reduction was between 40 to 60%. In the UK, the road traffic reduced by 70%. In the US, 6,000 people were killed by cars in 2018 while 200,000 died from air pollution annually. In April, Carbon Brief estimated that the fall of global emissions with respect to 2019 is 5.5%. Lack of travel across the world created climate-friendly conditions and even led climate activists to propose imposing similar solutions upon returning to the "normal". A free, interactive tool developed by HyperGiant, an artificial intelligence start-up, puts both global crises and their relationship to each other in perspective. But COVID-19 hasn't stopped the climate crisis. It has merely allowed for a very small pause in the rapidly expanding emissions problem.

Climate change may cause pandemics like coronavirus

It is clear that climate change did not cause the coronavirus pandemic but, in future, it may set the conditions for similar situations.

Extreme weather events such as heat waves and wildfires cause severe impacts. For example, air pollution is the cause of 1 in 8 deaths. There is no doubt that human actions have a direct effect on health. According to Dr. Aaron Bernstein, a paediatrician at Boston Children's Hospital and interim director of Harvard's C-CHANGE Institute at the T.H. Chan School of Public Health, "If we're still deforesting the world as we are and we're still having huge amounts of trade in wildlife that may be carriers of diseases for people, you could still wind up with big problems."

Fears and hopes

We would like to guide you to take action and implement strategies to tackle Climate Change and the socioeconomic impacts of this pandemic. COVID-19 has radically changed every aspect of our lives and every sector of businesses – from remote working and grounded flights to diminished movement and shuttered factories. In the words of Howard Kunreuther, co-director of the Wharton Risk Management and Decision Processes Center, "Aside from the coronavirus pandemic, the biggest, most destructive exponential growth processes that we must grapple with today are those associated with global climate change". We would like to guide you to the Harvard C-CHANGE School of Public health for an in-depth conversation on the topic of Coronavirus, Climate Change, and the Environment. Feel free to reach out to us on how to communicate your response to COVID-19 in your Sustainability Report or how to include your COVID-19 actions in your Sustainability Strategy and action plan.

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Dubai Financial Market launches ESG Index

How COVID-19 enhanced the importance of ESG standards
In the first quarter of the year, the COVID-19 pandemic caused the biggest collapse in the stock market since the great global financial crisis in 2008, and despite everyone suffering from its effects, companies and investors focusing on environmental, social and Governmental (ESG) standards were the least affected by the pandemic.
The importance of such initiatives to investors and beyond, has increased more than ever. Given the recent evidence of the excellent performance of corporates that follow ESG globally, corporates with better ratings in ESG disclosures have outperformed their peers in large markets during these difficult times. When the economy recovers, corporates following ESG standards will need to focus on demonstrating how ESG creates financial value and meet investor expectations, gain their confidence and ensure growth. In the medium term however, there is an opportunity to "rebuild better" in the sense of a cleaner, more environmentally friendly and sustainable economy.

Sustainability in capital markets
Stock exchanges play an essential role in promoting sustainability in the capital markets and enhancing investors' confidence. The Sustainable Stock Exchanges (SSE) Initiative, was set up in 2019, is a UN Partnership Programme organised by UNCTAD, the UN Global Compact, UNEP FI and the PRI, with a mission to create an efficient platform for dialogue between the United Nations and stock exchanges, investors, companies, and regulators. This initiative aims to spread best practices of sustainability and transparency in the capital markets, promote institutional investments in sustainable development, and improve corporate governance practices. It also works to reinforce the importance of ESG issues and the importance of public disclosure. More than 80 exchanges worldwide have joined this initiative by making a voluntary public commitment to enhance transparency and market sustainability.
Since the launch of the Dow Jones World Sustainability Indices (DJSI) in 1999, the S&P Dow Jones Indices have been leaders in the global sustainability benchmarks worldwide. In 2012 the first negotiable market index for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) stock markets was launched. It ranks and tracks the performance, transparency, and disclosure of regional companies in the field of ESG.

Accelerating ESG performance of listed companies
In the Middle East, the ongoing regulatory efforts to establish environmental, social, and corporate governance and encourage corporate responsible behaviours augur well. In Dubai, on 22nd April of this year, the Dubai Financial Market (DFM) launched the Emirates Environmental, Social and Governance Index, which is the first of its kind among the UAE and Gulf financial markets. The S&P/Hawkamah UAE ESG Index measures the commitment of 20 listed joint-stock companies to adopt best practices in corporate governance and social and environmental responsibility.

Development of the UAE ESG Index and guides

The UAE ESG Index was developed in cooperation with S&P Dow Jones Indices, the global leader in financial market indices and the Corporate Governance Institute in the UAE, Hawkamah, the strategic partner of the DFM in disseminating best corporate governance and discipline practices among the listed companies.

Earlier this year, the DFM had issued the ESG Reporting Guide, a Corporate Governance Manual to assist DFM listed companies to voluntarily disclose ESG information and encourage responsible behaviours.

The S&P/Hawkamah UAE ESG Index

The UAE ESG index provides investors with a reliable standard tool that monitors the performance of corporate stocks according to their commitment to the rules of governance and social and environmental responsibility, which will contribute to:

- Raising awareness of corporate governance principles, which are included in the new Corporate Governance Guide for public joint-stock companies
- Development of comparative indicators of these companies' performance, especially concerning adherence to social and environmental responsibility principles
- Increasing the healthy competitiveness of the UAE markets between listed companies to show their interest in granting issues of governance, social and environmental responsibility more attention
- Contributing to enhancing investor confidence in the capital markets in the UAE
- Attracting more domestic and foreign investment
- Ensuring sustainable growth
- All companies included in the Index are subject to an evaluation process according to three measures:
- transparency and disclosure, based on corporate disclosures on implementing environmental, social, and governance responsibility standards
- environment and social indicators
- governance indicators

During the evaluation process, all information related to corporate disclosure about environmental and social responsibility and governance contained in several sources is monitored, and may include the company's annual report, website, press releases and market disclosures. This process aims to determine the extent to which a company provides transparent disclosures on the indicators included in the assessment system.

Sustainability Vision and the UAE capital market

The United Arab Emirates has made unremitting efforts to push sustainability forward in the region. Within the framework of the United Arab Emirates Vision 2021 and the Dubai Plan 2021, the UAE ESG Index, creates a highly productive investment climate which will attract international investors and encourage sustainable investment while sustaining environmental and social development. The Index represents the efforts to further develop the capital markets' sector, while supporting companies to meet both their investment and sustainability goals.

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Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/dubai-financial-market-launches-esg-index/

Celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the UN Global Compact Summit Online

The UN Global Compact challenges COVID-19

Under the restrictions on movement imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic around the world, the United Nations Global Compact Leaders Summit celebrated its 20th anniversary of uniting businesses for a better world. Under the theme "Recover Better, Recover Stronger, Recover Together" on June 15, for two days online, we witnessed a celebration of Sustainability.

The United Nations Global Compact Leaders Summit promised to be bigger, better, and more inclusive than any other event aimed at business leaders committed to addressing societal challenges and promoting sustainable development goals (SDGs). Indeed, over 26 continuous hours and more than 100 virtual global, regional, and local sessions. The summit was the largest, the most comprehensive United Nations meeting so far, and the most inclusive, with over 20,000 participants from over 180 countries, which participated in their local time zones and languages.

The United Nations Global Compact Leaders Summit brought together thousands of business leaders, Heads of State, UN officials and Chief Executive Officers in a joint effort to define how business, civil society, Governments and the UN can collaborate to "Recover Better, Recover Stronger, Recover Together," from three unprecedented and interconnected global crises "Health, Inequality and Climate change."

Highlights of the 20th-anniversary Leaders Summit

At the summit, business leaders, civil society, governments and the United Nations were challenged to reflect on the importance of cooperation and partnerships between the public and private sectors and to increase their ambition to achieve the SDGs. With over 100 SDG targets linked to infrastructure, the UN Global Compact launched a Platform for Action on "Sustainable Infrastructure for the Belt and Road Initiative to Accelerate the SDGs." It's expected to affect 60% of the world's population, 40% of world trade, and 30% of the global Gross Domestic Product.

During the sessions, the progress report UN Global Compact 20th-Anniversary Progress Report: Uniting Business in the Decade of Action was issued. The report provides an analysis of the progress made by companies over the past 20 years in integrating the ten principles of the UNGC into their strategies and operations. It also focused on how alignment with the ten principles of the UNGC can contribute to achieving the 17SDGs. In general, the report found that awareness of the SDGs is high, as companies engage in focusing on the SDGs most relevant to them. However, although a large proportion of the companies participating in the UN Global Compact take measures on the SDGs, less than half of the companies integrate them into their core business or have targets that are sufficiently ambitious, science-based, or in line with societal goals.

Additional resources launched at the event include the [SDG Ambition: Introducing Business Benchmarks for the Decade of Action](#) report. The report includes an initial set of best business practices standards to measure whether corporate activities are aimed at the necessary level of ambition to achieve the SDGs. It aims to enable the world's leading companies to adopt ambitious goals and to promote the integration of SDGs into core business management, business operations and IT landscape.

The UN Global Compact also launched the case example report [Leadership for the Decade of Action](#), which identifies the unique characteristics shared by leaders who integrate Sustainability across strategy, operations, and stakeholder involvement possess. The report reveals that to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, business leaders must look beyond short term profits and elevate Sustainability and resilience a business priority – both inside and outside their companies and broader ecosystems.

A call to action for the 2030 Agenda
Less than 4,000 days separate us from the 2030 milestone. Will companies and governments be able to stick to the promise of the 2030 Agenda and transform their commitments into actions that can lead to tangible improvements? Now is the time for leaders to speak up, raise their standards and act responsibly to meet the needs of society and the planet. We trust that as Sanda Ojiambo of Kenya takes over from Denmark's Lise Kingo as Executive Director, a new promising era for the UN Global Compact starts.

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Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/celebrate-the-20th-anniversary-of-the-un-global-compact-summit-online/

Uniting Business in the Decade of Action 20th anniversary of the United Nations Global Compact

On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the UN Global Compact and the 5th year since the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) launch, the UN Global Compact, in cooperation with DNV GL, released the UN Global Compact 20th-Anniversary Progress Report: Uniting Business in the Decade of Action.

The purpose of the report is to assess how companies participating in the UN Global Compact adopted the ten principles and the progress that participants have made so far to lay the groundwork for the next ten years. The report also assesses companies' performance on critical sustainability issues and examines the necessary systemic changes and actions to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

The Ten Principles
Since its launch, the UN Global Compact has called on companies to promote best practices and strategies to work responsibly and ethically to create a sustainable environment. The UN Global Compact drew ten universal principles from the significant UN conventions and charters relating to human rights, environment, labour and anti-corruption, and taking actions that promote societal goals and the implementation of the SDGs.

Since the launch of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, companies have tended to contribute positively to the SDGs and develop policies that cover all ten principles. However, there is a gap between policy implementation levels and work to integrate the ten principles into the operations and strategies of the private sector. Only a few companies apply the ten principles to assess and address their risks and impacts. Because policy alone is not sufficient to bring about a deeper change in sustainable business, the business community must move from policy commitments and obligations to action that can lead to improvements in actual performance.

This is especially true in social dimensions such as labour and human rights. The report found that while a large proportion of companies conduct an environmental impact assessment, the conduct of human rights and anti-corruption impact assessments for employment is minimal.

Looking to the Decade of Action: achieving the required change

In the report, the UN Global Compact called on all companies to lead the transformational changes necessary to create the world we want, by:

•**Raise the ambition of the SDGs**

The world is not yet on the right track to achieving the SDGs, and the scale and pace of change to achieve the SDGs has not been significant or fast enough. Although the awareness of the SDGs is high, according to the report, only 39% of companies have goals that they believe are ambitious sufficient to advance the 2030 Agenda. Companies only have a Decade of Action to reverse this impasse by taking an in-depth look at where they are missing and setting industry goals, standards, and implementation plans. In this way, companies will contribute to achieving the change and transformation required to intensify ambition sufficiently.

•**Advocating ambitious policies and participating in collective action**

Despite the progress that has been made so far, there is also much to do. Although companies and their related systems are moving in the same direction, this is not done in a concerted effort. Companies and industries, in general, need agreed ambitions, goals, and guidelines to help them coordinate and focus on supporting the achievement of the SDGs.

•**Merging the ten principles completely**

Policy alone is not enough to drive change when there is a gap between the levels of policy implementation and work required to integrate the ten principles into company operations and strategies. The report shows that the ten principles and SDG have not yet been sufficiently integrated into most companies' governance and strategy systems and that they are not adequately present in decision-making and action. It is clear that companies need to move from policy to action. They need to integrate the ten principles to their business strategies and implement them as part of their operations with a goal to enhance sustainability outcomes.

There is still a lot to do

COVID-19 highlights weaknesses in health, social and economic aspects that widen social inequality and expose how fragile we are on a global scale and the rampant inequalities. In addition to the many looming crises, from climate change to biodiversity loss, they all demonstrate that the SDGs is not the ideal we aspire to reach but the basic requirement for creating a just society and a habitable planet.

Today, let's use COVID-19 as a wake-up call to correct the path, to take more ambitious actions, and drive the transformational changes required to accelerate the shift towards a sustainable and brighter future.

Sustainable Development in the European Union

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have driven global efforts to achieve Sustainable Development. The European Union (EU) is committed to making maximum progress towards the SDGs for the 2030 Agenda implementation. The European Commission is working to integrate the SDGs into the European Semester of economic policy coordination.

On June 22, 2020, the Statistical Office of the European Union (Eurostat) released its fourth report, entitled "Sustainable development in the European Union – Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context (2020 edition)".

Overview of EU-27 progress towards the SDGs over the past 5 years, 2020 (Data mainly refer to 2013-2018 or 2014-2019)

The report provides a detailed description of the EU's progress towards the 17 SDGs in the EU context. It monitors progress over the past five "short-term" years and the past fifteen "long-term" years while providing data. The report also includes the state of progress of each country towards the SDGs and the worst and best performing among the countries.

The analysis of the data in this report relied on the set of indicators developed in cooperation with a large number of stakeholders. The set of indicators includes approximately 100 indicators, is organized along the 17 SDGs, and focuses on the relevant SDGs from an EU perspective. It allows the EU's relevant SDG indicators to focus on monitoring the EU's policies and on related phenomena in particular in the European context.

How has the EU advanced towards the SDGs?
The report notes that the 2020 evaluation is not fully comparable with previous releases, due to changes in indicators for some of the targets, and because the EU no longer includes the United Kingdom.

On average, based on the data available, over the past five years, the EU has made significant progress toward some SDGs, and progress on some SDGs has been faster than others. The biggest progress made was in the SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institution), followed by SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being). This progress in the previous goals helped to reinforce SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and increase the quality of life in societies and cities. The report also reflected of the continued improvement in the UN economy on the labor market and the SDG 8 of (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

In contrast, the goals dealing with environmental issues, SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 15 (Life on Land) indicate slow progress or lack of development of the EU over the past few years overall. The report also reflects the slow progress towards SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and reducing inequality SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The report shows that the gap widens between women and men in obtaining education and in the labor market.

As for SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG14 (Life below Water), the progress of UN trends have not been calculated due to insufficient data.
The report presents the state of play in the EU and its member states until 2019, the year before the introduction of COVID-19 containment measures on a large scale by EU member states. Any adverse effects on the overall progress of the EU due to the COVID-19 on the progress towards achieving the SDGs is expected to be part of the next report, to be released in 2021.

This year's report introduces a new chapter, Chapter 18, on each member state's progress towards the SDGs, and shows the best and worst performers in the EU.

In general, the EU member states are making progress toward the SDGs and the countries closest to achieving the SDGs include Denmark and Ireland, while countries like Latvia and Romania are still catching up.

Eurostat released the report just in time for the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), a central platform for global follow-up of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs, scheduled to take place on 7th July 2020. This report will give Member States an overview at the progress made up to the HLPF session. Identifying the most pressing sustainability challenges and critically studying performance is essential for the EU to ensure a sustainable Europe as part of a sustainable world.

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Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/sustainable-development-in-the-european-union/

The 50th WEF Annual Meeting Calls for Stakeholder Responsibility: A six month update

Earlier this year on January 21-24, the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) celebrated its 50th meeting in Davos, Switzerland. This meeting focused on the responsibility of stakeholders, which has been the concept of the forum since its establishment in 1961.

Every year, the WEF brings together world leaders, heads of state, prime ministers and global stakeholders, with the goal to shape global, regional and industrial agendas for a coherent and sustainable world. For the last 50 years, the Forum has initiated change for global programs, historical shifts, innovations and collaborations to address pressing issues. The Forum focuses on a different theme every year and achieves the following: building awareness, shaping government agendas and driving collective action to improve the state of the world. A Coalition of Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, Improving renewable energy transition and aiding heavy industry reach net zero emissions by 2050 are some amongst several successful projects initiated by WEF since its launch. This year, under the theme of "Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World", the Forum brought together over 3,000 participants across the world, defining the concept of "stakeholder capitalism".

The Forum focused on the responsibility of stakeholders to take concrete action and address the most pressing environmental, social, and governance issues (ESG). It also calls on the stakeholders to help governments and international institutions track progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement, and facilitate discussions on technology and trade management.

Outcomes of the 2020 annual meeting
This year's annual meeting of the WEF highlighted several results of progress in the six main areas of the Forum:
- Ecology – climate change risks
- Economic – long-term debt removal
- Technology – deployment of 4th Industrial Revolution technologies
- Society – reskill and upskill 1 billion people by 2030
- Geopolitics – resolve conflicts in global hotspots
- Industry – drive enterprise

Over 160 high-impact lighthouse projects were presented during the forum to the six main axes of improving the world. Most prominently was the stakeholders focus on supporting efforts to develop a basic set of common standards and disclosures that can be used to measure the progress of the private sector against ESG. Additionally, the Reskilling Revolution Platform was launched to provide better education, skills, and jobs for a billion people by 2030.

Although the WEF meeting took place while the COVID-19 was still in its infancy and many countries are now COVID-19 free or have put in place measures to prevent its spread, the Forum referred to it during this meeting. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), announced three new vaccine development programs for COVID-19 and the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI) announced the arrival of vaccines and immunization to 760 million children and continued vaccination campaigns.

Regarding the efforts made to accelerate progress towards SDGs, Frontier 2030 was launched to take advantage of the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution to accelerate SDGs. A strategic partnership has also been signed between the WEF and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to accelerate progress towards inclusive and sustainable growth worldwide.

The annual meeting was climate neutral for the fourth year in a row, with a host of new initiatives to enhance resource efficiency and further reduce emissions. Klaus Schwab, the Forum's Founder and Executive Chairman, asked all members and partners to commit to achieving net carbon emissions by 2050 or earlier.

Six months after the meeting: What is the progress?
Looking back at this meeting six months later, the spread of the COVID-19 paralyzed the world, and much of the work of the WEF Meeting 2020 calls is left behind.
Climate action has been one of the main themes of the 2020 WEF meeting. Since the COVID-19 spread, climate change has taken a back seat, and reducing the spread of the COVID-19 has been placed on the political and commercial agendas in 2020 around the world. Although pandemic lockdowns have reduced pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, concrete plans at national and global level to take action toward climate change are still slow.

Despite hopes since the launch of the Reskilling Revolution Platform during the Forum this year, to provide jobs for one billion people by 2030. The COVID-19 has caused the global economy to shrink, and thus unemployment is higher than ever. According to the International Monetary Fund, unemployment is expected to rise across the board, from 3.7% in 2019 to 10.4% this year.

Although the GAVI announced at the WEF meeting that vaccination campaigns were continuing, vaccination programs got postponed. Measles and Polio vaccination programs have been postponed due to concerns about the spread of COVID-19 through the required vaccination contact. The World Health Organization also issued guidelines to help countries maintain immunization services, but recommended that mass vaccination campaigns be suspended temporarily.

Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World

Despite the progress made during this WEF meeting, improvement plans, and promising initiatives, the decline of COVID-19 made all the issues raised in the six areas more urgent and challenging. This emergency requires global cooperation between governments, international organizations, and the business community.

In this spirit, the WEF launched the COVID Action Platform to enhance multi-stakeholder collaboration between the public and private sectors. To make a greater change in sustainable business, stakeholders and leaders need to step up their efforts and collaborate to mitigate the risks of COVID-19, to achieve tangible results, and reach for a coherent and sustainable world.

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High-Level Political Forum 2020 on Sustainable Development

Every year, the United Nations hold the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development to follow up and review the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
The forum is a multi-stakeholder platform where 197 countries exchange experiences and promote international cooperation in implementing the SDGs, define gaps and propose solutions.

The 2020 meeting was held on 7-16 July, under the theme "Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for Sustainable Development." In light of the ongoing pandemic of COVID-19 and restrictions on personal meetings and international travel, technology solutions for virtual sessions and interactions were utilized to hold the forum.

The effect of COVID-19 on progressing towards the SDGs
During the forum sessions, the impact of COVID-19 on the progress of the SDGs was discussed, and speakers indicated that COVID-19 is likely to impact the SDGs profoundly.

COVID-19 is a major, multidimensional crisis that could affect the livelihoods of millions of people, amplifying poverty, hunger, and unemployment. The forum stressed the importance of promoting human well-being and placing it at the heart of the SDG agenda, of eradicating poverty, hunger and deprivation, supporting human rights, providing quality education and health, and ensuring equality.
Achieving human well-being cannot be achieved without protecting the environment and investing in it. One of the sessions held during the forum highlighted opportunities and solutions to protect the planet, build resilience and manage risks. The loss of biodiversity, land and forest degradation, climate change and natural hazards threaten the planet, human life, and well-being. During this session, speakers called on multiple stakeholders to address these threats through measures that promote economic and social development. Critical questions on the human-nature relationship, systemic risk creation and nature-based solutions were explored to create better outcomes for people, prosperity and planet.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an economic recession and the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and African countries are the most affected, as they are vulnerable in terms of health systems, financial resources, and social protection systems. It is expected that the Fifth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, which will be convening in Qatar (21-25 March 2021), will provide an opportunity to formulate a new plan of action for the Least Developed Countries.

The forum reviewed the impact of the recession and discussed strategies that can be used to rebuild better and smarter, leaving no one behind. Recovering better and rebuilding requires multi-stakeholder cooperation. Accordingly, a session was dedicated to examining implications of the crisis to policies and strategies, international solidarity, responding to the crisis, and addressing the impacts of COVID-19 in accelerating progress towards achieving the SDGs. Speakers called on everyone to put long-term development plans to rebuild better, achieve human well-being, and ensure that no one is left behind.

The importance of the role of the UN and its institutions in charting the way forward towards more reliable and influential international cooperation was raised in a high-level conversation between the leaders. In this particular session, participants reflected on global solidarity, the role of the UN and the kind of multilateralism required during times of crisis. They discussed ways to provide an effective collective response in times of global crises and long-term challenges such as climate change in order to achieve long-term Sustainable Development.

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS 2020

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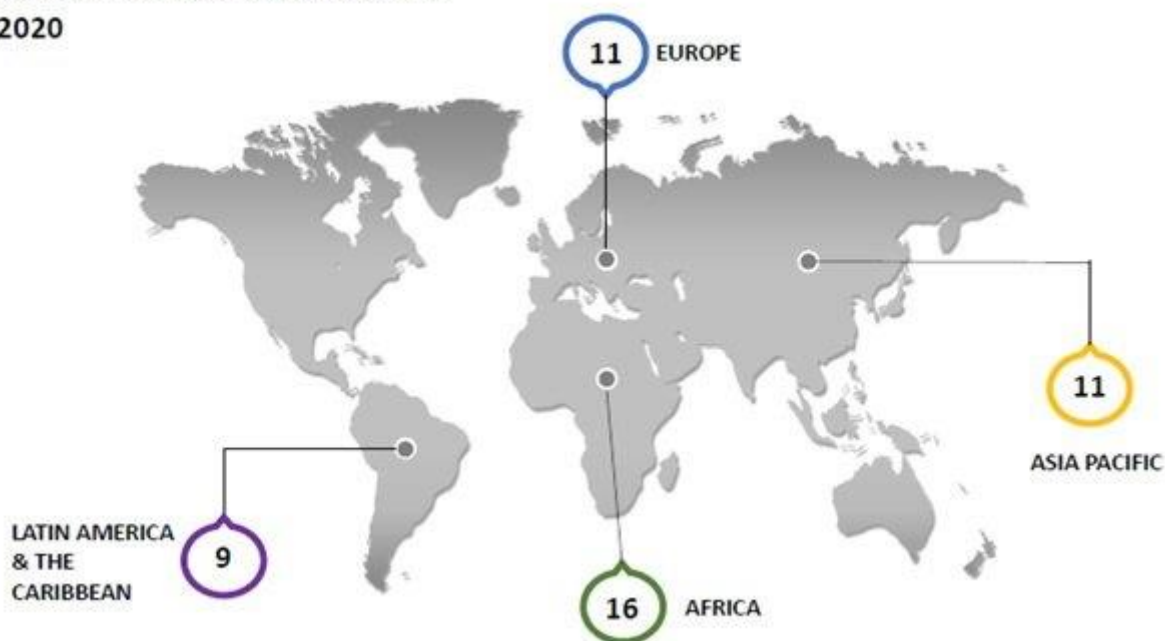
Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

Where are we heading

A "Where are we heading" session was held to focus on visions, scenarios and expectations for the future of the SDGs after the COVID-19 crisis. During the session, Secretary-General António Guterres presented a report on "long term future trends and scenarios -impacts in the economic, social, and environmental areas on the realization of the SDGs." The report contains best-case, business-as-usual and worst-case scenario outcomes for 2030 and 2050. A second report, "ECOSOC 2020", focused on the accelerated actions needed during and beyond the COVID-19 response to reduce inequality and eradicate poverty.

No one is left behind

The COVID-19 crisis showcased that we were not on the right path to achieve SDGs by 2030. The HLPF called for promoting the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions and making concerted efforts to build a comprehensive plan for a sustainable and resilient future for people and the planet. The transformations necessary to achieve SDGs by 2030 are possible. Still, they require strong institutions, integrated policies, international cooperation, and dialogue with multiple stakeholders to ensure that no one is left behind.

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Sustainable Leadership for the Decade of Action

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed how fragile our global systems are and has demonstrated that our world is probably not on the right track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

Our priority now is to work together to rebuild our societies and economies. The crisis is not over, and businesses cannot fully return "back to business as usual". But do we really want to go back to a world that is far from equal, empathetic or sustainable? A world of poverty, societal inequality, and climate change challenges? More than ever, we experience the urgent need for strong leadership, strong institutions, policy transformation into actions, international cooperation, and multi-stakeholder dialogue. "Recover Better, Recover Stronger, Recover Together" is a message we all need to embrace. This message, which recently marked the 20th anniversary of the UN Global Compact, reminds us that a new level of ambition, a new type of business leaders, and a regenerative strategy is the only way to achieve the 17 SDGs and to ensure that no one is left behind.

Leadership for the Decade of Action
During the Leaders Summit of the [20th Anniversary of the UN Global Compact](#) held on June 15-16, this year, the UN Global Compact, in cooperation with Russell Reynolds Associates, released a study on the characteristics of sustainable business leaders titled "[Leadership for the Decade of Action](#)."

The report's focus has been on business leaders, specifically board members, and the C-suite, as they have the power to make sustainability the center of their business. They are ultimately responsible for the success or failure of the organization.

The report showed the flaws in corporate systems that lie between rhetoric and reality. As 92% of leaders believe in the importance of sustainability to their business's success, however only 48% incorporate sustainability in their business. According to a recent report, this may be due to the failure of organizations to establish requirements and terms for recruiting new leaders. Sustainability is not built into the range of expectations from new leaders. The report showed that sustainability experience was an actual requirement for only 4% of executive and non-executive role specifications.

Characteristics of Sustainable Business Leaders
Fifty-five business leaders who have incorporated sustainability into their business have been interviewed to discuss how organizations can transform business leaders and make today's "leaders" the "sustainable leaders" of tomorrow. The report revealed the unique characteristics of these leaders who integrate sustainability across strategy, operations, and stakeholder engagement.

The selection of the 55 leaders was diverse and included a global group from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, North America, and Latin America. It also included both genders, where 34% of the leaders were female.

Sustainable leaders demonstrate four critical leadership attributes that are driven by their sustainable mindset:

- Multilevel Systems Thinking
- Stakeholder Inclusion
- Disruptive Innovation
- Long-Term Activation

When looking at their journey towards sustainability, the report showed that sustainable leaders have career experience and international experience that varied between two or more continents, enabling them to understand diverse cultures and how business works. In addition, 64% of leaders possess great professional experience in two or more jobs, giving them a broader view of their business and industry and honing their leadership skills.

The sustainability leaders studied have demonstrated a sustainable mindset, as they believe that businesses are not separate from the environment and society in which they operate. Leaders with a sustainable mindset integrate all of their organizations' operations with the economic, social, and environmental systems to drive change.

These leaders call for sustainable and commercial results through effective risk management and long-term growth opportunities. Sustainable leaders can respond effectively and engage with stakeholders. This is to obtain a wide range of perspectives to advance decision-making, create value, reduce risk, and considering all stakeholders.
Leaders of sustainability have the courage to challenge the traditional business model and status quo. They are fully aware that the shift required to make real progress towards the SDGs will not occur through incremental improvements to traditional approaches. Instead, they need radical change, innovation and disruption of the current business model.

Sustainability leaders have a long-term approach. They set bold goals and strictly push their actions and investments in their pursuit of these goals. The long-term focus is critical to business survival and success, driving sustainability-related innovation, developing their human capital and their customer base, expanding into new markets, creating operational efficiencies, and effectively managing social and environmental risks.

Sustainable Leaders of Tomorrow

There is an urgent need for a new type of business leadership, which is looking beyond profits in the short term but invests in long-term sustainability and resilience as a top priority. Sustainability is essential for long-term success but requires a certain mindset and leadership qualities. There is ample opportunity for boards and C-Suite leaders to place sustainability at the center of the organization's business and strategy, be ambitious and brave in leading a new vision for business and nourish sustainable leaders within their organizations. Sustainable leadership can be fostered and developed. Now is the time for all organizations to cultivate leadership at all levels, to disrupt established concepts, and establish successful business models for challenges not here yet and make sustainability...sustainable.

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Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/sustainable-leadership-for-the-decade-of-action/

The Planetary Computer: Addressing Collectively our Sustainable Challenges

Earlier this year, Microsoft announced its plans to become carbon negative by 2030. In addition, the company aspires to join other organizations, researchers, and governments to solve global environmental challenges by launching a "planetary computer." The planetary computer is a new environmental initiative as part of its efforts to enhance the pace of sustainability solutions. It will use aggregated global environmental data to increase the collective efforts to protect biodiversity and conserve ecosystems around the world.

What is a Planetary Computer?
A planetary computer is a new complex type of primary computing platform that provides access to trillions of data points that people and machines collect, in the earth, sky and space. It enables users to search by geographic location instead of keywords, which makes them seamlessly transition to a new more holistic approach to finding answers to new complex questions.

Through artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms this innovation will provide the global community and especially scientists, conservation organizations and businesses, with quick access to a wide range of environmental data and a platform for information analysis. The planetary computer will use artificial intelligence technologies to provide satellite imagery, environmental and biological data, and more essential insights to engaged stakeholders.

Data powered by machine learning is be a game-changer
The importance of the new Microsoft project lies in operating data and digital technology, through an ambitious program that collects environmental data from all over the world and places it in a planetary computer, which works to protect the planet across five main areas: biodiversity, climate change, agriculture, and water. This enables partners and customers to use the resulting outputs to enhance the environmental decision-making process intelligently during organizational activities. Microsoft will also use the outputs of the planetary computer to raise general environmental issues and reflect on Microsoft's responsibility towards minimizing its ecological footprint and promoting sustainability.

[Microsoft chief Brad Smith provided](#) some specific examples of what he hopes the planetary computer will be able to do. These include providing:

- searchable satellite imagery
- machine learning and user-generated data on actual forest boundaries on land for use in forest preservation efforts
- accurate forecasts to measure water availability and flood risks to make educated guesses about land management
- a platform for leveraging predictive models to estimate global carbon stocks
- wildlife scientists with information on wildlife populations to support preservation efforts

Microsoft has confirmed that it will provide more investment in species identification, land mapping, and land use information. The company will start [cooperating with the Group on Earth Observations Biodiversity Observation Network](#) (GEO BON), which will closely monitor the Earth's biodiversity and develop accurate enough measurements for researchers and ecologists to benefit from.

The planetary computer puts artificial intelligence tools in the hands of partners working in the wildlife, oceans and forestry agricultural endeavors. This platform will help to better understand the challenges to planetary health, provide answers to both Microsoft customers and scientists about how to plan for sustainability, and make better decisions on environmental issues. For example, to combat climate change it will take advantage of predictive models for estimating global carbon stocks and informing decisions about land use that affect the ability to tackle climate change.

A Call to Protect the Planet

This innovative project from Microsoft started two years ago with the launch of the [Microsoft's AI for Earth](#) program, and now aspires to be an extension of Earth's artificial intelligence and provide scientists insight into their basic questions. [Microsoft has called](#) on governments and stakeholders to raise their voices to defend ecosystems, to pay attention to continually monitoring biodiversity, and to do more to protect the planet. "[We must work together to determine how we maximize the benefits that nature provides to people while minimizing the environmental harm of our activities. It won't be easy, but it is possible if we put the pieces together. It is time to accelerate our work](#)."

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Benefit Corporations: Changing the Corporate Landscape

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought some fundamental changes in the way corporations conduct business. As COVID-19 continues to challenge our economy, environment, health, and financial security, the World Economic Forum has highlighted the concept of "shareholder capitalism" and the importance of "Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World" in recovering from this and new crises.

Indeed, many organizations focus on creating stakeholder value, particularly tackling social and environmental issues. This relevant new trend in corporate governance has led to the creation of a new organizational form: the Certified B Corporation. The recent estimate is that there are currently over 2,500 Certified B Corporations in more than 50 countries. What does it mean to be a Certified B Corporation? What does the process of becoming one involves? Why should companies become a Certified B Corporation?

A Certified B Corporation – What does it mean to be the one?
Certified B Corporations (B Corps) "are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. B Corps are accelerating a global culture shift to redefine success in business and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy".

Profits and growth are used to achieve a higher goal: a positive impact on employees, societies, and the environment. The B Corp community works to address global issues such as inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation and by harnessing the power of business, to accelerate the global cultural transformation to redefine business success and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy.

Being given the title of the Certified B Corp means that these for-profit companies have been thoroughly vetted by B lab that is a non-profit that serves a global movement of people using business as a force for good. B Lab decides on whether a company passes the rigorous tests for proving that it meets the required high standards (social and environmental performance, public transparency, legal accountability, and aspiration to solve social and environmental problems).

The process of becoming a Certified B Corp

B Corp Certification doesn't just evaluate a product or service, but it also assesses the overall positive impact of the company that stands behind it. Moreover, it is the only certification that measures a company's entire social and environmental performance. Becoming a Certified B Corporation is an extensive process and follows the four phases:

- Meeting Performance Requirements by completing **the B Impact Assessment**. The B Impact Assessment (BIA) is a free, online platform that evaluates how your company interacts with your workers, customers, community, and environment.
- Meeting **Legal Requirements** by using the Legal Requirement Tool to determine how your company can integrate stakeholder consideration into your governance structure. The company's specific legal requirement and timeline will depend on location and structure.
- **Verification and Transparency**: Upon completing the BIA, B Lab will verify the score to determine if the company meets the 80-point bar for certification. To maintain certification, B Corps update their BIA and verify their updated score every three years.
- Signing **the Agreement and the B Corp Declaration of Interdependence** as well as paying annual certification fees that vary depending on the company's revenue.

Why Become B Certified Company?

Doing business as usual and being solely focused on making profit has become outdated and sticking to the old business model can be punished by the new generation of aware and responsible consumers. Becoming a Certified B Corp allows the company to avoid risks and to present to its stakeholders that it takes measures and actions to solve the global social and environmental issues.

B Corps are more likely to attract investors due to the strict and rigorous standards that translate into stability. Also, by getting certified as a B Corp, the company avoids being targeted as belonging to the greenwash crowd. According to the research, B corporation certification would help companies stand out "in the midst of a 'greenwash' revolution" among large companies, and "help consumers sort through the marketing hype to find businesses and products that are truly socially and environmentally responsible". During the crisis, stakeholder-focused companies have proven to be genuinely more resilient in the face of economic downturns and crises. Anthea Kelsick, Co-CEO of B Lab U.S. & Canada – pointed out that during the 2008 financial crisis; B Corp was endured 64% better than other similar-sized companies were. B Corp's focus on stakeholder engagement has contributed to an excellent position to weather financial storms such as the storm caused by COVID-19.

Since B Corps are committed to maintaining strong relationships with employees, customers, suppliers, and societies, they are more willing to make the necessary adjustments in the face of economic turmoil. Their corporate business model provides value to stakeholders and these companies will adapt their business model more intuitively when the needs of stakeholders change. Especially after the COVID-19 outbreak, B Corps offered their employees a number of benefits including as paid leave, health care, additional parental leave, financial support relatively seamlessly. B Corps are responsible for measuring the impact of their business on the environment, providing their employees worldwide with opportunities to use alternative mobility and remote work options before the "remote work" trend sparked due to the pandemic. They have also provided more equitable terms to suppliers and manufacturing conversion. B Corps are transparent throughout their supply chain, and they track the impact of their businesses on energy, water, and other natural resources consumption.

Will B Corps Reshape the Corporate Landscape?
As the pandemic rages, B Corps have proven to be incredible resilient; B Corps may be the key to building a more equitable economic system that meets everyone's needs – and especially now, provides greater job security. B Corps are definitely reshaping the corporate landscape by incorporating both social and environmental performance standards and it pays off. The B Corp movement is directed mainly to small and medium enterprises making them more competitive and attractive to the investors.

So far, over 3,000 companies worldwide in more than 70 countries, 150 industries, are abiding by this new business model. Now is the time for more companies to walk the talk and adopt models that deliver true, measurable value and are build to last.

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Food and Agriculture to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

Access to quality and nutritious food is fundamental to human existence, and food security has a wide range of positive impacts such as economic growth and poverty reduction.

More efforts and innovation are required to increase sustainably in agricultural production and ensure that everyone has access to nutritious food. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is leading international efforts to eradicate world hunger and poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. FAO is the custodian of 21 of 230 of the SDGs indicators directly related to SDG2, SDG5, SDG6, SDG12, SDG14, and SDG15.

As a custodian agency, FAO is responsible for:
- Collecting data from national sources, validating, harmonizing, estimating regional and global aggregates, and making them available for international reports.
- Contributing to annual reports on the progress of the sustainable development goals and include them in the high-level political forum's follow-up and review processes.
- Establishing partnerships with other international agencies to monitor the increasing number of indicators necessary to achieve interrelated goals.

SDG 2: Zero Hunger
In developing and developed nations, nearly 690 million people still suffer from chronic undernutrition. Malnutrition causes massive losses that affect individuals' health and the quality of life for individuals and societies. With ten indicators, FAO monitors hunger, food insecurity, productivity and income of small-scale food producers. It also monitors agricultural sustainability indicators, the conservation of animal and plant genetic resources for food and agriculture, the risk situation of livestock breeds, public investment in agriculture, and food price volatility.

SDG 5: Gender Equality
In developing countries, women make up more than half of the agricultural workforce. Despite the critical role of women in agriculture and rural development, the restrictions women face compared to men prevent them from increasing their production. By monitoring both indicators of women's ownership of agricultural land and women's equal rights to land ownership, FAO works on gender equality. It seeks to enable and support rural women's production to reduce the number of poor and hungry, thereby increasing economic and social gains.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Around 2.5 billion people worldwide do not have access to adequate sanitation. Water scarcity and quality affect food security, nutrition, population growth, productivity, and the environment. FAO monitors both water use efficiency and water stress, works with countries to ensure that water and sanitation are available to all and are managed sustainably.

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

As the world's population grows, there is a need to move towards more sustainable approaches to production and consumption in water, energy and food to reduce negative environmental impacts. FAO works to monitor global food losses and waste and coordinate activities and initiatives for responsible use and production.

SDG 14: Life below water

Fish consumption is increasing, as it is one of the types of animal proteins. However, excessive consumption may threaten aquatic organisms, which in turn leads to several environmental problems. FAO initiatives focus on monitoring the fish stocks sustainability, illegal fishing, value of sustainable fisheries, and access rights for small-scale fisheries, in order to enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.

SDG 15: Life on Land

Healthy ecosystems protect the planet and secure livelihoods. However, ecosystems are stressful due to changes in land use that have led to biodiversity loss and many environmental problems. FAO promotes sustainable methods and approaches in natural resource management, monitoring and reporting on the forest area, mountain green cover, and sustainable forest management.

Building a Fairer Society Without Leaving Anyone Behind

Current estimates show that nearly 690 million people are hungry, or 8.9 percent of the world population. With more than a quarter of a billion people potentially at the brink of starvation, swift action needs to be taken. Associated issues, including agricultural productivity, land degradation, global supply chains and our broken food systems also require an urgent response and are directly linked to achieving SDGs. This can be achieved only through collaborative strategies and concrete action plans that will accelerate the transformation of the agricultural sector.

FAO continuously works on initiatives and activities to eradicate poverty and hunger, respond to climate change, conserve natural resources, achieve food security and sustainable agriculture. But with only one decade remaining to achieve the SDGs, this grand ambition requires cutting edge technology, resilient food systems, greater cooperation and global partnerships to address the root causes of poverty and hunger, and to build a fairer and safer society without leaving anyone behind.

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Women-Led Countries Cope Better with COVID-19?

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, reports showed that institutions and countries with higher representation of women in leadership, particularly in the financial sector, suffered less from the global economic crisis. This has increased calls for more outstanding gender balance in leadership, and Europe has seen an estimated increase from 15% in 2007 to 34% in 2016 in women's representation on Boards of Directors in central banks.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the media has shed light on the relationship between women leaders at the helm of various countries and the effectiveness in handling the COVID-19 crisis. The performance of the women-led countries, which are about 10% of the world's countries, has been very positive.

The actions of female leaders, particularly in New Zealand, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Taiwan and New Zealand have been cited as supporting evidence that women are handling the crisis better than their male counterparts.

What could be the reason?
A research study conducted by the University of Liverpool and the University of Reading, titled "Leading the Fight Against the Pandemic: Does Gender 'Really' Matter?," explains the main reasons. The women-led countries have performed better, especially in terms of the number of deaths. To understand why, the researchers found that female leaders quickly and decisively closed down their countries with fewer deaths than their male counterparts. On average, they had 22 fewer deaths on lockdown than their male counterparts. In addition to compassionate leadership, the standard features of these leaders' success were humility, pragmatism, benevolence, confidence in collective instinct, mutual assistance, flexibility, and more resilient leadership style. Women tend to feel more sympathy, to be more democratic and tend to have better communications skills. It can be said that women leaders avoid risking human lives, but they are willing to take great risks regarding the economy.

Indeed, during the onset of the current crisis, much risky behaviour was issued by male leaders. Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro denied the COVID-19 virus, describing it as "It's just a little flu or the sniffles". So far, the number of people infected in Brazil has reached more than 4 million, making Brazil the third country in the world in terms of cases of COVID-19. In the United States of America, President Donald Trump played down the importance of the outbreak of the COVID-19 in the country. He described the virus as a "new trick" and compared it to seasonal flu. Now the United States of America is the first country in the world in terms of the number of people infected and the number of deaths.

Are all women leaders doing a better job than men during crisis?

Not all female leaders are doing well. Despite the precise results achieved by women-led countries, it isn't easy to assert that female leaders are better at facing the COVID-19 challenge. For example, Belgium, which is headed by a woman, performed poorly in terms of cases and deaths, as it has the highest death rates per person in the European Union (854 deaths per million people). In addition, out of 194 countries surveyed by researchers, only 19 are run by women, and any conclusion should take this into consideration. In addition to all that has been mentioned, the following two points should also be taken into account: first, the epidemic is still present, and this means that a lot could change in the next few months, and second, the quality of the data currently available is not always accurate, in the sense that the number of cases and deaths may be less or more than recorded.

What can learn?

COVID-19 has provided many lessons in leadership, and many of the most successful leaders in government and business have demonstrated strong and effective crisis management skills. It has also showed the superiority -so far- of countries and organizations in which women occupy leadership positions, which allow us to conclude that more equal societies almost always do better. Indeed, not all countries led by women have low mortality rates, but, no matter who the leader is, there appears to be a "valuable leadership lesson here: empathy, warmth, clear communication, and transparency serve important purpose".

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Sustainably at the heart of the FIFA World Cup 2022™

In 2022, the world awaits the FIFA World Cup 2022™ not only to witness the world's largest sporting event but also to witness the first carbon neutral FIFA World Cup.
This tournament will set new, sustainable standards and leave a positive legacy as a catalyst for long-term sustainable change. sustainability is at the core of the preparations for hosting the Qatar 2022. The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy – the body responsible for the projects and initiatives of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 – is keen to implement the highest standards of sustainability in all projects of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ Sustainable Stadiums Report – prepared by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy- has identified sustainability features for each of the tournament's eight stadiums in terms of design, construction and legacy.
The following are the ten sustainability features identified by the report for the Qatar 2022 stadiums:

First fully demountable stadium in FIFA World Cup history
Ras Abu Aboud Stadium is mainly constructed from modular shipping containers. It will be completely dismantled after the end of the tournament, and parts of it will be used to build sports facilities after 2022. The stadium site will also be converted into a waterfront development project.

Donated more than 170,000 stadium seats
The FIFA World Cup 2022™! requires massive seating capacity compared to Qatar's domestic needs, hence the innovative solution to construct parts of the stadiums that could be dismantled. After the tournament, more than 170,000 stadium seats will be removed and donated to countries lacking sport infrastructure. Thanks to the modular design of the stadiums, it will be easy to dismantle, transport and reuse.

Building materials from sustainable sources
15% of stadium materials are recycled materials. The project also prioritized the use of local resources to support Qatar's economy and investments. The indoor spaces are painted with non-toxic paint, respecting the health of the fans. Light colors are used on the exterior parts to help retain heat and reduce the urban heat island effect.

The stadiums will operate year-round
The stadiums are designed with retractable roofs and energy-efficient cooling technologies. This feature will allow the use of the stadiums year-round. After the tournament ends, the stadiums will be converted by the community to hospitals, schools, retail stores and hotels.

30% less energy consumption

The report shows that stadiums in Qatar are 30% more energy-efficient compared to the minimum requirements as mandated by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers in ASHRAE 90.1.

40% of water savings

Stadiums are designed to use less water than the minimum requirements set by the International Plumbing Code of 40% water. The water vapor collected from the cooling system will be used for irrigation, and the reused water will be used for dust suppression.

850 thousand meters of green space around the stadiums

Qatar 2022 stadiums and surrounding areas will feature 850,000 square meters of new green space. These areas contain 16,000 trees which are irrigated with recycled water.

Public transportation brings fans to the stadiums

The Doha Metro is a fast, economical and environmentally friendly means of transportation, and it will facilitate access for fans to stadiums from across the Qatari capital, Doha. Its system consists of metro trains, trams and buses that will transport passengers directly to all stadiums. An extensive network of shaded pedestrian and bicycle pathways racks has gradually opened to the public near building entrances.

Reuse or recycle construction waste

In Al Janoub and Al Rayyan stadiums, during the demolition of the old buildings, 90% of the waste generated was reused or recycled. Also, all stadiums are designed to have highly efficient waste management, segregation, and recycling system on site.

Sustainability certificates

In accordance with FIFA mandatory requirements, all Qatar 2022 stadiums must receive a four-star rating under the Global Sustainability Assessment System (GSAS). Recently, two Qatar 2022 stadiums received a five-star rating.

A sustainable legacy

FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ is ambitious and will have a considerable impact. It will contribute to raising awareness of the importance of organizing tournaments and various sporting mega-events in a sustainable manner. It will contribute to people's well-being, economic development and environmental protection in the short and long term. It will demonstrate that being sustainable is both viable and value adding.

FIFA World Cup™is the first to be hosted in the Middle East and Qatar seeks to establish a legacy in sustainability and contribute to the promotion of the UN SDGs and the Qatar National Vision 2030. The vision for the FIFA World Cup 2022™ is to "use the power of football to open the door to a world of amazing experiences". Indeed, the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™ can create a better future for Qatar, the Middle East, Asia and the world through infrastructure, education, football for development, environmental innovation and a dedication to human right and workers' welfare.

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Recycling, Plastic and the Future of Waste

The waste recycling industry has become an important discussion point in the contemporary world. Over the years, the population's rate of resource consumption has quadrupled compared to 1970. Although consumption has increased globally, the global recycling rate has decreased from 9.1% to 8.6% in the past two years.

The importance of recycling lies in the fact that it reduces the demand for natural resources. According to the 2016 Carbon Trust report "Supply Chain Transformation and Resource Efficiency", the cost of remanufacturing a product is generally 40% to 65% less than making a new product. In addition, the same report highlights, that "remanufacturing typically uses 85% less energy than manufacturing, with corresponding carbon emission savings".

Brands are heading for recycling
Some of the leading brands have invested in recyclable products. For example, Coca-Cola European Partners (CCEP) has recently invested in state-of-the-art technology to convert its plastic packaging into bottles with unique properties for recycling. It pledged to convert at least 50% of its packaging to recyclable packaging by 2023. It also pledged that in 2025 all its packaging would be 100% recyclable.

As for KELLOGG'S, they have successfully recycled their Pringles snack containers. Pringles containers are complex in terms of construction, consisting of a metal base, plastic cap, metal tear-off lid, and foil-lined cardboard sleeve. After many experiments, KELLOGG'S has succeeded to convert about 90% of the new Pringles containers to paper, and about 10% is a polyal (plastic) barrier that seals the interior to protect the food. Although it is a positive step towards environmentally friendly packaging, Environmentalists see them as trivial changes that will not considerably contribute to solving environmental problems.

Is recycling a lie?
Companies specializing in recycling and waste management have spread all over the world, aiming to transform countries' economies into a greener alternative. Recycling companies from around the world were sending around 7 million tons per year of plastic waste to China, which is an estimated 70% of the world's plastic waste. For years, China has been recycling plastic waste and has benefited from processing it and selling the resulting raw materials. In 2018, Chinese governance threw a thunderbolt on the global recycling business, when it decided to close its doors and cut all waste imports. China and Hong Kong went from buying 60 per cent of the plastic waste exported by G7 countries during the first half of 2017, to taking less than 10 per cent during the same period a year later. What this meant?

"None of this plastic will be turned into new plastic things. All of it is buried" as per Rogue Disposal & Recycling, which like most recycling companies was sending plastic waste to China. One of the main issues in plastic recycling, its cost. It is costly to pick up, sort and melt it. Plus, plastic degrades every time it is reused, making it only reusable once or twice. When looking at the new plastic, in addition to being of better quality, its cost is so low that even now recycling of plastic waste cannot be economically justified. All of these problems have been around for decades, but public awareness is still low. Regardless of the new recycling technology or the more expensive machinery developed, according to the latest Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) statistic, so far, less than 10% of plastics have been recycled. But this does not change that fact that in September 2018, the World Bank announced that our global **waste production is predicted to rise by 70% by 2050** unless we take urgent action. Humankind currently produces two billion tonnes of waste per year between 7.6 billion people. The European Union produces more than 2.5 billion tonnes of waste every year. **The** Global Waste Index tracks global performance and reveals shocking results.

Final word: we need to move away from recycling
Manufacturing with recycled materials consumes less energy compared to manufacturing with raw materials. Recycling also reduces greenhouse gas emissions, whether from waste incinerators or landfills. But still, in order to reduce waste, we need to move away from recycling! We need to rethink our economy adopting a circular economy approach.

In a properly built circular economy, one should rather focus on avoiding the recycling stage at all costs; as preventing waste from being created in the first place is the only realistic strategy. In a linear economy, based on the take-make-waste extractive industrial model, where waste has inevitably the centre stage, we do not account for the side-effects generated by a product once sold to an end customer. According to Ellen MacArthur Foundation, **circular economy is a framework that is "restorative and regenerative by design".** "It entails gradually decoupling economic activity from the consumption of finite resources, and designing waste out of the system". it means **reducing waste** to a minimum.

Moving towards a more circular economy could deliver tangible benefits, including creating 580,000 jobs in the EU alone. Measures such as waste prevention, eco-design and re-use could save EU companies **€600 billion** – equivalent to 8% of annual turnover – while also reducing total annual greenhouse gas emissions by 2-4%. In March 2020, European Commission adopted "A new Circular Economy Action Plan" to accelerate the transition towards a regenerative growth model…a model without waste. Till then, if you cannot refuse plastic, recycle it

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Sustainability in the Aviation Industry

Aviation is essential to our global community, as it is an engine for economic, social and cultural development around the world. Today, passengers, crew, employees, and regulators are increasingly aware of the environment and GHG emissions. The global aviation industry produces around 2% of all carbon dioxide emissions, with the largest proportion of carbon emissions coming from jet fuel consumption. In 2019, flights produced 915 million tons of carbon dioxide. Therefore airlines take actions to reduce their environmental footprint by integrating sustainability into all their daily operations.

Sustainable fuel and lower emissions
Boeing, the world's largest aerospace company, owns the ecoDemonstrator program. The program aims to improve sustainability in the aviation industry and enhance safety, sustainability, and passenger experience. The program accelerates innovation by taking promising technologies out of the lab, testing them on the ground and solving challenges related to airlines, passengers, and the environment.
All flight testing programs included in the ecoDemonstrator use sustainable fuel in order to reduce environmental footprint and benefit the industry now and in the future.
In September 2020, in cooperation with Etihad Airways, the 787-10 Dreamliner flew from Seattle to North Charleston, South Carolina using 50,000 gallons of sustainable jet fuel.

World Energy produces fuels in commercial quantities at competitive prices. The fuel consists of a 50/50 blend of sustainable fuel, made from inedible agricultural waste, and traditional jet fuel. The fuel aims to improve air navigation and reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 75% over the fuel's life cycle.
Etihad Airways promised to halve the total emissions for 2019 by 2035, and to reduce the level of carbon emissions to zero by 2050.

Cleaning aircraft without water
During each flight, dust and dirt accumulate on the aircraft's exterior, increasing the amount of fuel it consumes by making the aircraft heavier and less aerodynamic. To sustainably wash aircraft, some airlines such as Emirates Airlines have turned to "aircraft dry wash".

Eco-friendly aircraft dry wash technology has allowed Emirates Airline to stop the waste of more than 11 million liters of water annually. Under this technology, small amount of water, or even no water, is used, and cleaning agents are manually applied to the entire outer surface of the airframe.

No plastic

Airlines continue to strive to reduce the environmental impact of our operations and promote efficient recycling practices. On Emirates Airlines, blankets are made 100% of recycled plastic bottles. One blanket need 28 bottles; this is done by turning plastic bottles into yarn and weaving them to turn into soft, sustainable blankets.

EasyJet, the British airline, is reducing the use of single-use plastics. It has removed plastic from food and beverage products on board. It also encourages the use of reusable cups by offering discounts on hot drinks to customers who bring their cups, in addition to replacing plastic stirrers with wooden spoons.

In 2019, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) worked with partners to create a special edition of the GreeningATL uniform for the Atlanta Host Committee. To fortify their zero-waste policy, 400 tons of plastic bottles generated by airport visitors were collected, then converted into REPREVE fibers, and into sustainable GreeningATL jackets. Each jacket uses six plastic bottles.

Sustainable crew and passenger transportation

Responsible airports are developing sustainable means of transportation for both crew and passengers.

In early October of this year, Emirates Airlines revealed that about a third of its bus fleet dedicated to transporting its crew is currently running on biofuels. This initiative is another step forward in its environmental mission to reduce emissions, as the CO2 emissions savings from this initiative alone are estimated at 75,000 kg annually.

At Charlotte Douglas International Airport, five electric buses have been included in its fleet. The five electric buses will lead to an annual reduction of 50,000 gallons of diesel fuel and will have an annual impact equivalent to removing 2,900 cars from city streets. The airport plans to replace 70 diesel buses with 50 electric buses over the next seven to ten years.

Aviation industry in sustainable development

Although there is no SDG target on mobility, the aviation industry plays a major role in support of the SDGs. Through day-to-day aviation operations, the sector can be empowered to support SDG topics. Working in partnership with governments and intergovernmental institutions will contribute to achieving future growth with the highest levels of efficiency and sustainability. The long-term sustainability of aviation can be ensured, through partnerships focused on addressing aviation's GHG emissions, developing ambitious action plans and using sustainable fuels.

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Disability Inclusion in the United Nations: No one is Left Behind

15% of the world's population, or one billion people, are persons with disabilities (PWDs). In June 2019, the United Nations (UN) announced the launch of its "Disability Inclusion Strategy" and work to achieve the SDG 10: reduce inequality. In 2020 and during the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, the Secretary-General announced the release of the report "Disability inclusion in the United Nations system".

This report represents the strategy's early efforts in building a more inclusive UN system for PWDs. The report paves the way for the inclusion of PWDs in the UN system and makes recommendations for the system to do more and combat isolation and marginalization of PWD. It also identifies concrete steps to support member states in implementing the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and leaving no one behind.

UN Disability Inclusion Strategy

The strategy aims to enhance the meaningful participation of PWDs, and to promote and mainstream their rights in the work of the United Nations. The strategy also works to raise the standards of performance of disability inclusion in the organizations and make an impact on their policies, programs, and operations. This comes through the development of special programs, considering disability-related perspectives, in line with the CRPD.

Work to achieve these goals requires a comprehensive, systematic strategy. The strategy consists of four core areas:
- **Leadership, Strategic Planning and Management:** Leaders' commitment is essential to implementing strategy as they are driving change in the organization. Leaders must integrate disability through internal and external communications, review and revise entity policies and strategies, and establish accountability mechanisms.
- **Inclusiveness:** This requires close consultation with PWDs and ensuring accessibility. Actively involve PWDs in all work of the organization.
- **Programming:** Where disability is integrated into all program and project cycles to accelerate progress. Implement a minimum level of disability-inclusive programmes and projects through the practical field and headquarters.
- **Organizational Culture:** Developing recruitment policies and strategies to attract PWDs. Work to build their capabilities, employ and promote them in the UN workforce, raise their level of satisfaction.

COVID-19 response and recovery efforts

This strategy enabled the UN system to take decisions and actions more quickly regarding the inclusion of PWDs in response and recovery efforts to COVID-19. In Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19, key actions and recommendations are identified to make the response and recovery inclusive for PWDs, leaving no one behind.

The policy brief was developed in cooperation with several entities, with the Special Rapporteur on the rights of PWDs and in consultation with the International Disability Alliance. It was launched in easy-to-access formats, including international signal interpretation and ePub.

The policy brief highlights the impact of COVID-19 on PWDs and identifies key actions and recommendations to make the response and recovery inclusive for PWDs. The brief identifies four overarching areas of action that are applicable to all:

1. Ensure **mainstreaming of disability** in all COVID-19 response and recovery together with targeted actions
2. Ensure **accessibility** of information, facilities, services and programmes in the COVID-19 response and recovery
3. Ensure **meaningful consultation** with and active participation of PWDs and their representative organizations in all stages of the COVID-19 response and recovery
4. Establish **accountability mechanisms** to ensure disability inclusion in the COVID-19 response

Moving Disability Inclusion Strategy forward

The Disability Inclusion strategy provides a concrete framework for sustainable transformation. The strategy aims to make transformative and lasting change for PWDs. This is achieved through their development, empowerment, and capacity building, in addition to developing plans that work to integrate effectively individuals into communities and increase societal awareness about the inclusion and rights of PWDs. The coordinated implementation of strategy across the organization is facilitated by:

•Mobilizing and maintaining the commitment of the entities leadership
•Establishing a robust coordination mechanism across entities
•Providing technical assistance to entities and the field
•Participating in communication and awareness-raising to raise awareness of the strategy (internally and externally)

The strategy calls for strong leadership within entities to drive its implementation in a meaningful and sustainable manner. The success of the strategy depends on a greater commitment by UN entities to the inclusion of PWDs and to achieving tangible benefits. The commitment to disability inclusion can be achieved by ensuring greater coherence and alignment between the implementation of the strategy and the 2030 Agenda across the UN system.

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UAE: A National Food Security Strategy

The UAE faces severe environmental challenges such as water and rain scarcity, climate change and global warming, scarcity of arable land, in addition to the increase in population that has prompted the import of about 90% of UAE's total food from abroad. Nevertheless, in 2019 the UAE made a leap in the Global Food Security Index (GFSI) issued by the Economist Intelligence Unit. The Economist reported that the UAE had advanced ten places since 2018, to reach 21st in the world. The index is based on three core issues related to food security: affordability, availability and quality.
This progress exemplifies the active role of the UAE in transforming into a global hub for innovation-based food security. It also represents the continuous pursuit of the goals of the National Food Security Strategy expressed in the provision of healthy, safe, and nutritious food at affordable prices at all times and conditions, for all members of society.

The National Food Security Strategy
Strengthening major food supply chains to provide food products to all members of society is a top priority for the UAE. Therefore, in 2018, the UAE issued the National Food Security Strategy. The strategy is based on innovation and aims to ensure food security in all circumstances. The strategic directions are based on five main pillars:
- Facilitate global agri-business trade and diversify international food sources
- Technology-enabled food production
- Reduce food loss and waste
- Food safety and improving nutrition systems
- Food risks and crises management

The strategy can be achieved by:
- Enabling sustainable food production and supply through the adaptation of modern technology and research and development in food security
- Developing international and local partnerships and engaging the community to change behaviours related to food security
- Creating a national food database and building the capacities of individuals specialized in food security tasks
- Building a useful governance model and activating legislation and policies to improve nutrition and reduce food loss and waste

Joint efforts

Food security is a top priority in the UAE. The UAE has an integrated system for food security, thanks to the joint efforts of the various federal and local government agencies and partners in the private sector and society. The UAE works to expand the network of international cooperation and exchange of experiences. Share knowledge about the latest practices and strengthen channels of communication and dialogue with decision-makers, academics, and heads of research centres to transfer food technology to the UAE.

At the beginning of Covid-19, Federal Law No. 3 of 2020 Regarding the Regulation of the Strategic Stock of Food Commodities was approved. The law enhances food security in the UAE and aims to organize food supplies in the event of crises, emergencies, and disasters. It is an important step in monitoring the main food commodities in the country and ensuring the availability of sufficient stocks of goods to be used when necessary.

The Food Security Office has launched several initiatives to ensure the participation of all groups, raise awareness about food, and transform food culture into a community approach. Among these initiatives are The Ag-Tech Accelerators Program, Food Water Energy Nexus Course, The FoodTech Challenge, UAE Aquaculture Pulse 2020.

Future aspirations and plans

Within the framework of achieving the UAE Centennial 2071, the long-term, full-vision plan that extends for 5 decades after 2021, the Food Security Office is working to achieve social and economic milestones, including national priorities as part of the food security agenda. It aspires to place the UAE among the top 10 countries in the global food security index by 2021. The food security strategy is expected to create about 16,000 new jobs, and have a AED 22 billion monetary Impact . The UAE aspires to be at the top of the index (first place) by 2051 and under the vision of a "**World-leading hub in innovation-driven food security**". These achievements will transform the UAE into a leading and inspiring global model in the field of food security.

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Link to SDGs: SDG 2, SDG 12

Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/uae-a-national-food-security-strategy/

Food & Agriculture: 20 Actions to Guide Decision-Makers

Food and agriculture are essential keys to sustainable development and tools to eradicate poverty and hunger. They are linked to food security, rural development and economic growth, and directly linked to the conservation of natural resources, responding to climate change, and thus achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As the world's population continues to grow, the issue of food systems being out of balance becomes more urgent, with 815 million people going hungry, and every third person suffering from malnutrition.

Transforming Food and Agriculture to Achieve the SDGs

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) recently published a report titled "Transforming food and agriculture to achieve the SDGs." It contains a set of tools and guidelines that can help reform our broken food systems and accelerate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) effective implementation. The report shows how food, agriculture, people's livelihoods, and natural resource management are separated and dealt with as different issues and not as one issue. However, they all aim for the same goal; this vision has been translated into an approach that can support and accelerate the transition to more sustainable food and agricultural systems. The report presents five principles and twenty "interconnected actions" that balance the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, help decision-makers design strategies, and develop action plans to accelerate the agricultural sectors' transformation.

The report was designed as an educational tool and introduced five main principles:

- Increase productivity, employment and value addition in food systems
- Protect and enhance natural resources
- Improve livelihoods and foster inclusive economic growth
- Enhance the resilience of people, communities and ecosystems
- Adapt governance to new challenges

Under the five principles, twenty actions are designed to support countries in selecting and prioritizing resources to accelerate progress. It identifies sectoral synergies that can catalyze the achievement of national goals and the achievement of results across the multiple goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. The twenty actions also provide countries with a thread connecting several sectors of agriculture and rural development to the country's broader development program that includes poverty eradication, national growth, job creation, natural resource wealth, and urban renewal.

In line with the 2030 Agenda's call for transformation, many of the approaches described in the report are cross-sectoral and rely on government cooperation and stakeholder dialogue. It requires policymakers to recognize the need to manage trade-offs, and to put in place concrete measures to improve the alignment of multiple goals and incentive structures.

It also encourages legal frameworks that recognize and guarantee access rights for smallholders and local communities, and favorable policies to stimulate private sector participation in sustainable market activities.

Private-sector partnerships promise technology development, knowledge transfer, innovation, job creation, and alternative revenue streams. Therefore, engaging with entrepreneurs and benefiting from the experience of the private sector, including agricultural producer organizations, cooperatives, small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as international companies, is a prerequisite for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

Measuring progress transforming food and agriculture

The interconnectedness of the SDGs is beneficial to investors, researchers, and technical practitioners as well as decision-makers responsible for integrating the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda.

Governments and stakeholders need to work together to develop more integrated programs and policies, linking different goals and objectives better. To enable real transformation, they must intensify efforts to monitor progress and identify and address barriers to change, signaling the way forward for sustainable food and agriculture to help countries achieve their development goals.

The central factor in achieving the SDGs will be the introduction of new and effective methods of collecting data, monitoring goals, and measuring progress. Decision-makers need better data to set measurable goals, design and monitor implementation of food security initiatives and social safety programs and define adequate support for agriculture and rural development. Data disaggregation will help transform food systems, achieving zero hunger, and leaving no one left behind.

For a brighter future for everyone

Sustainable food and agriculture systems are the critical link between people and the planet. They have great potential to help us overcome many of our challenges, provide affordable, nutritious food, enhance livelihoods, revitalize rural and urban landscapes, achieve inclusive national growth, and drive positive change through the 2030 Agenda.

In its report, FAO paved the way for decision-makers, presenting twenty interlinked actions, describing approaches, policies, and tools that contribute to the many SDGs. These actions integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, but these actions can only be achieved through the participation and partnerships between different actors and stakeholders.

Achieving SDGs requires transformative action. These twenty actions address the real issues countries face in building a world without poverty and hunger and a brighter future for all so that no one is left behind.

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Link to SDGs: SDG 2, SDG 8, SDG 17

Blog link: **https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/food-agriculture-20-actions-to-guide-decision-makers/**

Circular Economy in Cities and Regions

The concept of circularity is not new and the need to adopt circular practices in business and beyond is becoming even more pressing. COVID-19 has highlighted unsustainable environmental and social trends, contributing to a re-examination of production and consumption patterns. The traditional understanding of economic activity is based on a linear model, where natural resources are extracted and transformed into products, which then consumers use and then dispose based on a "take-make-dispose" process. Linear economy ignores high economic, environmental, and social costs, and thus is unsustainable in the long run. Circular economy, is considered an example of resilience in the face of crises, as it preserves the value of products, materials, and resources for as long as possible, with the purpose of eliminating waste. Cities and regions play an essential role in the global economy, and play an important role in the move from a linear to a circular model.

A circular economy as a transformative opportunity
Cities are home to more than half of the world's population and responsible for major policies in local public services such as transportation, solid waste, water, and energy management that affect economic growth and environmental health. Applying the principles of circular economy in cities and regions yields economic, social, and environmental benefits in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- **Economic benefits:** Contributes to the creation of cities that can prosper economically in the long term. It increases production rates and achieves savings related to improving resource efficiency. It also supports opportunities for growth, innovation and new business development.
- **Social benefits:** It achieves prosperity and well-being for citizens, as it improves air quality and reduces pollution, thus creating livable cities. It also creates job opportunities and enhances community participation.
- **Environmental benefits:** Preserves the planet and reduces its environmental impact by reducing congestion and eliminating waste. It improves resource security, as it reduces dependency on raw materials, in addition to achieving a balance between local production and global supply chains.

Cities and Circular Areas Initiative (CCRI)
The Cities and Circulars Initiative (CCRI) is part of the Circular Economy Action Plans (CEAPs) and focuses on implementing circular solutions at local and regional level.

An increasing number of cities and regions are participating in the formulation of various CEAPs. For example, Amsterdam has adopted the "Doughnut Economic" model, a sustainable framework developed by economist Kate Raworth.

The Doughnut model is a holistic approach that balances social needs without harming the environment. The inner ring defines the minimum individuals need to lead a good life. The outer ring represents the environmental ceiling as defined by scientists, which highlights the limits that humans must not cross. Between the two rings are the matters that represent the absolute needs of everyone and the needs of the planet.

The 3Ps framework: People, policies, and places
The circular economy in sustainable cities, regions, and countries still needs to be activated, and can be achieved based on the Three Dimensions of People, Policies and Places (3Ps). The 3Ps provides a conceptual framework for making a circular economy happen in cities and regions. The circular economy requires:

- **People:** A shift towards sustainable production and consumption pathways, as well as new business and governance models (e.g. use of secondary materials, recycling, and sharing)
- **Policy:** A holistic and systemic approach intersecting with sectoral policies (e.g. environmental policies, regional development, agricultural and industrial policies)
- **Places:** Adopting a functional approach that goes beyond the administrative boundaries of cities and regions and links them to surrounding areas and beyond.

Governance gaps
Cities and regions may face challenges when moving from a linear to a circular economy. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Survey on Circular Economy in Cities and Regions, there are five main categories of gaps:

- **Financial gaps:** Insufficient financing, financial risks, lack of critical scale of business and investments
- **Regulatory gaps:** Inadequate regulatory frameworks, and incoherent regulation across levels of government
- **Policy gaps**: Lack of a holistic vision, poor leadership and co-ordination, lack of political will
- **Awareness gaps:** Cultural barriers, lack of awareness, and inadequate information
- **Capacity gaps:** lack of capacity, skills, and human resources

Towards circular economy for cities

Cities and regions contribute significantly to Europe's transition towards a more circular model. Circular economy thrives on cooperation, and the best way to adopt successfully circular frameworks is to join forces with those who want to move in the same direction and make a difference.

Local and regional authorities have an important role to play in launching and accelerating the transition to the circular economy. **Promoting** a culture of circular economy and providing clear information and setting goals and objectives is key to success. **Facilitating** communication, dialogue, and cooperation, as well as **enabling** appropriate governance conditions and defining regulatory tools is seen as a prerequisite for this transition. Shared responsibility between governments and stakeholders will help in promoting, facilitating, and ultimately enabling this transition.

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Link to SDGs: SDG 9, SDG 11, SDG 17

Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/circular-economy-in-cities-and-regions/

Embracing Electric Cars

With the increase in environmental pollution and climate change, the need for innovative solutions and technologies increases in a variety of industries, including the automotive industry. In the past decade, the popularity and demand for electric vehicles (EVs) have accelerated. China and Europe both hit sale records in market share for EVs in 2019. In 2040, EVs are expected to account for more than half of the cars sold (about 54%) in the world.

EVs are directly aligned with the United Nations' global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 7: Clean Energy and also pave the way for action on SDG 13: Climate Action for a low carbon future.

No diesel and gasoline vehicles after this date
Significantly, China and Europe are promoting national and local support plans for EVs use. The Chinese government strongly supports EVs to achieve the goal of 5 million EVs on China's roads by 2020.

The main policies of the Chinese central government to promote EVs include the following:
- **Zero emissions vehicle mandate:** each Chinese vehicle manufacturer and importer is required to make or import at least 10% EVs.
- **Subsidies:** the Chinese government provides subsidies to manufacturers of EVs. All subsidies for the manufacture of plug-in EVs are scheduled to be eliminated in 2021.
- **Tax exemptions:** the Chinese government exempts EVs from consumption and sales taxes.
- **Procurement:** the Chinese government also uses its procurement power to promote EVs.
- **New auto factory requirements:** any new vehicle factory is required to include capacity for the construction of EVs.
- **Support for charging infrastructure:** the Chinese central government promotes the development of EV charging infrastructure as a matter of national policy. Its targets include: 120,000 EV charging stations and 4.8 million EV charging posts by 2020.

Although China is the largest market for EVs in the world, the situation in Europe looks positive. In 2019, the proportion of EVs on China's roads was only 5.2%, while 56% of vehicles on Norway's roads were electric.

Actions vary at the national and local levels to support the deployment of electric vehicles across European countries. Most European countries have adopted:
- Financial incentives to bridge the cost gap between electric and conventional cars
- Programs to deploy charging infrastructure information campaigns to raise awareness and increase visibility regarding available EVs and their benefits.
- National and local one-time purchase subsidies and annual national tax breaks on vehicle registration and operation
- Discounts or exemptions on parking fees or parking permits, charging an EVs, road tolls, and congestion charges
- Different local and national programs in place that support home and workplace charging

United Kingdom, France, Portugal, announced that they would ban the sale of new diesel and gasoline powered cars by 2040, and switch to EVs to reduce carbon emissions. A few days ago, the British government announced that in order to accelerate the transition it will ban diesel and gasoline powered cars by 2030, joining Sweden and Denmark, which will ban them also in 2030.

The British government will spend around £12 billion on the plan, including £1.3 billion to accelerate the deployment of charging points for EVs in homes, streets and on highways. About £582 million will help people afford low-emission vehicles, and nearly £500 million will be spent in the next four years developing and mass- scale EV batteries.

Especially for EU counties, the European Directive 2014/94/EU on the deployment of alternative fuels, urges Member States to implement charging points for electric vehicles (at least one station per 10 EVs) and many countries have announced the development of National Strategies for Electric Vehicles promoting innovative solutions. However, there is still great divergence among national rules and regulations.

Automakers
Automakers are accelerating plans to launch EVs as part of their climate commitments and to meet policy requirements. Whereas the increasingly strict regulations in some countries, which are limited to the use of EVs, will contribute to reducing the number of buyers of gasoline and diesel cars. In 2019, the EV industry saw sales of more than 2.1 million vehicles globally, with an annual increase of 40%.

In addition to new EV makers such as Tesla Inc. and Rivian Automotive Inc., the world's leading automakers also shift to the production of EVs. Ford Motor Co., General Motors Co. and Volkswagen AG focus on launching EVs and the total investments announced by global manufacturers for **North America between 2020 and 2025** is **estimated** at **US$300 billion**.

Challenges and concerns

EVs are still more expensive compared to other vehicles. It is estimated that the average EV battery can currently cost approximately US \$16,000, plus the EV manufacturing costs about \$10,000 more than gasoline cars. Although the switch to electric cars is very ambitious, it is a huge and expensive undertaking. Countries need to be financially prepared for such a rapid transformation, as it requires massive investment in the required infrastructure for EVs. Further issues arise related to subsidies, incentives and affordability. Despite the challenges, one thing is certain: the electric vehicle came to stay.

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Date Published: December 2, 2020

Link to SDGs: SDG 7, SDG 13

Blog link: https://sustainabilityknowledgegroup.com/embracing-electric-cars/

2020 Synthesis Report of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are part of the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) encourages member states to conduct regular and comprehensive reviews of progress at the national and sub-national levels. VNRs allow an exchange of experiences, successes, challenges, and lessons learned, to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The reports also aim to strengthen government policies and institutions and provide a platform for multi-stakeholder and partnerships for implementing the SDGs.

Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals
The United Nations released a Voluntary National Review synthesis report (VNRs) that included a review of 47 countries for the year 2020. The reports highlight the challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic and outline actions and visions around the SDGs.

VNRs showed progress towards the SDGs as follows:
- **SDG 1 (No poverty):** Many countries have warned that progress towards SDG 1 may stalled or reversed, due to the return of many segments to poverty as a result of the economic fallout of the COVID-19.

- **SDG 2 (Zero hunger):** Few countries have reported full achievement of SDG 2, while others have articulated their national strategies, plans and frameworks to support agricultural production, reduce land degradation, conserve agricultural biodiversity.

- **SDG 3 (Good health and well-being):** Many countries have reported measures to accelerate progress towards SDG 3. Some reports also mentioned a decrease in the maternal mortality rate, and children aged five and under. Some countries have also reported decreasing prevalence of tuberculosis and malaria, while non-communicable diseases such as diabetes and obesity continue to increase.

- **SDG 4 (Quality education):** Almost all countries focused on education, and SDG 4 report progressing this through policies that emphasized ensuring high-quality education for all, especially for marginalized groups.

- **SDG 5 (Gender equality):** Progress towards SDG 5 has been slow and uneven. More than half of the countries have reported on actions and measures taken to address violence against women.

- **SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation):** COVID-19 has affected this goal positively by increasing awareness of hygiene practices. Countries have reported improvements in basic sanitation services and access to water resources. It also reported increasing issues related to water scarcity due to the impacts of climate change.

- **SDG 7 (Affordable and clean energy):** Many countries reported plans and strategies to ensure universal access to energy, to promote the use of renewable energy sources, and to eliminate the use of fossil fuels.

- **SDG 8 (Decent work and economic growth):** Most countries reported on progress in implementing SDG 8, through the use of artificial intelligence, digitization, digital economy and ICT.

- **SDG 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure):** Some countries have taken institutional measures and policy innovations to upgrade, diversify, and green infrastructure and industry. The report also focused on the need to improve health infrastructure.

- **SDG 10 (Reduced inequalities):** All countries have addressed the problem of income inequality. Measures to address inequality faced by migrants, persons with disabilities, and gender inequality were also highlighted.

- **SDG11 (Sustainable cities and communities):** The reports focus on the importance of the health and well-being of urban dwellers, and on measures to find practical solutions to ensure housing quality and affordability.

- **SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production):** Many countries focused on implementing the 10-year framework of sustainable consumption and production programs.

- **SDG 13 (Climate action):** Several countries reported on mitigation actions and commitments to climate, and their contributions under the Paris Agreement.

- **SDG 14 (Life Below Water):** Majority of countries, including many landlocked countries reported progress towards SDG 14. It provided reports on its efforts to meet the challenges and on the progress, it had made towards establishing a marine reserve.

- **SDG 15 (Life on land):** Some countries showed progress towards increasing protected areas, preserving wetlands, and positive changes in forest coverage. However, reports indicated that many of the SDG 15 targets are still far from being achieved.

- **SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions):** Efforts and measures to reduce all forms of violence, strengthen the rule of law, and develop accountable and transparent institutions were reported on.

- **SDG 17 (Partnerships for the goals):** COVID-19 has hindered progress towards SDG 17 in many countries. The reports have highlighted the importance of a renewed global partnership and the need for clear commitments towards the international level.
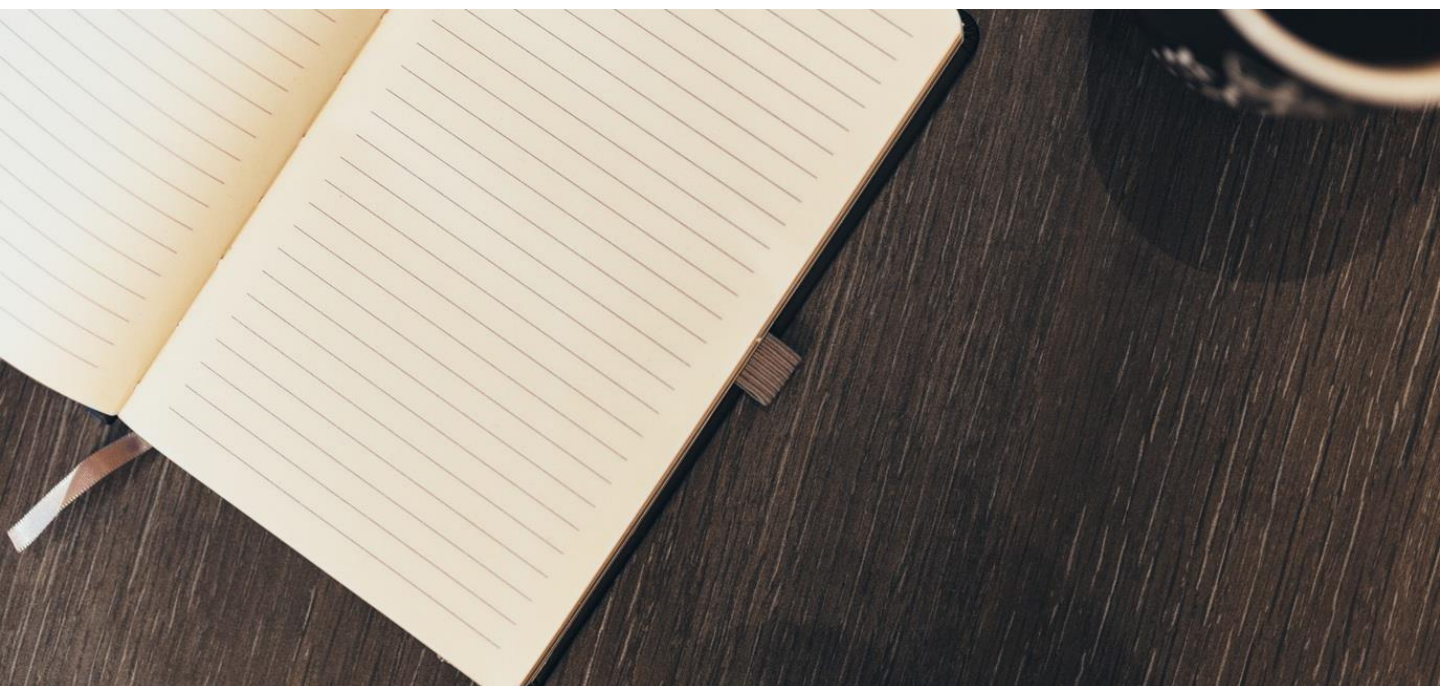
Final word

In over 100 pages, the fifth Synthesis Report of the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) published in 2020 reflected a variety of good practices, lessons learned, measures, and efforts in different countries that reported on the SDGs. The commitment to the 2030 Agenda remains strong, and many countries have clearly stated the effects of the pandemic on progress towards the SDGs and have raised issues of financing. Countries affirmed that the multi-pronged response to COVID-19 must include implementation of the 2030 Agenda. They also stressed the urgent need to make redoubled efforts to rebuild better and to accelerate the necessary actions to achieve the shared vision of the 2030 Agenda.

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Link to SDGs: SDG 16, SDG 17

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