

Getting to the Global Goals

**A Radical
Yet Realistic
Route to 2030**



Activist Greta Thunberg arrives in New York after crossing the Atlantic on a zero-carbon yacht.

Foreword

The need to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is more pressing than ever. The lives of tens of millions of people hang in the balance, as well as the collective global optimism represented by the United Nations' unanimous support for the SDGs in 2015.

The global goals are perhaps even more relevant today than they were four years ago. In a charged climate that has given rise to increased racial divisions and populist nationalism, as well as protectionist barriers that limit trade and immigration, it isn't hard to conclude why so many people the world over have lost their sense of optimism about the future.

That's why we have a shared responsibility to recommit to the SDGs and bring a renewed sense of urgency to the effort of building a global community in which everyone can be hopeful about the future.

At a time when people around the world have lost faith in their political leaders and institutions to solve our greatest challenges, we have to demonstrate what's possible when we work together to achieve common goals for the good of all people. This is precisely the moment in time when we need a new kind of leadership – not just from political leaders and governments – but also from civil society institutions and community leaders, scientists and investors, and corporate executives and young activists alike. This is a moment when the world needs everyone to step up collectively.

Leadership on the SDGs is more than a commitment to the goals; it's also about harnessing the power of innovation to advance the goals and an obligation to measure our progress. While crucial questions remain about the use and protection of data, the digital revolution offers new metrics and technologies that can help track progress toward the goals faster and more accurately than ever before.

Last month we heard nearly 200 CEOs of the Business Roundtable say they were abandoning the profit maximization creed of Milton Friedman for a more socially responsible approach. Now, these companies must back up their words with action by meaningfully reporting on their progress toward achieving the SDGs. By committing to the old axiom that says what gets measured gets done, these business leaders can help ensure that they stay on track.

The Rockefeller Foundation's century-long commitment to the values of partnership and collaboration have shown us what's possible when we bring together leaders from across all sectors and build bridges between communities to help humanity rise. Our proud history in these areas has historically fueled our optimism – and continues to do so today.

Drawing heavily on gatherings of experts at our Bellagio Center, our headquarters in New York, and around the world, this report sets out priorities for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals that I believe we can all unite behind. In doing so, may we also realize what the goals together stand for: humanity's collective aspiration for a better future for us all.



Dr. Rajiv J. Shah, President,
The Rockefeller Foundation

Getting to the Global Goals

A Radical Yet Realistic Route to 2030

*by Matthew Bishop,
The Rockefeller Foundation*

Sustainable Development Goals



Optimists of the world unite!

Unite behind achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030!

We have nothing to lose but our regrets!

To anyone who cares about the well-being of humanity as a whole, rather than just their little corner of it, the world today seems depressingly different from how it did in September 2015. Then, the leaders of 193 countries gathered at the United Nations (UN) headquarters to adopt 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030. They promised ambitious change, ranging from dramatic reductions in poverty and sickness to gender equality and effective action against climate change. No one, they proclaimed, should be left behind.

Four years later, world leaders will gather again in New York at a time when a nasty tribal populism is spreading, the Amazon is burning, inequality is rising, trust in institutions is crumbling as fake news spreads on social media, and a trade war threatens to trigger a global economic recession. The optimism that inspired the SDGs is in short supply. Yet if the past four years of global upheaval prove anything, it is that the need to achieve the SDGs is greater and more urgent than ever.

As great causes go, admittedly the SDGs do not set the pulse racing. The bureaucratise of the UN is far from the poetry of “I have a dream.” When even Bono jokes that the goals “sound like a sexually transmitted

disease,” as he did this year in Davos, it is clear the SDGs have an image problem. Yet as the rock-star activist also pointed out, the ideas animating the “Global Goals” (as the marketing folk have rebranded them) add up to the sort of world-changing vision that should unite those who want the best possible future for all. Harvard professor Steven Pinker, who attributes his well-known optimism to deep immersion in the data on human progress, recently described the SDGs as “glorious, noble, thrilling” and “proof that there really is a universal moral system” that can achieve goals and lead to progress. Even if you think the SDGs are not quite perfect, it seems unlikely that a better global vision will be agreed on anytime soon.

The time to unite is now, for the clock is ticking. We are entering the fifth year of the 15-year SDG process, and we have made far less progress than we anticipated in 2015. In some cases, we have, unfortunately, gone backwards. Key milestones are fast-approaching, and, without the necessary action, achieving several of the goals by 2030 will become practically impossible – and those that are not impossible will be significantly harder. In the 10 years that remain, a dramatic, system-changing improvement will be necessary to achieve our global goals.



A Matter Of Life And Death

An official UN report¹ on the SDGs issued this summer concluded that “the global response thus far has not been ambitious enough,” and “the most vulnerable people and countries continue to suffer the most.” This is a massive understatement. Things are going badly, and there are worrying signs of slowing, stalling, or even backsliding in areas where progress once was strong. In areas where there has not been progress, the will and ability to bring about change has seemingly disappeared.

True, as the UN report pointed out, there are examples of real progress, including fewer people living in extreme poverty, reduced child mortality, and greater access to electricity in poorer countries. Yet even that progress has been, for the most part, too slow. On current trends, there will still be 6 percent of the world’s people, including at least 20 percent of its children, living in extreme poverty in 2030. While this is much less than the 10 percent that were living in poverty in 2015, it still falls way short of the first Global Goal of eradicating extreme poverty. The same is true of health, especially in less-developed countries. On current trends, 2030 targets for fewer cases of HIV, AIDS, and tuberculosis will not be met. Since 2015 there have been no significant gains in reducing cases of malaria, which were previously falling fast: In 2017, in the 10 African countries with the highest malaria burden, there were 3.5 million more cases than there were in 2016.

In 2017, the number of people who were undernourished increased to 821 million, or one in every nine humans, up from 784 million two years earlier. That was the third year in a row that world hunger increased. The number of refugees and internally displaced people, who are victims of civil war or natural disaster, continues to set new records. As for climate change, it is happening at a much faster rate even was anticipated at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) target-setting meeting in Paris in 2015.

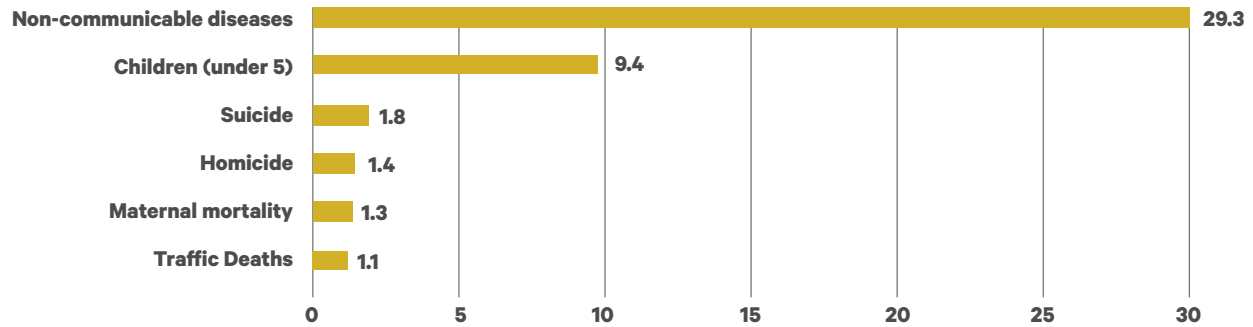
A recent report² by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, led by Columbia professor Jeffrey D. Sachs under the auspices of the UN Secretary General, concluded that currently “no country is on track to meeting all the

¹ The UN Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019

² Sustainable Development Report 2019, Sustainable Development Solutions Network

Chart 1: 44 million lives at stake

Difference between current projections and achieving the SDGs



Source: The Brookings Institution

goals.” Another report³ by the Social Progress Imperative, an independent nongovernmental organization (NGO), forecasts that while a handful of richer countries like Germany and Japan will get very close to meeting goals, the United States will fall well short, and the world as a whole will not achieve the SDGs any sooner than 2073.

A study⁴ by the Brookings Institution calculated the cost of not meeting the SDGs in terms of lives lost (see chart 1). Extrapolating current trends to 2030 suggests that some 44 million more people around the world will die between now and then than would if the international community achieved the SDGs. If nothing else does it, that grim forecast alone ought to be a powerful call to action.

Brookings also forecasts that on current trends many people will be left behind on many of the goals: As chart 2 shows, barely half of those who need electricity will gain access to it; four out of five women currently exposed to violence will remain so; and there will actually be a more than 50 percent increase in overweight children.

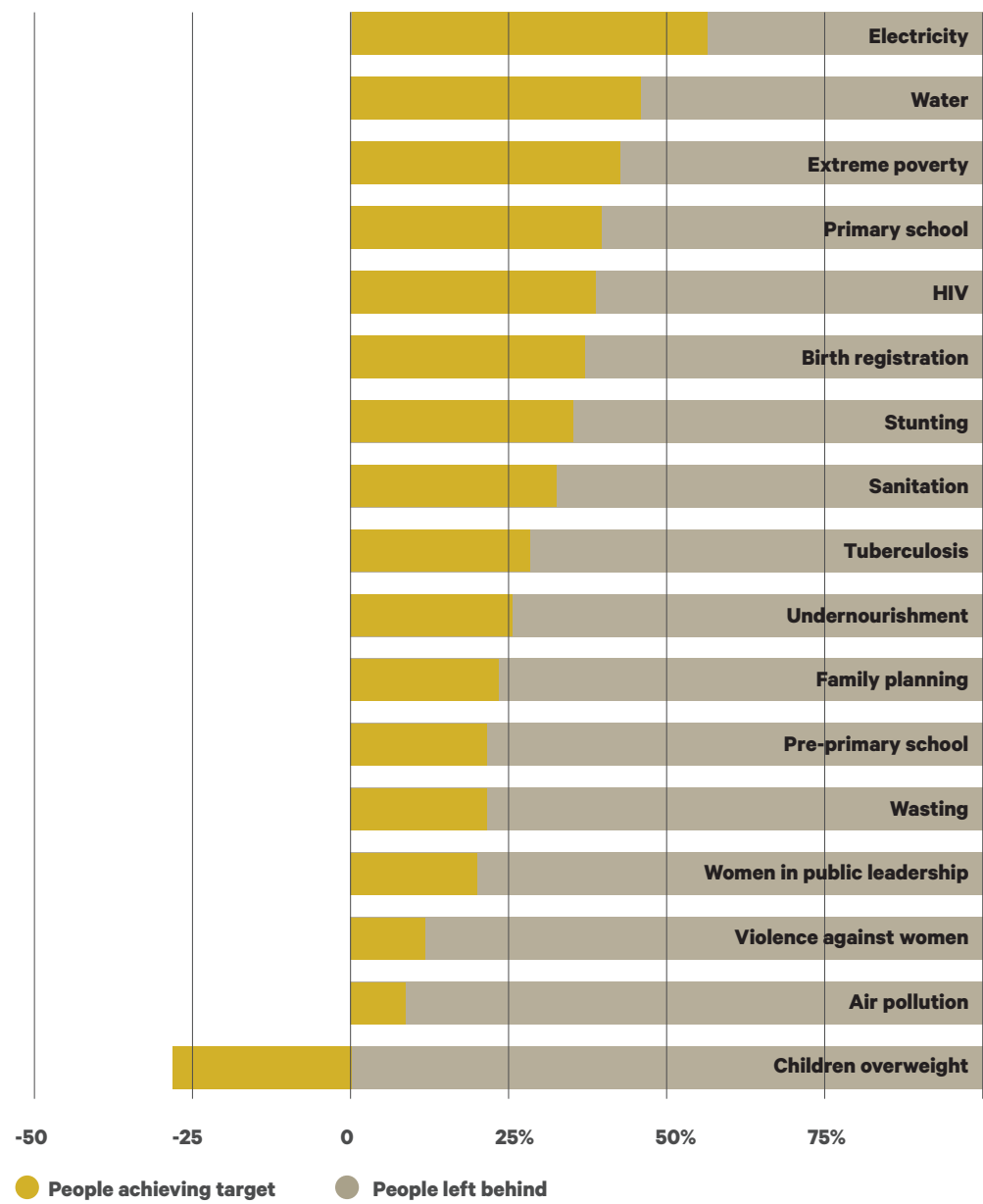
One of the philosophical underpinnings of the SDGs is that they apply to all countries, not just the so-called less-developed ones, because no country’s development journey has yet lifted it to its full potential. Even in the wealthiest countries, the SDGs aim to ensure that “no one is left behind.” Yet according to the Social Progress Imperative, the United States, for example, is currently further from meeting the SDGs than it was in 2016. The dangers of allowing inequality to grow inside a country, leading to a significant part of the population feeling left behind and left out of the benefits of economic growth, are much clearer today

³ Available at socialprogress.org; Matthew Bishop is a cofounder of the Social Progress Imperative

⁴ “Leave No One Behind,” edited by Homi Kharas, John W. McArthur, and Izumi Ohno, Brookings Institution

Chart 2: Left behind

Population currently left behind by the goals who still will be in 2030 on current trends



Source: The Brookings Institution

than they were in 2015. Making real progress on the SDGs may be the best hope the world has for defeating nasty populist nationalism and making credible again the notion that it is possible to improve the quality of life on earth for everyone, not just a few.



Transformational change doesn't happen without courage and dedication, especially in the face of incentives designed to maintain the status quo. Only by coming together and focusing on what matters—changing our systems—will we achieve the SDGs.”

Halla Tómasdóttir,
CEO of The B Team*

Getting The SDGs Back On Track

In this report we examine what can be done to get the SDGs back on track. There are still 10 years to get things right. Better still, there is reason to believe that if the world makes the right choices, the SDGs can be achieved. Our thinking draws heavily on discussions at the Solvable Summit convened in June at The Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center, and other recent convenings there, as well as the SDG-focused “17 Rooms” partnership between the Rockefeller Foundation and the Brookings Institution.

Our headline conclusion is that incremental changes will not deliver the SDGs; alternatively, we need substantial, systemic change. The good news is that proven models exist and provide us with a blueprint for what needs to be done. For most of the SDGs the biggest challenge is not finding instead, not alternatively breakthrough innovation (though that would be a bonus) but adopting at scale processes and plans that already work.

Admittedly this is not true for every SDG; in some cases, there are significant knowledge gaps requiring truly new approaches. It is not proven, for instance, how we can consistently strengthen or repair states that are fragile or broken, though at least there is a new consensus around what might work. And if artificial intelligence leads to mass unemployment, as is widely feared (though not yet certain), there is, say, no tried and tested path to creating decent jobs for the many. Yet for most of the goals, what is needed above all is commitment from leaders to do what we know works and the organizational capacity in government, civil society, and business to deliver.

This approach will require governmental and other organizations to raise their game with regards to how they are set up internally, how they allocate resources, who they put in charge, and how they work with each other. To say that it will not be easy is an understatement. But over the coming decade there will be a unique opportunity to harness the power of “big data” analytics and other “fourth industrial revolution” technologies to transform the effectiveness of government for the better. As for business, at least in terms of what CEOs say publicly, the philosophical battle may have been largely won, as short-term profit maximization is abandoned in favor of long-termism and social responsibility. But the battle continues in terms of actions. Can achieving the SDGs become central to how the private sector perceives profit-making opportunities and risks? Only if the private sector starts to see achieving the SDGs not merely as a way to “blue wash” reputations but as a significant source of potential new profits and better risk-management. Regulators, international financial institutions, development banks, and philanthropies each have an important role to play in setting the right incentives for the private sector to accelerate this essential mind-shift.

*The people quoted in the sidebars were all speaking at the Solvable Summit at the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in June 2019

Above all, the systemic change needed to achieve the Global Goals will demand bold leadership, in government, in philanthropic and other non-governmental organizations, in business, and throughout society. Given the inevitably complex planning challenges and the importance of working closely with a wide array of different partners, leaders will especially need the soft, diplomatic, bridge-building skills that in some ways are the direct opposite of those currently favored by the populist hard-man school of leadership. As Halla Tómasdóttir, CEO of The B Team, puts it, “Transformational change doesn’t happen without courage and dedication, especially in the face of incentives designed to maintain the status quo. Only by coming together and focusing on what matters—changing our systems—will we achieve the SDGs.” There is an urgent need to invest in building up a “bridging leadership” capacity where it is currently lacking, especially helping more women to break through the glass ceiling and strengthening local leadership in those countries furthest behind on delivering the SDGs. Likewise, we will need leaders with the technical expertise to implement strategies built on digital platforms and big data analytics.

Since the SDGs were adopted in 2015, four essentially optimistic global movements have seen strong growth in support: around fighting climate change, achieving gender equality, increasing opportunity for young people, and taking action to reduce income and wealth inequality. Each of these ambitions are key components of the SDG agenda. It should be a priority to harness the energy of these movements into a broader campaign to make 2020 a breakthrough year, when the people of the world stand up and demand real progress toward our shared Global Goals.



Building On What Works

In remote villages in places with poor or nonexistent road access, a drone can be a lifesaver. After a successful test in Rwanda this year, Zipline, a San Francisco-based logistics company, launched the world's largest drone vaccine-delivery service in Ghana, to serve up to 2,000 health facilities and 12 million people. It did so in a partnership with GAVI, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization, with financial support from donors such as the UPS Foundation.

Since its formation in 2000, GAVI has vaccinated 760 million children who were previously unprotected. Since that time, deaths of children under the age of 5 has been nearly halved each year to around 5 million. This is despite a 10 percent increase in low-income countries – and a 40 percent increase in Africa – in the number of children born each year. GAVI is now gearing up to tackle the challenge of vaccinating the “fifth child,” which describes the 20 percent of children who still do not receive a full course of the basic vaccines they need. Immunizing children has significant positive consequences not only for health but also for educational achievement and, ultimately, productive employment. GAVI calculates that every \$1 invested in immunization generates a return of at least \$21, and perhaps as much as \$54, when all benefits to society are taken into account.

No wonder GAVI has become a poster child for how a proven method for tackling a problem can be scaled up in places not yet reached. Similar examples of proven success abound. Indeed, for many of the SDGs, there is little, if any,



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Winnie Byanyima,
executive director of
Oxfam International.
Former member of the
Ugandan Parliament,
and the African Union
Commission.

ground for saying we don't know what to do. A lot of the thorniest challenges facing humanity have been overcome already, somewhere. The need now is to scale these solutions so that they benefit millions, or, hopefully, billions, of people.

A new documentary, "Solvable," supported by the Rockefeller Foundation, highlighted three of these proven solutions that are working on the ground in different less-developed countries. In Ethiopia, new systems of wells and irrigation have helped small farmers thrive, dramatically reducing their exposure to the risk of famine when the rains fail. In remote rural villages in India, mini-grids powered by solar energy are not just bringing light to homes; they are making new local business models viable, creating livelihoods that lift people out of subsistence. In Kenya, sharp reductions have been achieved in maternal mortality, again using tried-and-tested techniques that were anything but rocket science.

Indeed, in the case of maternal mortality, the mystery – and scandal – is that despite the wealth of knowledge about how to prevent this tragic, personally and societally disastrous outcome, it still happens so often. More than 300,000 women die each year due to complications in pregnancy and childbirth, nearly two-thirds of them in sub-Saharan Africa, and 2.5 million newborn babies die within a month. These are deaths that could mostly be avoided. The same can be said of educating girls: What could be more straightforward or beneficial to a country? Yet around the world, though there has been progress in closing the gap between girls and boys in primary education, rural girls are twice as likely as urban girls to be out of school, and only 39 percent of rural girls attend secondary school.

Understanding why proven solutions are not being taken up, despite often powerful ethical and economic reasons for doing so, is crucial if the world is to take the necessary steps to achieve the SDGs.

A lack of information may be part of the problem. Not so much the sort of information that well-paid, technical experts from foreign donor governments and the development banks provide to civil servants and ministers, perhaps, but the sort that comes in the form of a compelling narrative that builds public support for the right changes. The emerging field of "solutions journalism," which brings the highest standards of news reporting not only to identifying problems but also to solving them, could have a big role to play here.

Deep-rooted cultural assumptions may also be behind the worst examples of non-adoption of what we know works. As Winnie Byanyima, the executive director of Oxfam International, puts it, "We have achieved a lot in terms of women's rights in law and public policies, but where we need to make a great move to achieve lift is in tackling social norms; the informal laws that govern the lives of millions of people who live in poverty."

A lack of investing in reducing maternal and child mortality may stem from those countries being run predominantly by men who place a low value on women and kids, for instance. Encouragingly, still some proven models for challenging negative cultural norms are starting to emerge. There has been a sharp decline in the rate of child marriage (typically of girls) in South Asia, for instance, where the risk of marrying in childhood fell by about one quarter from 2013 to 2018. The rate of child marriage has also decreased in sub-Saharan Africa, but far more slowly.

Getting laws passed may not be enough: India bans marriage under the age of 18, yet until recently saw around 5 million child brides a year. Girls Not Brides,



Women's organizations protest against child marriage in front of Press Club in Dhaka.

a partnership of almost 1,300 NGOs focused on ending child marriage, has found success by working closely with community leaders, including religious leaders and tribal chiefs, to sensitize them about the harmful consequences of child marriage, not only for girls but for their wider communities. In doing so, they hope to convince their communities of the benefits of delaying marriage and help them to see that the practice they have long-regarded as a good thing is in fact harmful. A girl in a child marriage is typically taken out of school, if she went in

the first place. She is more likely to have complications or die during childbirth. Her children are likelier to die young. She has a higher risk of HIV/AIDs in certain circumstances and a higher risk of experiencing violence.

It is also crucial to make girls aware of their rights and agency and offer those who do not marry young an alternative life path. Schooling needs to be available, as does reproductive health care and contraception. Having the opportunity to work and pursue a career, too, must be made available.

Backing local NGOs that work on the issue is perhaps the biggest missed opportunity, says Mabel van Oranje, the founder of Girls Not Brides. Too often money given to tackling child marriage goes to UN agencies or big international NGOs. Not enough of it goes to local groups that really “know what’s happening in the community, why child marriage is taking place, and understand what needs to happen in order to change it.”

Way too much aid and charitable money from abroad that is supposed to help tackle a problem in a less-developed country ends up bypassing local organizations. Foreign consultants are often the main recipients, when instead the money could be helping local groups do a better job on the ground – and often at a lower cost. Strikingly, one of the best decisions that GAVI made early on was that, rather than design solutions for countries, it would back national plans developed by local leaders. This preference for locally led solutions would be a good default starting point for most efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Synergy, Synergy, Synergy

Child marriage touches on eight of the 17 SDGs, points out van Oranje. She notes that, until recently, there has been far too little focus on the potential for synergies from reducing child marriage, such as greater gender equality, and better education, health, and employment outcomes.

An early critique of the SDGs was that there are too many of them to be useful. Yet in practice, there has been a growing recognition of strong interconnections between different goals and efforts to find “force multiplier”

strategies that advance multiple goals at the same time.

The UN is encouraging governments to undertake “voluntary national reviews” of their progress toward the SDGs. According to a recent report by the Secretary General, 141 countries have so far done so, in many cases highlighting how hard they find it to integrate strategies across departments. Encouragingly there have been a growing number of experiments by governments intended to break the siloes that hinder a joined-up cross-government approach. A few countries have appointed

a senior member of government to a role with the power to coordinate action across ministries to advance the SDGs. Though it is too early to judge how much of an impact this will have, given the scale of the potential synergies this seems like a strategy that should be adopted widely.

Sometimes this search for synergies has been manifested by experts that focus on a particular goal – gender equality, say, or education or health – arguing that theirs should be treated as first among equals because of how its progress can positively affect other SDGs. But for most goals, there is real potential for synergies. Ending stunted growth in young children, for instance, not only has direct health benefits, it also leads to better outcomes in education and later employment. Plant-based alternatives to meat, such as the Impossible Burger, offer the possibility of a quadruple win, helping to tackle hunger, improve health, and reduce energy and water consumption all at the same time. Some of the biggest opportunities lie in the nexus between fighting climate change and reducing poverty – goals that are often portrayed as being in opposition to each other, not on the same side.

A new report⁵ by the Food and Land Use Coalition makes bold claims about the potential for beneficial synergies that, at first glance, can seem too good to be true. The report lays out a plan that it says by 2030 could bring climate change under control, safeguard natural diversity, ensure healthier diets for all, greatly



⁵ “Securing our Future: People, Food and Nature solving the Planetary Emergency,” The Food and Land Use Coalition, 2019

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Scale is going to come from strengthening the ability of governments to deliver.”

Agnes Kalibata, president of AGRA and former minister of agriculture of Rwanda.

improve food security, and create more inclusive rural economies. Moreover, this plan would achieve these goals while generating a societal return of over \$15 per \$1 invested and creating new business opportunities worth up to \$4.5 trillion a year.

The plan’s 10 key components draw heavily on the work of experts and rely largely on scaling up technology and operating models that are already proven to work. A major opportunity is tackling the many inefficiencies riddling the current food and land system. Land and water are often used in ways that go against societal interests. There is slow diffusion of best practices beyond large commercial farms. Underinvestment is rife in rural infrastructure and human capital. At least one-third of primary food production is lost or wasted. Perhaps the biggest leap of faith is that the plan relies on massive behavioral changes by consumers to adopt a healthier diet. But the theory of nudges has now reached a level of maturity. This may be an opportunity to deploy it on a massive scale to get us all eating food that is at once good both for our health and the planet’s.

Overall, far from being too good to be true, on close inspection it seems that the plan is based plausibly on reasonable assumptions. A key to achieving the SDGs will be many more detailed plans of this kind, focused in granular detail on large-scale systemic change. Yet even the most credible plan is only as good as the ability and commitment of those who would be responsible for implementing it. In particular, there is an urgent need to focus on improving the capacity of the public sector. As Agnes Kalibata, President of the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), puts it, “scale is going to come from strengthening the ability of governments to deliver.”

Towards A Digital, Data-driven State

One of the most remarkable examples of a government delivering at massive scale a game-changing solution – and, in this case, a previously unproven one – took place over the past decade in India. Some 1.2 billion Indians now have a unique biometric proof of identity, the Aadhar card, which is the foundation of a new digital system known as the “India stack.” This is transforming the country’s public finances and, in important respects, increasing the effectiveness of its



Capturing biometrics for Aadhar card.

government. Welfare payments, for example, can now be delivered directly into bank accounts, which beneficiaries can access directly via mobile phone. This is driving out fraud and corruption and giving the welfare system a better chance of fulfilling its social purpose.

Much of the credit for the Aadhar card should go to Nandan Nilekani, the co-founder of Infosys. He had the original vision for the India stack, then, in 2014, crucially also helped convince then-incoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi to continue with a scheme introduced

by the rival government he had just ousted. Nilekani and his colleagues are now working on finding other ways, such as building “societal platforms,” to harness the digital revolution to improve the workings of the state in areas such as education. He believes that by building the right digital infrastructure, governments in developing countries can leapfrog over their supposedly more-developed peers.

The digital revolution has lately become controversial in many countries, and with good reason. India is no exception; the India stack has been criticized over issues such as data protection and privacy. It is essential that the world prioritizes putting its big data platforms and companies on a sound, socially acceptable footing, not least because, as the India stack demonstrates clearly, building digital data-driven states may be the only way to push governments to deliver the SDGs.

The appropriate regulatory framework will likely vary from one country to the next, not least to reflect how developed it is and especially the capacity of its state to regulate effectively. As Reuben Abraham, CEO of the IDFC Institute, points out, in richer countries, people often want regulation to minimize their visibility to the state. But in developing countries, where invisibility is the norm for many people, gaining the sort of visibility to the government – especially its welfare payment system – that the India stack delivers may be a far greater priority. Also, given the weaker capacity of the state in many less-developed countries, a more “minimal, modular approach to regulation is probably preferable to a maximal approach which sounds good in theory, but is likely to

fail in practice,” he adds. There is an urgent need for states everywhere to build a cadre of professionals with the ability to make sound policy on digital and data regulation, especially since the growth of technology is rapid and tends to outpace the state’s ability to keep up.

It is not just developing countries that could reap potentially huge benefits from building a truly digital state. One of the biggest challenges facing so-called developed countries as they edge closer to the SDGs is how to modernize welfare states they built in the middle of the 20th century that are no longer fit for purpose. As the British social entrepreneur Hilary Cottam has demonstrated through a series of pilot schemes in Britain⁶, embracing the power of big data and the networking capabilities of social media can form key components of what she calls a “fifth social revolution,” in which, for instance, government partners with peer-to-peer networks of citizens to more effectively meet social needs.

The need for this is greatest in those countries furthest from achieving the SDGs, many of which have a government-backed safety net for citizens that is, at best, minimal and often nonexistent. As of 2016, for example, 55 percent of humanity, or around 4 billion people, were not covered by any cash-based social benefits. In sub-Saharan Africa, 87 percent lacked this basic form of social protection. A digital system that drove out fraud and corruption, like the India stack, would be the most effective platform on which to build such a safety net. Digitizing the revenue-collecting side of government would also almost certainly swell the national treasury. Another common feature of those countries furthest from accomplishing the SDGs is how poor a job their governments currently do at collecting taxes.

This is reflected in the gaps that exist between current public spending by countries on the SDGs and what they would need to spend to be on track to achieve them. According to a recent study⁷ by Brookings, the poorer the country the bigger the shortfall in spending as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP). Notably, all countries forecast to have a per capita GDP of \$1,000 or less in 2025 show expected shortfalls of at least 10 percent of their GDP. Many of these are fragile or failed states, which present a particularly difficult and yet must-solve challenge to the SDG agenda (see box on page 16).

Raising taxes offers one potential path to closing the funding gap but is likely to be harder to implement in less-developed countries. International aid flows, to the extent that they can be maintained in this moment of inward-looking populism in some major donor countries, can help, especially if they are better targeted to spending that most helps achieve the SDGs. One bright idea

⁶ Details of many of these are described in “Radical Help: How we can remake the relationships between us and revolutionise the welfare state,” by Hilary Cottam, 2018

⁷ “How much does the world spend on the Sustainable Development Goals?” Homi Kharas and John McArthur, July 2019, brookings.edu

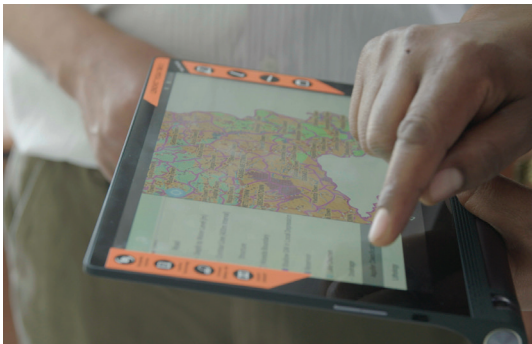
might be to use the money to invest in creating the sort of leapfrogging digital government platforms championed by Nilekani.

The bottom line in every country, however rich or poor, is that they need to focus on spending money as effectively as possible. Better data has a crucial role to play in enabling that.

Big Data, Big Opportunity

As the old saying goes, what gets measured gets managed, and what isn't measured often gets ignored. Good data is essential if the SDGs are to be achieved. And while there has been some progress on this front, including in trying to figure out how to harness the potential of the big data revolution to generate useful new metrics, this is an area in need of urgent prioritization.

There are huge gaps in data coverage, the quality of that data, its timeliness, and the ability to disaggregate it, all of which gets in the way of informed decision-making and the efficient and effective deployment of resources to deliver



the SDGs. Moreover, as the quality and range of data tends to be much higher in more-developed countries, as does the degree of useful innovation in data analytics, there is also a danger that growing data inequality will become a serious factor slowing progress on the SDGs in the developing world.

In some less-developed countries many people are essentially ignored. Less than half of all children under 5 living in sub-Saharan Africa have had their births registered. More than half of the countries in sub-Saharan Africa are

unable to adequately measure poverty trends. But even in the richest countries, there are significant data gaps, such as in tracking things that are often more significant in the lives of women than of men: time spent caring for children or elderly relatives, for example.

A recent paper⁸ by the Social Progress Imperative highlighted that even where data is collected, there is often a lack of sufficient standardization to allow meaningful comparisons between countries. For instance, there is no internationally agreed-upon definition of homelessness, and either the datasets on country-level homelessness are limited to specific sub-groups (such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, or OECD, or the European Union) or data are not comparable between countries. There is little good data on domestic violence, not least because this tends to rely on self-reporting, and the same goes for mental health issues. There is no consistently

⁸ “Towards Better Data,” 2019, Social Progress Imperative

reliable global data on educational attainment, though data on school enrollment is better.

There are two things we need to do to move forward, both of which should be pursued as fast as possible. One is to build up proper traditional national statistics offices in those countries that do not have them. Persuading the governments of these countries to prioritize this, especially if they suspect it will cast them in a bad light and strengthen their opponents, may be a bigger obstacle than the financial cost.

The second is to make effective use of the new sources of data being created, not just through whatever digital infrastructure the government has, but also through the rapid growth of the broader digital economy. Big data is a big opportunity, offering the potential for much cheaper and faster tracking of what is going on. One obvious opportunity for less-developed countries to leapfrog over more staid and developed countries is to find new sources of data to track progress on the SDGs. One effort less-developed countries could potentially tap into is by Planet, a company with a network of satellites that take frequent photographs of the entire surface of the world. The company is developing some new indicators that draw on real-time data about what is happening in a country. Earlier this year, it launched a pioneering measure of forest carbon stocks and emissions.

The important role that civil society and business need to play if the world is to achieve the SDGs also means that more data are needed to measure their contribution. There are many efforts underway to generate these measures, especially around carbon disclosure and environmental performance. But more work is needed, including around the performance of NGOs and philanthropies.

Today, developed countries are far ahead of less-developed countries in the big data revolution, thanks to more-established data infrastructure and earlier adoption of data generating and collection technologies, from smartphones to the internet of things. The digital divide caused by different levels of access to computing and the internet was bad enough; unless action is taken, the data inequity to come between richer and poorer nations may be far worse. Helping less-developed countries make the most of the big data revolution should be an urgent priority. One good start, points out Stefan Dercon of Oxford University, would be for those countries to help themselves by introducing regulations that lower the cost of data services on mobile phones in less-developed countries, which today are often significantly higher than in their more-developed counterparts.

Fixing Fragile States

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You have to do what is correct, not what is popular. When you know that what you're doing is correct, you have that inner strength that allows you to persevere”.

Juan Manuel Santos, *former President of Colombia and the sole recipient of the 2016 Nobel Peace Prize.*

On current trends, by 2030 more than half of the world's poorest people are projected to live in countries affected by conflict. They include the growing record number of refugees around the world, who often find themselves in dire circumstances in the countries that end up hosting them. Unless significant progress can be made in promoting peace and strengthening the institutions of good government in fragile or broken states, there is no chance of the world achieving the SDGs.

That is clearly a huge challenge, especially at a time of weakening commitment to multilateral efforts that can require global and regional superpowers to sublimate their narrow national interest to the common good. The last big push to strengthen fragile states, based on a “New Deal” agreement reached in 2011 at a summit in Busan, South Korea, in practice fell well-short of expectations, perhaps because its initial pilot projects took on some especially challenging countries: Afghanistan, the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste, with Somalia added in 2013.

Yet the New Deal was an attempt to fashion a new approach to strengthening fragile states based on a savvy understanding of the practicalities and politics of operating in such troubled places. The old, rather inflexible and technocratic approach was not working, as was emphasized in two recent reports: the first, last year by the Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development⁹, chaired by David Cameron, Donald Kaberuka, and Adnan Khan; and the second¹⁰, this February, by the bipartisan Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States. The latter effort, under the auspices of the U.S. Institute for Peace, seems to have persuaded a majority on all sides in Congress that staying engaged in strengthening fragile states would help promote America's national security. Both reports urge greater pragmatism and

flexibility, a focus on finding solutions that work with the grain of the country's politics (however unappealing) and local traditions, and the need for the international community to finance locally led solutions rather than plans, priorities, and processes driven from outside.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have recently started singing from this hymn sheet, too. The Bank in particular has overhauled its financing procedures to allow it far greater flexibility in putting money into fragile situations. What is needed now is compelling evidence that the new approach can work in practice by repairing a clearly broken country, or better still, strengthening a fragile state so that it does not break in the first place. The key is to find a country or two at a pivotal moment, where local leadership has a new plan requiring support from the international community to help it succeed. Exceptional leadership may be essential, as making the compromises necessary to build peace can make you very unpopular with your own people, Juan Manuel Santos, a former President of Colombia, told the Solvable Summit this summer. But, he added, “You have to do what is correct, not what is popular. When you know that what you're doing is correct, you have that inner strength that allows you to persevere.”

Progress on fragile states would work wonders for the entire SDG project. There is an opportunity for the World Bank to lead on this, with its new president and newly clarified mission to focus on ending extreme poverty. Perhaps it should start by developing detailed plans for addressing the challenges in the more fragile three of the “Big Five” countries that together are home to nearly half of the people in the world now living in extreme poverty: Nigeria, the DRC, and Pakistan.

⁹ “Escaping The Fragility Trap,” Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development, 2018

¹⁰ “Preventing Extremism In Fragile States: A New Approach”, Task Force on Extremism in Fragile States, US Institute of Peace, 2019

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We have to tackle the problem of tax competition and the avoidance of taxes by the multinationals. That is something that can be done, and done relatively quickly”.

Joseph Stiglitz,
Economist, public policy analyst, and a professor at Columbia University. Recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.



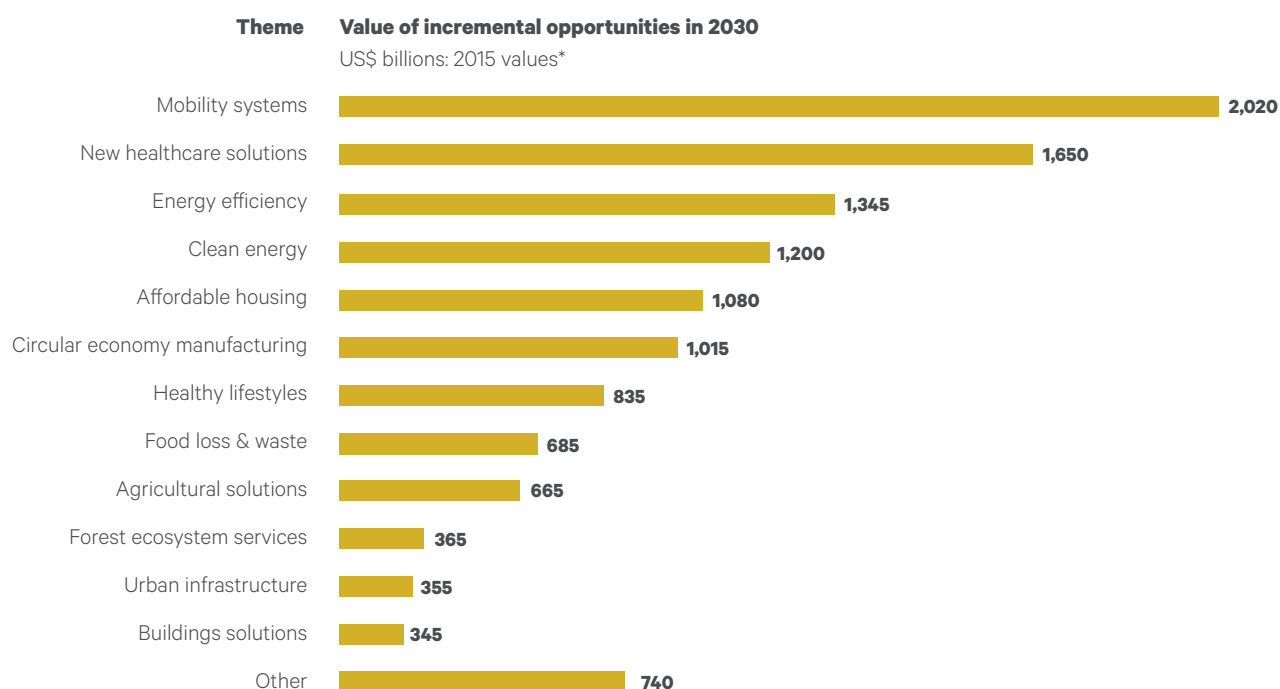
Business And Finance For The Global Goals

When it comes to the SDGs, for business and finance the priority should be a little less conversation and a little more action. Last month around 200 members of the Business Roundtable, a group representing big companies, said they no longer favor always putting shareholder interests first and are instead embracing an approach that takes into account the interests of all stakeholders in the company – employees, customers, society, as well as investors. This is the latest in a series of repudiations by business and financial leaders of the late Milton Friedman’s notorious claim that the only social responsibility of business is to maximize profits. Nowadays, despite pushback from some shareholder groups, the fashion is for capitalism’s bosses to talk up their company’s purpose and broader socially responsible behavior – which increasingly includes pledging their allegiance to the SDGs.

This is welcome progress only insofar as it leads to meaningful action. There is a clear and present danger that, just as some companies have used superficial commitments to the environment to “greenwash” their dirtied reputations, others will now sign up for the SDGs only to paint themselves “United-Nations blue.”

Some key early data are not encouraging. For instance, a growing commitment to the SDGs ought to have led to a sharp increase in private capital flows from rich countries to the countries that are furthest behind. Yet according

Chart 3: 12 largest business opportunities for achieving the global goals



* Based on estimated savings or projected market sizings in each area. Rounded to nearest US\$ billion.

Source: Business and Sustainable Development Commission

to a report¹¹ by the OECD, since 2015 there has instead been a notable decline in private capital flows into developing countries, both for foreign direct investment and project finance.

For optimists, the time is ripe to take the titans of finance and business at their word about their intentions and use every means at our disposal to chivvy them into action. When a company talks up its ethical supply chain or its circular economy credentials, it should be thoroughly scrutinized. Good examples should be celebrated, and bad actors should be called out. Paying reasonable rates of tax, instead of exploiting every loophole and lobbying hard against reforms that would increase corporate taxes, would also be indicative of a more socially responsible attitude. Certainly successful policy reform will be necessary to produce big changes. As Joe Stiglitz, an economics Nobel laureate, points out, if we are serious about achieving the SDGs, and especially about reducing inequality, “We have to tackle the problem of tax competition and the avoidance of taxes by the multinationals. That is something that can be done, and done relatively

¹¹ “Time To Face The Challenge: Global Outlook On Financing For Sustainable Development,” OECD, 2019

quickly.” Quicker still, absent lobbying against it by business. Certainly, recent work by the OECD to tackle tax base erosion and profit shifting (BEPS) provides a strong foundation for action on multinational taxation.

The media, especially the business media, have a key role to play in holding supposedly more responsible business and finance to account. But the media too often are guilty of lazily reporting claims made at press conferences or in interviews without reporting on what is really going on the ground (which, given the nature of these challenges, is often in grim, foreign places).

Likewise, all those who claim to be “impact investors,” or that say they focus their portfolio on investments with good records on ESG (environment, social, governance). Perhaps the biggest opportunity to apply pressure has been created by the UN Principles of Responsible Investment, a commitment to take into account environmental and social factors, that has now been signed by nearly 1,200 investors who together manage over \$70 trillion. That is more than enough capital to make a real difference in the world. Many of these signatories have done the bare minimum in terms of implementation; a concerted effort to get them to do as much as the handful of their peers on the cutting edge of best practice could have a huge impact.

There’s Money In It

A key challenge, and opportunity, is to get business and finance leaders out of the mindset that the SDGs are primarily about doing good and instead to see them as doing good business. If investors and businesses are serious about moving from short-termism to delivering great long-term performance, it should not be hard to help them understand that investing in the SDGs can often be a valuable new source of profits, and at the very least should help them manage risk better.

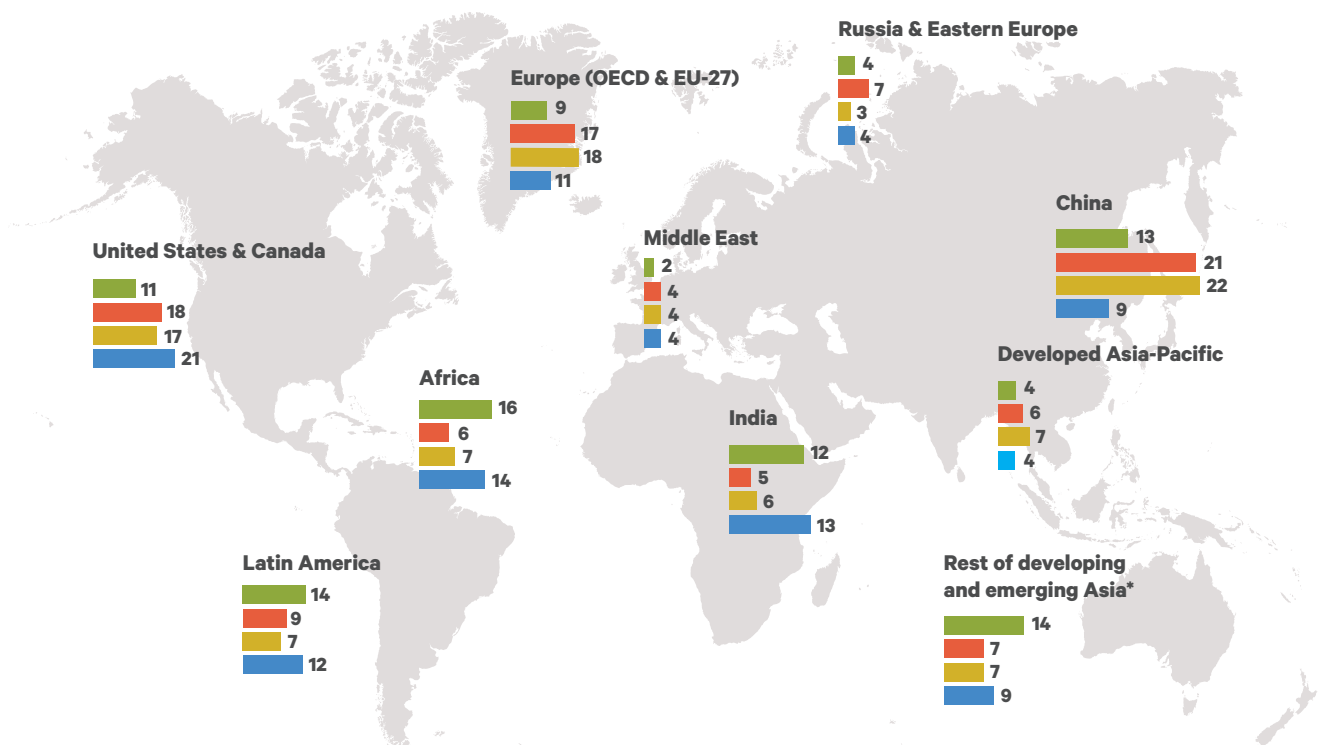
The case for this point was set out powerfully in the report of the Business and Sustainable Development Commission¹², chaired by Mark Malloch-Brown. Though now a couple years old, it is more relevant than ever. One of its key messages is there are potentially huge fortunes to be made – a “\$12 trillion opportunity” – by building out SDG-compliant industries, ranging from food and agriculture to health and well-being (see chart 3). Around half the value of these opportunities would be generated in less-developed economies (chart 4). Another message is that the outlook for profits in many industries would change dramatically if governments and regulators were to make a more serious effort to stop businesses from imposing costs on society, such as pollution and climate change. In the past few years, the growing investor concern about climate change

¹² “Better Business, Better World,” Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2017

Chart 4: Where the opportunities are

Share of value of SDG business opportunities by region and system; Percent

● Food and Agriculture ● Cities ● Energy and Materials ● Health and Well-Being



*Rest of developing Asia includes Central Asia (e.g., Uzbekistan), South Asia (e.g., Bangladesh), Southeast Asia (e.g., Laos), and North Korea.

Note: Numbers may not sum due to rounding

Source: Business and Sustainable Development Commission

has been driven largely by regulatory and other efforts to highlight what impact certain policy changes (such as introducing a carbon price) would have on the profits and balance sheets of companies with exposure to carbon, and to force greater disclosure of those exposures (chapeau to Michael Bloomberg's Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures). A powerful next step would be for these efforts to look at the implications of potential policies to advance other SDGs and require proper disclosure of corporate exposures to them.

Fuller disclosure would allow better impact measurement and thus make it easier to hold investors and companies to account for their performance. If anything, there are too many competing efforts to measure impact; what could really help now is picking one of these and focusing on applying it broadly enough to enable meaningful comparison of the performance of essentially similar organizations. The Impact Management Project is one candidate for this important role.

In an ideal world, perhaps someone would calculate a single number that captures an investor's or company's contribution to the SDGs. That seems technically out of reach for now. But a promising initiative by the World Benchmarking Alliance could have a big impact if it is adopted widely. Having found it impossible to come up with one benchmark for all 17 SDGs, it is instead focusing on seven systems that need to be changed to achieve the goals. It will shortly announce the first 300 "keystone" companies it believes can play the biggest role in delivering the SDGs, with a plan eventually to track the performance of some 2,000 firms. The United Nations Development Programme's SDG Impact Practice Standards initiative is also promising. The Standards aim to help investors ensure their processes are in line with best-practice impact measurement and management and demonstrate the investor's contribution to the SDGs.

Making Catalytic Capital Work

Donors, development banks, multilateral institutions, and philanthropies each have an opportunity to help move the center of gravity of mainstream capitalism by increasing their supply of "catalytic capital" to the emerging field of "blended finance." The basic idea is that investors that are driven by a mission, rather than by maximizing financial returns, can take on certain kinds or amounts of risk that mainstream profit-driven investors or businesses don't want to – and by doing so, make it easier to attract much larger sums of that mainstream capital to neglected but socially important investments. For instance, the mission-driven investor could agree to take the first \$1 million hit in the event that such an investment turned a loss, reducing the risk of mainstream investors in the same investment.

The key to making this work is to design the "capital stack" so that the mission-driven investors reduce risk only by the amount needed to attract the mainstream money (don't make it too easy for them!), and on the other hand, ensure that mission investors do not take on risks that other investors would want to take, as the lower returns demanded by the mission-driven investor might lead to the mainstream investor being crowded out. A well-designed capital stack can incorporate a wide range of investors with different appetites for risk and needs for a return.

Examples of this approach include the Catalytic Capital Consortium, backed by Omidyar Network and the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation's Zero Gap initiative, which aims to reduce the shortfall in funding of the SDGs. One of its grantees, the Land Degradation Neutrality Fund, is a model of how this can work. Efforts are also underway to develop a blended-finance stack

Trade More, Not Trade War

Achieving the SDGs will require economic growth that is not only environmentally and socially sustainable but also strong. Dynamic international trade was expected to contribute to that growth, which makes the escalation of trade conflict in the past few years especially worrying.

Throughout history trade wars have rarely been to the long-run benefit of the warring countries. According to the UN, by the summer of 2019, the cost of trade restrictive measures to the global economy had risen to \$588 billion, seven times larger than a year earlier, and the trade war between the United States and China has continued to intensify since then. In this more challenging context, the share of less-developed countries in global merchandise exports has remained below 1 percent, whereas a 2 percent share by 2020 had been seen as a key milestone to achieving the SDGs.

One positive exception to this global trend is in Africa, where it is estimated that the rate of economic growth needs

to triple to over 3 percent to get on track for the SDGs, and which has the highest average trade tariff rates of any of the main regions of the world. In this context, the recent agreement to create the African Free Trade Area (AFTA), a 54-country trade bloc spanning 1.2 billion people, is a giant step in the right direction.

A key to achieving the huge benefits it promises will be to ensure that its implementation does not get bogged down in bureaucratic inertia over how rules should be interpreted. There are fears that the countries with bigger economies may try to slow things down to hinder smaller economies, since some in government mistakenly believe the latter stand to benefit most from the single market the AFTA will create. That would be a significant missed opportunity, as a relatively fast implementation, plus expansion to include services such as telecoms, could be a game changer for all of Africa.

to back specific strategies to achieve a particular SDG, such as advancing Global Goal three (health) in, say, Nigeria. If this approach gets off the ground, it could initiate a tidal wave of financial innovation based around bringing together different sorts of investors to deliver the capital needed to achieve specific SDGs.

Initiatives aiming to solve specific SDG challenges by bringing together key players to identify capital generating strategies are proliferating. In climate finance, there is a growing coalition around building a “net-zero economy” by 2050.

Particularly worthy of support is a new effort to dramatically reduce the potential carbon footprint of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to provide trillions of dollars to fund development in some of the countries most behind on the SDGs. A new report¹³, "Decarbonizing the Belt and Road," calculates that if current investment and lending behavior continues, the vast amounts of money China is investing in less-developed countries will not only guarantee that the global temperature increase target of no more than two degrees is missed, but might take the world to three degrees. On the other hand, there are already better arrangements in place, such as the Green Investment Principles agreed between Britain and China, that could be a model for a much greener BRI – and so be a game changer in the fight against climate change. Forming an international coalition to focus on this challenge would probably help. How it approaches the BRI, in this and other respects, will be a key test of whether China aspires to be a major driving force in achieving the SDGs, or, by default, perhaps the biggest obstacle to doing so.

Another promising strategy is to form industry clusters focused on sector-wide strategies for achieving the SDGs. The International Chamber of Commerce is currently working with leading fashion brands on an SDG strategy that is likely to include everything from supply-chain reforms to circular economy responsible consumption policies. Also, the Fair Fashion Center is working to reduce the carbon footprint of the fashion industry and increase livelihoods. In this respect, at least, other industries are expected soon to be dedicated followers of fashion.

Finally, the time is surely ripe to launch an effort to mobilize the public to demand that private capital play its part in delivering the SDGs. Most of the efforts described here are driven by big institutions and expert, elite NGOs. So far there are only a handful of retail investment opportunities for impact investing, let alone products tied to the SDGs. (Some pioneering retail impact examples are OpenInvest, Impact Shares, and The Big Fund.) If members of the public were to take a far greater interest in the role their savings play in achieving, or not achieving, the SDGs, that would add useful popular pressure on big investment institutions to get the job done.

¹³ "Decarbonizing The Belt And Road: A Green Finance Roadmap," Tsinghua University Center for Finance and Development, Vivid Economics and the Climateworks Foundation, 2019



Participants in the Bellagio Center 60th Anniversary Solvable Summit.

Wanted: A Different Kind Of Leader

One of the big differences between the Sustainable Development Goals and the earlier Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that ran from 2000 to 2015 is that the MDGs were essentially a creature of governments. By contrast, the ideation and implementation of the SDGs has always been seen as a process of partnership creation, bringing government together with business, philanthropy, NGOs, and other parts of civil society. From the start it was understood that the ambitious agenda of the SDGs would be too big and too complex for government to deliver on its own. To get there, all of society would have to work together.

The task now is to figure out how to do so effectively. After all, the era of public-private partnership and multi-stakeholder alliances is now well out of its infancy, yet has a decidedly mixed record of achievement. One reason is that typically not enough thought has gone into how to design an effective partnership – in particular, how to find the right people to lead it and how to set them up to succeed.

Leading complex “coalitions of the positive” that bring together government, business, nonprofits, and civil society, often spanning many industries and countries, requires a different set of skills as compared to the top-down autocratic leader who has come out of hibernation with the recent rise of populism. Empathy and vulnerability, an enthusiasm for diversity, and the ability to bridge different cultures with flexibility and nuance are essential, along with more traditional skills such as a good sense of strategy and knowing how to communicate and implement it. If there is to be a decade of delivery on the SDGs, a high priority is to nurture a new generation of this kind of leader – and to give them the chance to shine.

Encouragingly, we live in an era where new leaders can emerge quickly. A year ago, few of us knew of Greta Thunberg, a 16-year-old who has emerged as a face of the fight against climate change. In Africa, people like peace campaigner Victor Ochen aspire to follow in the footsteps of his role model, the late Kofi Annan. We need to do a better job of providing the support these young leaders need to thrive. Universities can play a part by encouraging students to work toward achieving the SDGs.

Outrageously, women still remain underrepresented in leadership roles in most countries – though once male-dominated Iceland is one example of how this can quickly change. We should also look for new talent from older generations who may have neglected their higher purpose until now but can find in the SDGs the optimistic challenge they have been waiting for.

Leadership Is A Development Issue

It is not just at the top of government, in big business, big NGOs, and the new grand coalitions, that a leadership revolution is needed. The quality of leadership is often weak at every level of the systems that must be changed to deliver the SDGs. This represents a massive barrier to the implementation of even the best designed policies. In less-developed countries in particular, leadership development has been sorely neglected, including by UN agencies, international development banks, and aid donors, which historically have preferred to fly in consultants from abroad than invest in building up leadership capacity on the ground.

Over a decade ago, African philanthropist Mo Ibrahim tried to address this problem at the highest levels of government in his home continent. Change is slow. Despite the considerable efforts he has made to foster a more positive leadership model for Africa, several times the judges have been unable to find even a single worthy candidate among recently retired heads of state or government for his lucrative “Achievement in African Leadership” prize.

Local in-country leadership should be increasingly relied upon to achieve the SDGs, and there needs to be an accompanying shift in money flowing to initiatives that help develop effective local leaders. A recent meeting on this topic in the Bellagio Center, led by social entrepreneur Wendy Kopp, recommended a sharp increase in support for three different approaches to leadership development in less-developed countries. The first, such as the African Leadership Academy, Global Health Corps, and Teach For All, helps build a pipeline of individual leaders early in their careers capable of working effectively at the highest level. The second, such as AMP Health, Building State Capacity, and Synergos, focuses on building state capacity by developing the leadership capabilities of existing government teams and those they partner with. The third works to develop leaders involved in addressing particular problems, such as The Clothing Bank (empowering unemployed mothers) and The Citizens Foundation (creating schools for the underserved).

With examples of bad leadership currently dominating the global headlines, the case for investing in the sort of leaders who actually could help deliver the SDGs could not be stronger.

A Movement Of Movements

2020 is shaping up to be a crucial year for the SDGs – and not just because of whatever will happen in the race for the White House.

On the one hand, time is running out: For at least some of the goals, it may be a case of now or never. On the other hand, there will be a series of moments throughout the coming year when the SDGs will be at the top of the global agenda. For instance, several major fundraising efforts by organizations such as GAVI, the Global Fund for Aids, Malaria and Tuberculosis, and the World Bank's International Development Association, will reveal a lot about the prevailing attitude of the world's governments to international aid. In the fall of 2020, a major conference on biodiversity will be held in Kunming, China, which will be revealing not only about the host country's willingness to lead on the SDGs more broadly, but also about how much ambition remains at the top in other countries. There is expected to be another COP to build on the climate change targets established in Paris in 2015, as well as significant gatherings on gender to mark the 25th anniversary of a pioneering conference in Beijing on the advancement of women. The UN will again shine a light on the SDGs during its General Assembly next September. The organization's 75th birthday celebration will no doubt provide another occasion to focus on the Global Goals, too.

The growing realization that 2020 is going to be a make-or-break year has prompted talk among leading advocates of the SDGs, in organizations such as Project Everyone, One.org, and Global Citizen, about launching a global campaign to mobilize everyone from government officials to the public. One inspiration, along with successful campaigns such as the anti-apartheid movement, is the Make Poverty History campaign, which brought together activists and business and political leaders from around the world to demand – and get – big commitments from world leaders. Reaching its peak at the G7 meeting in 2005, it breathed new life into the Millennium Development Goals, which, just as the SDGs will be in 2020, were then in year five of their 15-year lifespan.

Today's political leaders, in this moment of tribal populism, are less likely to be sympathetic to such a movement than were their predecessors in 2005. But because the SDGs were never intended to be delivered by government alone, energizing business and civil society may of itself be a worthwhile goal. The challenge is also bigger and more urgent than it was then: In some important respects, the global action required now would be the greatest since the international reconstruction effort that built a new world order out of the ashes of the Second World War.

If that is to happen it will be essential to tap into the momentum of several movements that have been growing fast over the past few years, at least partly in reaction to the recent anti-global populist trends. These include movements

driven by a desire for equality for women; opposition to rising inequality of income and wealth; improving the increasingly depressing prospects facing young people; and above all, the growing concern that the world is about to pass (if it hasn't already) the point of no return on climate change.

If the energy of these different movements can be harnessed in a combined “movement of movements” effort to demand action on the SDGs, that could have a big impact. Having a well thought-out plan to implement will be crucial, as the relative success of the Make Poverty History campaign proved, though the systemic changes required to achieve the SDGs are on a different scale than the MDGs.

In different ways, Jamie Drummond, who co-founded One.org with Bono and was a key strategist in Make Poverty History and other earlier campaigns, Kumi Naidoo of Amnesty International, and former Irish President Mary Robinson have been working to unite human rights, gender, and environment groups in what they hope will be a campaign that, in effect, relaunches the SDGs in 2020 around the theme of kicking off a “decade of delivery.”

Until now, however, these movements have been mostly growing and working independently. Many in the climate movement are driven by a belief that the problem they are addressing is a state of emergency that should take precedence over everything else. By contrast, the SDGs are an explicit effort to unify two camps that historically have seen themselves as being on opposite sides: those wanting greater human prosperity and those demanding a healthy planet.

It is increasingly clear that many actions could simultaneously advance both the fight against climate change and help to deliver the other SDGs. Encouragingly, when the teenage climate-change crusader Greta Thunberg sailed into New York last month, her solar-powered vessel was flanked by an armada of 17 sailboats, each representing one of the SDGs. Those of us who believe there is still an opportunity to build a better world for everyone should take inspiration from her leadership.

The SDGs navigate their race around the world with nothing to lose.





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The Rockefeller Foundation advances new frontiers of science, data, policy and innovation to solve global challenges related to health, food, power and economic mobility. As a science-driven philanthropy focused on building collaborative relationships with partners and grantees, The Rockefeller Foundation seeks to inspire and foster large-scale human impact that promotes the well-being of humanity throughout the world by identifying and accelerating breakthrough solutions, ideas and conversations. For more information, visit www.rockefellerfoundation.org.