



Wilton Park



Report: Towards 2030: Transformative actions and partnerships to deliver the SDGs

Wednesday 06 – Friday 08 March 2024

In association with
UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

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Executive summary

1. Turbocharging the SDGs requires three key components: working in **partnership** to deliver more **money, better spent**. Resource constraints are a significant barrier to making progress and this cannot be underestimated. The OECD estimates there is a USD 3.9 trillion funding gap annually to achieve the SDGs by 2030. But with six years to go, it is also critical that resources are focused on transformative actions to deliver the SDGs, maximising the synergies across the framework. The multiple development-focused international summits in 2024 and beyond are an opportunity to drive momentum on achieving the SDGs and champion initiatives and policy solutions that turbocharge delivery.
2. Partners from around the world, including governments, advisers, think tanks, academics and civil society discussed these pressing challenges and how to truly accelerate SDG progress. The conference afforded a rare opportunity to have candid, collaborative conversations, with participants valuing the space to discuss, share and reflect with a range of passionate SDG actors. The SDGs are an interconnected framework and many ways of accelerating their delivery were discussed, but three prevalent themes were identified: leadership, financing, and innovation.

“the world doesn’t agree
on many things but it
does agree on the SDGs”

Setting the scene

3. Two years after their mid-way point, the SDGs are severely off track. Many countries feel anger and/or disappointment at the lack of progress. Despite the

challenges and shocks of the last few years, at the UN General Assembly in September 2023 the world unanimously recommitted to the SDGs. The SDG framework continues to be recognised as the collective vision of the world we all want to see and provides a common language to describe our efforts. The power of this shared aim in a world that feels increasingly divided should not be taken for granted.

4. The huge development gains since the 2000 Millennium Declaration must not be forgotten and must spur us on at this critical juncture, with a laser focus on accelerating SDG delivery. Everyone having a part to play, governments, academia, businesses, and civil society must come together as partners to rescue this common vision, driving momentum and amplifying success stories.

SDG Success Stories

5. Looking at the global picture, progress across the Goals is not equal across geographies and income groups. Higher income levels, along with a functioning and stable state that uses resources for the benefit of its population, are two critical factors in SDG progress. The nature and impact of public spending matter as much as the level of spend. Public spending is most effective when shaped by evidence and research. Innovation and rising productivity are key to sustainable, inclusive economic growth that does not exacerbate climate risk or increase inequality.
6. There are multiple international initiatives which aim to accelerate SDG delivery. The UN's High Impact Initiatives identify six key transitions that have a multiplier effect across the SDGs. The UN SDSN's Transformations work also identified six areas for immediate SDG action. The SDG Synthesis Coalition produces rigorous syntheses, systematically collating evidence on how to progress the SDGs. Other non-UN led initiatives, such as ONE's accelerators, similarly look at how to turbocharge SDG delivery. Consistent themes across many of these initiatives are gender equality, climate action, education, and technology. These initiatives shine a spotlight on the need to accelerate SDG delivery, though they can present challenges as actors are not clear if/how the initiatives are interconnected or complimentary, and whether they have a strong evidence base.

7. Sharing success stories and lessons learnt from different country contexts helps build both a shared understanding and the evidence base on what works to deliver the SDGs. The following four country case studies illustrate outstanding examples of national and local actions. Common learnings and best practice across the case studies demonstrate the importance of mainstreaming SDGs across national development plans and budgets, integrating SDGs into national and local governance processes, and civic, private sector and local community engagement. In many cases, developing countries have been highly successful in mainstreaming SDGs at national, regional and local levels. Recognising the universality of the SDGs, other countries including developed countries, may consider enacting similar policies and approaches.

Case study: Indonesia

8. As a foundation for SDG delivery, Indonesia has strengthened regulation and governance. This is complemented by investing in multistakeholder partnerships and localising the SDGs. By mainstreaming 124 of the 169 SDG targets, including its indicators, into the National Development Plans, developing regional SDG action plans, and creating SDGs Centers /Hubs now at 47 local universities, the SDGs have been embedded across the multiple levels of policy making and financial planning. An SDG roadmap was created and the interlinkages between SDGs were identified, highlighting that health, water & sanitation, education, inequality, energy and environment are particularly synergistic. The SDGs interlinkages serve as a basis for identifying priorities at both the national and provincial levels. Avoiding silos, more work at local & regional levels, increasing private sector engagement, and using the same KPIs across government and other partners were all seen as helpful lessons learnt.

Case study: Ghana

9. Through a whole of government and whole of society approach, Ghana has put the SDGs at the core of its development planning and development management processes. The SDGs are fully integrated into the overarching national development framework and the country has adopted SDG-based budgeting to track expenditure flows in support of SDGs implementation. The country has established a robust governance architecture made up of multiple stakeholders to oversee the

implementation of the Goals, including a High-Level Ministerial Committee, an SDGs Implementation Committee, and a National Technical Committee. The private sector and civil society are active participants in this, working together with the government in this shared endeavour. The government has been intentional in implementing strategic flagship programmes that directly contribute to achieving multiple SDGs. A notable case in point is the national school feeding programme, whereby free meals provided at schools have increased school enrolment and attendance at basic schools, reduced school drop-out rates, reduced malnutrition among children, improved educational outcomes, reduced inequalities and created employment opportunities in the local communities.

Case study: Mexico

10. The National Development Plan for Mexico is intrinsically linked to the SDGs, whilst Federal Budget is bound to SDGs and its targets since 2019. Shared goals are embedded in the budget plan at every level, from the federal to programme budgets. At each level, the work must explicitly be directly or indirectly contributing to the SDGs. The importance of leaving no one behind, and equal opportunities for all, for example reducing regional differences, is seen as critical. The SDGs have been institutionalized into the lifeblood of Mexico's operations through strong governance, multiple national and local voluntary reviews, and extensive collaboration across government, civil society, and beyond. The agroforestry programme, Sembrando Vida (Sowing Life), is an example of how the two issues of rural poverty and environmental degradation can be tackled simultaneously, having a positive impact across multiple SDGs. Mexico refers to these as 'round' programmes; programmes that hit all three aspects of sustainability simultaneously.

Case study: Nepal

11. Nepal has succeeded in making progress on the SDGs through close alignment of the Goals with domestic policies and governance processes. The SDGs are mainstreamed across the national development plan and the budget. For example, Nepal's 16th development plan (2024-2030) was designed based upon previous successes and learnings, and aims to accelerate the SDGs through good governance, social justice and prosperity. The SDG framework is embedded throughout different levels of

government, for example through local level planning guidelines, robust governance mechanisms and implementation monitoring. Nepal has reflected upon its SDG progress and lessons learned, noting hurdles in localising the SDGs, plugging the financing gap, and building greater civic SDG awareness amongst rural populations.

Transformational policies and actions to accelerate SDG delivery

12. As the SDGs are an interconnected framework, there are multiple opportunities to leverage the inherent synergies between the Goals. There must be a strong focus on evidence-based policies with a multiplier effect – those which accelerate progress across multiple Goals at once. This is partly about prioritising how resources are invested, but more fundamentally, it is about drawing upon a range of levers – economic, social, political – to make significant change. For example, finding ways to maximise co-benefits between tackling climate change, biodiversity loss and eradicating poverty.
13. A wide range of policies and actions accelerate SDG delivery, with it being critical to apply what works best in the local context. Three prevalent themes were identified: leadership, financing and innovation. It is clear, however, that these themes are some of many ways to accelerate SDG delivery, with others including action to address fragility and conflict, inequalities, and the climate/development nexus. One immediate and unifying action that can be taken, is to intentionally design programmes, policies and investments that have a built-in synergistic or multiplier approach.

Leadership

14. As demonstrated by the country success stories, with good leadership progress is possible. Many countries are making excellent progress in aligning their resources to SDGs and leveraging the synergies across the SDG framework. This approach could be adopted by other countries, including developed countries. Planning and monitoring at national, regional, and local levels only works if there is strong accountability and governance. A prerequisite for all this is exemplary leadership, across both political and official orbits.

15. Leaders must also bring together different voices and ensure participation from underrepresented and marginalised groups. Putting citizens at the heart of discussions, including intergenerational discourse, is critical if long-term, transformational change is to be achieved. An inclusive and locally led approach to development increases the likelihood of success, with strong local leadership also being recognised as fundamental. There are multiple definitions of local leadership, and all are important for SDG delivery: empowering and funding grassroots organisations, delivering the SDGs sub-nationally especially at the city level, and putting partners and their priorities in the lead when allocating funding.

Financing

16. It is not surprising that the biggest challenge faced by many countries is accessing sufficient resources to deliver the SDGs. The International Financial System is not able to adequately respond to needs of developing countries, whether that be providing greater development finance, more accessible climate finance, or shock-responsive finance.

Domestic resource mobilisation

17. Additional domestic resources are critical to closing the financing gap. Revenue is mobilised not just by new or higher taxes and economic growth but through strengthened systems. Domestic resource mobilisation provides governments with resources to drive SDG delivery but is also an important step in becoming financially independent and moving away from donor dependency.

International finance

18. A significant increase in the volume of international finance that flows into low- and middle-income countries is urgently needed. A critical source of development finance for the world's poorest countries is the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA), for which an ambitious replenishment this year is key. As set out in the UN's Financing for Development 'Addis Ababa Action Agenda', Official Development Assistance (ODA) alone will never be enough to deliver the SDGs. New sources of finance and innovative mechanisms are needed, for example, reducing the transaction costs of remittances and utilising climate resilient debt clauses.

“the SDGs are a powerful convening platform for the private sector and all member states

Private sector

19. The SDGs should be viewed as an opportunity for the private sector, both from a corporate social responsibility perspective and a return on investments. Businesses have significantly increased their use of the Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) framework, but there has been less SDG engagement and action. It is critical to engage with the private sector on the SDGs and incentivise SDG action and reporting. The private sector has an important role to play in filling the SDG financing gap, mobilising both more domestic and international private capital. In many cases the private sector has an appetite to do more but needs clear direction from governments and the multilateral system.

Outflows

20. High borrowing costs and debt service payments are unsustainable. They place huge pressures on developing countries and reduce the fiscal space available for essential spending. The global debt architecture needs to be restructured to provide timely, predictable and fair debt restructuring and debt relief. Improving transparency of how credit ratings are set, and plugging evidence gaps, are key to unlocking access to affordable finance and removing risk bias.
21. Funds received or borrowed in the name of a country’s citizens are not all reaching the communities that need them due illicit finance activities. Countries require tools and assistance to prevent and combat illicit financial flows – more must be done on this urgently.

Innovation

22. Innovation and access to technology are essential if countries are to achieve stable economic growth and productivity gains, which in turn increase income levels driving SDG progress. There is a vast array of exciting research and innovation happening across sectors - this is important for both the scalability and cost effectiveness of development solutions. Scientific innovations, such as clean-energy technologies, provide important opportunities for greater climate resilience and low-carbon growth pathways accelerating progress across multiple SDGs.
23. Addressing the barriers that developing countries face in engaging and benefiting in the current technical revolution is critical. Issues of inclusion, access and leave no one

behind are fundamental. Alongside enhancing critical infrastructure, such as electricity and connectivity, is the need to support communities in building their digital capabilities.

24. Timely, high-quality data is critical to evidence-based decision making and measuring the progress on the SDGs. Investments are required to harness new data and address data gaps, as well as building data management capacity. With the volume of data in the world increasing exponentially and with ethical standards in place, big data can be used to support and inform SDG delivery. Much of this data is collected by the private sector and is a further opportunity for partnership.
25. Artificial Intelligence (AI) holds huge potential for transformative progress on the SDGs. Given the full potential and risks of AI are not yet entirely understood, there is a need for strong ethical AI governance and safeguarding. AI could also be used to build the evidence on what works to deliver the SDGs, developing and growing a live database.
26. Collectively the focus must be on leveraging and harnessing the opportunities innovation presents for key SDG breakthroughs. This requires increased investment and improved collaboration between innovators, researchers, businesses, governments, the multilateral system, and civil society – recognising the private sector is the key driver of innovation.

“we need hope rather than optimism – optimism is passive, hope is active and engaged”

Next steps

27. While the significant challenge of delivering the SDGs by 2030 is acknowledged, there is a real sense of radical optimism and enthusiasm for what can be achieved. The universality and global consensus around the SDGs have stood the test of time and they remain a powerful framework to work together in solidarity to drive sustainable development.
28. We must collectively share this hopeful narrative, significant SDG progress has already been made, and through joint action we can accelerate delivery over the next six years. In particular we should share, highlight and celebrate SDG success stories and lessons learnt from country partners, as these are critical to demonstrate progress and driving continued momentum. Through

collaboration and partnerships these messages can be amplified from the local to the global level.

29. We should increase the visibility of the SDGs across the whole of society - governments, civil society organisations, local communities and the private sector. This is vital for progress. Citizens understanding how SDGs impact their lives can have a multiplier effect on progress. Engaged and informed citizens are more likely to demand higher standards and hold governments and companies to account, and thus providing an incentive mechanism for action towards the goals.
30. We need to continue to build and utilise the evidence base for what works to accelerate SDG delivery, collaborating across sectors to harness the power of data and technology. By intentionally design programmes, policies and investments that have a synergistic or multiplier approach we can turbocharge SDG delivery.
31. If we are to achieve the SDGs, it is clear we must work in **partnership** to deliver **more money, better spent**. There are multiple development-focused moments and international summits throughout 2024 and beyond. This coalition should collectively drive momentum on achieving the SDGs and champion initiatives and policy solutions that will turbocharge delivery.

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