SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

IISD Perspectives on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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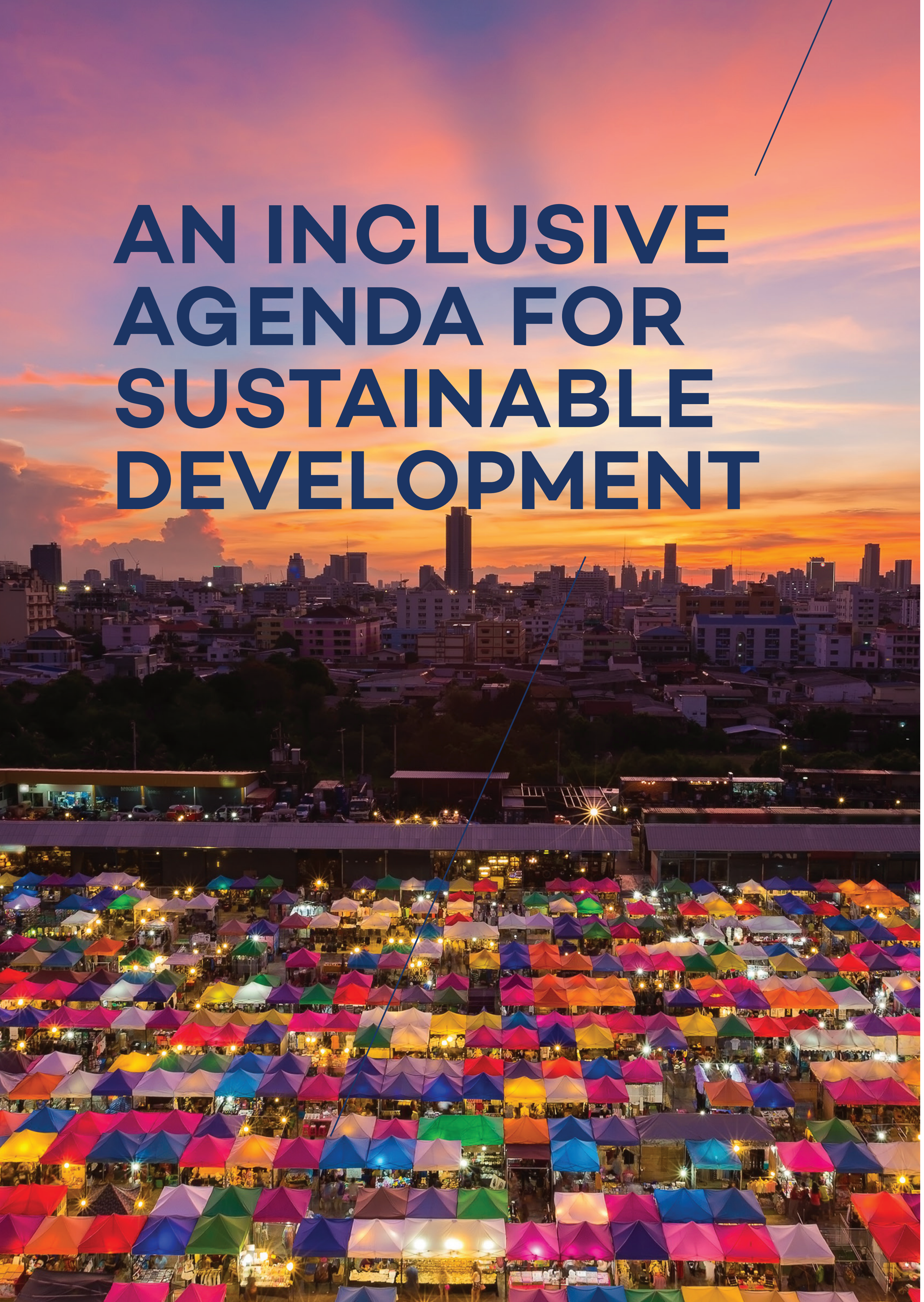

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)[1]—has plenty of detractors. Some dismiss global development targets altogether, complaining that top-down targets ignore how community-led development actually functions. Some of the harshest criticism is focused on their policy sprawl. The predecessor to the SDGs—the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—comprised a tidy set of 10 targets. The 2030 Agenda has 17 goals and 169 targets. Critics predict that the SDGs are destined to collapse under their own weight.

One imagines some commentators pining for the good old days when a sensibly focused global development agenda could be drafted by an equally sensible small group of experts behind closed doors, just as the MDGs had been. Those days are over. And good riddance. The SDGs have been negotiated and endorsed by all countries. Of critical importance, they are—unlike the MDGs—universally applicable to all countries.

This core principle of inclusivity extends beyond how the SDGs were negotiated as well as where they will be applied. The complaint that they are too big misses this central point: the SDGs are not simply bigger than the MDGs, but fundamentally different. As such, they demand radical departure from business as usual, from how governments conceive and implement policy, to how they coordinate with the private sector. And the SDGs demand new ways of working for civil society organizations—like IISD—that support the SDGs through a blend of applied research, communications and advocacy.

As the SDGs were in the final hours of negotiation in 2015, and in the early days of implementation in 2016, IISD experts reflected on the implications for our own work. The following articles, first published as a series of blog postings, are the outward expression of that thought process. Consolidated in this publication, they provide a snapshot into our own grasping of the size and complexity of the 15-year agenda that lays ahead, as well as the tangible intersection of the SDGs with our own programs of work.

Scott Vaughan,
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[1] For an overview of the SDGs, visit the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs

MEASURING PROGRESS

Are We There Yet? Five Criteria for Successfully Measuring Progress on the SDGs

By Livia Bizikova, Peter Denton and László Pintér

One of the biggest challenges when it comes to attaining the SDGs is determining where we are on the journey towards accomplishing them. To measure progress, we require a starting point, an initial state, as well as some means of measuring how far we have come and how much longer it will take to reach the goal.

We need indicators throughout the entire SDG policy cycle. Indicators will prove key in sustainable development reports and assessments of progress if we are to have accountability at local, national and global levels for the commitments the SDGs require.[2] Indicators at these different levels, moreover, must be commonly understood and reported if we are to align the results in useful and informative ways.

Put simply, we have to count the same things, in the same ways, to accurately measure our progress.

In December 2015, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) submitted its report to the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC).[3] Of the 231 proposed SDG indicators, 151 are well established and many statistical agencies already report on them. The other 80 indicators require more in-depth research and discussions.

Looking at this large set of diverse indicators raises a crucial question: What shared principles and criteria would provide us with a consensus on what we need to measure and how?

First, indicators need to be manageable, able to be regularly monitored and reported on. Even in wealthier countries with significant institutional capacity, collecting data and reporting on many indicators can be both technically challenging and too costly. 150 indicators are far too many. We must start with a core set of "must-have" indicators.

Second, indicators must be relevant for the sustainable development priorities in their particular context. Relevance must be agreed upon by governments, statisticians and all relevant stakeholders involved in the implementation of a specific SDG and its targets. Good progress has been made at the UN level, but it will be difficult to replicate down the statistical ladder to local authorities in each country.

Third, indicators must monitor actual changes over time. They must be "state" indicators, measuring the state of resources. While almost half of the SDG indicators so far are state indicators, generating consistent data for them at all levels will prove challenging.

[2] Overall indicator sets were proposed, among others, by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), while others put forward indicators on specific priorities, including a report by the United Nations Environment Programme and IISD on indicators for sustainable consumption and production (see report here: https://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/sustainable-consumption-production-indicators-future-sdgs_0.pdf

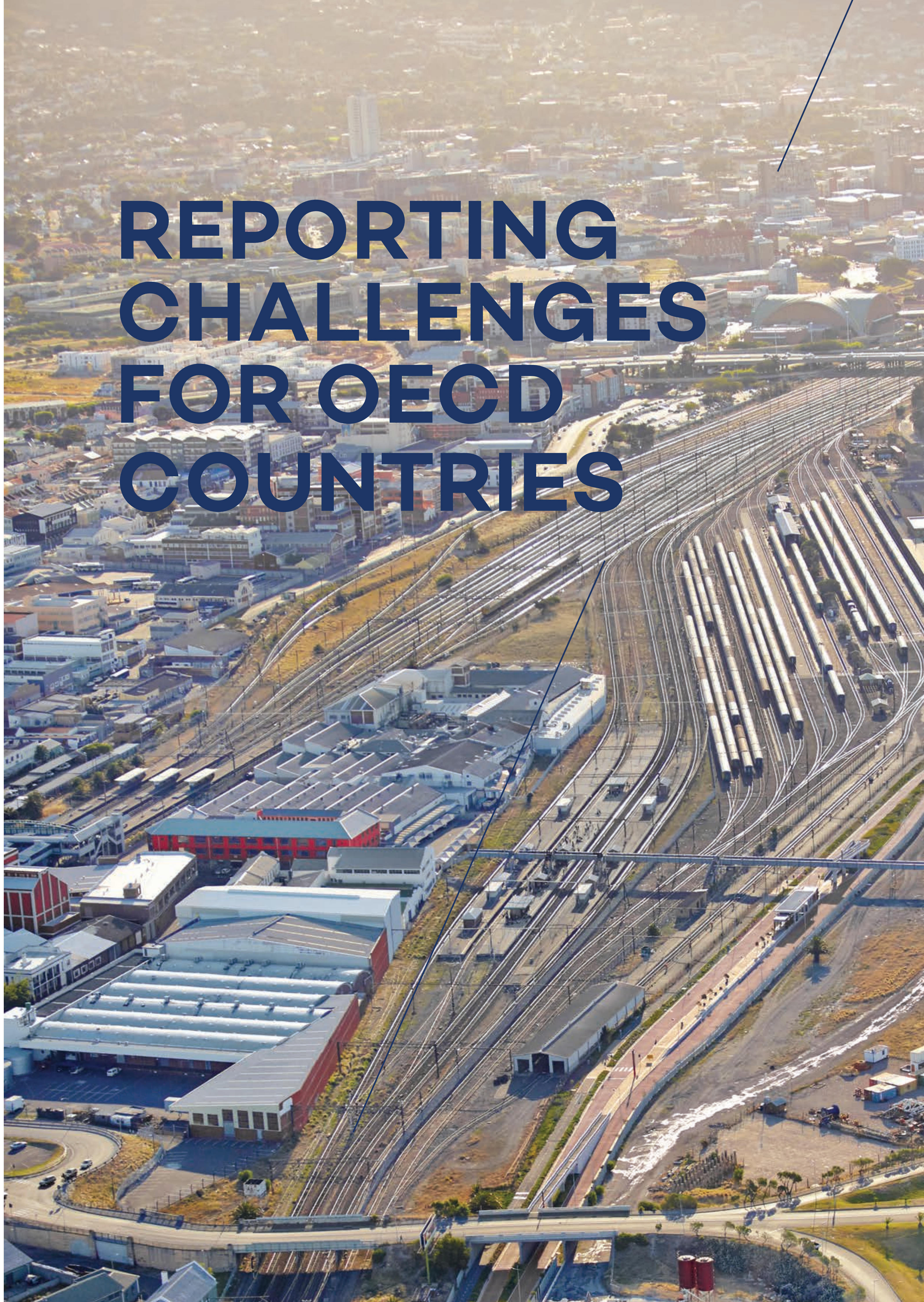
[3] See the Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, as presented to the Statistical Commission's 47th Session (2016, March 8–11) (E/CN.3/2016/2) here: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/47th-session/documents/2016-2-IAEG-SDGs-E.pdf

Fourth, when SDG state indicators are not available, we should be able to use proxies to measure management activities, such as the use of sustainable practices, policies to regulate resource management, allocation of financial resources and strategies for risk reduction. These types of indicators may also help encourage specific actions by directly pointing to what still needs to be done.

Fifth, and finally, indicators must cover all key dimensions of a broad sustainable development framework. The SDGs recognize the importance of governance and culture, not simply socioeconomic and environmental conditions. For example, currently there are no state indicators for SDG 10 ("Reduce inequality within and among countries"), SDG 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns") and SDG 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts"). Measuring progress in these areas will require developing a consensus around qualitative indicators that are applicable across different cultural contexts.

Given the small window of time we have to achieve the SDGs, it is imperative that a concerted effort be made to agree on all the necessary indicators to measure our progress at local, national and global levels. When the answer to that persistent question, "Are we there yet?" is "no," we must be able to give a further answer that lets our audience know how much longer it will take, at the rate and direction we are currently travelling.

REPORTING CHALLENGES FOR OECD COUNTRIES



PART ONE: ALIGNMENT AND COHERENCE

By Mark Halle

Given the 2030 Agenda's transformative ambitions, its success hinges on becoming the "defining agenda" for international cooperation, the framework into which all other agendas must fit. Past sustainable development agendas failed not because they were poorly crafted or lacked international legitimacy, but more often because they were undermined by other, more powerful agendas driving the behaviour of states and other stakeholder groups.

Agenda 21, adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, offered a perfectly good program, and the world would be a significantly better place had we genuinely tried to implement it. Unfortunately, it was adopted at a time when the present economic paradigm, based on the Washington consensus, took hold and markets were unleashed to pursue development through a singular focus on economic growth based on open competition. We now know that this alone could never guarantee a shift to sustainable forms of development, but the economic growth agenda was clearly dominant and the rest had to adapt to it or fall by the wayside.

If the world is to come anywhere close to achieving the 2030 Agenda, this must be reversed. The 2030 Agenda must be the gold standard, and other agendas—whether relating to trade, investment, taxation, employment, refugee policy or other priorities—should be required to demonstrate their compatibility with the primordial agenda. Similarly, institutions entrusted with advancing these other—especially economic—agendas should be accountable for ensuring that they not undermine progress towards the 2030 Agenda and that, where possible, they actively advance it.

While this is a challenge for all countries, it is especially important for the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, whose influence on international cooperation agendas is particularly powerful. So what does this mean for wealthy countries in the OECD, and how should it be reflected in their reporting to the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF)? It means that there must be a major effort to ensure policy alignment among the positions these countries take in international regimes and organizations. Positions with respect to the World Trade Organization, to take an example, must be crafted and deployed bearing in mind the requirements of the 2030 Agenda. For instance, the rules governing intellectual property rights, or the ban on local content requirements relating to outside investments, might usefully be reviewed to determine whether, in their present form, they advance or undermine the 2030 Agenda.

OECD countries should create a space in their regular reporting to chronicle progress on this alignment process. This is a challenge, but it is clear that we will not reach the SDGs without a significant harmonization of policies across these broad economic, social and environmental agendas. Unless we are successful, it is likely that the economic agendas that advance the interests of the powerful will, once again, make nonsense of the solemn commitment of our leaders—this time—to genuinely act to ensure that our future is sustainable.

PART TWO: UNIVERSALITY

By Mark Halle

It is common in presentations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to stress that, unlike the MDGs, the SDGs are "universal." The primary meaning is that the goals are intended to apply equally to all countries, not simply the developing and emerging economies.

What, then, does the term "universal" or "universally applicable" mean in the context of reporting on SDG progress and implementation? The terms—and especially the former—are salted throughout the 2030 Agenda and are clearly intended to be taken seriously. Nowhere, however, are they elaborated or explained. I would suggest that the notion of universality has profound implications and that countries should report both on how they are advancing the SDGs at home and in other countries and on the planet more generally. Three examples will suffice.

First, the targets under Goal 13 ("Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts") specify not only that countries must take action domestically and build climate considerations into their own plans and strategies, but also that they must contribute to mobilizing the funding needed by developing countries to meet their climate-related challenges and, more generally, build capacity and awareness around the climate challenge. Thus, it is clearly not sufficient for a rich country like Switzerland to lower its own climate footprint—it must also act or contribute to action beyond its borders. Reporting on this is clearly part of its obligations. However, the principle of universality would suggest that Switzerland should also be monitoring the impact that its domestic energy consumption has on the "climate space" of other countries that consume less and reporting on steps it is taking to ensure that its actions are not making the path to full implementation of the 2030 Agenda rockier for other countries.

The difference is subtle but important. The universal nature of the SDGs implies that countries should clean up their own act and contribute to helping others to do so; but it also implies that their action must be commensurate with the extent to which they are part of the problem. Having this as the basis for reporting would respect the notion of universality; ignoring it would serve that notion poorly.

A second example comes from Goal 12 ("Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"). This complex goal, with its 11 targets, lays out a range of actions governments are expected to take, many of them calling for efficiency gains in production and consumption as well as a reduction of waste. All 11 targets can fully be reached, however, without the goal being achieved. OECD countries should have no difficulty reporting against these targets. If the goal is a universally held commitment, however, the reporting should include progress towards the goal itself, including an assessment of how patterns of consumption and production affect the ability of other countries to achieve the SDGs and for the goal itself to be reached.

Finally, OECD countries should identify and develop a means to assess how their overall impact on the planet might be made more amenable to success in reaching the SDGs through and beyond the fulfillment of the targets. The need for each country to bring its development fully within the boundaries dictated by sustainable development is strongly implied in the principle of universality, and it is fully articulated in the Declaration that forms the lead-in to the articulation of the SDGs themselves. The aim is, after all, "transforming our world." A positive transformation will require ensuring a robust "social floor" and living within known "planetary boundaries." So the principal of universality strongly suggests that reporting should not simply allow the mechanical tracking of the goals and targets against indicators, but provide the basis for an assessment—perhaps by the HLPF, which is charged with monitoring and reviewing the 2030 Agenda—of the extent to which our world is being transformed and a sustainable future secured.

PART THREE: MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

By Mark Halle

It stands to reason that a country's ability to fulfill the SDGs is contingent on its ability to identify and mobilize the means that will permit it to take the necessary action. Not all of the commitments require new investment, but many of them do. So it is fair to ask: Can a country unable to locate the necessary resources nevertheless be called to account for failing to fulfil these commitments? And who is responsible, in a universal agenda, for making these resources available?

In the past, it was taken as a given that, in the case of international commitments, the poorer countries would receive direct assistance from the richer ones. The term "means of implementation" (MoI) was code for increased development assistance. With the 2030 Agenda, the notion of MoI has been greatly broadened and specifically includes obligations on the part of the developing countries. The targets under SDG 17 spell out the elements of this rebooted MoI, and there is a further elaboration in paragraphs 60 through 71 of the 2030 Agenda. However, this text, being a negotiated compromise, remains vague on some essential points.

Certainly, there are specifics in some areas. For example, the commitment by developed countries to dedicate 0.7 per cent of gross national income to official development assistance (ODA) (SDG 17.2), first proposed by the Pearson Commission in 1969 and endlessly reaffirmed over the past half-century, is prominently in place at a time when ODA is more threatened than it has been in decades. Similarly, there is a call to rebalance trade in favour of developing country exports (17.11), though the World Trade Organization has failed over the past 15 years to deliver such an outcome, and the mega-regional trade agreements don't even pay lip service to this aim.

While we must all accept that there is an aspirational element to the SDGs, their fulfillment will require action across the board, and not only on the limited set of topics agreed in the agenda. It is clear that, if we wish developing countries—to the extent possible—to locate the means of implementation domestically, then e verything will need to be done to make that possible. This means improving terms of trade, correcting the imbalances in investment agreements, enabling developing countries to earn income through remittances from their citizens living abroad, and much more.

The danger of not doing this in good faith and at scale is that it provides a convenient excuse for any shortfalls in performance and compliance. If the "universal" 2030 Agenda is genuinely to be realized, the richer countries have only two acceptable choices: either help countries with an MoI shortfall or make it possible through less direct action for these countries to generate the means of implementation themselves. Failing this, we revert to the default choice—that of allowing implementation to stumble, leaving the world untransformed and watching sustainable development disappear below the horizon.

This is, of course, also a challenge for reporting. In many ways, how countries report on SDG 17 is the most delicate reporting challenge they face, especially for OECD countries like Switzerland that have signed up to a set of specific obligations. Naturally, it is important to report on the efforts made to meet the targets under the agreed categories—finance, technology, capacity building, trade and systemic issues. But this may not be enough, because the implications of the expanded notion of MoI run considerably deeper.

Take, for example, the expectation that developing countries focus on domestic resource mobilization. One of the approaches designated in the targets under SDG 17 is reform of taxation. To fully succeed, however, this will require cooperation at the international level, such as that occurring through OECD's Base Erosion and Profit Shifting project. More disclosure of information on foreign citizens' holdings in rich country banks, greater cooperation on stamping out money laundering, gradual closure of off-shore tax havens—all of this is required to lay the foundation for successful tax reform in the poorer countries. Indeed, without such cooperation, it is difficult to imagine how domestic tax reform will yield its optimal share of resources mobilized domestically and, thereby, the means needed to implement SDG 17.

This form of action is implied in the targets relating to systemic issues, especially in addressing the challenge of policy coherence; but they are nowhere spelled out specifically as an adjunct to the obligations placed on countries for domestic action. However, if we are to track progress comprehensively, countries like Switzerland and its fellow OECD members should be reporting on measures they take in this and related domains.

PART FOUR: FINANCE

By Mark Halle

Implementing the 2030 Agenda will require investment on a massive scale. Estimates of the sums needed for "Transforming our World" vary, but generally hover in the low trillions of US dollars annually through 2030. While these figures frighten and impress, even the highest estimates amount to only one or two percent of global capital stocks. So the issue is not absolute availability of financial resources in the economy, but very much how they are used.

Official development assistance (ODA) amounts to some US$131 billion a year, and increasing proportions of that are spent on refugee care in OECD countries. Even if SDG target 17.2 were reached and 0.7 percent of gross developed country national income were available as ODA (welcome as this would be), it would still not make much of a dent in the totals needed. Where, then, will we find the money needed to implement the 2030 Agenda? The SDGs are not terribly clear on this question. Target 17.3 suggests that financial resources for developing countries should be mobilized "from multiple sources," hardly a roadmap that can easily be followed. Developing countries are encouraged to mobilize domestic resources, for example through tax reform, and the richer countries are encouraged to address the debt burden of the poorer ones.

All of these are good ideas but will not come close to generating the resources required to implement the agenda.

In the end, it will take a substantial alignment between the interests of investors and the needs of sustainable development such that the behaviour that rewards investors is the same as the behaviour that advances sustainable development. But how do we get there?

With public sector funding becoming an increasingly rare commodity, it is vital that what there is well spent. Direct expenditure of the public budget on the creation of such public goods as health, education and social services—often priorities for which private investment is not readily available beyond the needs of the elite—remains a priority. Beyond such direct deployment of the public purse, there are two fundamental priorities for public sector action.

First, it should focus strongly on "pursuing policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development" (para 63 of the 2030 Agenda).[4] We need an enabling policy, regulatory and institutional framework that will align the interest of investors with the needs of the real economy, and in particular with the SDGs and their targets. This framework must eliminate the perverse incentives that reward unsustainable development and instead reward behaviour that delivers on the 2030 Agenda.

The bad news is that such perverse incentives pervade our economy, from the massive waste of public money on ill-considered subsidies or low-priority projects that benefit particular constituents, to the corporate practices that reward short-term profit seeking or favour investments disconnected from the generation of real goods and services.

The good news is that we now have a very precise idea of the reforms that would help bring about a favourable alignment between investment and sustainable development—covering everything from monetary policy to standards, disclosure and governance, and aimed not only at banking but also at pension funds, insurances, and bond and stock markets. The United Nations Environment Programme's Inquiry into the Design of a Sustainable Financial System is brimming with examples of the sorts of reforms now underway and that would need to go to scale.[5]

Second, the limited public funds available for the 2030 Agenda should be used to "catalyze additional resource mobilization from other sources, public and private" (para 42 of the 2030 Agenda). The best way to do this is to use public funds to "de-risk" necessary green investments. Investment is still not flowing in adequate proportions to projects that would advance sustainable development, in part because these projects are perceived to carry a level of risk greater than conventional projects. If we are to accelerate the transition to sustainable forms of development, a good use of public funds would be to lower the risk attendant on sustainable projects to the point that they become attractive to private capital. Good examples, from countries as diverse as Bangladesh and the United States, include favourable financing terms for green projects like renewable energy or waste management.

All of this is well known. And yet it is the implementation of this sort of reform that would do more than any other action to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Those most capable of acting on these reforms are the countries—like Switzerland and the other OECD countries—that are home to major financial and capital market actors: banks, insurances, pension funds, etc. They tend to be the rule-makers in finance. Given that it is the gift of these countries to act on finance sector reform, and that such reform represents the single most powerful means to create the kind of enabling policy framework that SDG implementation needs, it should also be central to their regular reporting on their efforts to advance this universal agenda. Civil society should ensure that this is the case.

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[4] *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* can be found here: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld

[5] See for example the Inquiry's 2015 report, *The financial system we need*. Retrieved from http://web.unep.org/inquiry/publications

WHY PRIVATE SECTOR REPORTING ON THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IS IMPORTANT

By Cory Searcy, Darren Swanson and Livia Bizikova

Goals and targets to advance corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability have been widely embraced by the private sector. KPMG reports[6] that 90 per cent of the world's largest companies now report on aspects of their sustainable development performance.

However, public disclosures show that the types of CSR and sustainability goals and targets used by businesses vary widely, even among companies in the same industry. Tailoring goals and targets for specific business contexts is necessary for materiality. However, a common reference point is also needed to promote meaningful comparisons of sustainable development performance. The SDGs should provide this reference point going forward.

Several efforts are underway that recognize the importance of the private sector to achieving the SDGs. The Global Reporting Initiative, World Business Council for Sustainable Development and United Nations Global Compact are currently working on the development of a guide that will "support businesses in assessing their impacts, aligning their strategies with the SDGs and setting company goals."[7] Efforts to catalogue the private sector's contributions to achieving the SDGs are already under way. There are two key reasons why it is important that these initiatives, and others like them, succeed (reasons have been largely over-looked in the discussions to date).[8]

First, linking private sector sustainable development reporting to the SDGs will provide a common reference point in the development of goals and targets. As articulated in the work of Peter Senge, a systems scientist, a shared vision of sustainable development is needed to foster greater commitment to its achievement.[9] The lack of common goals and targets linked to the broader context may encourage a situation where reporting is largely self-referential. The SDGs, which are explicitly intended to be universal, provide a means to link private sector reporting with the broader sustainable development imperative globally, nationally and locally.

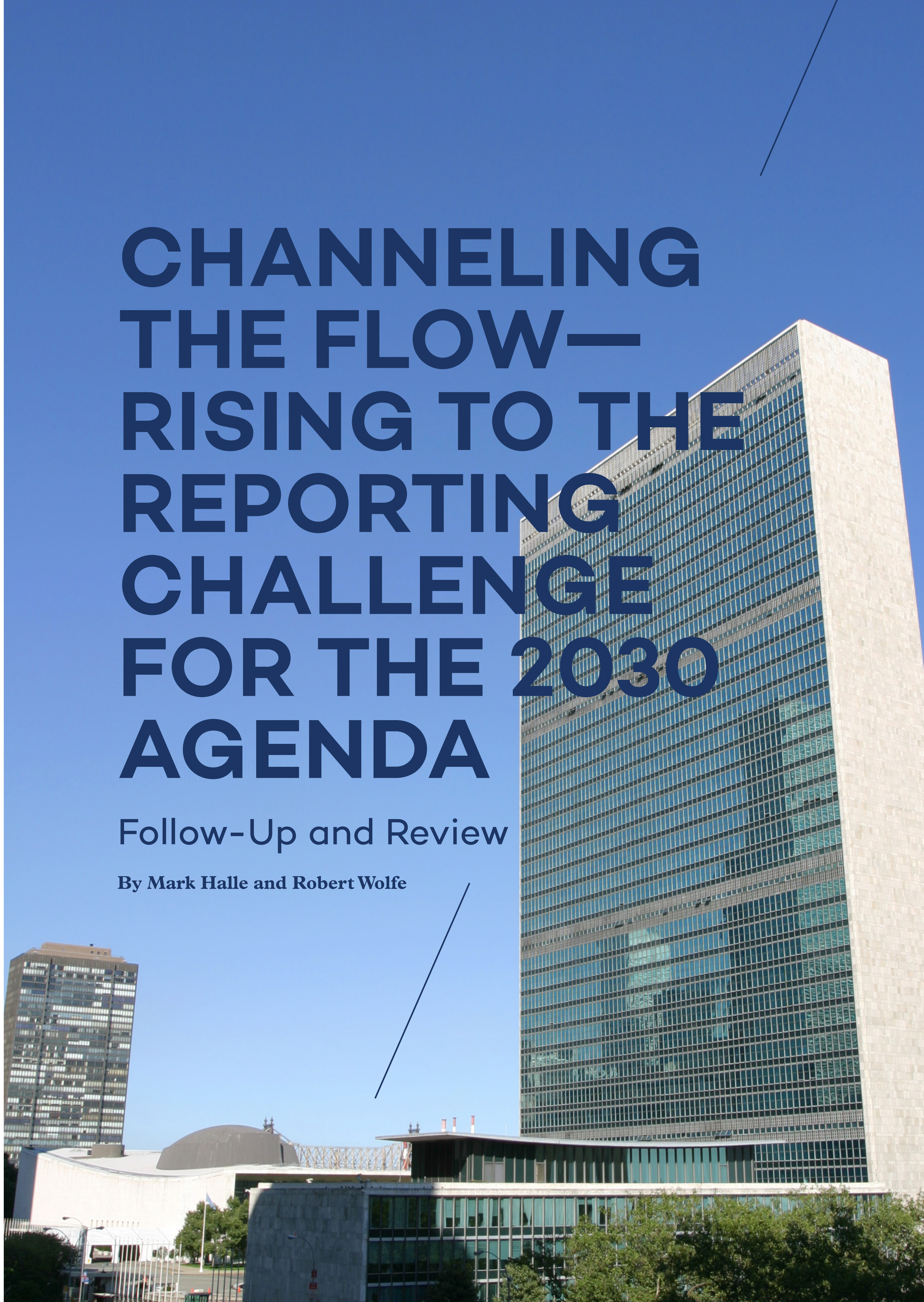
[6] KPMG International. (2013). *The KPMG survey of corporate responsibility reporting*. Retrieved from http://www.kpmg.com/AU/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/corporate-responsibility-reporting-survey-2013.pdf
[7] WBCSD. (n.d.). Joining forces for business action on Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved from http://www.wbcsd.org/Pages/EDocument/EDocumentDetails.aspx?ID=16335&NoSearchContextKey=true
[8] See, for example: http://www.businessfor2030.org/
[9] See, for example, Senge's principles in *The Fifth Discipline*.

Second, using the SDGs as a basis for sustainable development reporting provides a mechanism for improving linkages between public and private sector reporting. A concept as broad as sustainable development cannot be achieved or accurately reported by either the public or private sector acting alone. Unfortunately, linkages between public and private sector sustainable development reporting are currently weak or non-existent. Private sector entities rarely explicitly report on how they contribute to achieving public sector sustainable development goals and vice versa. The SDGs provide a basis for more standardized reporting around widely accepted goals and targets. This could facilitate greater usage of publicly reported data. For example, a federal government could draw on private sector data in the development of national sustainable development reports. Improved alignment in reporting would help clarify whether organizations, communities, regions and nations are making meaningful progress on sustainable development. This is currently difficult, given the fragmentation of reporting.

However, there are a number of challenges in using the SDGs as a reference point for private sector sustainable development reporting. It is possible that some of the SDGs could be interpreted differently by different organizations, resulting in different views on what data would be needed to report on goals and targets. Greater alignment in reporting would likely require improved verification mechanisms in both public and private sector entities. Since sustainable development reporting—including setting goals and targets—is largely discretionary, some mandatory reporting requirements may need to be introduced.

These challenges mean there is likely to be some confusion, at least initially, in applying the SDGs to private sector reporting. Increased upfront costs are also likely. However, given that the SDGs are intended to be in place for the next 15 years, these upfront investments may mean less effort is needed on a year-over-year basis once the foundation for reporting is in place. In any case, progress towards sustainable development simply cannot be assessed in the absence of connections to the bigger picture and linkages between the various entities that report.

Fortunately, many companies are already reporting on aspects of the SDGs. This provides a strong foundation on which to build. The charge going forward is to report on goals and targets in a consistent systematic way that provides insight into whether or not meaningful progress on sustainable development is being made.



CHANNELING THE FLOW—RISING TO THE REPORTING CHALLENGE FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

Follow-Up and Review

By Mark Halle and Robert Wolfe

The plan of action set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires implementation by all countries and stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership. That action will not happen by itself. We have less than fifteen years to transform the world, and the task is complex.

How will we know if we are making adequate progress? And how will we identify the obstacles that will necessarily need to be removed if we are to reach the level of ambition set out in the 2030 Agenda? The answer is set out in the Agenda itself—largely in paragraphs 72 through 91. The high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) is the apex of a pyramid for follow-up and review. If the other parts are not robust, however, the structure will collapse. One of the essential building blocks is the flow of information to the HLPF.

States agreed on a stream of progress reports from the national and regional levels as well as an annual synthesis report, a periodic Global Sustainable Development Report, and a myriad of other reports by UN entities and other international organizations, as well as reports on themes and on thematic clusters. And these reports are only the ones specifically called for. It is likely that stakeholders will voluntarily submit a range of further reports of different levels of complexity and specificity.

The challenge will not be the lack of information on which to assess progress, but the veritable blizzard of reports that will fall on New York in preparation for the HLPF. There is still a great deal of work to be done in working out how this flood of information will be filtered and synthesized, who does the work, what is submitted to the HLPF and what is targeted elsewhere—most prominently at the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

The principal responsibility for implementing the SDGs lies with the UN Member States. Their periodic progress reports provide the fundamental building materials with which the follow-up and review system will be constructed. So the first lesson to stakeholders is that a strong focus must be given to making these reports as comprehensive, as sharp, as comparable and as practical as possible. This objective means designing and implementing adequate stakeholder consultation. It means a strong effort by international players not only to support the national process but to feed it with relevant, up-to-date information that often lies in their knowledge bases or in the world of big data. And it means adapting the framework of indicators so that it is useable at the national level.

The next key step is at the regional level, where the national reports must be aggregated and the key findings distilled to be passed upward for discussion and action at the HLPF. This is the level at which practical, mutual learning can take place, assisted or not by peer review. It is also the level at which the particular needs and concerns of the regions can be crystallized and articulated, contributing to the richness and diversity of the picture presented in New York. The Secretary General's synthesis can draw on these regional reports and complete the edifice.

Follow-Up and Review" and the title of the blog is "Channeling the Flow—Rising to the Reporting Challenge for the 2030 Agenda

This much is relatively straightforward, at least conceptually. Much less so is how the other streams merge and are integrated with the bottom-up stream coming from the base—from the implementation front. A great deal of creativity in design and process will be needed to avoid overwhelming the HLPF with information and drowning ministers in 'white noise.' This challenge is, first and foremost, one for the UN system and one that relates closely to 'fitness for purpose' and systemic coherence in rising to the challenge of the 2030 Agenda. Here multiple processes are underway at many levels to reconfigure the system around this challenge.

Even if this reconfiguration occurs, however, it will be far from sufficient. Indeed, there is a basic fallacy in the all-too-common assumption that the 2030 Agenda is primarily a matter for government action, ably assisted by a harmonious family of intergovernmental entities at the global and regional level. While government action is essential, successfully reaching the finish line in 2030 will depend to a very considerable extent on the mobilization not only of the full range of stakeholders in the private sector, in civil society and in sub-national jurisdictions. It will depend also on tapping into the universe of data, understanding and innovative spirit increasingly in evidence outside formal government structures. This information mobilization will require a cultural shift in the intergovernmental process that is earth-shaking in its implications and that has not yet seriously been considered beyond the usual and half-disingenuous statements on the need for full stakeholder involvement and for innovative partnerships.

Steps that are needed now include stronger guidelines or templates for reporting to the HLPF in a way that allows other organizations to extract the information that might be relevant for them, and to include it in an online searchable database accessible to everyone. We suggest that any body submitting information to the HLPF might follow a simple template covering:

(a) an assessment of areas of progress and setback at the global level;

(b) the identification of areas requiring urgent attention;

(c) valuable lessons learned;

(d) emerging issues;

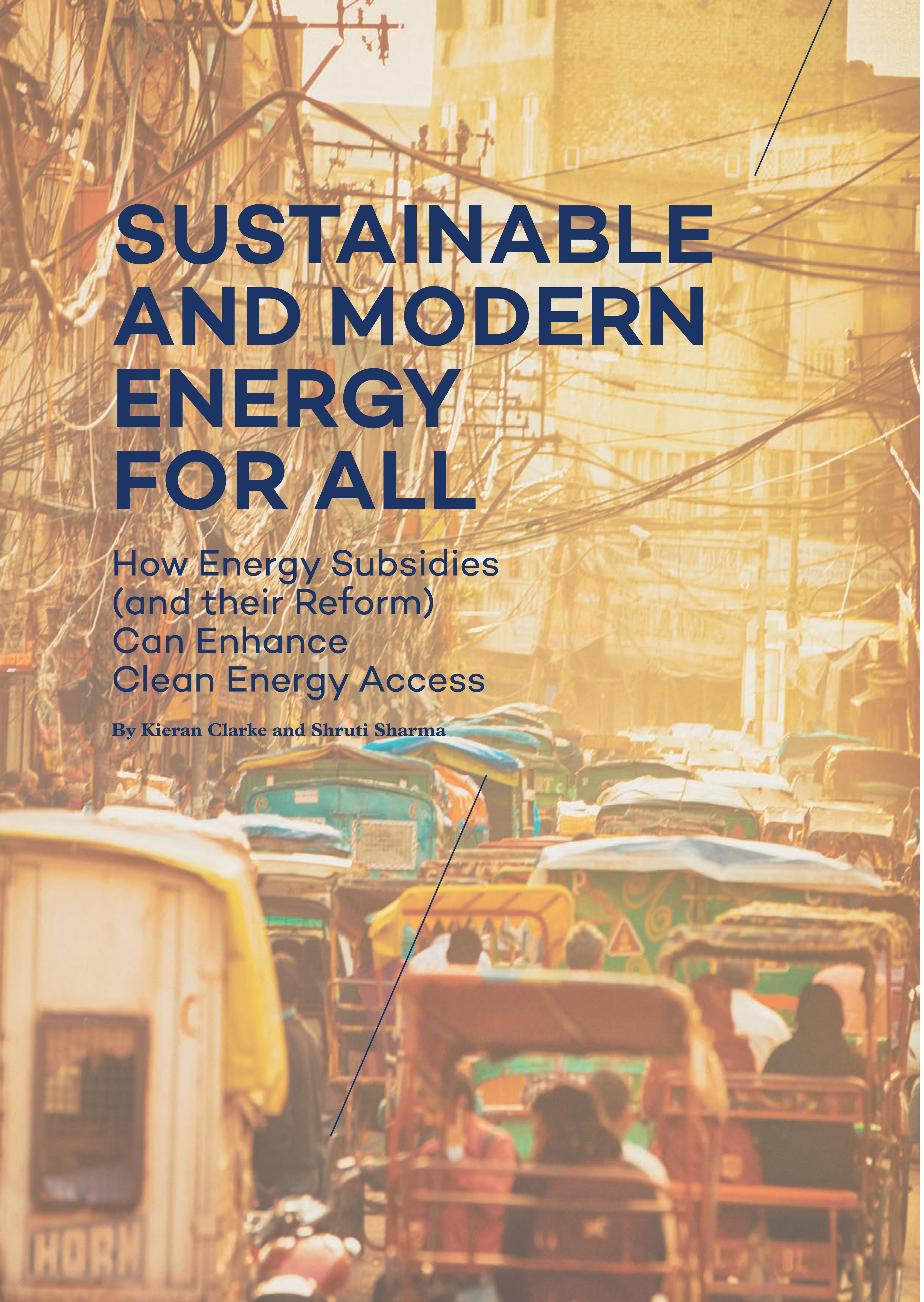
(e) links to the 2030 Agenda as whole, and the annual theme of the HLPF;

(f) areas where political guidance is required; and

(g) policy recommendations and tools to accelerate progress.

Perhaps it is not surprising that we are struggling with this shift in how to generate and present information. Everyone, at all levels, is contemplating the dimensions of the challenge we have set for ourselves, and trying to work out how on earth we will meet expectations. We have a short time left to configure the follow-up and review process before focusing solidly on the task of implementation. Designing a comprehensive but manageable follow-up and review system is central to whether or not we succeed.

Follow-Up and Review" and the title of the blog is "Channeling the Flow—Rising to the Reporting Challenge for the 2030 Agenda



SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL

How Energy Subsidies (and their Reform) Can Enhance Clean Energy Access

By Kieran Clarke and Shruti Sharma

Goal Seven of the SDGs calls on governments to "ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all." This draws welcome attention to the serious issue of global energy poverty, which affects as many as 2.6 billion people worldwide,[10] including about 800 million people in India.[11]

Fossil fuel subsidy reform is aptly listed as a means of implementation for achievement of the SDGs because the large fiscal savings can be used to finance pressing developmental priorities. However, fossil fuel subsidies are also directly critical to the achievement of greater energy access for the large populations currently living in energy poverty. Fossil fuel subsidies can hinder clean energy access; for example, kerosene subsides—which are provided in numerous countries in South Asia, Africa and Latin America—tend to "lock-in" in kerosene use in cooking and lighting by providing a financial incentive for its consumption.[12]

Well-designed energy subsidies have a positive role to play as well. Subsidies targeted at rural solar home systems in Bangladesh have helped enable 3 million households to gain access to electricity and displace kerosene lighting.[13] Government support for liquefied petroleum gasoline (LPG) stoves and connections has also enabled the displacement of kerosene as a cooking fuel in Delhi.

At IISD, we have been looking at Delhi's success in becoming the first Indian city to totally eradicate kerosene usage under the Kerosene Free Delhi (KFD) program. Under this scheme, subsidized kerosene was no longer to be supplied in Delhi, replaced instead for poor households by a free LPG connection and basic equipment to manage LPG cylinders. As demonstrated by an evaluation conducted by IISD and partners in late 2014, KFD was a significant success, demonstrably improving the quality of life of beneficiaries across a range of indicators, including by saving women on average two hours per week by reducing cooking time and eliminating the need to find various other fuels for cooking.[14]

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10 See the International Energy Agency. (2016). Modern energy for all. Retrieved from http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/resources/energydevelopment/
11 See the International Energy Agency. (2016). Energy acess database. Retrieved from http://www.worldenergyoutlook.org/resources/energydevelopment/energyaccessdatabase/
12 See Rao, H. D. (2012). Kerosene subsidies in India: When energy policy fails as social policy. *Energy for Sustainable Development*, 16, 35–45. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Narasimha_Rao7/publication/233863728_Kerosene_Subsidies_in_India_When_Energy_Policy_Fails_as_Social_Policy/links/00b7d526fa41e132d1000000.pdf
13 Khandker, S. R. et al. (2014). Surge in solar-powered homes: Experience in off-grid rural Bangladesh. Retrieved from https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/20427/913490PUB097810B00PUBLIC00100802014.pdf?sequence=1
14 The report is published here: http://irade.org/KFD%20Report_final.pdf

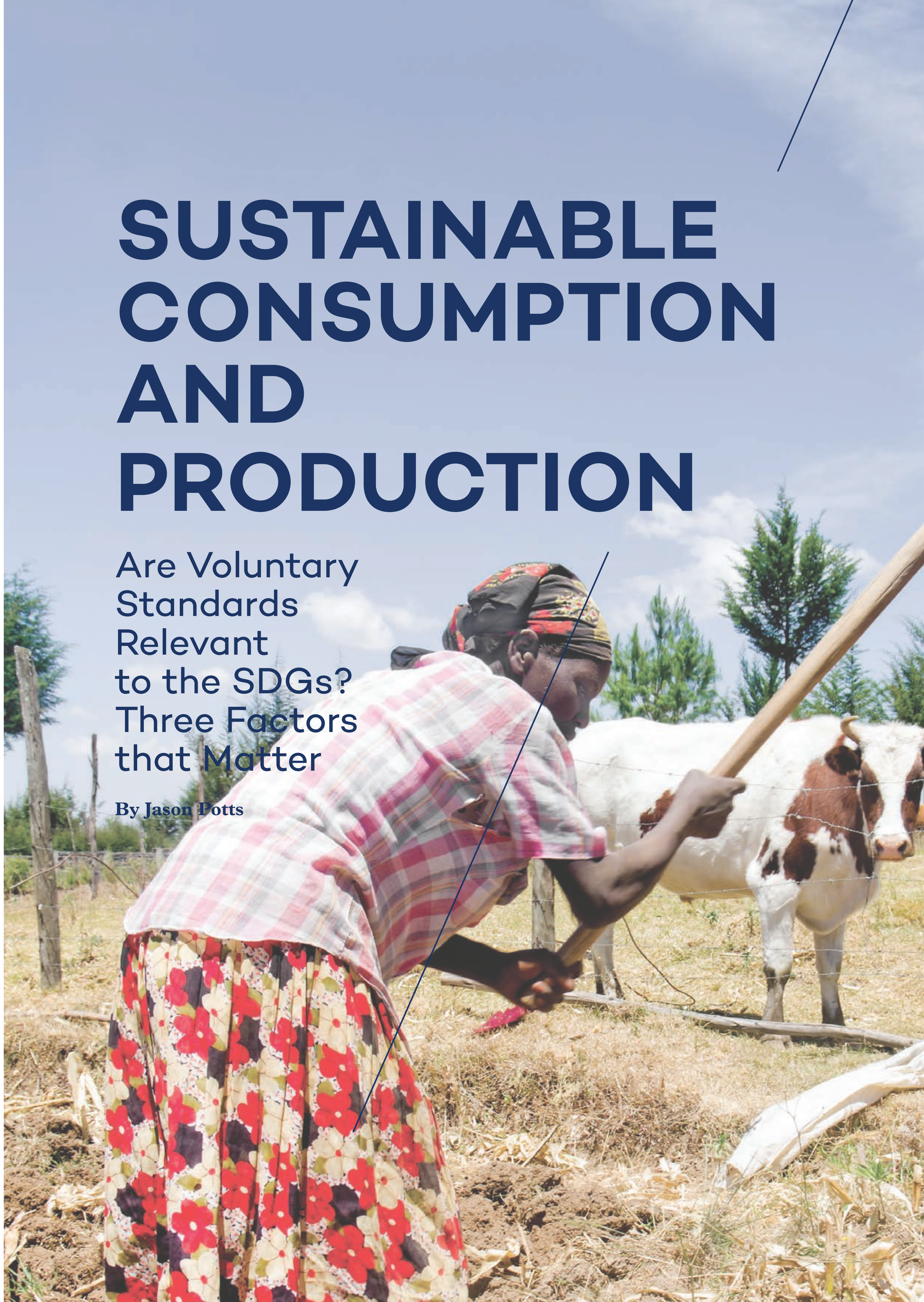
The success of the KFD scheme begged the question: Why couldn't the scheme be replicated in other urban and peri-urban areas to reduce kerosene use and enhance LPG penetration among poor communities? Working with our local partner IRADe, we surveyed poor households in Ghaziabad to test this proposition in a peri-urban context (as opposed to the strictly urban context of Delhi).[15]

In general, households reported that they tend not to use kerosene because accessing their kerosene rations is time-consuming and difficult, given the shortage of kerosene in the public distribution (i.e., rationing) system, and because they tended to have informal electricity connections for lighting. This suggests that kerosene is ripe for phase-out. They tended to cook with biomass (typically cow dung cakes) or with LPG, and strongly preferred the latter. Unfortunately, however, the LPG that was being used for cooking in poor households is not subsidized; rather, it is generally bought from the open market at high prices. The primary research being conducted is finding that, despite billions of dollars of dollars spent per annum in India, LPG subsidies are not reaching the poor (let alone the rural poor).

There are largely administrative reasons for this. Poor households are eligible for free registration to the LPG subsidy system, which usually costs about USD 40 to register. However, in practice, LPG distributors ask consumers to pay a fee of around USD 70 to process registration, which poor households are unable to pay. This combines with the complexity of the registration process, with poor households often lacking the requisite documents or uncertain of their entitlements. Conversations with local LPG distributors showed, frankly, that distributors lacked the incentive to provide free registration to poor households, when others pay for these. All of this suggests that improving "last-mile" administrative processes, modes of subsidy provision and distributor performance will be critical in allowing for greater LPG access among poor households over time, including through KFD-like schemes.

This is just one example of the way that effective energy subsidy design can assist in achieving the goal of "affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern" energy for all in India. It does, however, demonstrate the critical importance of consulting directly with those who suffer from energy poverty to identify key barriers to energy access and to therefore be able to effectively design relevant and helpful pro-poor solutions to these challenges. It is only in this way that progress is likely to be made.

[15] See our report here: http://www.irade.org/Diesel report IISD3 28 01 15.pdf



SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

Are Voluntary Standards Relevant to the SDGs? Three Factors that Matter

By Jason Potts

At face value, it would seem, there could be little doubt as to the relevance of sustainability standards in achieving the UN's freshly minted SDGs. Goal 12 explicitly calls on governments to ensure that consumption and production practices are sustainable.

Standards have long sold themselves as promoting sustainable consumption and production by facilitating the identification and application of sustainable practices along global supply chains. Voluntary sustainability standards would, at minimum, appear to have an obvious role to play in fulfilling Goal 12.

Moreover, as voluntary "eco" standards have gradually migrated from single-issue initiatives (for example, ozone-friendly or dolphin-friendly labels) toward increasingly comprehensive multi-issue "sustainability" standards, their potential relevance extends to the other SDGs. Add to this the growing adoption of voluntary standards by mainstream companies such as Walmart, Unilever, Nestle, Home Depot and Mars, to name but a few, and it would appear that standards are poised to play a pivotal role in the achievement of the new SDGs.

While such an observation might be conceptually accurate, the real meaningfulness of voluntary standards to the SDGs will depend not on their purported thematic relevance to the SDGs, but rather on whether they actually offer anything new to the international trading system. This, in turn, has far less to do with their thematic coverage and much more to do with how they are operated and the systems they employ. More specifically, the relevance of voluntary standards to fulfillment of the SDGs will turn on their ability to overcome three hurdles facing all market-based approaches to sustainable development:

1. *Economic inclusiveness:* Voluntary standards have long been understood as vehicles for offering economic benefits in return for the adoption of sustainable practices. Presented in such a light, voluntary standards offer no shortage of "opportunities" for improved economic well-being among the poor. However, as instruments *of the market*, voluntary standards are persistently forced to seek the lowest-cost solutions for compliance, which, to date, has tended towards a consolidation of production among those producers that already have the means to demonstrate compliance or make the necessary investments to do so.[16] Those *most in need*, the long-understood priority of sustainability development, thus have the potential to become the losers in a free-market world governed by voluntary sustainability standards. This presents a major challenge for voluntary standards and points towards a systemic need for targeted investment in capacity building and technical assistance to facilitate the transition of poorer producers to a position where they can access compliance-based markets.

2. *Participatory governance:* Voluntary standards offer private systems of governance that operate in parallel to public regimes, but that are themselves subject to very little regulatory oversight. In principle, voluntary "sustainability" standards run by single individuals or companies on a for-profit basis and with little meaningful sustainability impact could easily dominate trade. However, over the years, voluntary standards, largely in an effort to ensure their own credibility, have relied heavily on multistakeholder, not-for-profit governance models. This has, in turn, given rise to a variety of innovative systems for enabling stakeholders across multiple jurisdictions to participate in their rule making processes. In many cases, voluntary standards have offered new opportunities for otherwise marginalized stakeholders to participate in global supply chains. Sustainability standards are, however, conflicted by a deep need to pay special attention to the needs of big market players as a basis of maintaining or expanding market share—leading to a situation where more marginalized producers may remain under-represented in their so-called participatory governance processes. While sustainability standards appear to have improved the participation of more marginalized decision-makers in many cases, even the most participatory initiatives tend to be driven by actors in developed countries.[17] The ability of voluntary standards to exert meaningful change in global economic relations will depend on their ability to transform the status quo distribution of decision making among global supply chain actors through more participatory forms of governance.

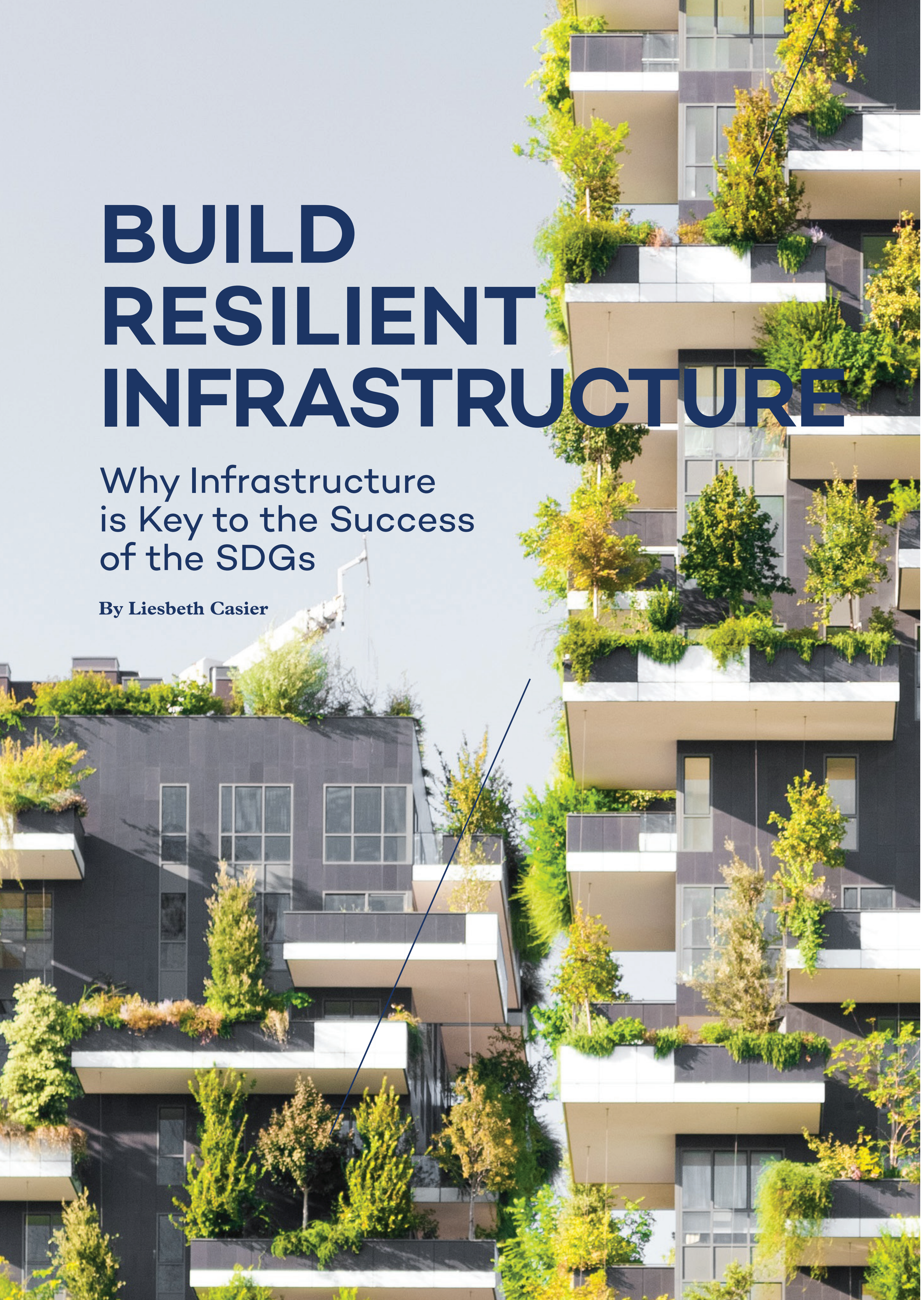
3. *Measurability:* In terms of content, the SDGs offer very little that is actually new. The SDGs are primarily a parcelling and prioritization of concepts and objectives already captured by the Earth Summit and Agenda 21 processes. The value-add of the SDGs rests in their ability to provide focused and measurable targets for decision-makers that can improve tracking and accountability related to their achievement. One of the major attributes that standards bring to conventional supply chains is also an improved ability to define goals and measure results towards their achievement through their standards development and enforcement processes. To a large degree, the very project of sustainability standards can be seen as a micro-application of the SDG effort itself. And while standards have made significant advances in improving the measurability of supply chain actions, to date, many, if not most, sustainability standards have focused on stipulating management requirements rather than actual performance requirements.[18] This, in turn, has left issues related to the measurable impacts of standards largely in question. If standards are to become effective tools in the realization of SDGs, standards will need to place a greater emphasis on performance requirements and related outcomes/ impacts.

While it has been common to focus attention on the *content* of standards systems when evaluating their potential contribution to sustainable development, the real value of standards to the SDG process is likely to lie elsewhere. In particular, the ability of the voluntary standards infrastructure to promote economic inclusiveness, participatory governance and enhanced measurability across global supply chains will represent the most important asset of such systems in the context of the SDGs. The actual requirements of sustainability standards will be meaningless if they are not supported by processes that explicitly and significantly advance equity and accountability within global supply chains.

[16] For further discussion on this, see Potts, J. et al. (2014). *The state of sustainability initiatives: Standards and the economy.* Retrieved from https://www.iisd.org/pdf/2014/ssi_2014.pdf

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.



BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Why Infrastructure is Key to the Success of the SDGs

By Liesbeth Casier

Infrastructure is core to our quality a life—a fact that explains the prevalence of infrastructure, both implicitly and explicitly, in the SDGs. Population growth, migration and urbanization trends demand an increase in infrastructure development, especially in emerging economies and developing countries.

By one estimate, a total of USD 57 trillion is needed by 2030, or USD 3.4 trillion per year, for infrastructure investment. As such, governments are increasingly looking for ways to crowd-in private finance, and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure projects. Innovative approaches to infrastructure finance and sustainable public procurement will be critical to their success.

SDG 9—“Build resilient infrastructure, p romote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.” This is the most direct call for increased investment in sustainable infrastructure in the SDGs. Implicitly, infrastructure development will also play an important role in many other SDGs. Take the first five goals, for example.

SDG 1—“End poverty in all its forms everywhere.” The targets relate to: access to basic services; building resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate-related extreme events; and other economic, social and environmental shocks. Good infrastructure is needed to provide this resilience, as well as for public service delivery, such as education, healthcare or access to water and energy.

SDG 2—“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.” The targets refer to an increase in investment for rural infrastructure, which illustrates the importance of infrastructure investment, not only in urban but also in rural areas.

SDG 3—“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.” Target 3.8 focuses on access to quality essential health-care services for which the development of health centres and hospitals in urban and rural areas will be essential.

SDG 4—“Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities.” Target 4.a demands the construction and upgrading of learning facilities.

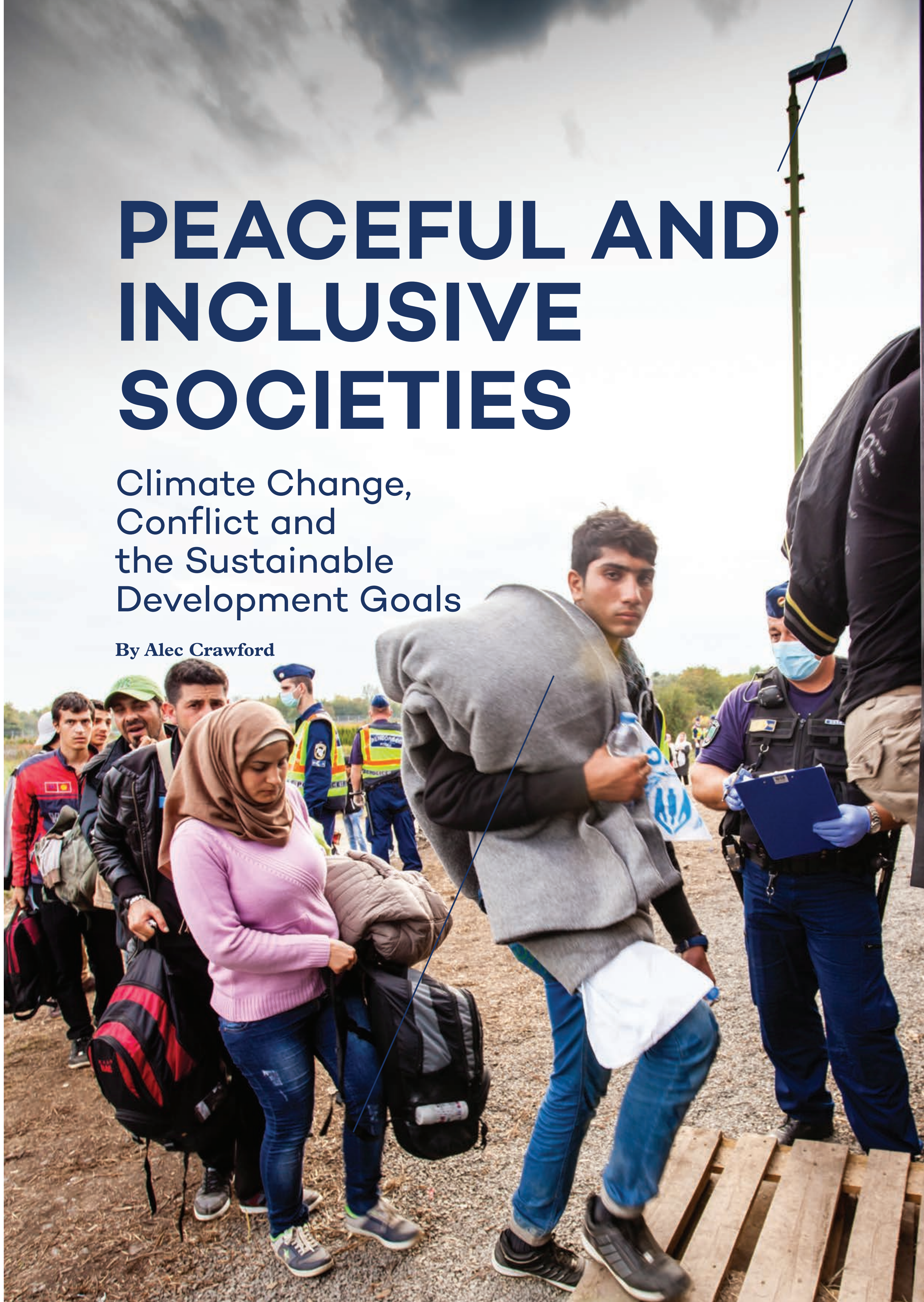
SDG 5—“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” Target 5.4 points at the provision of public services and infrastructure for social protection of unpaid care and domestic work.

Public procurement will play a vital role in delivering all of the above. Indeed, the power of the public purse—public procurement represents on average 20 per cent of a country’s GDP —is instrumental in creating the demand for innovative and sustainable infrastructure solutions. This certainty of demand will push domestic industries to transform the market into more sustainable production patterns and will give suppliers to government the incentive to innovate, increase efficiency and deliver value-for-money across the asset life cycle.

There are various ways for governments to deliver public infrastructure. They range from traditional procurement methods to a range of public private partnerships (PPPs). In a PPP model, the different risks and responsibilities are distributed among the public and private partners. The private partner brings in the expertise and efficiency of the private sector and usually carries the operational and technical risks; the public partner that has the mandate to deliver the service or infrastructure project is often responsible for the monitoring, setting the general legal and policy framework, and carrying, for example, the political risk. This mix has the potential of delivering more efficient and effective infrastructure, and thus value-for-money for taxpayers.

For example, in Brazil the first PPP project for roads consisted of a concession contract for the expansion and maintenance of 667 km of federal road in the state of Bahia. It was the first of its kind to introduce performance-based contracting in PPPs in Brazil, which allowed it to demand the best available performance and innovative solutions from the private sector.

It is essential for the implementation of the SDGs that infrastructure projects are assessed based on value-for-money across the asset life cycle. Indeed, only then will projects be assessed not only on their initial capital investment but also on the operational cost, maintenance and disposal of the asset. This will open the door and make the business case for much more sustainable infrastructure projects that are likely to have a higher initial capital cost, but perform much better across the life cycle.



PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

Climate Change, Conflict and the Sustainable Development Goals

By Alec Crawford

Peace and stability, it has long been recognized, are prerequisites for sustainable development.

A quick look at the most recent *Human Development Report* by the United Nations Development Programme shows that those countries furthest from achieving sustainable human development are typically those most affected by violence and fragility: countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Somalia.[19] Without peace and stability, progress on education, health and other determinants of well-being in these countries will be difficult, if not impossible.

In those fragile states most in need of development progress, it is SDG 16—"The promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development"—that is central to achieving immediate and future well-being. In these countries, achieving peace and stability is a necessary first step toward the achievement of the other SDGs.

Climate change will complicate the achievement of SDG 16 in fragile states. It is increasingly well accepted that climate change can be a contributor—at times subtle, at times significant—to the causal network that generates conflict and threatens human security. This is particularly true for fragile states, many of which are found in regions where the worst climate impacts are anticipated, such as the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Middle East (see Table 1, noting that climate vulnerability data is not available for Somalia or South Sudan). The vulnerability of fragile states to climate impacts is rooted in a number of factors, including: the limited capacities of their governments and institutions; the reliance of their populations and economies on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and pastoralism; their histories of conflict; and their high rates of poverty and inequality. In such contexts, the additional stress of climate change may strain the capacity of households, communities and governments to cope with and respond to impacts.

Climate change is not expected to directly result in violence. Rather, there is growing consensus that climate change will instead act as a "threat multiplier," exacerbating existing challenges and sources of tension such as weak governance, poverty, historical grievances and ethnic differences. With climate change making many fragile parts of the world hotter, drier and less predictable, it could contribute to the root causes of conflict by: undermining livelihoods; increasing competition for scarce natural resources; displacing large numbers of people; and overwhelming state institutions by placing addition stress on social, economic and natural systems.

Ensuring that progress can be made in fragile states on SDG 16 therefore links to action on SDG 13: "Taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts." Concerted international action is needed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. But significant effort will be required to strengthen the adaptive capacity and resilience of fragile countries, and their populations, to manage the impacts of climate change.

Thankfully, international stability, adaptive capacity and climate resilience are achieved through many similar investments. All will require the support of the international community. These include strengthening statutory and customary governance and institutions; clarifying resource rights, particularly around water and land; and integrating climate risks into sectoral policies and responses, including water, health, agriculture, infrastructure and disaster management. More support is required for research into new seed varieties, crop types, livestock breeds and growing techniques; for improved water management; and for building early warning systems that ensure support arrives when and where it is needed. Regional cooperation around resources like water should be supported and enhanced.

Specific investments should be made to improve the data on climate change and its impacts in fragile states, so that policies are based on sound numbers. At a basic level, it is often difficult to access and interpret such data in fragile contexts: in Haiti and South Sudan—combined—there are fewer functioning weather stations (8) than in the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island (9). At the same time, capacities must be strengthened to deal with the complexities of climate change vulnerability and risk is low, particularly in fragile states. This includes government staff and peacebuilding practitioners; they often do not have the skills or knowledge required to use or understand climate data and translate it into appropriate responses.

When working in fragile states, peacebuilding interventions should be climate resilient, so that they take into account the implications of near- and long-term climate risk as a contributing factor in driving conflict. This could mean integrating drought and flood risks into decisions on refugee camp placement, or including climate risks in reintegration programs for ex-combatants. Climate change responses must also be designed and implemented in a conflict-sensitive way, to ensure that, at a minimum, the interventions do not increase the risk of conflict and—preferably—they instead enhance peacebuilding opportunities. This would mean, for example, ensuring that the benefits of adaptation programs are equitably distributed across all the relevant stakeholders.

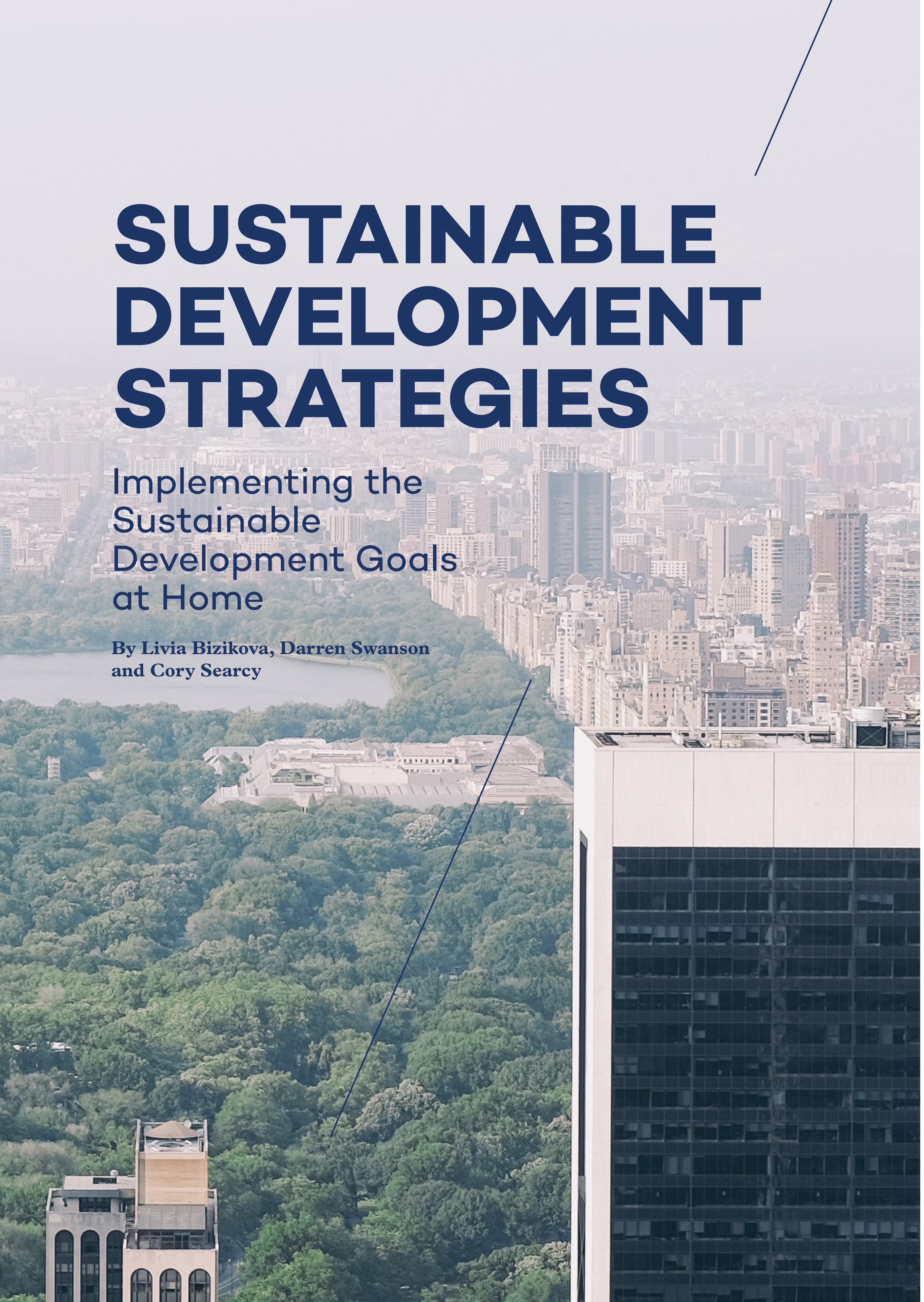
Investments in building resilience are investments in peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Designing policies, programs and projects that support the resilience and adaptive capacity of individuals, communities and governments in fragile states, and in so doing reduce the risk of climate-related conflicts, is an important part of ensuring sustainable development for those most in need.

Table 1: State fragility and climate vulnerability, 2015

Top 10 most fragile states	Top 10 most climate-vulnerable states
South Sudan	Eritrea
Somalia	Sudan
Central African Republic	Chad
Sudan	Congo (D.R.)
Congo (D.R.)	Central African Republic
Chad	Burundi
Yemen	Haiti
Syria	Yemen
Afghanistan	Guinea-Bissau
Guinea	Solomon Islands

[19] UNEP's 2015 *Human development report* can be found here: http://report.hdr.undp.org/

[20] Sources: Fund For Peace (2015). *Fragile States Index 2015: The book*. Retrieved from http://library.fundforpeace.org/fsi15-report; Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index (ND-GAIN) (n.d.). Retrieved from http://index.gain.org/



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at Home

By Livia Bizikova, Darren Swanson and Cory Searcy

Unlike the MGDs, which focused on developing countries, the SDGs are universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development.

Unlike the MGDs, which focused on developing countries, the SDGs are universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development. That means integrating the SDGs into national planning priorities and documents as well as developing means to encourage implementation at regional and local levels. Thus the SDGs must connect with national-level and subnational needs and capacities in implementation, monitoring and reporting.

Many developed and developing countries have already started to examine how to integrate the SDGs into their existing national strategies and plans. Let's take a look at some of the associated challenges, and then consider some possible solutions.

What needs to be taken into account?

First, countries need to develop strategies to implement the SDGs in such a way as to encourage different sectors to work together. The 17 SDGs are highly linked, and cannot be implemented in isolation. For example, Goal 2, which focuses on hunger and sustainable food production, also aims to promote an agricultural system that is resilient to climate change. Similarly, Goal 11, which relates to cities and human settlements, also emphasizes the importance of reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities. Goal 12, on sustainable production and consumption, requires sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources. These linkages demand a highly integrated strategy that brings together many or all aspects of sustainable development.

Second, we need to take into account national and regional priorities when determining which SDGs to implement immediately, and which over the next decade, and what the specific national and subnational targets should be for the SDGs. This requires collaboration across different levels of government and stakeholder groups. Therefore, a participatory process is needed to prioritize goals, determine the level of effort needed and set out timelines. If the goals aim to improve well-being and environmental quality, and create inclusive economic growth, then they need to be discussed with citizens to identify their aspirations and needs.

National and subnational sustainable development strategies (SDSs) will help countries to link domestic sustainable development priorities with the global framework that the SDGs provide. Over the past 20 years, SDSs have successfully brought together different perspectives and concerns at the higher policy level. There are also examples of SDSs providing a number

[21] See, for example, Bertelsmann Stiftung (Ed.) (2013). *Winning strategies for a sustainable future*. Retrieved from https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/imported/leseprobe/LP_978-3-86793-554-8_1.pdf

of **innovative policy responses**, including investment in green technology, social protection and more effective means of collaboration.[21]

SDSs are often initially developed and reviewed by stakeholder groups or created as reports based on data and indicators. A global review of SDSs indicates that many countries have set up National Councils for Sustainable Development or other bodies serving a similar purpose: to further sustainable development at the national level by engaging a wide range of stakeholders in the process of creating national SDSs.

Take Canada as an example, where the next Federal Sustainable Development Strategy (FSDS) could guide the implementation of SDGs spanning economic, social and environmental issues. The current FSDS covers the period of 2013–2016, and there is thus an opportunity to begin shaping the new phase of FSDS in line with the SDGs. This would entail broadening the focus of the current FSDS from the mostly environmental domain to all aspects of sustainable development, and then subsequently translating the actions to policies and programs.

The process of consultation has not yet fully started in Canada. There is therefore a need to pay careful attention to creating a legitimate consultation process to explore the relevance of SDGs for different places, regions and people, and then develop plans, strategies and processes to implement the SDGs based on the outcomes of these consultations.

A way forward for Canada would need to include leadership at the national level with a clear roadmap of integrating the SDGs into federal, provincial and local strategies framed by the outcomes of a transparent consultation process. It is also critical to ensure that the created strategies are seen as priorities supported by allocated budgets on a year-by-year basis.

[22] See SDplanNET's *National Councils for Sustainable Development: lessons from the past and present* brief here: http://www.iisd.org/sites/default/files/publications/sdplannet_lessons_from_the_past.pdf

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