

TIMES OF CRISIS,  
TIMES OF CHANGE  
SCIENCE FOR ACCELERATING  
TRANSFORMATIONS  
TO SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT



GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT REPORT

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## CHAPTER

## 6

# Calls to action for transformations

**Against the backdrop of the changes and shocks of the last few years, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains a strong and valid agenda for a desirable future – for people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. This report points to the science-driven transformations urgently needed to enable progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals.**

At the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda, marked by major setbacks experienced by humanity and the planet, all countries must renew their efforts to enable transformations towards the Sustainable Development Goals. This means identifying key interventions that have systemic effects across the Goals, scaling up investment, mobilizing the knowledge of scientists, practitioners and communities at all levels, and building the capacity needed in all countries and institutions, all while enhancing policy learning and accountability and closely monitoring the impacts of interventions.

There is evidence that Goals and targets matter in themselves. But experience in the last eight years has also shown that implementation and compliance are still weak. Today, halfway to 2030, collective action towards sustainable development becomes one of the most important levers, if not the most important, to actively embrace and meaningfully engage with transformations. Using this lever effectively requires ambitious public policies to establish adequate incentives for change, consultation with a wide range of stakeholders and coalition building.

Equally important for the 2030 Agenda is to step up international cooperation for the poorest and most vulnerable countries – to help them recover from the pandemic, as well as from ongoing conflicts, inflation and the cost-of-living crisis, and to build resilience to future shocks and climate risks. In the twenty-first century, global solidarity and international cooperation are instrumental to human security and to building an inclusive, equitable and peaceful world.

Fully achieving all Goals and targets in the remaining seven years will be difficult, but every inch of progress matters. And this must be achieved globally – leaving no country, society or person behind.

Incremental and fragmented change is not sufficient and will not achieve the transformations that are required. The only way forward is to transform how we think, live, produce and consume in order to achieve a new equilibrium that balances resilience, security and well-being, and does so in harmony with nature. There are efforts to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP, but they should be further enhanced on the basis of socially robust science.

As indicated in the *2019 Global Sustainable Development Report*, the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets can be approached through six entry points: (i) human well-being and capabilities, (ii) sustainable and just economies, (iii) food systems and nutrition patterns, (iv) energy decarbonization with universal access, (v) urban and peri-urban development, and (vi) the global environmental commons. These entry points offer opportunities for social and technological innovation and changes in human behaviour that lead to transformative pathways.

The previous *Global Sustainable Development Report* also identified four main levers that need to be deployed in these entry points – governance, economy and finance, individual and collective action, and science and technology. This report adds a fifth lever – capacity-building – since all countries need the knowledge and skills to understand, enable and navigate context-specific transformative change. Supporting the transformation process entails enhancing capacity in all countries for strategic direction and foresight; innovation and the generation of new alternatives; orchestration, engagement and negotiation; identifying and overcoming impediments; and in learning and resilience.

While these entry points are valuable globally, applying them locally will require contextualized strategies and actions. Countries and local governments will need to develop their own strategies and implementation plans in line with domestic priorities and practices. To do so they need to understand how the Goals are interlinked, how progress in one Goal supports progress in others, and how to address trade-offs and maximize

synergies, while promoting social cohesion, equality and participation at local, subnational, national, regional and international levels.

These systemic changes need to increase harmony with nature. Human livelihoods, culture and well-being depend on biodiversity and the health of landscapes, ecosystems and oceans. Achievements in the Sustainable Development Goals will be short-lived if they are accompanied by overuse and degradation of the natural environment.

To guide policymakers as they engage with Sustainable Development Goals, this chapter presents a series of calls for action. First, that the United Nations Member States establish a shared transformation framework for the Sustainable Development Goals, to support transformation processes globally and locally across all the stages of transformation. Second, it provides recommendations on how to build the capacity of State and non-State stakeholders. Third, for each of the six entry points there are game-changing interventions that will tap into synergies and help manage trade-offs. Fourth, given the changing contexts identified in chapters 1 and 2, there are proposed measures for improving the fundamental conditions for implementation. Finally, there are recommendations on how science, policy and society can work together for a future where people and nature can thrive as one.

## ESTABLISH A TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK FOR ACCELERATED ACTION FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS BY 2024

Business-as-usual approaches will not achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 or even 2050. To achieve progress locally, nationally and globally to reach the Goals will require truly transformative action with radically new efforts and approaches. This *Report* recommends therefore that Member States agree on a transformation framework for accelerated action that blends local action with international cooperation and reflecting local contexts, needs, aspirations and capabilities. First action plans should be presented at the high-level political forum in 2024.

Six essential steps and elements for this transformation framework would be needed to actively embrace transformative change:

1. Develop **national plans for transformative accelerated action** that are underpinned by strong scientific evidence within a context of local and Indigenous knowledge and meaningful public engagement. Plans should pursue action where Sustainable Development Goal indicators show stagnant or negative trends, and they should use appropriate levers to implement synergistic interventions that are truly transformative in pushing progress across interlinked Goals. Negative transboundary spillovers should be targeted and reduced. Plans of action should clearly identify impediments in each entry-point and at each phase of transformation and take action to address these. Individual and collective action levers should be employed for inclusive, bottom-up decision-making that engages all sectors, including all segments of the population and subnational entities so that no one is left behind. National plans should also include action for international cooperation and, wherever possible, link action on the Sustainable Development Goals with the implementation of global commitments under the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sendai Framework. Developing national targets, as mentioned in paragraph 55 of the 2030 Agenda, is strongly recommended in this regard.
2. **Local governments, business and industry associations, and institutional investors should be encouraged to develop similar plans**, and feed into national plans. Many actors in these sectors are innovating and experimenting with action on the Sustainable Development Goals, and there is a need to better share learning, jointly evaluate and recognize successful steps.
3. Employ **national and international economic and financial levers** to accelerate transformations towards just and sustainable economies and infrastructures, including incentives for behaviour change of individuals and of corporate decision-making. Efforts should strengthen the Addis Ababa Action Agenda framework for aligning domestic and international resource flows towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and for increasing fiscal space, that is, through increasing tax revenue and official development assistance, combating illicit financial flows, achieving debt relief and restructuring, so that no country is left behind. Reforming financial, tax and budgetary operations systems and moving from silo-specific to interlinked, issue-based systems will be crucial. Environmental, social, and governance investments should be linked to the Goals using a corresponding index. At the multilateral level, progress is also needed in reforming the international financial architecture.
4. Invest in **data, science-based tools and policy learning** to improve policy planning and implementation. This would include a focus on improving the quality of data and developing a funded and credible plan for closing the Sustainable Development Goal data gap globally by 2030. Increasing investments for R&D in low- and middle-income countries is needed. Development of a broader range of economic and non-economic metrics is also needed that reflect the value of human life and nature for monitoring progress in improving human well-being, economic performance and the provision of public goods.
5. Establish a new partnership for **enhancing the science-policy-society interface** to increase the use of science and scientific evidence and strengthen trust in science and public information. Necessary action includes stronger scientific advisory systems for government departments, open science and cross-border partnerships aligned with specific Goals and entry-points, South-South partnerships and capacity development in research, knowledge translation, and evidence use.
6. Invest in **improving accountability** of governments and other stakeholders on implementing the Goals at the international, regional, national and sub-national levels. Government action should be supervised by parliaments. CSOs should hold governments accountable while also making inputs into national and local policy learning. Global implementation of

the transformation framework should be monitored by the high-level political forum. Monitoring and reporting should also include action at subnational levels and by the corporate sector.

## BUILD CAPACITY FOR TRANSFORMATIONS

Strategic transformations for the Sustainable Development Goals rely on a wide range of capacities and skills at individual, institutional and network levels. Therefore, national acceleration plans should invest in the capacities to strategize, innovate, manage conflicts, identify and overcome impediments and cope with crises and risks. For this purpose, governments may need to reorganize policymaking and public administration to improve horizontal coordination, between departments, and vertical coordination, across levels of government. They will also need to integrate policies from multiple fields and goals – for example, between agriculture, environment, water, social and labour policies, in line with the interlinked nature of the Goals. Such coordination will allow for regulation and setting incentives that transform decision-making and behaviour patterns in households and in the private sector in a way that is coherent with the Goals, and takes advantage of synergies and minimizes trade-offs.

Specific measures for capacity-building include:

- *Management for transformation* – Develop capacity of key stakeholders (policymakers, academics, CEOs, CSOs) for driving and managing sustainability transitions in a strategic and systematic manner, including inter-ministerial collaborations with shared vision for long-term goals.
- *Foresight capacity* – International organizations and governments should strengthen foresight capacity to develop visions for long-term sustainable development to 2050 and beyond, and to better understand and respond to external shocks and new opportunities for transformation.
- *Effective public engagement* – Engage citizen groups, youth, women's groups, Indigenous communities, marginalized groups, philanthropists and other groups

in the quest for transformative change towards sustainability. Safe spaces for youth, people with disabilities and marginalized groups may be needed for effective engagement.

- *Suitable knowledge production* – Strengthen the process of producing, validating and disseminating socially robust scientific knowledge for the Goals and inclusion of Indigenous knowledge into scientific processes.
- *Strengthening the science-policy-society interface* – Establish platforms for interaction between academia, think tanks, policymakers, practitioners and the public, focused on key interventions. Reinforce public trust in science by promoting learning models throughout the education system that teach students and the general public how to filter materials and recognize misinformation.
- *Negotiation and conflict resolution skills* – Countries should build the capacities needed for negotiations to navigate the acceleration phase, conflict resolution, mediation across scales, designing effective policy mixes, overcoming system lock-ins, encouraging horizontal and vertical coordination and orchestrating various actors.
- *Incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals in codes of conduct and business strategies* – Multinational and large-scale companies should use their influence within their supply chains to make their processes and financial goals compatible with the Goals. Equally, consumers should exert their individual and collective voice to demand that the quality of the goods they buy is closely aligned with multiple Goals, prioritizing the interlinkages between Goals.

## PUSH TRANSFORMATION BY ACTIVATING SYNERGIES IN THE SIX ENTRY POINTS

Putting the transformation framework to work requires locally relevant, synergistic and integrated implementation that breaks down the silos of public service and policymaking. Drawing on global scenario studies and other evidence, we recommend key interventions with systemic effects for each entry point and across them.