

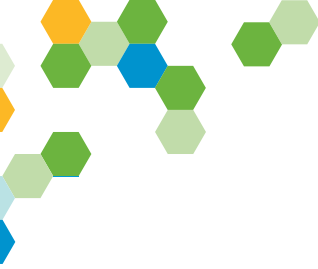


SPECIAL REPORT

The challenges companies face to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals

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1. INTRODUCTION

836 million people live in extreme poverty. In developing countries, one in every five people live on less than \$1.25 a day. By 2030 we expect to eradicate this issue and “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages who experience poverty in all its dimensions” . This is one of the most ambitious goals adopted on September 25 2015 by the 193 member states of the United Nations and included in the Sustainable Development Plan.

Since its adoption, much has been said about the SDGs. Some label them as confusing and assure it will not be easy to monitor such a complex agenda. The roadmap companies and governments should follow for the next 15 years consists of 17 goals broken down into 169 targets. “It is so broad that there is danger it becomes ineffective”, says Gonzalo Fanjul, researcher and activist against poverty².

¹ Naciones Unidas. *Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. 17 Objetivos para transformar nuestro mundo*. Available at: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/poverty/>

² El País. *Ya tenemos 17 Objetivos, ¿y ahora qué?* Available at:

http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/02/26/planeta_futuro/1456484933_719548.html



“By 2030, it is expected that the inhabitants of the earth will attain prosperity and welfare without abandoning the protection of the environment”

2. A STEP FORWARD FOR THE WELFARE OF HUMANITY

Without a doubt, the SDGs have evolved from the Millennium Development Goals- MDGs-, but they are more ambitious and incorporate new tactics such as climate change, responsible consumption, peace and justice, among others. By 2030, it is expected some that the inhabitants of the earth will attain prosperity and welfare without abandoning the protection of the environment, in order to guarantee access to resources for future generations.

Amina J. Mohammed, special advisor to Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon, said the following about the Development Plan: “We have learned from the MDGs (...). The Sustainable Development Plan is actually a more comprehensible and profound response to all of the challenges we face. It is based on both the economic and social reality, as well as the environmental dimensions in place. Now that we are talking about a universal program, I believe it is important to not leave anyone behind”³.

³ UN News Centre. Interview with Amina J. Mohammed, Secretary-General’s Special Adviser on Post-2015 Development Planning Available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/newsmakers.asp?NewsID=113#sthash.CxxuJkFN.2jwx8Rx7.dpuf><http://www.un.org/apps/news/newsmakers.asp?NewsID=113>

⁴ El País. Ya tenemos 17 Objetivos, ¿y ahora qué? Available at: http://elpais.com/elpais/2016/02/26/planeta_futuro/1456484933_719548.html

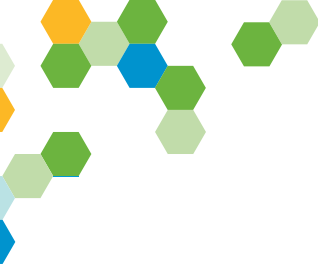
⁵ Sostenibilidad para todos. La empresa y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible. Available at: <http://www.sostenibilidad.com/empresas-y-objetivos-desarrollo-sostenible>

However, this presents a great challenge for those responsible for its implementation. Jan Vandemoortele, considered the father of the Millennium Development Goals, says: “There is much confusion about what to do with the resources we have available. This document is unclear, it is a monster that only a few people in New York understand”⁴.

3. THE PRIVATE SECTOR: LEADER OF THE 2030 AGENDA

A shared responsibility now arises that includes an abundance of committed actors creating partnerships, networks and teamwork in order to build sustainable societies. These development goals pose challenges not only for states but also for corporations, turning them into lead actors in the implementation of SDGs.

The United Nations recognizes their transformative power, because they are the main provider of economic resources and can help improve quality of life. All productive sectors and companies can contribute regardless of their size. How to do it? It is essential for corporations to work on two fronts:



“Companies need to develop their business responsibly”

A) INCLUSION OF THE SDGS IN THEIR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

- **Construction and revision of CSR plans in light of the SDGs.**

Companies need to develop their business responsibly. The companies that are in the process of building their CSR strategy have the opportunity to do so in line with the SDGs, and those that already have one in place should review it in order to see where they are contributing and what adjustments should be made.

In this regard it is crucial to understand that, according to the Global Compact, not all SDGs are relevant for all businesses, large and small.

A compass exists and there are tools to do it. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), The United Nations Global Compact and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) developed the SDG Compass, a protocol of action that aims to help companies identify their financial contribution, encourage them to make commitments and communicate their progress in this regard⁶.

- **Monitoring the environment: Beyond the area of influence.**

To define their contributions to sustainable development,

companies perform a monitoring exercise to understand their area of influence and the impact of their operations. In the process, they determine the economic, environmental, and social needs of the region in which they operate. However, in light of the SDGs, this will not be enough.

Being a global program, companies must be aware of the challenges facing the regions and countries in which they operate, and align them with the SDGs. They should then be able to define their contributions, indicators and the strategic alliances they need to establish in order to be successful.

B) STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: IN LINE WITH THE NEW GLOBAL AGENDA

For years there has been a growing emphasis on the importance of communication in sustainable development, but at this time it has become increasingly relevant and a priority, as it will facilitate following-up on the progress made on the SDGs.

- **From a two-way communication to a multi-stakeholder dialogue**

SDGs raise challenges that force companies to evolve and reposition their communication strategy. For their contributions to be

⁶ SDG Compass. Available at: <http://sdgcompass.org/>

“It is essential for companies to contemplate diverse tools that are available to them and are now inseparable”

sustainable and efficient and to generate value, it is key to derive towards two-way communication channels in which two players intervene (for example: company-community, company-environmental authorities) and establish a multi stakeholder dialogue that should involve, among others, the company, its employees, the competition, unions, social organizations, authorities and communities.

This dialogue should be based on transparent, timely and constant communication in order to build long term relationships that benefit the common good.

- **Inseparable: Traditional and Digital Communication.**

Companies need to understand that CSR, coupled with strategic communication, generates great benefits: it contributes to achieve the SDGs; helps improve productivity; creates loyal clients, employees and suppliers; and improves relationships with governments and NGOs. This translates into a positive corporate image that contributes to the success of the business.

Considering that this is the era of dialogue and hyper-transparency, it is essential for companies to contemplate diverse tools that are available to them

and are now inseparable. On one side, there is traditional communication, which includes the relationship with stakeholders, engagement with communities, print reports on sustainability and the use of traditional media – newspaper, radio, and television-.

On the other hand, there is RSE 2.0. The Internet and social networks are privileged platforms to engage with stakeholders since interaction is more dynamic, allowing to share advancements made in sustainable development in real time as well as continuous monitoring.

There are companies that are still shy, but, if managed in a strategic and systematic manner, these media become effective tools for strengthening corporate reputation and advancing in the completion of SDGs.

- **Accountability: Primary and strategic.**

Accountability goes beyond reporting results. It should be part of the reputation management strategy of any company. In addition to informing stakeholders about their contribution, it is a useful diagnostic tool that companies use every year to assess where they stand, review the progress of their commitments in the social, economic and environmental dimensions, and acquire new ones.

“Innovation and technological development is another way to contribute to sustainable development”

Today, with the SDGs serving as a roadmap for the next 15 years, it is not enough to contribute to its completion and communicate progress under international standards like the GRI, but it has become primary and strategic for all organizations. This methodology offers performance indicators regarding sustainability that help companies effectively evaluate themselves regardless of the sector and the size of their business.

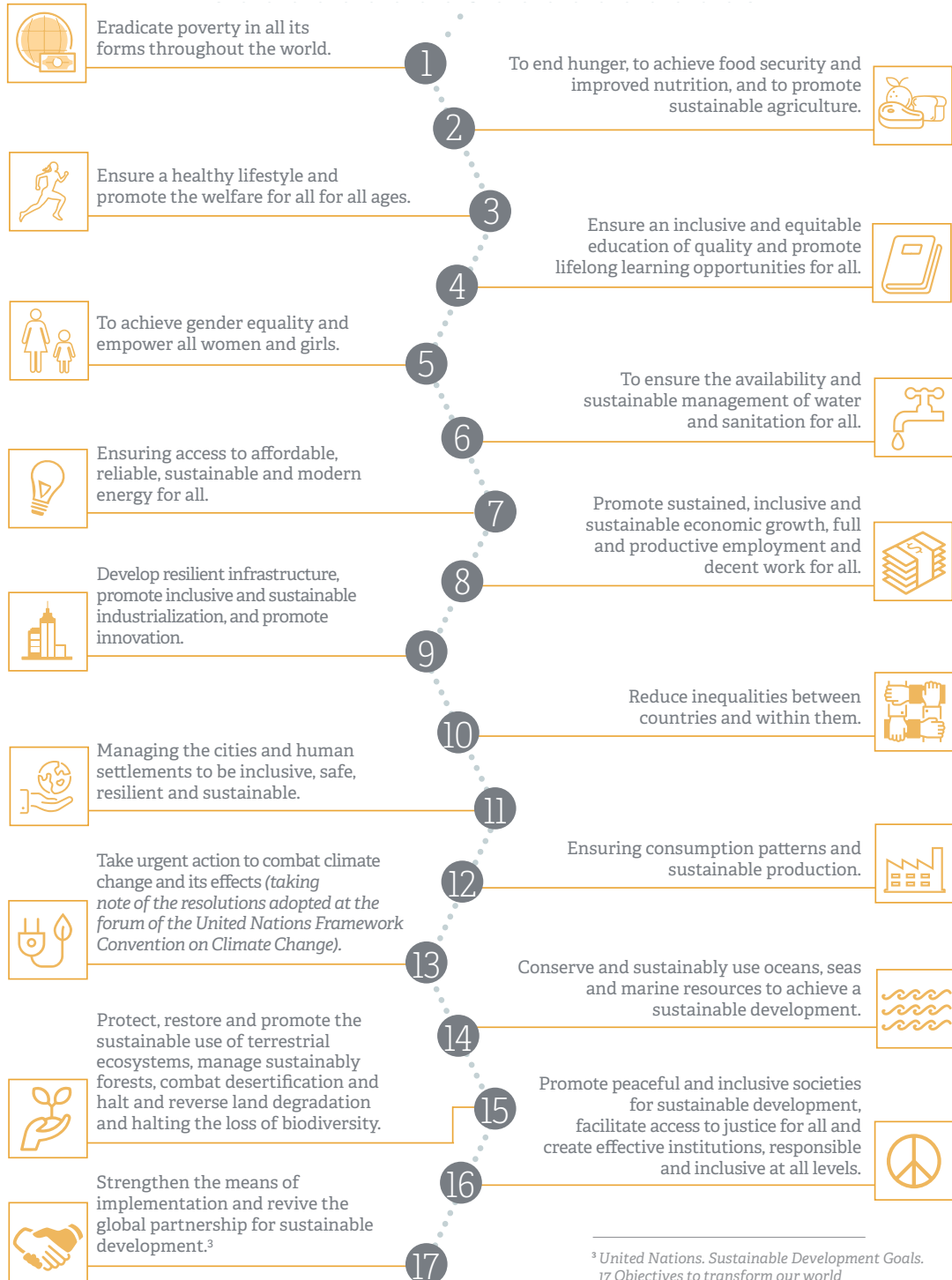
4. CONCLUSIONS

SDGs are voluntary, but companies that do not do incorporate them to their strategy will remain behind, affecting their reputation

and losing valuable business opportunities. Innovation and technological development is, without a doubt, another way to contribute to sustainable development. Companies that develop solutions in line with the new global agenda will have access to new markets, improve productivity and mitigate risks. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary General of the UN, highlights the “vital role businesses will play in achieving SDGs. The private sector can contribute through the core of its business, which is why we urge companies to value their impact in this agenda, raise ambitious goals and transparently communicate their results”⁷.

⁷ Boletín Pacto Global Colombia. Disponible en: <http://pactoglobal-colombia.org/index.php/boletin-ods-octubre-9>

5. NEW DEVELOPMENT AGENDA



³ United Nations. Sustainable Development Goals. 17 Objectives to transform our world <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/mdgs>

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