



# Sustainable Development Goals: A Promising Journey for Spaceship Earth

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## Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide us with an all-encompassing agenda for developing our societies while addressing the critical challenges of poverty, environmental degradation and inequality. They represent the start of a new era. In 2015, leaders from civil society, business and government made significant commitments that will transform our economies and societies to achieve a low carbon, thriving economy. 2016 must be the year we start delivering and reporting on these commitments. Only then we will be able to build the sustainable world we urgently need and are accountable for.

## Keywords

SDGs, Sustainability, Low-carbon

For those of us working in sustainability, 2015 was an inspiring year, where two long political processes culminated in success. In September, world leaders embraced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to eradicate poverty, promote peace, fuel inclusive growth and protect the environment. At the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP21 in December, the year was capped off when the historic Paris Agreement was adopted: it will set the speed and direction for achieving the SDGs.

Our world is in a systemic crisis: An astonishing 9.6% of the world's population lives in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2015) [1], according to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), 25% of global land is degraded [2]. Global inequality is still unacceptably high - the "top 20% of the global population enjoys more than 70% of total income" (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund - UNICEF, 2011) [3]. But we needn't lose hope.

The SDGs provide us with an all-encompassing agenda for developing our societies while addressing these critical issues and making the transition to a sustainable and thriving low carbon economy. They represent the start of a new era.

Building on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the SDGs encompass a broader range of sustainable development topics across economic, social and environmental dimensions. The SDGs also differ from the MDGs in their explicit call to action from non-state actors, including business, to achieve their ambition.

At the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), we work with the world's leading companies to develop

and scale up business solutions with integrated economic, environmental and societal benefits. We believe in the innovative potential of business to improve lives across the planet and help protect our climate and ecosystems. Business has historically led technological progress, and going forward it will be a critical implementation partner for governments in addressing our global challenges.

At our Council Meeting during COP21, some 800 global business leaders from 25 countries joined influential political figures such as Al Gore and the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It was a unique moment to share the beautiful Call to Earth video to underline the fragility of our planet and call on world leaders to seize the opportunity to put the world on a sustainable trajectory.

Nothing could have been more powerful than the words of the astronauts against the breathtaking backdrop of the Earth in the horizon. Astronaut Wubbo Ockels said that seeing the Earth through an astronaut's eyes would lead one to love and want to protect the Earth. Wubbo passed away the day after the interview was filmed, but his words will echo forever. As governments, businesses, members of civil society, but above all, as astronauts on "spaceship" Earth, we have a responsibility to take action for a sustainable world.

Forward-looking companies across the world are already taking this call to action very seriously and integrating sustainability at the core of their business. Their activities range from adopting science-based emissions reductions targets, to removing commodity-driven deforestation from supply chains and procuring 100% clean

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energy from renewable sources. Sustainable growth strategies aligned with the SDGs represent new strategic investment and business opportunities closely tied to societal progress and environmental protection. For business, embracing the SDGs will open new markets, trigger further innovation in low carbon technologies and add value to the economy through new jobs.

When the United Nations conducted its thematic consultations to prepare for the post-2015 Development Agenda (from late 2012 to early 2013), the business community also provided input. WBCSD was represented through our chairman Paul Polman, who was a member of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of eminent persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

2015 demonstrated the willingness and capacity of business to support governments in making the transition to a clean and inclusive economy. Through the coalition of We Mean Business, organizations working with more than 6,000,000 companies around the world expressed support for an ambitious climate agreement in Paris.

The Low Carbon Technology Partnerships initiative (LCTPi) led by the WBCSD brought together over 150 global businesses and 70 partners to work collaboratively on the climate challenge. LCTPi groups presented their ambitions and action plans at COP21. The first key outcomes of their work covering nine different sectors will be shared in Morocco at the end of this year.

Yet, achieving the SDGs, delivering the now 1.5°C climate target and remaining within the other planetary boundaries require us all to accelerate the pace of the transition. We need more companies to build on the progress that was made, push for more and bring sustainable solutions to scale fast.

Sustainability must become an integral part of every company's decision-making and disclosures. A performance picture that incorporates the environmental and social impacts of a company alongside its financial results will guide investors in allocating assets and incentivize more companies to become sustainable. This will ultimately accelerate the shift to a clean, prosperous economy and safeguard the future of our planet.

In 2015, leaders from civil society, business and government made significant commitments that will transform our economies and societies worldwide.

But actions speak louder than words. 2016 must be the year we start delivering and reporting on these commitments. Only then we will be able to build the sustainable world we urgently need and are accountable for.

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