



# Sustainable Development Goals – The Future of Spaceship Earth

Insights from 2016 Sustainable Development Goals Roundtables

# SDGs roundtables

DNV GL hosted a series of Roundtables in London to launch our publication '*Future of Spaceship Earth – the Sustainable Development Goals*', and discuss how companies can meaningfully contribute to progress. The aim of the Roundtables was to examine how the SDGs were an opportunity for business.



## What are companies saying?

- **Opportunity for innovation:** Whilst there are huge challenges, participants were optimistic about the ability of pioneering companies to have a real impact and help create the future humanity wants.
- **Still taking stock:** most companies are mapping or planning their current strategy against the goals.
- **Evolution not revolution:** no-one saw the SDGs leading to a revolution in their strategic approach.
- **Governments are lagging behind:** little evidence of engagement or action yet.
- **All the SDGs are relevant:** the challenge is where to focus.
- **Common vernacular:** a useful common language to engage and collaborate with other companies, governments, NGOs, senior managers, and consumers is needed.

## What next?

- Companies are keen to collaborate further and DNV GL will be launching a series of SDG-focussed workshops to support business in playing its part in delivering the goals.

## Roundtable participants:

- Veolia
- Old Mutual
- Whitbread
- Virgin media
- Marks & Spencer
- Shell
- Unilever
- Siemens
- BP
- John Lewis Partnership
- Wienerberger
- Amec Foster Wheeler
- Tesco
- IPIECA
- Twinings
- Statoil
- Chemical Industries Association
- Economist Intelligence Unit

## A toolkit for internal engagement

A few participants have spoken of a “paralysis”, facing the complexity and multiplicity of the 17 goals and the 169 targets. According to some, the SDGs are still confined to the sustainability space and are not common language in boardrooms and business world. But with SDG reporting now forming part of the Global Compact and a large number of companies already starting to map their activities against them, the movement behind the SDGs is becoming stronger and more difficult to ignore.

### Rather than getting lost in the details, using our toolkit below can help you identify actions that you can take as a sustainability professional to drive engagement throughout the business:

- **Start with your business strategy:** Where does your strategy fit with the goals? Where can you have the most impact? In which areas can you start leveraging the conversation and partnerships needed to move the goals forward?
- **Focus:** Rather than trying to progress all goals, champion one. This will allow your company to use its expertise, and employees to get behind a single cause - perhaps interlinked with their jobs - in which they have the knowledge to start and lead a conversation. More importantly, your company will be able to deepen their involvement on the issue and leverage collaborations key to reaching the goals.
- **Present a business plan and strategy to the board:** A clear focus on one goal linked to the business case will help you make the case for the SDGs and show how they can add value to the business (see the 17 frontier companies in The Future of Spaceship Earth report).
- **Use a language that people know:** Relating the SDGs to materiality and megatrends can help link the topic to conversations people are already having.
- **Drive partnerships and collaborations:** These will be the key of the extraordinary action needed to reach the Goals.
- **Calibrate efforts at a national level:** This is the scale at which the SDGs will be measured.

*DNV GL can help you identify which of the SDGs are most relevant to your operations and where your initiatives could have the greatest impact.*

# Future of Spaceship Earth - Forecasting Progress

As part of our strategic research and innovation programme, DNV GL developed a 'most likely future' forecast of our world based on the likelihood of achieving each of the 17 SDGs by 2030. The report provides 'deep dives' into private sector solutions for attaining the Goals and for each SDG it provides case studies of frontier companies pioneering progress towards the Goals.

- **DNV GL's Future of Spaceship Earth report forecasts that none of the SDGs will be reached in all the regions of the world by 2030**, and none of the regions of the world will meet all of the Goals, **unless extraordinary action is taken**.
- **Progress against the SDGs is not fast enough or fair enough** and at an unacceptable cost to environment. Cue the role of business.
- It is forecast that, by 2040, the accumulated CO2 emissions will have **overshot the carbon budget** – the limit that ensures that global warming will stay lower than 2° C above preindustrial levels



"The red and amber are the #SDGs that will not be met.  
**That's where businesses will have to step in"**

● Goal likely to be reached

● Goal not likely to be reached, but more than 50% of gap is likely closed

● Goal not likely to be reached, and less than 50% of gap is likely closed

	ROW	BRISE	CHINA	OECD	USA
1. No poverty	●	●	●	●	●
2. Zero hunger	●	●	●	●	●
3. Good health and well-being	●	●	●	●	●
4. Quality education	●	●	●	●	●
5. Gender equality	●	●	●	●	●
6. Clean water and sanitation	●	●	●	●	●
7. Affordable and clean energy	●	●	●	●	●
8. Decent work and economic growth	●	●	●	●	●
9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure	●	●	●	●	●
10. Reduced inequality	●	●	●	●	●
11. Sustainable cities and communities	●	●	●	●	●
12. Responsible consumption and production	●	●	●	●	●
13. Climate action	●	●	●	●	●
14. Life below water	●	●	●	●	●
15. Life on land	●	●	●	●	●
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions	●	●	●	●	●
17. Partnerships for the goals	Not enough data to assess				

# Future of Spaceship Earth – Business Frontiers

DNV GL has partnered with 17 frontier companies that have taken bold decisions to act to push their way forward where precedents don't exist, and to show leadership in one or several SDGs.

*"Extraordinary action is not the exclusive domain of the private sector. But what business does best is innovate and lead technological development that can leverage vast, global changes.*

*The private sector delivers nearly 60% of worldwide GDP and reaching the SDGs would be inconceivable without its alignment and support.*

*There is a growing realisation that business cannot succeed sustainably in societies that fail. The corollary is also true: societies striving for sustainability open up many opportunities for the private sector.*

*The rationale for broad engagement with the SDGs by business could not be plainer."*



# Roundtable Discussion: Integrating the SDGs into business strategy

## Will the SDGs be a driver to revise strategy or business as usual?



With the SDGs seen as a 'full expression of what sustainability needs' and a 'common baseline', companies can use the SDGs as a useful tool for reporting, building partnerships and policy making. The SDGs can be used to codify and systemise company footprints, reducing negative impacts and risks and creating new business opportunities.

However, companies with established corporate responsibility frameworks are unlikely to pursue a significant transformation to align with the SDGs, rather using them as a tool to identify gaps in current approaches or inspiration for innovation.

## Are businesses expected to tackle all of the SDGs or select areas where they can have the most impact?



All 17 of the SDGs are interlinked and it is almost impossible to tackle one in isolation from the others. However, in order to generate the most impact, companies can map the SDGs to their core purpose of the business and how business is conducted.

For example, an O&G company can probably generate the most impact on the Affordable and Clean Energy/ Climate Action SDGs, but they can also ensure progress on SDGs such as Gender Equality/ No Poverty by embedding responsible business practices.

## What next?



Companies are taking stock of the SDGs in order to develop meaningful ways to have a positive impact. Most are at the early stages of mapping existing work and capabilities but recognise the need to be innovative to ensure real progress for transformative change that can be scaled up across new markets and regions. Discussions included how we need to learn from the pioneers and early adopters to 'tackle the impossible' and achieve 'creative competition.'

*"Pioneering with the SDGs does not mean doing business and separately addressing the SDG targets. It means addressing the SDGs head-on, as an integral part of a company's business model.*

*There might be enlightened self-interest in using one's own industry-leading innovation to boost education, change the nature of healthcare, or raise the productivity of micro-businesses. But doing this on a wide enough scale means, as some of the firms we feature have discovered, that these engagements start to become brand-defining."*

# Roundtable Discussion: Key challenges and opportunities



## Differentiation under a common framework: What is the business case if all companies are working towards the same goals?

Participants concluded that each company will identify the relevant SDGs to its activities (linking back to their materiality analysis and brand origins). Innovative thinking will support the identification of new opportunities that are meaningful and impactful for their business.



## How do you develop a meaningful contribution to the SDGs and obtain buy-in?

Discussions reflected that the language used by the SDGs needed translation and generally did not appeal to either business leaders or consumers, amongst others. For consumers there was discussion that the assumptions that *'consumers will do the heavy lifting [and pay for solutions] is inaccurate - they want us to have solved the issue back of house... so they can make the right choices...'*

To engage senior leaders, as well as avoid 'sustainability fatigue', companies should focus on their core business purpose to identify new ways to have a positive contribution, leveraging existing initiatives and demonstrating the business case and engaging investors to increase 'blended financing' solutions.



## Can attainment of the SDGs occur without stronger engagement from the UK government, e.g. incentives and targets?

Companies can use industry groups as a tool to collaborate on common objectives within their core business purposes (Goal 17). If strong commitment is demonstrated in the private sector, government is more likely to act. Clearly defined national SDG strategies at government level will also help companies to align their investments with country needs (e.g. developing a water programme instead of an education programme where water stress is a higher priority), and secure improved licence to operate.

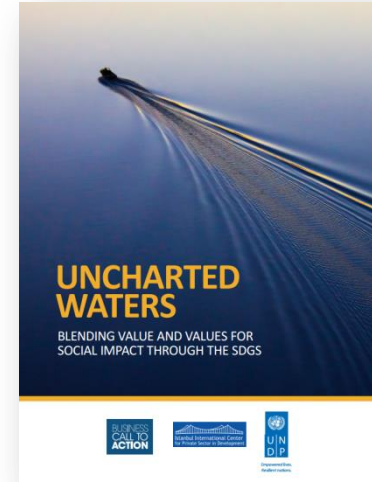
### Comments from participants:

- *"Ultimately we are working towards what benefit comes to the brand..."*
- *"Cities is where the SDGs can have the most meaningful contribution and where they will be won or lost..."*
- *"Investment in clean energy in oil and gas will support Goal 7 - but requires tough discussion on the risks around expectations for secure, cheap energy..."*
- *"The SDGs suffered being launched in same year as climate and have not hit home yet as collective responsibility..."*
- *"Frontier companies don't need to wait for Governments..."*
- *"Maybe we need a SDG scorecard for Governments..."*

# Useful resources



**The Business Call to Action (BCtA)** aims to accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by challenging companies to develop inclusive business models that engage people at the base of the economic pyramid.  
[Measuring Impact: How Business Accelerates the Sustainable Development Goals](#)  
[Uncharted Waters Blending Value and Values for Social Impact through the SDGs](#)



**The SDG Compass:** provides guidance for companies on how they can align their strategies as well as measure and manage their contribution to the realization of the SDGs.  
[SDG Compass](#)



**The SDG Index:** provide a report card for tracking SDG progress and ensuring accountability. The report shows how leaders can deliver on their promise and it urges countries not to lose the momentum for important reforms.  
[SDG Index](#)

**“The Sustainable Development Goals can be seen as THE definition for sustainability.”**

## We concluded...

For leadership in sustainability, we need to acknowledge the systemic global challenges and promote behavioural change beyond incremental initiatives to scalable solutions. Frontier companies will continue to collaborate to identify transformative solutions that create new markets and new value, supported by Governments and wider society.

*"Failure is not an option..."*

### [Future of Spaceship Earth Report](#)

- *"Everyone can apply to turn risk to opportunity..."*
- *The core can kill you... innovation happens at the edges of your business and landscape...*
- *Risk is rescue, use risk as a strategy tool to navigate opportunities behind it..."*

### [2016 Global Opportunities Report](#)

## DNV GL SDG expertise...



The examples of our work on the SDGs are complemented by our research related to the transition to a global sustainable economy discussed at this Roundtable. We use this insight and thought-leadership to build and transform sustainability strategies.

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[www.dnvgl.co.uk](http://www.dnvgl.co.uk)

Build a strategic response to the SDGs:

<https://www.dnvgl.co.uk/assurance/articles/How-the-SDGs-are-changing-corporate-sustainability-reporting.html>.

**Tracy Oates**  
**Director**

Tracy.Oates@dnvgl.com

+44 (0)7725 679615

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