

Paola Diez
MBA,
Strategic Development Expert,
STU Consulting Group,
Spain
stu_diezpaola1@hotmail.com

GLOBAL PROSPECTS IN SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT

Since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, there have been many positive developments. Countries have started to incorporate the Goals into national plans and strategies, and many have set up coordinating structures for coherent implementation. Of the 110 voluntary national reviews submitted during the 2016, 2017 and 2018 sessions of the high-level political forum, 35 mentioned explicit measures to link the Goals to their national budgets or were considering such action. There have also been initiatives aimed at safeguarding the environment, notably regarding climate change, land use and oceans. And important parts of the private sector have begun to move away from business-as-usual models, for example by adopting and reporting on sustainability standards. Meanwhile, the mobilization of civil society and non-governmental organizations in favour of sustainable development is rising.

However, despite the initial efforts, the world is not on track for achieving most of the 169 targets that comprise the Goals. The limited success in progress towards the Goals raises strong concerns and sounds the alarm for the international community. Much more needs to happen – and quickly – to bring about the transformative changes that are required: impeding policies should urgently be reversed or modified, and recent advances that holistically promote the Goals should be scaled up in an accelerated fashion. Adding to the concern is the fact that recent trends along several dimensions with cross-cutting impacts across the entire 2030 Agenda are not even moving in the right direction. Four in particular fall into that category: rising inequalities, climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing amounts of waste from human activity that are overwhelming capacities to process them. Critically, recent analysis suggests that some of those negative trends presage a move towards the crossing of negative tipping points, which would lead to dramatic changes in the conditions of the Earth system in ways that are irreversible on time scales meaningful for society.

Recent assessments show that, under current trends, the world's social and natural biophysical systems cannot support the aspirations for universal human well-being embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals. Just over 10 years remain to achieve the 2030 Agenda, but no country is yet convincingly able to meet a set of basic human needs at a globally sustainable level of resource use. All are distant to varying degrees from the overarching target of balancing human well-being with a healthy environment. Each country must respond to its own conditions and priorities, while breaking away from current practices of growing first and cleaning up later. The universal transformation towards sustainable development in the next decade depends on the simultaneous achievement of country-specific innovative pathways.

New scientific and technological research, as well as the adaptation of existing knowledge and technologies to specific local and regional contexts, are needed to further streamline efforts, maximize synergies between the Goals and pre-emptively accommodate emerging challenges beyond the 2030 horizon.

Economic growth has increased national incomes significantly, albeit unevenly, across countries. While that has contributed to advances in human, social and economic well-being, the effects on human societies and the environment are currently unsustainable. Economic activity should be seen not as an end in itself, but rather as a means for sustainably advancing human capabilities.

Innovative governments, a committed private sector and an active – and often, young and well-educated – citizenry can overcome inequalities and create liveable cities in both developing and developed countries.

References

1. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24797GSDR_report_2019.pdf
2. World Investment Report 2019. UNCTAD.