



Sustainable Development Goals

By Priscilla Haring-Kuipers (The Netherlands)

The United Nations's list of Sustainable Development Goals have been clear since 2015. Will your electronics company be part of the problem or solution as we move forward?

In 2015 the United Nations agreed upon a to-do list for a better future and set the deadline for 2030. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are meant to lead the world to "prosperity for people and planet." All 193 national governments in the UN have pledged to support these 17 actionable goals.

The goals:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. (Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.)
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

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



In 2020, we entered the Decade of Action. Reports of the UN showed that for most goals we were not on track to achieve them in 2030. Then COVID-19 hit and derailed progress further. At the same time, this global health crisis along with recurring extreme weather is driving home the need for these goals to be achieved quickly.

Big power players have written a road map — “Sector Transformation: An SDG Roadmap for Electric Utilities” [2] — for the transformation of the electric utilities sector based on the SDGs. It discusses the decarbonizing of electricity to provide access to modern electricity for all whilst driving net biodiversity gains and doing all this with a diverse and inclusive workforce. There are several examples of actual projects that fit on the map: CLP started a program in Hong Kong to mentor female engineering students (goal 4). Celsia built a large scale solar farm in Colombia at the site of an old coal power plant (goal 7). Tata maintains a program in the Western Ghats in India that aims to conserve endangered species, improve hydro-power lakes, and to generate employment in local villages (goal 15).


The mobile industry has committed to the SDGs, and it claims [3] that by increasing greater connectivity, it increases the impact of all other industries on the entire to-do list (goal 9). Some 1.4 billion mobile subscribers are using their phones for educational purposes (goal 4), while the connectivity and digital solutions that mobile provides reduces energy use in other sectors (goal 13). However, according to their own impact report, the industry is not on track to achieve its intended contribution to the SDGs by 2030. By 2018, they had achieved 41% of total impact.

Foxconn Group takes the SDGs as a plan to achieve sustainable operations and includes them in their yearly Corporate Social Responsibility

Report [4]. Among many other things, they provide industrial learning programs, scholarships and elementary school support (goal 4). They recycled almost 5% of the water they used (goal 6), and built up enough solar power to provide almost 10% of their power consumption on factory sites (goal 7). Foxconn has reduced carbon emissions overall by 24% in 2020 compared to 2015 (goal 13). They have made provisions for equal pay (goal 8) and officially reject exploitative work such as prison labour (goal 16).



We can be part of the solution when we choose to do things differently.

Application and development of technology can be part of how we achieve the SDGs. Think lab grown protein (goal 2), drones dropping medicine in remote areas (goal 3), interactive educational platforms (goal 4), pollution sensors (goal 6) and smart housing (goal 11), or satellite forest tracking (goal 15). But the industry that produces your blinking LEDs also contributes to the problems that these SDGs aim to solve. The mining of raw material is often problematic (goal 1,3,8,9,12), working conditions in the chain are less than ideal (goal 1,3,4,8,10,12,13), and many more considerations need to be made at the beginning (goal 12,16) and the end (goal 9, 6, 13, 14,15) of our electronics. The good news of being part of the problem is that we can be part of the solution when we choose to do things differently. 

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About the Author

Priscilla Haring-Kuipers writes about technology from a social science perspective. She is especially interested in technology supporting the good in humanity and a firm believer in effect research. She has an MSc in Media Psychology and makes This Is Not Rocket Science happen.

WEB LINKS

- [1] United Nations, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” Department of Economic and Social Affairs: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>
- [2] World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), “Sector Transformation: An SDG Roadmap for Electric Utilities,” March 2021: <https://www.wbcsd.org/contentwbc/download/11681/176465/1>
- [3] GSMA, “2019 Mobile Industry Impact Report: Sustainable Development Goals,” 2019: <https://bit.ly/GSMA-2019>
- [4] Foxconn, “Corporate Social Responsibility Report,” 2019: <https://bit.ly/foxconn-2019-report>

