



Sparking a Second-Half Comeback for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

I've spent a lot of time in recent years thinking and writing about the immense planetary challenges we face. But my experiences over the past couple days attending events at the United Nations have been a strong reminder of the interdependence of people and planet, and the equally important social dimensions of sustainable development.

BCG has supported the acceleration of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through a high-impact initiative program and by partnering with many organizations to help them maximize their societal impact. This year marks the midway point of the SDGs, set in 2015 by the international community with the goal of addressing humanity's most fundamental needs and creating a more livable world by 2030.

Today, however, only 15% of the 169 targets that make up the SDGs are on track. That lack of progress is largely driven by the multiple crises of recent years, including the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, financial shocks, and extreme weather events.

Yesterday, I had the great honor of moderating the closing

ceremony of SDG Acceleration Day, alongside UN deputy secretary general (DSG) Amina Mohammed, president of the general assembly Dennis Francis, actor and activist Natalie Portman, and others. It was the culmination of 65 sessions focused on the 17 SDGs and their key enabling capabilities—a day made up of honest dialogue about our shortfalls and the need to do more.

But it was also truly inspirational, with substantial commitments to action, a sense of urgency, and broad societal engagement, including hundreds of young people alongside leaders from government, business, and NGOs. As DSG Mohammed put it, “I think this next seven years will be the game won in the second half.”

The Unique Potential for Business to Effect Change

The SDGs are ambitious for sure, but they’re not impossible to achieve. They do, however, require taking action at scale—as outlined in [my colleagues’ call for optimism](#)—and leveraging critical tools, such as [digital technologies](#).

Participants in the multilateral ecosystem will also need to step up, with business playing a central role. The private sector can drive immense impact by bringing scale, speed, and agility to reaching the SDGs. It has a critical part to play in areas such as transforming food systems, speeding up the energy transition, building economic development and jobs, delivering more equitable health care, and generally lifting people out of poverty.

Acting on that unique power is a moral imperative, but it’s also in the near- and long-term best interest of businesses. If we foster social stability, equity, education, and a net zero economy, economic growth will bloom. What’s more, when these efforts reinforce the core business of an organization, they can drive both strategic advantage and positive societal impact in the short term. [Our research](#) finds that businesses are more effective, are more profitable, and grow faster when pursuing sustainable advantage.

Business leaders can play a critical role in advancing the 2030 agenda while winning in their own arenas by focusing on the following:

- **Play big where you matter most.** Identify where you can drive material change while fortifying overall business strategy and corporate purpose. Aligning the potential for positive impact with competitiveness can require

reimagining your business model—and radically rethinking opportunities for new growth.

Some companies have enormous supply chains, and intentional adjustments can greatly reduce emissions, for example, or improve the lives of millions of small business owners. When companies have huge organizational footprints, they have the power to create jobs, improve health, and have a direct impact on people's lives in many other ways.

- **Partner for impact.** Multistakeholder partnerships and coalitions, including pre-competitive partnerships and joint efforts with NGOs and the public sector, can accelerate policy change and innovation. True change depends on collaboration at all levels.

For example, a global transition to regenerative agriculture requires the collaboration of governments, investors, private sector agronomists, and others to support farmers.

The annual UNGA week in New York is traditionally the largest forum for the international community to discuss the SDGs, with heads of state convening with leaders from across the private, public, and social sectors. I'm so pleased that BCG is playing a major role at UNGA this year, offering our deep expertise to help move the needle on SDG progress, as well as serving as a corporate partner at Climate Week NYC, which is run in coordination with the UN.

Now at the midway point of the goals, this year's event feels particularly pivotal—a moment to get things right and head toward a more prosperous and sustainable future for everyone.

Until next time,
Rich

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Rich", with a stylized, cursive script.

Rich Lesser
Global Chair

Further Reading



[SDG Digital Acceleration Agenda](#)

Innovations in digital technology have the potential to increase financial inclusion and the effectiveness of government and public service delivery, transforming countries, communities, economies, and societies.

[READ MORE](#)



[Will a Green Skills Gap of 7 Million Workers Put Climate Goals at Risk?](#)

New research from BCG shows that public and private sector leaders must take urgent action to address the green skills gap to advance decarbonization.

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[The UN's Sustainable Development Goals Are Not Out of Reach](#)

Prospects for achieving the SDGs by 2030 look dim. But innovation, technology, and creativity can turn the tide.

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