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MAJOR GROUP



# HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2025



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# Introduction



Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires shared responsibility, international cooperation, and collective action. Yet, rising nationalism, geopolitical tensions, and weakened multilateralism have weakened the spirit of collaboration and international law, hindering efforts to address urgent challenges—poverty, inequality, conflict, and the triple planetary crises. Incremental progress no longer suffices; bold and inclusive action is needed now to protect nature and ensure no one is left behind, even with constrained funding. All governments and stakeholders must act in a spirit of global citizenship to ensure no one is left behind.

In these final five years of the 2030 Agenda, the NGO Major Group urges Member States and stakeholders to intensify efforts and accelerate progress toward the SDGs. In partnership, we present the following recommendations for each SDG under review at the 2025 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF):

- **SDG 3:** Adopt an environmentally and socially just “One Health” approach that recognizes the interdependence of human, animal, plant, and planetary well-being. Prioritize primary prevention, promote maternal and child health; ensure nurturing environments; promote healthy, plant-forward diets; invest in animal health systems, and provide comprehensive healthcare for all, including marginalized groups.
- **SDG 5:** Women and girls still face discrimination, violence, and limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. Addressing these issues requires sustained policy reform, increased funding, and gender-focused initiatives that account for intersectionality and the needs of marginalized groups.
- **SDG 8:** Economic inequalities persist. Member States, including businesses and nonbusiness entities, must ensure that all workers, particularly those in informal sectors, have access to fair wages, social protection, and safe working conditions, thereby fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.
- **SDG 14:** Strengthen international cooperation and enforcement to conserve and ensure sustainable and resilient marine environments and protect animal and plant life under water. Close research gaps, share data, address bycatch and support animal health and welfare standards in aquaculture and fisheries, and expand marine protected areas to 30% by 2030.
- **SDG 17:** Revitalized partnerships are essential to accelerate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, ensuring a unified and multidimensional global effort and development for all, in line with common but differentiated responsibilities.

At the 2025 HLPF, we urge Member States to reaffirm their commitment to the 2030 Agenda, keeping the SDGs central to cooperation, policy, and financing. Failure to fulfill these commitments will have profound, far-reaching and interconnected consequences impacting generations to come. Further, insufficient support for civil society weakens services, stifles innovation, and jeopardizes Agenda 2030.

Therefore, we call on Member States to:

- Ensure full and meaningful inclusion of civil society,
- Deliver on concrete commitments to fully finance the SDGs,
- Reaffirm and strengthen multilateralism,
- Commit to meaningful and equitable reform of multilateral institutions, and
- Address structural and systemic inequalities.

# 3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



## 3 good health and wellbeing



### What progress has been made?

As with many of the Sustainable Development Goals, SDG 3 has experienced significant setbacks due to the COVID-19 pandemic and intersecting crises including armed conflict, climate change, rising pollution, and systemic inequities in health systems. The 2024 SDG Report indicates that progress in key areas like maternal mortality, premature deaths, and access to universal health coverage (UHC) has slowed or reversed.

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes, had already become the leading causes of death before the pandemic. In 2021, NCDs accounted for 65% of global mortality, underscoring an urgent need for action. The pandemic also highlighted the inadequacy of global mental health systems, the fragility of healthcare infrastructure, and the underinvestment in primary prevention strategies for both communicable and noncommunicable diseases.

Compounding these challenges are structural injustices and data gaps that obscure the true extent of inequalities in healthcare access and outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups.



### How should governments implement this SDG and related targets?

A rights-based and systems-level approach is critical to achieve SDG 3. As with OHCHR's framework for human rights indicators, implementation must attend to structures, processes, and outcomes. Governments should embed health into all policies—education, labor, housing, food systems—rather than treating it in isolation.

#### Universal Health Coverage and Equity

UHC is a cornerstone of SDG 3. According to WHO, around 4.5 billion people lacked full access to essential health services in 2021. However, aggregate statistics often mask underlying inequalities. Wealthier, urban, and more educated populations usually experience greater access to care, while rural and underserved populations lag behind. These disparities are particularly pronounced in lower-income countries. Governments must map health inequalities using disaggregated data, focus interventions on underserved communities, including Indigenous Peoples, migrants, refugees, and persons with disabilities, and ensure that improvements in healthcare statistics reflect real-world equity.

#### Community Health and Workforce Support

National health systems should adopt WHO guidelines on community health worker programs, ensuring that technical and normative support reaches local levels. These strategies should align with the [Thirteenth General Programme of Work \(2019–2023\)](#), supporting primary health care, patient safety, and broader public health priorities.

## 3 good health and wellbeing

### **Mental Health Integration**

Mental health must be fully integrated across sectors and policy frameworks—not siloed within clinical health care alone. Mental well-being should be supported through preventive, promotive, and therapeutic services across the entire life course.

This includes embedding mental health policies into all aspects of governance, such as education, employment, housing, urban planning, and climate adaptation. Research and action on mental health should be incorporated into these systems to ensure holistic, inclusive support—especially in times of crisis.

### **Adopting a socially and ecologically just One Health approach**

The One Health framework recognizes that human, animal, and environmental health are interconnected. A just approach to One Health should address the triple global crises—climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution—by focusing on upstream prevention.

Governments should prevent future pandemics by addressing root causes such as land-use change and animal exploitation; recognize that health is shaped by legal, political, and economic systems, not just biological factors; move away from wildlife exploitation and industrial animal agriculture, which elevate the risks of zoonotic disease and antimicrobial resistance; invest in animal health systems as a core pillar of One Health, including improved access to veterinary care, diagnostics, and medicines; enhance training and employment for animal health workers to build capacity for early detection and prevention; and support the transition away from industrial farming systems that drive environmental degradation and zoonotic risks.

### **Addressing the social and environmental factors that influence premature deaths**

Lastly, the majority of premature deaths are linked to lifestyle, dietary, and environmental conditions—also known as behavioral causes of death. Rising global consumption of animal products contributes to heart disease, diabetes, and other NCDs. At the same time, industrial animal farming generates pollution and increases disease exposure for marginalized communities, including pregnant people and children.

Governments must support a shift toward plant-based diets in alignment with WHO guidance, reform food environments to enable healthier consumer choices, and redirect public subsidies from industrial agriculture toward sustainable and healthy diets

This shift must be holistic—addressing the full supply chain from production to consumption—to reduce the strain on overburdened health systems. Efforts should be based on independent, science-driven recommendations and shielded from corporate influence. Expanding public nutrition education and investing in school food programs are critical steps.

## 3 good health and wellbeing



### What structural obstacles hinder the implementation of this SDG (at local, national, regional, and/or global levels)?

Key barriers include:

- **Structural inequities** and entrenched social disparities.
- **Violations of human rights** and legal frameworks that exclude marginalized populations.
- **GDP-centered economics**, rather than holistic well-being frameworks.
- **Insufficient workforce development**, especially in women-led sectors.
- **Geopolitical instability** and ongoing global conflicts.
- **Lack of political will**, corruption, and conflicts of interest.
- **Under-resourced transitions** from pediatric to adult health care.
- **Neglect of health systems** for both humans and animals.
- **Expansion of industrial animal farming and wildlife exploitation.**
- **Inadequate health financing**, particularly in the Global South.
- **Lack of cross-sector coherence**, resulting in policy silos.
- **Weak gender mainstreaming** in health strategies.
- **Failure to regulate business accountability** in occupational health and safety.



### What role can civil society play in achieving this SDG?

Civil society is vital to:

- Educate communities and raise awareness.
- Conduct research and pilot innovative solutions.
- Provide direct services, especially to underserved populations.
- Monitor and report progress on SDG 3.
- Advocate for policy change and systemic reform.

CSOs often fill gaps in services where governments fall short and ensure that health interventions address the social and environmental determinants of health. Their role is particularly important in representing marginalized groups such as women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, older adults, and persons with disabilities. For example, eye health programs developed by ILO/IAPB demonstrate civil society's capacity to integrate health into labor protections.

## 3 good health and wellbeing



### How does this SDG support or connect with other goals in the 2030 Agenda? With specific targets of other international frameworks?

SDG 3 is interconnected with all other SDGs. For example:

- **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** Poor health is both a cause and a consequence of poverty.
- **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** Food systems and nutrition are foundational to good health.
- **SDG 4 (Quality Education):** Health affects school attendance and performance.
- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** Health services must meet gender-specific needs.
- **SDG 6 (Clean Water):** Essential to infection prevention and hygiene.
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Climate impacts air quality, disease transmission, and mental health.
- **SDGs 14 & 15:** Ecosystem exploitation and disruption increases zoonotic risks.
- **SDG 17 (Partnerships):** Multisectoral collaboration is essential to achieving SDG 3.

Without good health, people cannot fully engage in education, work, or civic life. The SDGs are deeply interdependent, and SDG 3 is foundational for the realization of human potential.



### Are there emerging issues related to this SDG that should be noted?

Several pressing issues are reshaping the global health landscape:

- **Antimicrobial resistance (AMR):** Predicted to cost over \$1 trillion and cause 10 million deaths annually by 2050.
- **Zoonotic diseases:** 75% of emerging infectious diseases originate in animals, worsened by habitat disruption.
- **Barriers to healthcare access:** Particularly for people with disabilities and those in remote or conflict-affected areas.
- **Widening inequalities** in access to lifesaving interventions like medications, vaccines, and surgeries.
- **Inaccessibility of assistive technologies,** such as pediatric wheelchairs or communication devices.
- **Mental health inequity,** especially in zones of displacement and violence.
- **Telemedicine exclusion,** especially for those lacking digital literacy or infrastructure.
- **Climate change impacts,** including extreme weather, air pollution, and vector-borne disease, which intersect with public and worker health risks.

These complex issues demand coordinated, cross-sectoral, and equity-centered strategies that address both immediate needs and systemic causes.

## 3 good health and wellbeing



### **Case study: ‘The case for investing in animal health to support One Health in Ethiopia’**

Ethiopia relies heavily on livestock for livelihoods, yet faces significant barriers due to weak veterinary services and frequent disease outbreaks. The case study demonstrates how investment in animal health, under a One Health approach, helps prevent zoonotic spillovers and contributes to broader development goals.

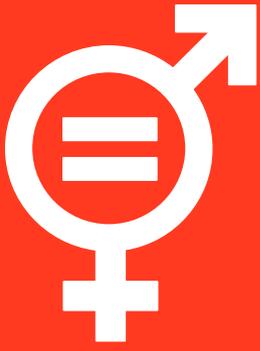
Key outcomes include:

- Expansion of community-based veterinary services.
- Improved access to medicines and vaccines.
- Stronger surveillance and workforce training.
- 

This model shows how strengthening animal health systems not only benefits public health, but also improves economic stability, resilience, and sustainability in vulnerable communities.

Read the full case study [here](#).

# 5 GENDER EQUALITY



## 5 gender equality



### What progress has been made?

No country has achieved gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, CEDAW, and the SDGs all reaffirm that sustainable development is only possible when women and men benefit equally. However, despite decades of commitments, progress on SDG 5 remains unacceptably slow.

While there have been modest improvements in poverty rates for women and girls, projections suggest that at the current pace, millions will remain in extreme poverty for another 137 years. Gender inequality persists across all dimensions—economic, political, social, and environmental—with women often living longer but with less income and support in older age.

Alarming, 2023 saw intensified pushback against gender equality. There has been a resurgence in regressive policies, including setbacks to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and an increase in gender-based violence (GBV). In conflict settings, the proportion of women killed doubled, and verified instances of conflict-related sexual violence rose by 50%. Simultaneously, women’s rights organizations (WROs) face a crisis in sustainability: half anticipate closure within six months due to funding cuts.



### How should governments implement this SDG and related targets?

#### A Human Rights and Intersectional Approach

Governments must treat women’s rights as human rights, ensuring full protection under international and domestic law. An intersectional approach is essential, acknowledging the specific needs and agency of all women and girls—including those facing compounding forms of discrimination based on age, disability, race, ethnicity, or migration status.

#### Local Leadership and Funding for Grassroots Feminist Movements

Direct and reliable funding for grassroots feminist and women-led organizations (WLOs) is critical. These organizations are best positioned to implement locally relevant, rights-based solutions. Leadership by women from the most affected communities must be prioritized in decision-making and program design.

#### Ensuring SRHR and Peace as Core Priorities

Sexual and reproductive health and rights must be treated as life-saving humanitarian and development priorities, not optional services. Equally, gender equality must be central to peace and security strategies. Conflict-related sexual violence requires the same level of investigation, prosecution, and support services as other war crimes.

#### Gender Sensitization Across Systems

Governments should embed gender sensitization training across all institutions—health, education, legal, political, and economic—and invest in changing societal attitudes through public education campaigns.



### What structural obstacles hinder the implementation of this SDG (at local, national, regional, and/or global levels)?

Systemic barriers persist at every level:

- **Individual:** Limited access to education, digital tools, and decision-making restricts women's knowledge and agency.
- **Interpersonal:** Discriminatory gender roles and violence continue to shape women's lived realities.
- **Institutional:** Health systems, legal frameworks, and education structures often exclude women from leadership and fail to provide inclusive services.
- **Community:** Harmful social norms intersect with racism, ageism, classism, and ableism, compounding disadvantage.
- **Policy Environment:** Lack of sex- and age-disaggregated data and underrepresentation of women in policy development render many policies unresponsive to women's specific needs.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Limited investment in women's leadership, especially among girls and young women, hinders sustainable change.



### What role can civil society play in achieving this SDG?

Civil society plays a transformative role as:

- **Advocates:** Amplifying the voices of marginalized women and girls and holding governments accountable.
- **Service Providers:** Delivering health, education, legal, and psychosocial services where the state falls short.
- **Watchdogs:** Monitoring progress, collecting data, and challenging regressive policies.
- **Change Makers:** Promoting feminist values, economic justice, and inclusive governance.

Civil society also fosters cross-sector collaboration and strengthens democratic processes by engaging the full diversity of women's experiences in all aspects of sustainable development.

## 5 gender equality



### How does this SDG support or connect with other goals in the 2030 Agenda? With specific targets of other international frameworks?

Gender equality is foundational to the entire 2030 Agenda:

- **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** Gender-based economic inequality limits poverty reduction efforts.
- **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being):** Women's health, including SRHR, is essential for overall development.
- **SDG 4 (Quality Education):** Gender equality in education leads to broader empowerment.
- **SDG 8 (Decent Work):** Women's economic inclusion boosts national economies.
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Women's environmental leadership strengthens climate resilience.
- **SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions):** Gender-equal societies are more peaceful and stable.

Cuts to aid and development funding, particularly from donor countries like the UK, USA, and Netherlands, threaten gender progress across multiple goals. Recognition of women's unpaid care work, their role in food systems, and their protection from violence must be integral to all policy responses.



### Are there emerging issues related to this SDG that should be noted?

Emerging threats to gender equality include:

- **Climate Change:** Women and girls in the Global South—despite contributing least to emissions—bear the brunt of climate-induced displacement, food insecurity, and gender-based violence.
- **Digitalization and AI:** These technologies risk amplifying gender bias, digital surveillance, and the online recruitment of trafficking victims.
- **Online Misogyny:** The proliferation of misogynistic ideologies on social media, particularly targeting boys and young men, is a growing concern.



## Case Study: Gender-Just Climate Action in the UK

This case study highlights how UK climate action must integrate gender justice by funding women-led organisations, supporting female leadership in climate decisions, and embedding gender equality across green transition strategies. Despite commitments, UK progress remains slow, with less than 1% of climate finance reaching gender-specific initiatives.

Read the full case study [here](#).



## Case Study: Women’s Eye Health and Violations of Women’s Privacy, Dignity and Rights

Women with blindness or vision impairment often face systemic barriers in accessing healthcare with autonomy and dignity. In clinical settings, they are frequently accompanied by others, compromising confidentiality. Healthcare providers may communicate indirectly or provide inaccessible materials, excluding women from informed decision-making.

These issues are particularly acute during sensitive appointments, including sexual and reproductive health services. Beyond healthcare, such violations extend into broader systems, including justice and social protection, compounding the marginalization of women with disabilities.

Older women, too, face discriminatory assumptions about aging. Health issues such as cataracts are frequently neglected, framed as inevitable rather than treatable, further limiting their access to adequate care.

*“We like to take decisions for them instead of including them in decision-making places.”*

– Besma Essoussi, Association IBSAR, Tunisia

*“Women with blindness often go to the doctor with someone they don’t want to go with. A lot of their rights are violated.”*

– Verónica Carolina González, Red por los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad, Argentina

Read more [here](#).

# 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH





### What progress has been made?

Despite global commitments, no country has fully achieved SDG 8. Economic growth continues in many regions, but it is often decoupled from decent work and labor rights protections. Governments have largely failed to integrate SDG 8 into coherent national policies or align domestic legislation with international labor standards, notably ILO Conventions.

Key issues include:

- **Unemployment and Underemployment:** Job creation lags behind productivity and population growth.
- **Informality:** Over 2 billion people remain in informal or precarious employment, lacking social protection and fair wages.
- **Gender and Age Disparities:** Women, youth, and older persons face systemic barriers in labor markets, exacerbated by care responsibilities and discrimination.
- **Exploitation and Unsafe Conditions:** Modern slavery, unsafe work environments, and weak enforcement of labor laws persist, particularly in the Global South.
- **Youth Employment Crisis:** Mismatched skills and labor market demands push youth into unemployment or migration.
- **Occupational Safety:** Over 3 million people die annually due to work-related accidents and diseases. Yet, few countries have ratified ILO conventions C155 and C187.
- **Migrant and Platform Workers:** These groups are especially vulnerable to abuse, lacking legal protections and recognition.



### How should governments implement this SDG and related targets?

#### A Rights-Based and Inclusive Economic Approach

Governments must treat decent work as a fundamental human right, grounded in the ILO Decent Work Agenda. Implementation must center the needs of marginalized workers, particularly women, migrants, and informal workers.

#### Policy and Legal Alignment

Countries should ratify and implement core ILO conventions, including C155 and C187; align national labor laws with the Decent Work Agenda and SDG 8 targets; and ensure coherence between labor, economic, and social protection policies.

## 8 decent work and economic growth

### Transformative Economic Policies

In order to support job creation, governments must invest in green, digital, and care economies. It is also important to protect labor rights by enforcing fair wages, collective bargaining, social protections, and safe workplaces. Governments can support micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by providing financing, training, and legal support. Lastly, governments should ensure coverage for all workers, including informal and gig workers.

### Sustainable and Inclusive Growth

In order to promote responsible industrialization, governments should encourage the development of fair trade practices and eco-tourism. Governments should also foster inclusive infrastructure, digital access, and innovation to increase productivity and resilience.



### What structural obstacles hinder the implementation of this SDG (at local, national, regional, and/or global levels)?

Systemic and multi-level barriers prevent progress on SDG 8:

- **Individual:** Limited access to education, training, and secure employment.
- **Discrimination:** Gender norms, ageism, and caregiving expectations constrain workforce participation. It is estimated that 42% of workforces at national levels are female workers, who are subject to disparities in gaining equal remuneration due to traditional discriminatory practices and caregiving responsibilities that aggravate access to development for families worldwide; this is further exacerbated for indigenous people and older persons
- **Institutional:** Weak labor law enforcement, lack of ratified conventions, and insufficient occupational health systems. In many countries, the power structure and collusion between private sector and government hinders the application of new economic sustainable development strategies and wealth distribution and is exacerbated with the lack of fulfillment of International Labor Standards and obligations of human rights and businesses.
- **Community:** Discriminatory attitudes toward women, migrants, and older workers.
- **Policy Environment:** Collusion between government and private sector actors, lack of political will, and poor data disaggregation.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Inadequate investment in public labor systems, skills development, and social audits.



### What role can civil society play in achieving this SDG?

Civil society is essential in driving SDG 8 forward through:

- **Advocacy:** Campaigning for ratification and implementation of labor rights conventions.
- **Accountability:** Monitoring violations, conducting social audits, and demanding transparency in public spending.
- **Empowerment:** Educating workers about their rights and facilitating access to justice.
- **Dialogue:** Supporting thematic platforms for negotiation and inclusive policy-making.

CSOs are uniquely positioned to amplify marginalized voices and promote labor justice rooted in human dignity and sustainability.



### How does this SDG support or connect with other goals in the 2030 Agenda? With specific targets of other international frameworks?

SDG 8 intersects with numerous SDGs:

- **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** Decent work lifts people out of poverty.
- **SDG 3 (Health):** Safe work environments reduce occupational diseases.
- **SDG 4 (Education):** Skill development enhances job readiness.
- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** Equal pay and recognition of unpaid care work are integral.
- **SDG 9 (Industry & Innovation):** Sustainable industrialization creates quality jobs.
- **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities):** Promotes inclusive labor markets.
- **SDG 12 (Sustainable Production):** Drives green jobs and circular economy.
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Green industries contribute to climate resilience.
- **SDG 16 (Strong Institutions):** Transparent labor systems reduce corruption.
- **SDG 17 (Partnerships):** Multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential for sustainable employment.

SDG 8 is also aligned with the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the Paris Agreement's call for a just transition.

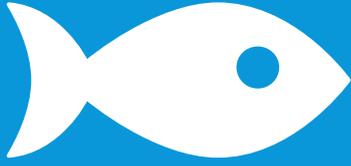


## Are there emerging issues related to this SDG that should be noted?

Are there emerging issues related to this SDG that should be noted?

- **Trade Conflicts:** U.S. tariffs impact over 50% of global trade, threatening job growth.
- **Climate Disruption:** Climate change is already displacing workers and reshaping entire industries.
- **Gig Economy Risks:** Platforms like Uber and Fiverr operate in legal gray zones, often sidestepping labor protections.
- **Technological Displacement:** AI and automation risk widening inequality without social safety nets.
- **Labor Migration and Exploitation:** Women and undocumented migrants remain among the most exploited.

# 14 LIFE BELOW WATER





### What progress has been made?

Oceans, covering over 70% of the Earth's surface, are vital to planetary and human well-being—yet SDG 14 remains one of the least funded and least implemented goals. Despite frameworks like the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), challenges remain acute.

Key gaps and regressions include:

- Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to escalate, eroding marine ecosystems and local livelihoods.
- Artisanal and small-scale fishers face displacement by industrial fleets violating territorial waters.
- Marine pollution from plastic and sewage runoff causes lasting damage, with minimal progress on mitigation.
- Ocean acidification and climate impacts are rising, threatening biodiversity and carbon sequestration.
- Weak policy enforcement and inadequate funding undermine the implementation of marine protections.

While initiatives like the UN Ocean Decade and the upcoming UN Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice present opportunities, transformative change has yet to materialize at national and local levels.



### How should governments implement this SDG and related targets?

#### **Strengthen Marine Protection and Governance**

Governments must invest more financial and human resources to maintain and grow the number of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around the world, and in marine research to find/empower sustainable solutions for contributing to stronger biodiversity conservation efforts.

#### **Translate international frameworks to the local level**

We encourage Member States to bridge/translate international commitments (such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) into actionable national and local policies. Marine conservation instruments must be incorporated into national plans as a priority, resulting in real policies with budgets, human resources, and everything needed to advance significantly.

#### **Collaboration on research and data**

We urge governments to collaborate with other Member States, NGOs, and other stakeholders to cooperate in research and data collection on ocean conservation and health, as well as the implementation of projects at the local level, and to share best practices. As regards pollution, governments enforce strict laws limiting disposable of polythene & plastic and illegal fishing methods. Governments should also support the development of health and welfare standards for aquatic life and implement these at the national level.

## 14 life below water

### Governance

Governments should establish Fishing Commissions to monitor which sustainable use of ocean products, creating jobs for youth and women, increasing capacities of coastal communities to manage and prevent pollution and plastic waste and contribute to the livelihoods of those communities.

More resources should be targeted to support the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This Convention should make it easier for Civil Society to be accredited and should also work with governments to establish a Fishing Commission to effectively assist attain Goal 14 and Climate change challenges.



### What structural obstacles hinder the implementation of this SDG (at local, national, regional, and/or global levels)?

Implementation is hindered by:

- **Funding Gaps:** Ocean conservation receives disproportionately low investment compared to other sectors.
- **Policy Fragmentation:** Disconnected mandates between environment, fisheries, and development sectors weaken coherence.
- **Security Prioritization:** Marine biodiversity is sidelined in favor of geopolitical and military concerns.
- **Invisibility of Ocean Ecosystem Services:** Critical contributions to carbon storage and climate regulation remain unrecognized in national budgets and global models.



### What role can civil society play in achieving this SDG?

Civil society plays a critical role as:

- **Connectors:** Bridging global policy goals with local realities and lived experiences, as well as fostering collaboration between academia, policymakers, industry, and civil society.
- **Advocates:** Raising awareness, mobilizing communities, and shaping ocean literacy.
- **Accountability Actors:** Monitoring compliance, exposing harmful practices, and upholding the rights of coastal peoples.
- **Knowledge Brokers:** Using historical, cultural, and ecological knowledge to co-create sustainable marine policies.

Cross-sector collaboration is essential. Civil society must be integrated into every level of decision-making—from international negotiations to local marine resource planning.

## 14 life below water



### How does this SDG support or connect with other goals in the 2030 Agenda? With specific targets of other international frameworks?

SDG 14 is deeply interconnected with multiple SDGs:

- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Wild animals play an essential but often overlooked role through their ecological functions, such as carbon sequestration. Many species, including fish and sea otters, enhance carbon sequestration in marine and terrestrial ecosystems. For example, kelp forests with sea otters capture up to 12 times more carbon than those without. Mesopelagic fish account for an estimated 16% of the total carbon sinking below the ocean's upper layers, supporting long-term oceanic carbon storage. Protecting these species and their habitats strengthens progress towards both biodiversity and climate goals.
- **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 1 (No Poverty):** Oceans provide food and livelihoods for over 3 billion people.
- **SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption):** Reforms in fishing practices and waste management are vital for ecosystem health. Carbon sequestration benefits cannot be fully realized unless food systems evolve to prevent further environmental degradation, particularly the expansion of industrial animal agriculture and destructive fishing practices. Overfishing and indiscriminate fishing practices deplete fish populations, disrupt marine food webs, release stored carbon back into the water column, and reduce the ocean's ability to sequester carbon. Rebuilding fish populations could contribute significantly to oceanic carbon storage.
- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality):** Women in coastal communities are key stewards of marine resources, yet are often excluded from fisheries governance.

However, industrial fishing and extractive economies undermine these connections, depleting fish stocks, releasing stored carbon, and damaging ocean-based livelihoods.



### Are there emerging issues related to this SDG that should be noted?

#### **Ocean Acidification and Climate Risk**

Oceans absorb approximately a quarter of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This leads to acidification, which threatens marine species and weakens the ocean's capacity to moderate climate impacts. Whales, for instance, play a critical role in nutrient cycling and carbon sequestration, making their protection vital to planetary health.

#### **Deep-Sea Mining**

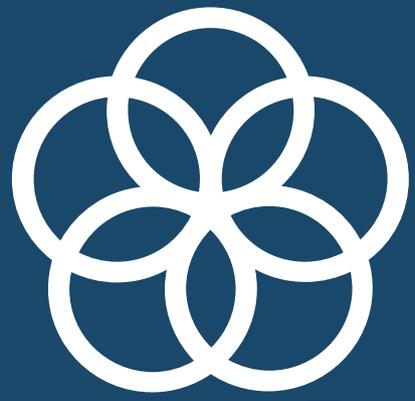
This emerging industry poses unprecedented risks to biodiversity, as it destroys unique deep-sea habitats and jeopardizes species yet to be discovered. Immediate regulation or moratoria are needed to prevent irreversible ecological loss.



**Case study: ‘Knowledge Brokering’: Key to successful development of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)**

The IUCN and OCTO's SEA Success initiative in Thailand and Bangladesh demonstrated that "knowledge brokering" – facilitating tailored, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange – enhances Marine Protected Area (MPA) management. By addressing site-specific challenges through expert mentoring and targeted support, the project improved conservation outcomes and established a scalable model for global MPA effectiveness.

# 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS





### What progress has been made?

While partnerships remain central to the 2030 Agenda, progress on SDG 17 is alarmingly off track. According to the [2023 SDG Progress Chart](#), only a handful of targets under SDG 17 are on track (notably 17.6, 17.8, and 17.10), with most experiencing stagnation or regression.

- **Official Development Assistance (ODA)** remains well below the longstanding 0.7% of GNI target, and many donors are cutting funding altogether.
- **The termination of 83% of USAID programs** and reduced U.S. engagement in multilateral frameworks has created a vacuum in global development and humanitarian financing.
- **Geopolitical tensions** and rising nationalism are further weakening global cooperation.
- SDG 17.17, focused on multi-stakeholder partnerships, lacks adequate metrics and meaningful implementation mechanisms.

This backsliding threatens the entire SDG framework, especially as SDG 17 underpins financing, cooperation, and accountability mechanisms essential for every other goal.



### How should governments implement this SDG and related targets?

Partnerships are at the heart of delivery of the entire 2030 Agenda. In order to deliver the SDGs, there is an opportunity for a joint approach that brings together broad engagement across the whole of society. By establishing a partnership approach to delivery, there is the possibility of unlocking wide support and identifying additional resources from a range of partners alongside Member States.

Governments should strengthen intergovernmental cooperation for mutual benefit, by using international law and well established multilateral mechanisms and organizations as a means to continue to engage in dialogue, while also engaging non-traditional donors in a cooperative, rather than competitive, approach.

Member States should also continue to strengthen multilateral institutions and cooperation frameworks to better represent countries, particularly from the Global South, to increase their legitimacy and effectiveness.

Furthermore, when considering wider partnerships, governments should maximise the opportunity to learn from additional expertise and resource of different partners including civil society organisations, researchers and the private sector to build effective knowledge and capability from different parts of society.

## 17 Partnership for the Goals

- **Nationalism:** The current rise of nationalist and protectionist policies among Member States can be attributed to several interconnected root causes, many of which have been exacerbated by recent global crises. Nonetheless, this trend is increasing worldwide, having significant consequences for development financing and creating new additional challenges for global economic cooperation, particularly in favor of the SDGs. Therefore, countries are prioritizing domestic spending over foreign aid, leading to cuts in contributions to international organizations.
- **Protectionism:** Protectionist trade policies, such as the increased tariff schemes we currently witness, disrupt global chains, making it harder for developing countries to access the international market. This strategy also includes discouraging cross-border investments and limiting capital flows to developing economies. However, despite these challenges, institutional innovation, resource mobilization diversity, strategic trade deals, and diplomatic engagement can help mitigate the impact of these trends.
- **Financing:** Member States, particularly from the Global South, who are the most affected by cutting development and humanitarian financing, should find alternative cooperative ways to address challenges, in cooperation with the private sector and other entities, that build an infrastructure that aligns with both profit and sustainable development. In addition, donors and national governments must prioritize predictable, direct, and flexible financing to local governments and civil society. We advocate for decentralized, context-responsive financing models, as highlighted in its Local Power initiative. Long-term, unrestricted support is essential for empowering grassroots CSOs, social movements, and informal civic actors.
- **Policy:** Member States should push for key regional or multilateral agreements to bypass protectionist barriers, including support for developing nations to integrate resilient, multi-country supply chains while ensuring global trade rules are respected. Members States should also opt for allowing debt relief in exchange for climate or conservation investments while exploring decentralized finance for remittances and microfinancing in unstable economies.



### What structural obstacles hinder the implementation of this SDG (at local, national, regional, and/or global levels)?

#### Financing Gap

With developing countries facing a \$4.3 trillion annual financing gap for sustainable development, including a \$1.8 trillion for climate needs (according to recent data by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), the global financial system is failing to meet the challenges of escalating debt, systemic inequalities, and the consequences of a triple planetary crisis. The problem is exacerbated by the announced termination of 83% of USAID programs worldwide, whose consequences are still yet to be fully determined but place a significant global challenge to pushing the SDGs forward, particularly around issues such as gender equality, fighting HIV/AIDS, climate justice, and others.

## 17 Partnership for the Goals

### **Nationalism and Protectionism**

The current trends around nationalism and protectionism are also causing Member States to withdraw political support and funding from leading development agencies, particularly the United Nations. Recently, a presidential order withdrew the United States from certain United Nations organizations deemed contrary to American interests or accused of promoting anti-American and anti-Semitic ideologies. The decree ended US participation in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), prohibiting future funding of the UN Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA), and mandated a 90-day examination of US membership of UNESCO. A review of international organizations receiving U.S. funding is being carried out to identify those deemed harmful to U.S. interests and to assess a possible withdrawal, significantly undermining multilateralism.

The United States also announced that it rejected and denounced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs during a vote at the United Nations General Assembly on March 4. During the vote, the United States also expressed its opposition to several resolutions, highlighting its desire to distance itself from international initiatives that reference the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), which the US administration seeks to eliminate. This is unfortunately having an impact on the attitude of other Member States to continue with their commitments towards the SDGs.

### **Increased Humanitarian Needs**

This year, the [2025 Global Humanitarian Overview](#) reported unprecedented humanitarian needs: \$47 billion is required to assist 190 million people across 72 countries. A potential reduction in U.S. humanitarian aid—the world's largest donor—raises concerns among humanitarian organizations.

### **Geopolitical Tensions**

Geopolitical tensions, particularly among major economies, are disrupting global supply chains and technology transfers. The US administration's "America First" stance has strained relationships with traditional allies, particularly affecting the world's poorest economies. The administration's policies are likely to constrain global sustainable development financing by reducing multilateral commitments, favoring fossil fuel investments, and shifting toward bilateral/private-sector models. While alternative funders may step in, the lack of U.S. leadership could slow progress on critical climate and the SDGs.



### **What role does civil society play in achieving this SDG?**

In a context where rising nationalism and great-power competition weaken multilateral cooperation and where civil society is under attack:

- Civil society is a champion of voices that demand to honor the commitments made under the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. Thus, it plays a key role in continuing to push for advocacy and accountability.
- Civil society also co-leads implementation efforts—particularly in data generation, monitoring, and service delivery—especially in fragile and under-resourced contexts.
- As multilateralism is less well-funded, civil society can continue to engage in grassroots and national mobilizations demanding delivery of international agreements.
- Civil society, despite shortages in development and humanitarian funding, continues to work on the ground for service delivery for the most vulnerable, particularly as governments are falling short on their commitments.
- Public awareness of the SDGs reinvigoration is needed as never before. Thus, civil society can continue to publicly engage in SDG-related advocacy at all levels.

While SDG 17 has seen some progress, systemic barriers—geopolitical divides, financing gaps, and weak governance—hinder full implementation. Localization and multi-stakeholder partnerships are among the most effective levers to accelerate SDG implementation, with 65% of SDG targets requiring local action. Empowering local actors—particularly local governments and civil society organizations (CSOs)—must be viewed not as a technical adjustment but a strategic shift to rescue the 2030 Agenda. Governments must prioritize cohesive policies, debt relief, and digital transformation, while civil society must hold leaders accountable and drive innovation. Without stronger partnerships, the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs remain at risk.



### **How does this SDG support or connect with other goals in the 2030 Agenda? With specific targets of other international frameworks?**

SDG 17 is the backbone of the entire 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. All other SDGs will significantly lag behind without strong global cooperation. Nonetheless, in the current context, rising geopolitical tensions, debt crises, and weakening multilateralism are straining these partnerships.

SDG 17 provides a basis for financing, technology, trade, policy coherence, and data-sharing mechanisms that other SDGs depend on. Integration of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) and Voluntary Subnational Reviews (VSRs) into national SDG planning and reporting cycles must be institutionalized. These mechanisms are crucial for enhancing vertical coherence, accountability, and context-specific delivery of the SDGs.

Without SDG 17, all other SDGs risk collapse due to funding gaps, technology disparities, and policy fragmentation. While multilateralism is weakening, alternatives like South-South cooperation, digital solidarity, and debt justice movements offer hope. 2025 | 28



### Are there emerging issues related to this SDG that should be noted?

While some progress has been made, emerging geopolitical, technological, and financial trends are reshaping the landscape of international cooperation. In particular:

- **Conflict:** Increased armed conflicts and wars, including genocide.
- **Environment:** Decline in environmental protection and standards, accelerating the consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- **Politics:** Geopolitical fragmentation, erosion of multilateralism, growing trend of protectionism and trade wars, authoritarian backlash and erosion of civil space.
- **Debt:** Debt-trap diplomacy and South-South cooperation restrictions.
- **Financing:** Reduced financing for development and humanitarian response, particularly with targeted attacks on climate financing, as well as significant cuts to social spending, particularly around education, healthcare, and infrastructure.
- **Digital cooperation:** Fragmented digital cooperation, especially as AI continues to pose a threat to the international system.
- **Civil society participation:** There has been reduced participation of civil society due to silencing and threatening. In particular, digital repression, surveillance, and algorithmic bias are posing growing threats to civil society. Human rights-based digital governance frameworks aligned with the 2024 Global Digital Compact are needed.
- **Partnerships:** Indicators measuring goal 17.17 needs to be reworked to suit those around partnerships
- **Demographics:** Rapid demographic shifts particularly in developing countries offers challenges and opportunities.

# A Whole-of-Agenda Approach to the 2030 Commitments



The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a vision of transformation, but that vision cannot be realized if its goals are pursued in isolation. The current siloed implementation model is not only inefficient—it is unsustainable. No single Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) can be achieved without progress across the others. The interdependence of goals is not theoretical—it is operational, structural, and existential.

We are at a moment of reckoning: the world is far off track. Only 17% of the SDG targets are on course to be met by 2030. Fragmented approaches, vertical policy development, and compartmentalized funding streams undermine the integrated nature of the agenda. To accelerate progress, we must invest in the “spaces between the goals”—the interlinkages that bind poverty to climate, gender to governance, peace to sustainability.

## **Localization as a Primary Entry Point**

With over 65% of SDG targets requiring local implementation, localization offers one of the most promising pathways to operationalize interlinkages. Local governments and civil society are uniquely positioned to respond to intersecting challenges—such as climate vulnerability, gender-based violence, and inequality—because they are embedded within them.

Tools like Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), citizen scorecards, and co-created data ecosystems demonstrate how communities can build cross-sector solutions while also holding institutions accountable. Localization is not an end-point—it is a mechanism for unlocking interdependencies and translating them into action.

## **A New Ethic of Interconnection**

Cutting-edge science and Indigenous worldviews alike affirm a truth long understood by spiritual leaders: we are one interdependent system. Yet global development continues to prioritize measurable outputs over relational systems.

We must evolve from a project-based model to a relational approach—one that honors community wisdom, shared wellbeing, and the ethical dimensions of sustainability. Intangibles such as trust, dignity, and solidarity are not soft values; they are the social glue that holds sustainable development together.

New metrics must reflect this interconnected reality. Indicators developed under the Pact for the Future must move beyond GDP and target-specific benchmarks to capture systemic impacts, policy coherence, and the lived realities of marginalized communities.

## **Policy Coherence and the Four Pillars of Sustainability**

A piecemeal approach to policy-making undercuts sustainability. A policy that strengthens economic growth but accelerates climate collapse or undermines social protection is not sustainable. The four pillars of development—social, ecological, economic, and cultural—must be advanced in concert.

Governments must assess the externalities of their domestic and international policies, including impacts on other countries and across generations. They must maximize their global positive handprint, not just minimize their domestic footprint.

We call for mandatory cross-impact assessments of all SDG policies, backed by data disaggregated by gender, age, income, geography, and ability.

## **The Role of Civil Society in Bridging the Gaps**

Civil society is uniquely positioned to bridge interlinkages:

- It works across sectors—gender, environment, health, governance—not within policy silos.
- 
- It connects communities with institutions, translating lived realities into policy demands.
- 
- It produces knowledge, monitors government action, and fills service gaps in fragile contexts.
- 

But this role is under threat. Digital surveillance, political backlash, and shrinking funding streams are severely limiting civil society’s ability to act at the intersections. We call for protected civic space and human-rights-based digital governance, aligned with the principles of the [Global Digital Compact](#).

## **A Call for Intersectional Infrastructure**

To move from fragmentation to integration, we call for the following:

- Dedicated platforms and convenings to advance intersectional analysis and practice across the UN system.
- Heightened attention to interlinkages within frameworks on peace, human rights, and climate.
- New composite indicators that measure synergy and trade-offs across SDG pillars.
- Citizen-generated data and co-owned knowledge systems, particularly through participatory localization tools.

Transparent, equitable financing that supports intersectional work—especially by grassroots organizations.

**Conclusion: Interlinkages as Strategy, Not Rhetoric**

Interlinkages must move from being a conceptual buzzword to a strategic compass. This means funding intersectional programming, designing for cross-sectoral impact, and resourcing the actors—particularly at the local level—who are already doing this work.

The 2030 Agenda’s strength lies in its indivisibility. Our implementation strategies must reflect that. Only through interconnected thinking, policy coherence, and collective action can we create a world that truly leaves no one behind.



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