

The people's agenda

The SDGs herald the start of 15 momentous years that have the potential to change our world and its people immeasurably for the better. With commitment and hard work, the opportunity is ours to grasp

By **Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General, United Nations

In a world beset by so many challenges, problems and disputes, it is a sign of hope that world leaders came together in 2015 to adopt both the far-reaching 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the ambitious Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): 17 bold yet achievable goals to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and build peaceful societies on a healthy planet.

The SDGs are the result of the most open consultation process in the history of the United Nations. Countless individuals, community organisations, businesses, scientists, academics and other partners worked with governments and the United Nations to define a vision for a better world and to outline what is needed to attain it. The result is truly the people's agenda.

The goals are universal: they apply to all countries, since we know that even the wealthiest have yet to conquer poverty and inequality, realise full gender equality or achieve environmental sustainability.

No one goal is more important than any other; they are integrated and mutually reinforcing. Access to sustainable energy will allow a child to study at night. This energy might come from a solar source, helping to tackle climate change. In turn, the solar panel industry might be helping a developing country grow its economy. Greater opportunity to study, in turn, can lead to better job opportunities and innovation.

One important cross-cutting element of the SDGs is the need to combat climate change. The subject of its own Goal 13, climate action is also directly or indirectly related to realising almost all the other goals. The adoption of the Paris Agreement in December 2015 sends a clear signal to markets and entrepreneurs that the transformation of the global economy to



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low-emission, climate-resilient growth is inevitable, beneficial and underway.

More than 185 countries have submitted national climate plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience. The implementation of these climate plans will provide significant impetus towards reaching the SDGs.

The goals also have strong links to our efforts to foster international peace and security. It is in countries affected by conflict where so much human need resides. When hostilities start, so much else comes to a halt: schooling, vaccination campaigns, economic



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growth, development itself. We will not reach the SDGs without renewed resolve to end today's conflicts and violence.

At the same time, achieving the goals will help address the frustrations and grievances that can fuel instability. The new goals therefore aim to promote inclusive societies, access to justice, the full participation of women and accountable institutions. A sustainable world will be a safer world.

Making such dramatic improvements in the span of 15 years will be no small feat. Yet we know that global goal-setting works. The efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals, adopted in 2000, improved the lives of hundreds of millions of people. Global poverty continues to decline; more people have access to improved sources of water; more children than ever are attending primary school; and targeted investments in fighting malaria, AIDS and tuberculosis have saved millions. But much more needs to be done, especially to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable, to

safeguard ecosystems and resources, and put our societies on a more sustainable footing.

The new agenda and goals embody a commitment to leave no one behind. They are for millennials and grandparents, city dwellers and rural communities, employers and employees, developed and developing countries alike. Transforming this agenda from a promise to concrete action will take high-energy, high-level political commitment. Institutions – starting with the United Nations – must adapt and rise to the challenge.

Many people joined in the process of articulating the SDGs. Many took to the streets and kept the heat on political leaders for climate action. With the SDG framework and a climate agreement now in hand, we need to keep these coalitions together and elicit effort from everyone, everywhere. The United Nations looks forward to working with people across the world to bring the goals to life, to transform our world and to build a future of dignity for all. That's the plan; that's the promise. Let's get to work! ●

▲ Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visits Santa Rita, a rural indigenous community in Bolivia