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Aligning SDG and climate action

Perhaps the biggest threat to the 2030 Agenda is climate change. The Sustainable Development Goals, from poverty eradication and ending hunger to conserving biodiversity and peace, will be unattainable if climate change is not urgently addressed

By **Liu Zhenmin**, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations

The ambitious and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the interconnected 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a universal call to end poverty, enhance peace and prosperity and protect the planet. In the same year it was launched, 2015, countries adopted the historic Paris Agreement. Its aim is to address the increasing risks from climate change by limiting global temperature

rise to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Climate change, caused by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, acts as a threat multiplier, threatening or reversing the progress we make towards the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Or, to put it another way, combating climate change and achieving sustainable development are intrinsically linked: the attainment of one depends on the other.

The rise in sea levels, shifts in weather patterns and more extreme weather events such as heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms will intensify the risk of more

severe disasters and threaten livelihoods. Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi recently witnessed one of the worst tropical cyclones on record to affect the Southern Hemisphere. The catastrophic consequences demonstrate the vulnerability and exposure of countries to shifting weather patterns. Long-term environmental impacts from climate change, including ocean acidification and ecosystem degradation, will further erode food, energy and water security. These in turn can trigger or exacerbate displacement, social upheaval and violent conflicts.

◀ **Magaro, Mozambique, where the bridge across the Lucite River collapsed during Cyclone Idai. The storm, one of the worst on record to hit Africa, provided a stark reminder that all development has to take account of climate change**

These changes will affect the poorest and most vulnerable people the most, particularly in small island states, megacities and rural areas. The impacts of climate change will aggravate existing vulnerabilities and generate new challenges. The SDGs, from poverty eradication and ending hunger to conserving biodiversity and peace, will be unattainable if climate change is not urgently addressed. When we consider any of our global challenges, we must therefore consider the impact of climate change.

Rapid global response

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change *Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C* stresses the urgency of action on climate change. Due to GHG emissions, the world has already warmed by 1°C, affecting people, ecosystems and livelihoods. A warming of 2°C would lead to significantly worse global and regional impacts than a 1.5°C rise. These include a 10cm higher rise in sea levels this century, exposing an additional 10 million people to coastal flooding, saltwater inundation and freshwater shortages. Coral reefs would virtually be lost.

A rapid global response, including a far-reaching transition in all aspects of society, is therefore urgently needed. If we are to stay as close as possible to the 1.5°C goal, global emissions of carbon dioxide need to decrease by 45 per cent by 2030 and reach net zero by around 2050.

Due to the interconnectedness of the issues, efforts to advance the SDGs can also accelerate progress on the Paris Agreement, and vice versa. Many of the impacts of climate change affect the agricultural sector and threaten to reverse gains made in ending malnutrition. Shifting to more resilient, productive and sustainable agriculture and food systems is crucial for improving food security (SDG 2). But it also contributes to climate change mitigation as GHG emissions from human activity and

livestock are a significant contributor to global warming. Furthermore, sustainable agriculture practices can improve the resilience of ecosystems and reduce the vulnerability of rural populations to climate impacts.

The restoration and protection of forests, degraded lands and coastal zones that is envisaged in SDGs 14 and 15 also increases the adaptive capacity of socio-ecological systems to climate impacts and sea-level rise. Climate action should thus be integrated into every SDG.

Enhanced climate action

Similarly, climate action can reinforce progress on the SDGs. Mitigation policies are expected to have positive impacts, particularly for SDG 3 (good health and wellbeing), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) and SDG 14 (life below water). The transition towards low-carbon or no-carbon societies is a priority area for maximising synergies between the initiatives. We can cut GHG emissions while simultaneously boosting the competitiveness of the economy, promoting growth and employment.

Reducing fossil-fuel combustion in accordance with the 1.5°C goal is also an important component of tackling air pollution. The World Health Organization estimates that the harmful effects on health of breathing polluted air – including stroke, lung cancer, heart disease and asthma – kill seven million people every year. The cost to the global economy in lost labour income is therefore significant.

Enhanced climate action could thus improve health and save millions of lives (SDG 3) and also bring significant economic benefits (SDG 8). However, such win-win outcomes may not arise without deliberate efforts to advance the joined-up implementation of both agendas. To avoid the risk of trade-offs between stringent climate mitigation strategies and poverty reduction, the transition to a climate-friendly economy needs to be sustainable, just and inclusive.

This stresses the need for climate action to go hand in hand with the pursuit of the

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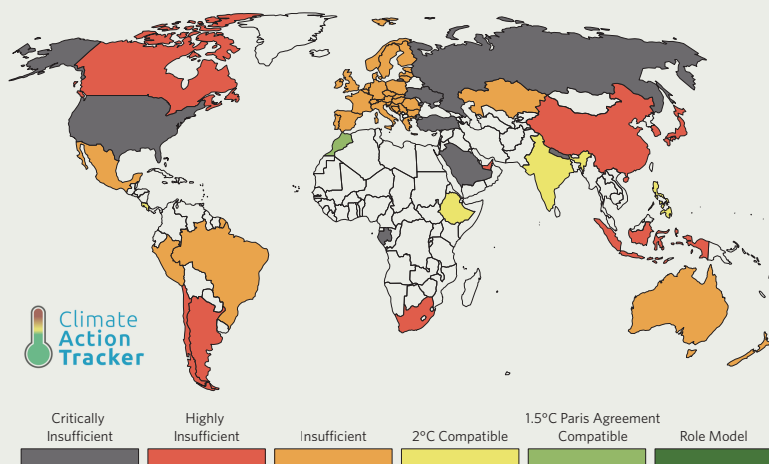
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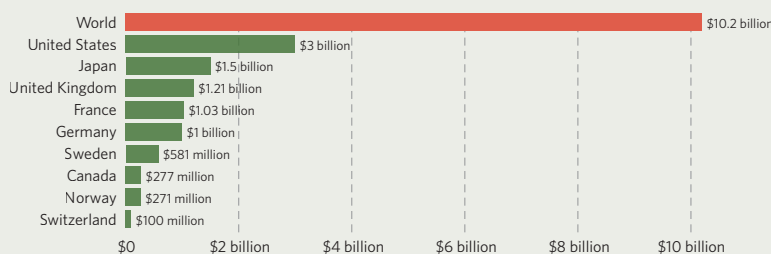


Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

Progress by country towards the Paris Agreement targets



Green Climate Fund (GCF) signed pledges for Initial Resource Mobilisation, 2015-2018



The Green Climate Fund (GCF) is a global fund created to support lower-income countries in climate mitigation and adaptation. The US, under the Obama administration, committed to contribute \$3 billion to the GCF and paid \$1 billion. Subsequently, the Trump administration has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement. Under the agreement, advanced economies formally committed to mobilise at least \$100 billion per year by 2020. The next round of contributions will be confirmed at a pledging conference scheduled to be held in October 2019.

SDGs. But time is running out. Current pledges under the nationally determined contributions are not sufficient to meet the aim of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. Close collaboration between international organisations, countries, the private sector and civil society is needed to step up our climate ambition and action and combine

our efforts to reach the SDGs in tandem with the Paris Agreement.

Ultimately, it is governments that have the primary responsibility for defining policies and systems that promote the achievement of the SDGs and climate goals in a transparent, accountable and inclusive way. The Global Conference on Strengthening Synergies between the Paris Agreement and the 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development (held from 1 to 3 April 2019 in Copenhagen) and the 2019 Climate Action Summit of the UN Secretary-General (to be held on 23 September in New York) mark important opportunities to align the climate and SDG processes. They are also key moments in raising ambition and stimulating action from stakeholders at the global, regional and country levels.

The 2030 deadline will determine our pathway to climate change. Now just a decade away, it underlines the urgency of action if we are to stay as close as possible to the 1.5°C target. Both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement define time-bound and specific global targets, are

Close collaboration between international organisations, countries, the private sector and civil society is needed to step up our climate action

grounded in scientific knowledge, recognise the importance of multi-stakeholder implementation and acknowledge that there is no one-size-fits-all approach. But, most importantly, both initiatives appreciate that they can be deeply complementary to each other at various levels. We therefore need to plan all our action to advance progress on the SDGs in the context of climate action and concentrate on maximising the co-benefits.

In September this year, heads of state and government will gather at the United Nations for a series of critical high-level meetings. The SDG Summit in particular will provide an important setting to review the global response to the entire 2030 Agenda, including climate action, and to shift the focus towards the next phase of implementation.

In this sense, it will also provide a valuable integration of the climate and sustainable development agendas by aligning SDG and climate action at all levels. ●

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

- **91 per cent** of the urban population worldwide were breathing air that did not meet the World Health Organization air quality guidelines value for particulate matter (PM 2.5)



- **More than half** were exposed to air pollution levels at least 2.5 times higher than that safety standard

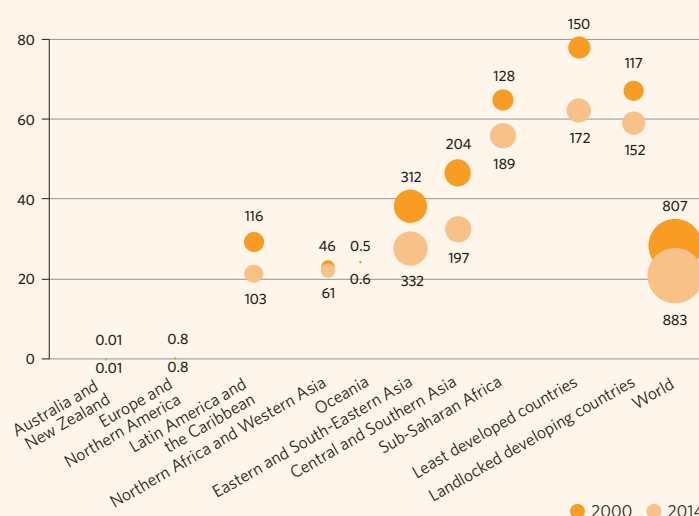


- **An estimated 4.2 million people** died as a result of high levels of ambient air pollution



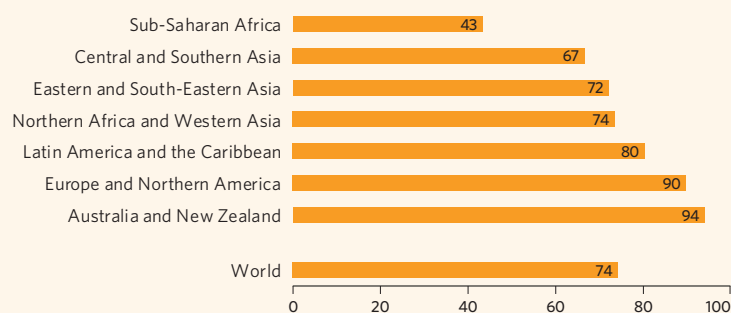
- **Many cities** around the world are facing acute challenges in managing rapid urbanisation – from ensuring adequate housing and infrastructure to support growing populations, to confronting the environmental impact of urban sprawl, to reducing vulnerability to disasters

Number and proportion of the urban population living in slums, 2000 and 2014 (millions and percentage)



- **Urban population growth** is outpacing improvements in slum conditions. Despite a 20 per cent reduction (from 28.4 to 22.8 per cent) in the proportion of the urban population living in slums during the 15-year period 2000 to 2014, the total number rose from 807 million to 883 million over this period

Proportion of the municipal solid waste generated that is collected, 2001–2015 (data from 214 cities/municipalities in 103 countries) (percentage)



- **The safe collection, removal, treatment and disposal** of solid waste are among the most critical services in the urban environment. In sub-Saharan Africa, less than half of all municipal solid waste generated is collected, with adverse effects on the health of residents. Even when waste is collected, it is often not treated and disposed of in a sustainable and environmentally sound manner

Source: The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018, UN