

WBCSD Insider Perspective:

Key Takeaways from the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

July 2018



Introduction

The 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, the UN's central platform for follow-up and review of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), took place at the UN headquarters in New York City from 9 to 18 July 2018.

Gathering some 2,000 representatives from UN member states, business leaders, mayors, the scientific community, foundations, UN agencies and civil society organizations, the HLPF reviews on an annual basis the overarching progress with regard to the SDG agenda. It also provides a platform for member states to present updates on the actions they are taking to implement the SDGs at national level.

The theme of this year's HLPF was "*Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies*," with a specific focus on progress and challenges in relation to [SDG 6](#) (Clean Water & Sanitation), [SDG 7](#) (Affordable & Clean Energy), [SDG 11](#) (Sustainable Cities & Communities), [SDG 12](#) (Responsible Consumption & Production), [SDG 15](#) (Life on Land) and [SDG 17](#) (Partnerships for the Goals).

The HLPF also provides a critical opportunity for wider groups of stakeholders, including business, to engage and share solutions to SDG implementation. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and its member companies again played an active role across a variety of

important dialogues. WBCSD's overarching message on the SDGs was that companies that have a clear understanding of their SDG interactions and impacts will ultimately be better placed to unlock market opportunities, consolidate an enduring license to operate and manage operational and regulatory risks on the path to 2030.

Over the following pages we highlight some of the key takeaways from this year's discussions that are most relevant from a private sector perspective.



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2,000
attendees

100
ministers

46
national reviews

6
SDGs in focus

Key Takeaways

1 There is growing momentum but a need for accelerated action

The HLPF continues to draw increasing levels of participation from member states with over 100 ministers attending this year (up from 77 in 2017) and a total of 46 countries submitting [Voluntary National Reviews \(VNRs\)](#) on their SDG progress.

While this underlines widespread support for the bold ambitions of the SDG agenda, this year's Forum also presented a series of [stark findings with regard to the progress being made](#).

Addressing the Forum, the UN Secretary General António Guterres highlighted the fact that the world has backtracked in areas that are fundamental to the shared pledge to leave no one behind. In particular, Guterres

highlighted how the number of people globally who are under-nourished has increased for the first time in a decade; how enduring gender inequality continues to deprive women of basic rights; and how investment in critical sustainable infrastructure remains “entirely inadequate” – all against a backdrop of runaway climate change, eroding human rights and persistent pockets of poverty.

Guterres encouraged member states to leave the forum “with a fresh commitment to work together, to share innovative solutions,” while also pointing to a number of critical action pathways such as: mobilizing the transformative power of the world's young people; getting

GHG emissions under control; unlocking SDG financing; ensuring the responsible use of technology; and the strengthening of international institutions.

As in previous years, the forum closed with the adoption of a [Ministerial Declaration](#) in which member states reaffirmed their commitment to effectively implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for all people, everywhere.



Secretary-General António Guterres (centre) addresses the closing session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

(UN Photo/Laey Felipe)

Key Takeaways

2 Business has a key role to play and is more engaged at the HLPF

An increasingly broad cross-section of stakeholders is now engaging around the HLPF, and the UN received applications for over 600 side events this year. The private sector was strongly represented, with many business representatives forming part of member-state delegations and a notable increase in CEO-level attendance.

The central platform for private sector engagement alongside the 2018 HLPF was the third annual [SDG Business Forum](#). Held on 17 July and co-hosted by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and the UN Global Compact, the SDG Business Forum brought together nearly 600 attendees to explore business

progress in accelerating sustainable development.

Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations opened the session by underlining the critical role that a dynamically engaged business community has to play in realizing the SDGs and noted that it is “encouraging to see business responding to the 2030 agenda at an unprecedented scale”.



Opening plenary of the SDG Business Forum

Close to 40 WBCSD member companies attended the Forum and [the agenda](#) included high-level interventions from Jean-Pierre Clamadieu, CEO of Solvay; Roberto Marques, Executive Chairman of Natura; David MacLennan, Chairman and CEO of Cargill; and Masaya Futamiya, Chairman of Sompo Japan Nipponkoa Insurance Inc. A recording of the Forum plenary is [available here](#).

Following on from the SDG Business Forum, on 18 July, for the second year running, WBCSD collaborated with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDEA) to convene a half-day event for Chief Sustainability Officers to explore challenges and solutions to integrating the SDGs into business strategy. The session



Liu Zhenmin, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs and WBCSD's Filippo Veglio open the jointly convened event for Chief Sustainability Officers

drew a capacity audience of 130 attendees and [the agenda](#) showcased the experiences and insights of a wide range of WBCSD member companies and partners across a series of panel discussions. A [recording of this session](#) is also now available.

The level and quality of engagement

by leading business across these events and many others during the course of the HLPF underlines a clear commitment by the business community to be part of these discussions with a view to fulfilling its potential to drive forward impactful business solutions on the road to 2030.

Key Takeaways

3 The critical role of partnerships

A common theme throughout the HLPF was the importance of innovative collaboration in the context of realizing the SDG agenda.

WBCSD's event with UNDESA explored this concept in detail during a panel discussion titled "*Business as Unusual*" which highlighted a range of pioneering partnerships that are being pushed forward by Cargill, Equinor, Solvay, Veolia, and Yara respectively.

One collaborative effort that came to the fore at the HLPF was the [Chemical Sector SDG Roadmap](#) which was launched in New York on 17 July. This initiative convened by WBCSD represents the culmination of pioneering efforts



Jean-Pierre Clamadieu, CEO of Solvay launches the Chemical Sector SDG Roadmap at the SDG Business Forum

by leading chemical companies and industry associations to present a collective vision on the key impact opportunities for the sector to contribute to its most material SDGs. The roadmap also outlines tangible actions that the chemical sector may take to accelerate impact in the short-, medium- and long term in the run up to 2030.

Speaking at the SDG Business Forum Jean-Pierre Clamadieu CEO of Solvay, one of the companies that led the work on the Roadmap, noted that "efforts where the whole industry comes onboard show we are moving forward on the SDGs". He described the work as a "comprehensive, ambitious, yet pragmatic roadmap to 2030."

Also in New York, WBCSD member company Cargill [announced](#) a new US\$ 2 million partnership to support One's Poverty is Sexist campaign, which will seek to ensure that women and girls living in extreme poverty are not left out of the conversation on gender inequality. Furthermore, David MacLennan, Cargill's Chairman and CEO, spoke about trade's positive impact on

sustainable development, underscoring a rules-based trade system as a key partnership that enables economic growth, increases incomes, and empowers societies.

Dialogues throughout the week underlined the fact that realizing the ambitions of the SDGs is beyond the reach of any actor in isolation and instead calls for new and innovative forms of collaboration at scale.



David MacLennan, Chairman and CEO of Cargill, addressing the SDG Business Forum



Key Takeaways

4 Increased focus on measuring business impact

Another recurring theme across private sector-focused discussions was the importance of continuing to advance and standardize methodologies to measure business impact on the SDGs and turn ambition into action. During the SDG Business Forum, John Denton, Secretary General of the ICC stated:

“The SDGs are a wonderful vision for the world for the future, but as anyone in business knows, a vision without a fit for purpose action plan and clear outcomes being measured and achieved runs the great risk of becoming a hallucination.”

The UN Global Compact and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) announced that they would be

seeking to advance this agenda with the release in the coming months of practical guidance on how to integrate the SDGs into corporate reporting and also launched a [new report](#) in collaboration with UN PRI which provides guidance to companies on how to disclose on the SDGs in a manner which is most useful to investors.

Erik Solheim, Executive Director of UN Environment welcomed more detailed corporate disclosure on SDG performance and advocated for the “**naming and faming**” of companies that are doing well, and the “**naming and shaming**” of those of who are not playing a role. In the same vein, attendees at WBCSD’s sustainability leaders event also heard from Steve

Waygood, Chief Responsible Investment Officer at Aviva Investors who underlined efforts that are underway by the [World Benchmarking Alliance](#) to produce a series of public league tables that rank companies on how they impact the SDGs.

Moving forward, it seems likely that there will be an increasing onus on companies to measure and disclose details of their SDG impacts against a backdrop of enhanced stakeholder scrutiny of SDG performance.



John Denton, Secretary General of the ICC underlines the importance of measuring SDG impact at the opening of the SDG Business Forum



Steve Waygood, Chief Responsible Investment Officer at Aviva outlines the work of the World Benchmarking alliance during WBCSD's Chief Sustainability Officer event

Key Takeaways

5 The human rights opportunity

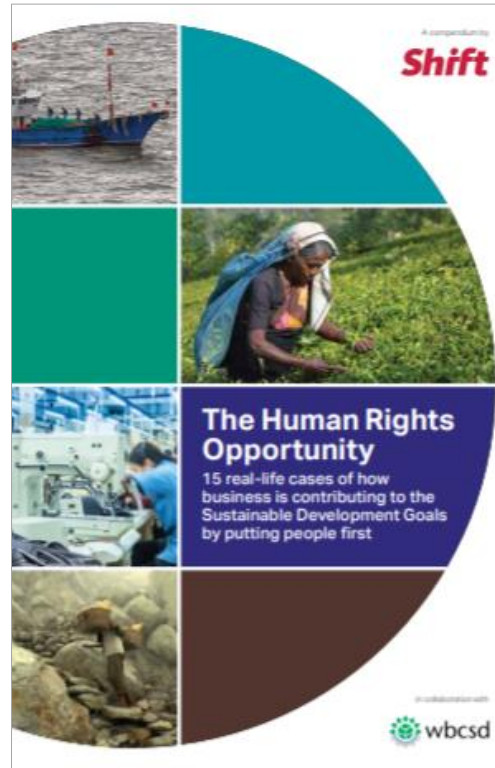
One of the panels during WBCSD's event for Chief Sustainability Officers focused specifically on the critical role that corporate respect for human rights has to play in the realization of the SDG agenda.

During this session Caroline Rees, President and Co-founder of Shift, the leading center of expertise on the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, [launched a new report](#) that has been developed in collaboration with WBCSD and which highlights, through a series of 15 case studies, how companies have the power to bring transformative, positive change to the lives of millions of workers, families and communities through tackling human rights issues.



Caroline Rees, President and Co-founder of Shift, explains links between human rights and the SDGs

Focusing more specifically on opportunities for impact around SDG 6, also released during the HLPF was WBCSD's [WASH Pledge impact report](#) which highlights commitments and actions taken by 47 WBCSD member companies to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) for all their employees in operations across the globe.



For more details on how the SDGs interact with human rights issues visit WBCSD's [Business and Human Rights Gateway](#).

Key Takeaways

6 Technology as a driver for transformation in line with the SDGs

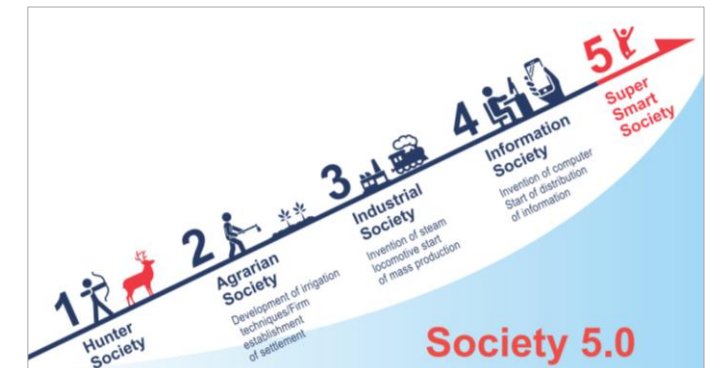
There were a number of resources published on the fringes of the SDG Business Forum which underlined the critical role of technology in achieving the SDGs.

ICC [launched a report](#) exploring ICTs' role in fueling the Goals that were in focus at this year's HLPF, while the Global e-Sustainability Initiative (GeSI) also [launched an analysis](#) that explores the correlations that exist between digital access and the SDG agenda.

The Keidanren (Japan Business Federation) also leveraged the HLPF to launch a [new report and platform](#) showcasing the potential of Society 5.0, its vision for society that balances economic progress with the solution of social problems through the application of innovative technologies, to act as a key driver in realizing the SDGs.



Masaya Futamiya, Chairman of the Keidanren's Committee on Corporate Behavior & Social Responsibility outlines the Society 5.0 for SDGs initiative at the SDG Business Forum



Conclusions

The Road Ahead

Ultimately, while the 2018 HLPF pointed to a number of areas where progress on the SDGs is not yet being achieved at the scale required, it also served to underline the commitment of both public and private sector representatives to work closely together to advance this agenda moving forward.

Building also on insights gained through our [recent member survey on business integration of the SDGs](#), the WBCSD team looks forward to supporting these efforts and to again shaping an engaging series of dialogues and discussions around next year's Forum which is tentatively scheduled to take place between 8 and 19 July 2019.

For more information on developments at the HLPF and other SDG-related resources that have been recently released, visit WBCSD's [SDG Business Hub](#) or contact James Gomme, Director SDGs, at gomme@wbcsd.org





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