



From Science to Practice

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE TO ACHIEVE THE SDGS

Scientific research can make a critical contribution to addressing global challenges and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, translating the knowledge that comes from research into action on the ground can be complicated. Research often fails to find its way into policy making due to a number of constraints—including cultural, political and institutional barriers.

Translating research into policy and practice is difficult because of **divergent approaches, objectives and constraints** characterizing the worlds of science and policy making. The way in which scientific research is conceptualized and conducted may not always be conducive to the results-oriented imperatives of policy making, which operates on highly compressed timescales and is often subject to budgetary restrictions determined by political interests. As a result, scientific research is not always aligned with societal needs and priorities, and policy makers often underestimate the time and resources necessary to collect data thoroughly and responsibly and to develop recommendations.

Another important challenge is the **lack of diversity** present in privileged research circles, in terms of age, geographical location, discipline, gender, and race/ethnicity, and the **unequal distribution of researchers globally**. To better tackle the SDGs, policy making must be informed by a range of voices coming from a variety of backgrounds. Yet researchers from the global South in particular can face different constraints to those in the global North, limiting their access and influence and biasing the kinds of knowledge that are incorporated and considered in policy-making processes. This exacerbates long-standing hierarchies of knowledge and delegitimizes alternative knowledge structures, in particular those that are embedded in distinctly local paradigms and approaches.

Finally, getting research into the hands of policy makers is a key hurdle, as there are **few direct**

links between science and policy communities, and those that do exist tend to be compromised by **communication barriers**. At the international level, formal direct processes that feed research findings into the UN system are lacking. Further, bridging the science to policy gap requires not only establishing channels, but strategically communicating across those channels, as there is often a language barrier between science and policy.

With this in mind, a consortium of Geneva-based institutions has established a new route through which research and knowledge from International Geneva and its global networks can amplify its impact on national and global policy making and help to achieve the SDGs. The project began with a call to organizations to submit research related to the SDGs being reviewed at the 2021 High-level Political Forum (HLPF). These were organized by the first three “entry points” of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report, *The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development*:

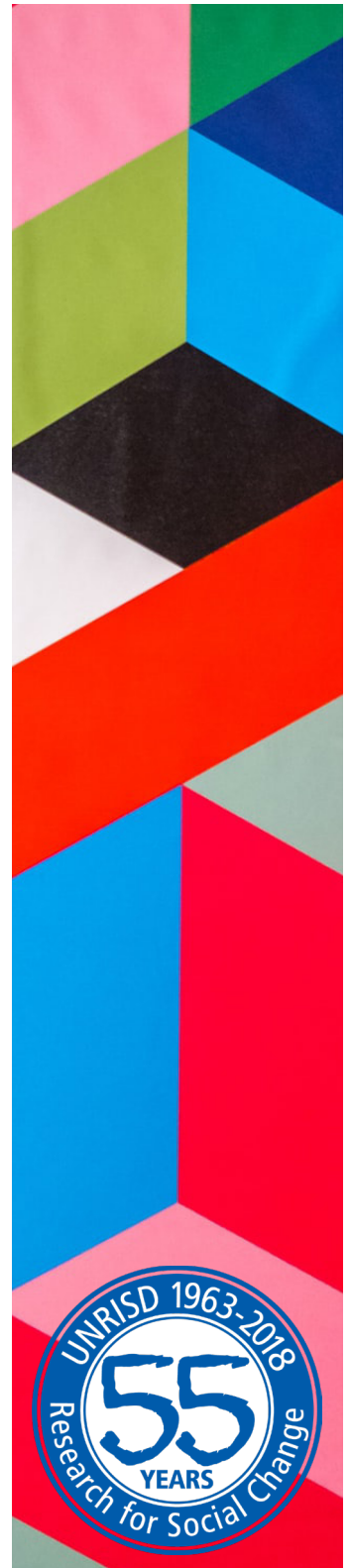
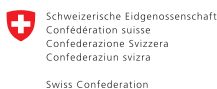
- Human well-being and capabilities
- Sustainable and just economies
- Food systems and nutrition patterns

After receiving submissions from a broad range of organizations throughout Geneva and their international networks, three synthesis reports were drafted that brought together the research submitted and situated this new evidence against the state of the art. This brief summarizes the main findings of the three reports.

PROJECT PARTNERS



FUNDING PARTNER



Human Well-being and Capabilities



Read the full report on [Human Well-Being and Capabilities](#)

A human well-being and capabilities approach—which is people-centred, gender-sensitive, rights-based and locally relevant—demands that development be addressed holistically in ways that take account of the linkages between different dimensions of social, health and environmental systems. The report considers the individual and collective dimensions of well-being in three categories—Freedom from Poverty, Freedom from Violent Conflict and Freedom to Flourish—exploring the immediate and longer-term actions which can expand and create sustainable freedoms, in the direction of progress towards the SDGs and of greater human well-being for all.

Poverty, in its multiple dimensions, harms human well-being and prevents people from realizing their full capabilities. While much progress has been made in reducing extreme poverty, globally the pace of poverty reduction has been decelerating in recent years. Covid-19 has worsened this situation further, leading to millions of people being pushed back into extreme poverty—the first increase in extreme poverty in over 20 years. Multidimensional poverty has also increased, with the global human development index—measuring education, health and living standards—on course to decline for the first time since it was created over 30 years ago. In many ways this too has been exacerbated by the pandemic: already struggling health systems collapsing under unprecedented patient loads; school closures rolling back the progress in enrolment rates and equity that has been made in recent years, increasing gaps in education quality and access along gender, regional and class lines, and between countries; and the economic costs of the pandemic draining government expenditure on social protection.

Violence is another inhibitor of human well-being, from violence against women and children—also magnified during the pandemic with vulnerable individuals confined to their homes with violent family members—to violent conflict which is on



the rise, with 70 million people displaced by war, persecution and conflict in 2018, the highest level recorded in nearly 70 years. Such forms of violence compound and are compounded by multidimensional poverty, with devastating outcomes for human development.

Climate change and environmental degradation act as fuel to the fire, with pollution, drought, natural disasters and coastal flooding (just to name a few) amplifying the costs in terms of human well-being. The impacts of climate and environmental disruption disproportionately affect those individuals who have contributed the least to climate change, in particular vulnerable groups who lack the resources to cope with it, and the political influence to combat it.

Findings and recommendations

The various solutions presented in the evidence submitted all focus on broad, long-term and structural approaches for ensuring individual and collective human well-being:

- Data on human development trajectories in a broad range of countries show that comprehensive development strategies that take advantage of synergies and minimize trade-offs yield the most significant gains over time.
- Care policies—which integrate health, education, labour market and social protection policies—have great potential to increase gender equality and improve the well-being of caregivers and receivers, with positive outcomes for economic and social development.
- Universal health coverage complemented by reforms in education, transport, nutrition, and water and sanitation can significantly impact not only health but well-being across the board.

- Because climate change has significant overlaps with well-being, integrating environmental goals into social policies can have positive multiplier effects for people and planet.
- Expanding capabilities must also be understood as a process in which the participation and inclusion of marginalized groups in decision making is assured.
- Sustainable development relies on governments' ability to maintain peace and ensure access to public services. Moving towards strong governmental institutions, by providing security, building state capacity and deepening inclusion, is essential for human development and well-being.
- Addressing complimentary, cross-cutting issues in a holistic way—moving towards universal access to public goods such as health, education and social protection through a more equitable distribution of resources—is key to addressing multidimensional poverty and conflict.
- Decisive action to reduce digital inequalities is essential to ensure that technological advancement engenders rather than hinders prosperity for all.
- Environmental sustainability is the foundation for present and future well-being.



also presented an opportunity for rethinking and “building forward better”. The report interrogates attitudes, assumptions and approaches driving social and economic development, and explores alternative principles and practices that may pave the way for a new economic system based on justice, equality and development within planetary boundaries.

Read the full report on [Sustainable and Just Economies](#)

Of the many challenges that stand in the way of realizing the vision of a sustainable and just economy, at the top of the list is inequality, which obstructs poverty reduction, human rights and sustainable development, and is linked to shorter, unhealthier and unhappier lives. Girded by the dominance of neoliberal policies, rapid technological change, weak global and national tax governance, the erosion of labour rights, and corporate capture of political processes and state institutions, today's global economic system is characterized by unprecedented concentration of wealth and income, and the increasing share of national income captured by capital compared to labour. Shifts in the world of work have eroded decent work and labour protections in the formal sector, and aggravated exploitation in the informal sector, which has created an unprecedented level of precarity. Such precarity particularly affects women, who receive lower pay on average than men, are overwhelmingly employed in the informal economy (and in particular in more precarious sectors), take on the majority of unpaid care work, and are more often cut off from opportunities for social mobility and generating economic stability.

Beyond the social costs, the current economic system also has severe environmental costs. The world economy is almost five times the size it was half a century ago, and this expansion has already been accompanied by the degradation of a significant proportion of the world's land areas. Such unencumbered growth is unsustainable on a planet with finite resources. Global patterns of consumption and production, marked by overuse of resources beyond the rate at which they can replenish, and production of waste which cripples ecosystems and disrupts planetary functions, have surpassed planetary boundaries. This system, which privileges growth above all else, disregards the well-being of people as well as the planet, with wide-ranging implications for human rights, peace and security.

Sustainable and Just Economies



The lens of sustainable and just economies stresses the importance of economic growth that works against the growing concentration of wealth, preserves rather than destroys the natural environment in the name of profit, and ensures an equitable distribution of benefits to the whole population. The report explores how to put social objectives and environmental sustainability at the heart of the economy. This is particularly salient when the pandemic has laid bare the deep flaws in our economic system, but

○ Findings and recommendations

Reversing the unsustainable course of global development requires a drastic reimagining of the attitudes, assumptions and approaches that drive it, and placing social and environmental objectives over perpetual growth.

- Growth must be seen as a means to improve people's well-being, rather than an end in itself: what matters is not the quantity of growth but its quality. Growth must also be inclusive, generating decent jobs for all groups of people. Measures of growth must be reevaluated to ensure they capture dimensions of equity, sustainability, well-being, health and resilience.
- Patterns of production and consumption must be drastically transformed in a way that allows all living beings to access and benefit from global commons such as land, soil, water and air, and ensures the biosphere's capacity to process greenhouse gases.
- Redistribution, both in terms of equitable and sustainable access to resources and rebalancing the skewed rewards flowing to capital versus labour, is vital to reduce inequality. This may take the form of revised tax policies, redesign of welfare states, shifts in social policy delivery to account for new landscapes of labour, or the expansion of bottom-up alternative economies, such as social and solidarity economy grounded in practices of cooperation, solidarity, ethics and democratic self-management.
- Radical measures must be taken to tackle the impacts of climate change while ensuring that those who contribute the least to climate change are not harmed or further penalized by adaptation or mitigation measures. Recent work linking the concepts of "just transition" to a low-carbon economy and transformative change suggest a progressive way forward.
- Good and effective governance is an essential lever of the systemic transformations needed to achieve the SDGs. The inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable populations in decision-making processes must be prioritized.
- Bringing about the transformative vision of the SDGs requires overhauling the multilateral system, in particular trade, so that it is capable of enforcing rules and ensuring that actions align with the shared values of human rights, peace and sustainable development.

- Systems thinking affords the broad perspective on complex economic problems that is necessary to develop holistic and integrated approaches, and foster policy coherence for sustainable development. A systems thinking approach could help to realize the vision of a circular economy, for example, preserving resources, reducing greenhouse gases and more equitably distributing benefits.

● Food Systems and Nutrition Patterns



The food and nutrition system is one of the most vital and complex components of the human ecosystem. It demonstrates the interconnections of the global system, the way injustices, inequalities, inefficiencies and unsustainable practices in one area reverberate all the way down to our plates. The report explores the potential for transforming global food systems and nutrition patterns so that they minimize environmental impacts, are resilient to shocks, and ensure all people equal access to a healthy diet, now and in the future.

Food availability is growing globally, yet more than 800 million people are still hungry. Malnutrition sits alongside obesity in the same cities and towns. Such contradictions in our food system are a result of distorted agricultural relations, skewed exchange relations and extractive environmental relations. One challenge accounting for both the

overuse of resources and the unequal distribution of profits is the exclusion of smallholder farmers from global value chains. The global food market is largely controlled by a small number of actors who overexploit natural resources, engage in environmentally harmful farming practices, and drive smallholder farmers out of the market, creating food and income insecurity for both subsistence farmers and small-scale producers. In the pursuit of higher productivity, agricultural practices have become more unsustainable and inequitable, with severe social and environmental consequences. The exclusion of smallholder farmers has been driven in part by the corporatization and privatization of agricultural value chains. Over-commercialization has led to low average food security and reduced dietary diversity and reinforces the gender division of labour, wage inequality and marginalization of women.

Changing consumption patterns have also put new pressures on food systems, leading to environmental degradation and climate change, as well as increased social inequality. Urbanization has shifted the way people obtain their food and what kinds of food they have access to, with access to food linked directly to purchasing power. Additionally, rising incomes and nutrition standards have resulted in a move towards more land- and water-intensive diets, with significant environmental impacts. According to the FAO, the social cost of greenhouse gas emissions associated with current dietary patterns is expected to reach the trillions of dollars by 2030.


In addition to these structural factors, the Covid-19 crisis has placed unprecedented strain on global food systems, as a result of both economic effects and supply chain disruptions.

○ Findings and recommendations

The report identifies various possibilities for transforming the global food system based on evidence of sustainable alternatives from many countries, and draws the following lessons for public policy.

the structural constraints that limit their access to various resources, from land and extension services to knowledge, technologies, practical training and market linkages. A second pillar aims at improving economic access, especially for disadvantaged or vulnerable people, for example through social protection systems.

- Beyond social protection, direct public interventions in agriculture and food systems are also necessary, including investing in sustainable agricultural practices, minimizing food loss, and supporting local and indigenous farmers.
- Food systems will not be sustainable in the long term without changes in consumption patterns. Changing these will be gradual and require participation from all stakeholders at all levels, starting with educational curricula at the kindergarten level. This will be most effective by incorporating local and/or traditional knowledge into public policies, and dissemination in ways that incentivizes behavioral change.
- Technology can be used to promote sustainable production and consumption, for example through the development of less resource-intensive farming methods, and digital tools that enable farmers to access and use appropriate data in making farming decisions that are less resource intensive.
- The report highlights the possibilities for scaling up promising initiatives through tailored public policy, and the key role that governments, agricultural enterprises, solidarity networks, scientists and practitioners have to play as agents for the sustainable transformation of global food and nutrition systems.

● Read the full report on [Food Systems and Nutrition Patterns](#) 

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