

Executive summary

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the UK with a unique opportunity to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities, combat catastrophic climate change and protect our natural environment by 2030.

The SDGs are underpinned by the principle of universality. This means that all nations, and all people, are responsible for their achievement. It also means that all governments must work to implement them in their own nations.

To date the UK Government has committed to embedding the Goals in Single Departmental Plans (SDPs). While a practical way of delegating responsibility for programmes, by allocating goals and targets this way, there is a risk that the connected and interdependent nature of the framework will be lost. As the Government prepares to report to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2019, our research provides them with a foundation to build this from, and an opportunity to engage with stakeholders across the UK as they do so.

What is happening in the UK

With the evidence from *Measuring up* we can understand how the UK is performing against the SDG Targets, the wider policy context and the historical trends that will affect us achieving them. It is now possible to understand in one place, for the first time, what is happening in the lives of people of the UK, in our natural environment, in our economy and to our governance systems. The SDGs are the most comprehensive tool to date to assess the 'state of the nation'.

While there is an enormous amount to celebrate, the most vulnerable places and people in our society are increasingly being left behind. Our assessment of the UK's performance against the SDGs used public data to understand progress against the global indicators, existing public policy and historical or future trends that may impact on progress.

Out of 143 targets we considered relevant to the domestic delivery of the Goals, UKSSD found that the UK is performing well on 24% of them. There are gaps in policy or inadequate performance for 57% of them, and 15% where there is little to no policy in place to address the target, or where performance is poor.

The value of the 17 SDGs and their 169 Targets lies in their connectedness. The evidence here allows us to see how we can take collaborative action, including through partnership with the Government. The links between targets are identifiable in every goal. It is clear that the SDGs cannot be achieved by individual organisations or Government working alone or in siloes; the links between targets mean collaboration is critical. This is evident in a number of chapters in this report:

Example from Goals 2, 3, 8, 10. We have a food system that struggles to provide healthy, sustainable, diverse diets for everyone in the UK. We have high and growing levels of obesity, and the highest levels of household food insecurity in Europe. Calories from healthy food consistently cost more than calories from unhealthy foods. And the wealthier you are, the higher portion of household income is assigned to consuming vegetables. This has a direct

impact on health and wellbeing, with obesity and poor diet linked to key health issues including heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Tackling obesity and poor diets would improve both mental and physical health and reduce the strain on our health system. It would also enable people to live full and productive lives, which will benefit our economy.

We are also now beginning to understand the UK's impact on the rest of the world. Not just through our commitment to 0.7% Overseas Development Assistance, but the inward and outward flow of resources, goods and services, and pollution. This is emerging in this report but needs more investigation.

Our rating on some of the SDG Targets, such as water quality, is more positive than actual performance because of existing EU Directives. If these are not retained after the UK leaves the EU this will significantly impact on the likelihood of achieving them. It is particularly important when it comes to our environment and trade to have greater clarity over the process and terms of the UK's withdrawal from the EU if we are to understand the impact of this on our likelihood of achieving the Goals.

The spending environment in the UK will impact on our prospects of achieving some of the public services required to deliver the Goals, but there is an opportunity for greater collaboration between investors and government to address this. It is likely that we can use the SDGs to make better, or different, spending decisions.

What needs to happen

Based on the findings of this report, UKSSD believes that the following actions are needed to achieve the SDGs in the UK by 2030:

1. To ensure that the cross-departmental action necessary to achieve the SDGs is implemented, and to ensure policy coherence across Whitehall, top level political leadership is needed. Responsibility for the Goals should ideally be in the Prime Minister's Office, or with a senior minister with a significant domestic policymaking remit.
2. The Voluntary National Review process is an opportunity to engage stakeholders in producing a comprehensive and integrated plan to implement the SDGs. Given its coordinating role, it would be appropriate for the Cabinet Office to lead an inclusive and transparent process to produce a whole-of-government response.

As well as government, business has a critical role in the implementation of the SDGs. Some UK businesses have already positively responded to the SDG agenda, recognising the economic opportunities as well as the environmental urgency. Businesses of all sizes are encouraged to review how they can help the delivery of the SDGs in the UK based on the analysis in this report, and to collaborate with others to address them.


The findings in this report provide all stakeholders with a means of identifying their role and the opportunities open to them. We can use this report as a starting point for our future activities, together.


How the UK is performing on the Sustainable Development Goals




Target	SDG 1	SDG 2	SDG 3	SDG 4	SDG 5	SDG 6	SDG 7	SDG 8
1	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Red
2	Red	Red	Green	Amber	Amber	Green	Amber	Red
3	Green	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber
4	Amber	Amber	Red	Red	Red	Amber		Amber
5	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber		Amber
6			Amber	Green	Amber	Amber		Amber
7			Amber	Amber				Amber
8			Green					Amber
9			Red					White
10								Green
11								
12								
13								
14								
15								
16								
17								
18								
19								
a	Grey	Grey	Green	Green	Grey	Grey	Grey	Grey
b	Grey	Grey	Green	Green	Grey	Amber	Grey	Red
c		Grey	Green	Green	Amber			
d			Green					

Key to RAG ratings

- Green**  The UK is performing well and has appropriate policy in place to address the target

- Amber**  There are some gaps in policy coverage, the UK is not performing well enough or performance is deteriorating

- Red**  There is little or no policy in place that adequately addresses the target, performance is poor

