

REALITY CHECK:

Business' contribution to the Global Goals is not enough

This study is the 5th in a series conducted every three years that dates back to 2007. In the 2016 study, CEOs told us the Global Goals would provide a clear framework for their companies to lead on the sustainable development agenda.

This year, the 2019 study finds that CEOs believe that business execution is not measuring up to either the size of the challenge of the Global Goals or their previous level of ambition.

IN 2016

49% said business would be the most important actor in the delivery of the Global Goals

78% saw opportunities to contribute to the Global Goals through their core business

90% said they were personally committed to ensuring that their companies lead on the sustainable development agenda

IN 2019

48% are implementing sustainability into their operations according to the UN Global Compact Progress Report

Only 21% feel business is currently playing a critical role in contributing to the Global Goals

71% of CEOs believe that – with increased commitment and action – business can play a critical role in contributing to the Global Goals

THE DECADE TO DELIVER

CEOs call for bold action to accelerate business contribution to the Global Goals

Economic constraints and business pressures are stalling corporate action

28%

cite "absence of market pull" as a top barrier to implementing sustainable business

43%

of the world's largest companies cite competing strategic priorities as a top barrier in implementing sustainability

55%

say pressure to operate with extreme cost-consciousness against investing in longer-term strategic objectives is a key trade-off that they are facing

63%

say political uncertainty across markets is the most critical global issue for their companies' competitive strategies, and 42% say it is reducing or stalling their sustainability efforts

CEOs say businesses should be making a far greater contribution to achieving a sustainable global economy and society by 2030

63%

see Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technologies — digital, physical and biological — as a critical accelerator of the socioeconomic impact of their companies

78%

of CEOs from both, Asian and North American businesses believe we need to decouple economic growth from the use of natural resources and environmental degradation

76%

say citizen trust will be critical to business competitiveness in their industry in the next five years

88%

believe our global economic systems need to refocus on equitable growth



These CEOs are calling for their sectors and peers to step up impact and to course-correct the private sector contribution to 2030's targets, with three resounding calls to action:

CALL TO ACTION 1:

Starting at home: raising ambition and impact in their own companies and for their industries

Successful delivery of the 2030 Agenda requires engagement from all businesses to:



Raise ambition through 'threshold' actions aligned with the 17 Global Goals



Drive broader industry action by accelerating market and systems transformation



Adopt new technologies to accelerate impact on the Global Goals

CALL TO ACTION 2:

Changing how we collaborate with more honesty about the challenges and real impact

To accelerate broader action and systems transformation, business leaders identify three areas for collective action:



Shaping realistic, science-based solutions: key actors must come together in honest dialogue on the challenges and trade-offs



Levelling the playing field: industry leaders need to step up non-competitively in coordination and exchange



Driving local action: businesses have to elevate the role of local partnership moving between global and local implementation

CALL TO ACTION 3:

Defining responsible leadership to pinpoint what is needed of this generation of leaders

CEOs point to nine emerging qualities of responsible leadership that will enable business to be a leading actor in driving the Global Goals



For their organizations and markets

- Pioneer systems change
- Drive sustainable market demand
- Build cultures of responsibility and sustainability



Within their ecosystems

- Know the issues and engage in science-based leadership
- Extend responsibility to ecosystems and lift up industries
- Engage in non-competitive collaboration



As individuals

- Take sustainability personally
- Hold people to account and meaningfully engage investors
- Lead change with authenticity