



Towards 2030 and beyond:

Working together to build economies that deliver health and sustainable development.

September 2023

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The George Institute for Global Health

ABN 90 085 953 331

Level 5,
1 King Street
Newtown, Sydney NSW 2042
Australia

T +61 2 8052 4300
info@georgeinstitute.org
www.georgeinstitute.org

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All currency is in Australian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

Acknowledgements

Authors

Claudia Selin Batz (The George Institute for Global Health), Goran Tomson (Dept of Learning, Informatics, Management, Ethics, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm Sweden), Jaime Miranda (University of Sydney), Kumanan Rasanathan (Alliance for Health Systems and Policy Research, World Health Organisation), Rhoda Wanyenze (Makerere University), Omnia El Omrani (Imperial College London), Maarinke Van Der Meulen (The George Institute for Global Health), Amanda Shriwise (University of Bremen).

Contributors

This report represents the collective insights of participants in the Roundtable, listed in the Annex of this report.

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Key contact

Ms Claudia Selin Batz

Policy and Advocacy Advisor
UK and Multilaterals
The George Institute for Global Health

E cbatz@georgeinstitute.org.uk



Executive summary

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a state of permacrisis due to conflict, the effects of climate change and increases in the cost-of-living, as well as more silent but ongoing threats such as the spread of non-communicable diseases, has further strained the resilience of our people, societies, and economies. Amid the devastation and damage to lives and livelihoods, there is ***an opportunity to engage with the recovery efforts to embrace and accelerate transformations that promote inclusivity and economic prosperity*** to improve human health and well-being and planetary health.

This report captures the discussion and recommendations from an intersectoral roundtable on ***'Towards 2030: Using pandemic insights to build sustainable economies'*** held in May 2023. The roundtable brought together ***stakeholders from diverse sectors and regions*** (international and national governmental organisations, policymakers and practitioners, civil society organisations (CSOs), academics and experts, and other global, national, and sub-national actors, etc.) ***who are working to build forward economies that deliver health and sustainable development convened to examine progress, barriers, and opportunities*** for the pursuit of transformative change in the context of recent crises. Participants also reflected on what has worked and what needs to change to achieve health and health-related goals within the current United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and in future global development agendas. The ***primary goal*** of this report is to synthesise discussion from the roundtable to inform and influence discussions and decisions focused on delivering a healthier, more sustainable future.

In line with the five calls to action for acceleration and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) attainment by 2030, the roundtable called for attention to the following:

- Ensure that SDG Transformation networks focus not only on amplifying work that is already underway in the health sector, but that they prioritise a focus on how health and health systems can be both a driver and beneficiary of shifts towards a nested model in line with current efforts to advance well-being economies.
- Complement efforts to build capacities for transformation with a focus on reducing short-termism in project funding and delivery support structures to deliver on the health-related SDGs.
- Drive transformation and manage SDG interlinkages through a focus on well-being and by strategically using entry points such as youth engagement and economic transformations for environmental sustainability to address asymmetries and strengthen accountability to improve health and strengthen health systems.
- Continue to adapt and invest in long-standing social programmes and systems, strengthen data collection and monitoring of progress and trends, and ensure that preparedness and response mechanisms lay the groundwork for new policy and governance structures to improve the underlying conditions that support attainment of the health-related SDGs.
- Build and normalise investing in the development of the capacity and new capabilities that are needed to effectively address complex problems at the science-policy interface.

Key implications for advocacy:

The roundtable was convened ahead of the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development that was held from Monday, 10 July, to Wednesday, 19 July 2023, under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council. During this week, world leaders convened in New York to discuss effective and inclusive recovery measures to address the impacts of COVID-19 on the SDGs and explore actionable policy guidance for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at all levels. As we anticipate the upcoming SDG Summit in September, which seeks to accelerate progress through significant political guidance, including on transformative actions to consider before 2030, these recommendations are especially pertinent to consider.

Setting the scene: Global Sustainable Development Report 2023

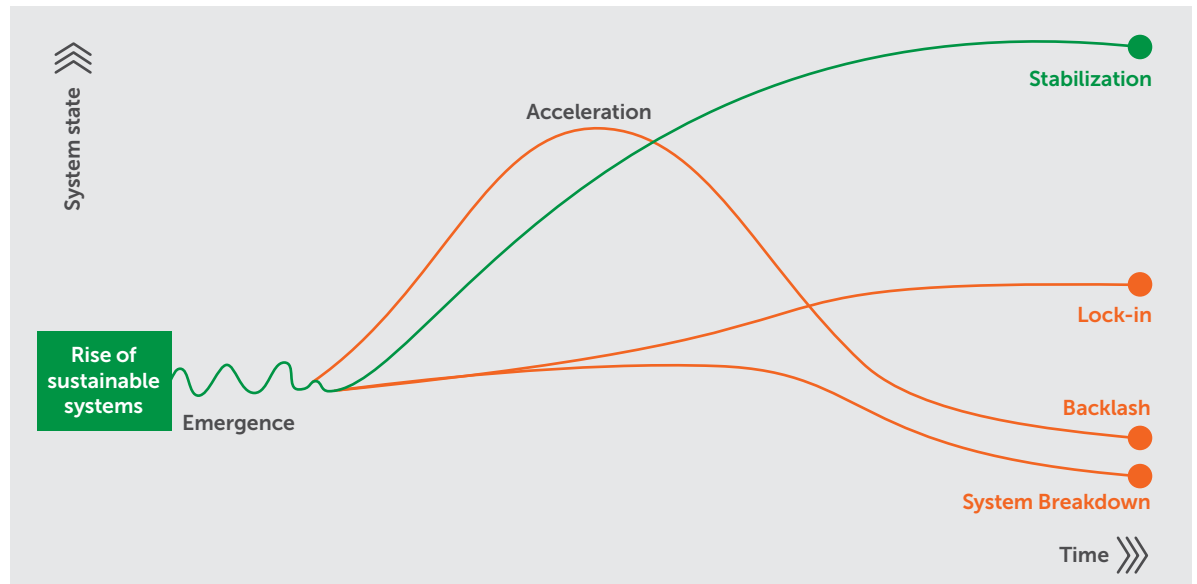
“Against the backdrop crises, the 2030 Agenda remains a strong and valid agenda for a desirable future. Making progress on the SDGs is not only essential, but also an insurance to build resilient systems against new crises and shocks. Without the SDGs, things would be worse.”

At the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Summit in September 2023, world leaders will be tasked with discussing a Rescue Plan for People and Planet. As highlighted in the opening to the roundtable, ensuring that we achieve purpose-led, rather than reactive and crisis-ridden development, is one of the biggest challenges we have.

To set the scene, Professor Jaime Miranda shared the key messages and findings of the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023. The report’s main message is that transformation towards a better, more sustainable future is possible, but not inevitable, and it requires conscious management and decision making. With this in mind, the report is designed to help decision-makers accelerate and remove obstacles that stand in the way of progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

In his presentation, Professor Miranda, highlighted several key considerations in managing transitions and transformations for health and sustainable development. First, not all transformations are constructive and stable. When poorly managed, transformations can result in backlash and systemic breakdowns, which may result in backsliding rather than progress (Figure 1).

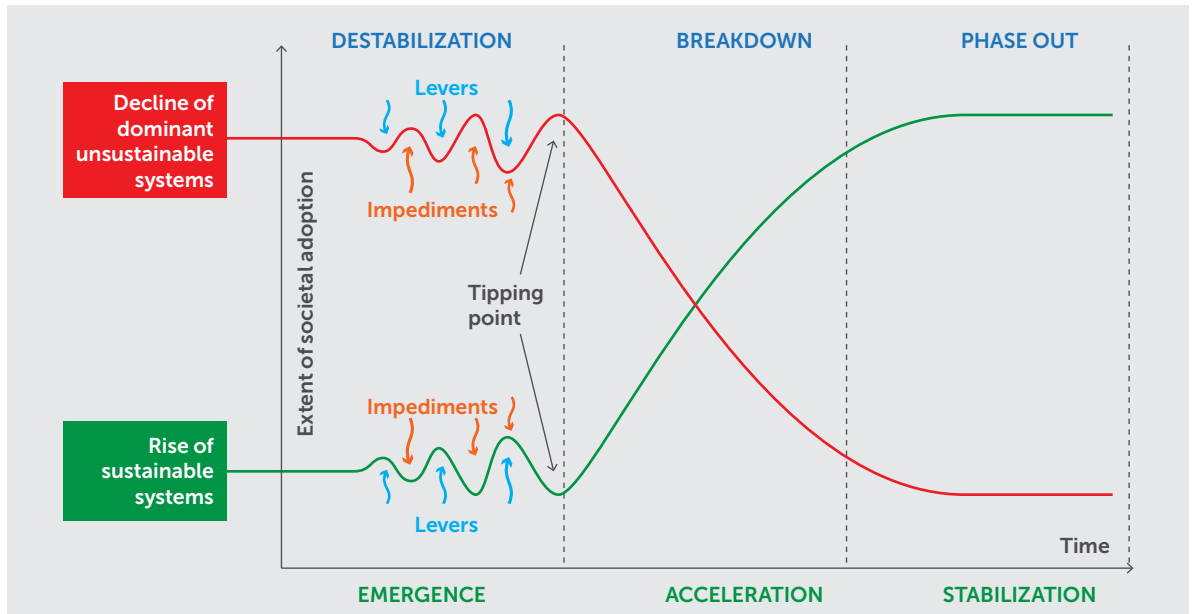
Figure 1. Successful and unsuccessful transformation pathways (Source: Global Sustainable Development Report, 2023)



Therefore, it is important to pro-actively manage and balance the decline of dominant unsustainable systems with the rise of more sustainable systems (Figure 2). This is a key consideration for all countries and stakeholders in the second half of the 2030 Agenda, efforts to achieve health and developmental goals and accelerate progress towards SDG attainment are re-invigorated.

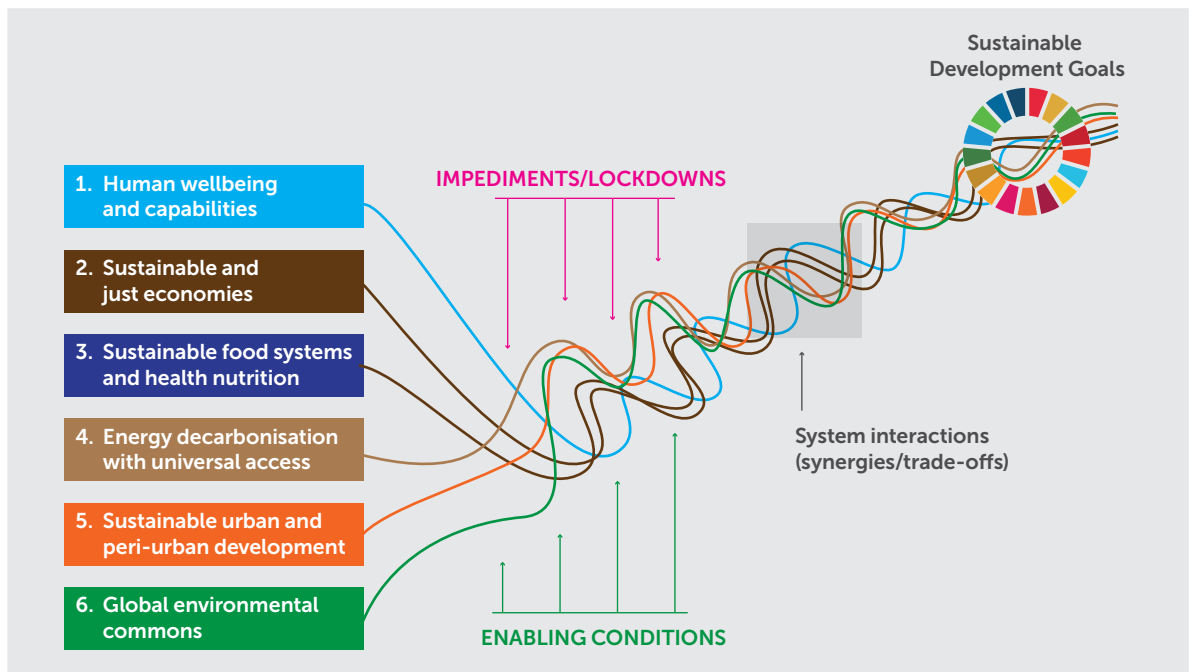


Figure 2. Phases of transformation (Source: Global Sustainable Development Report, 2023)



Furthermore, well-intentioned transformations of health, social, economic, and environmental systems on which we all depend can also interact with one another in synergistic or deleterious ways (Figure 3). Ensuring strong communication between systems and sectors, as well as early identification of possible deleterious effects, can help to ensure good governance of transitions and transformations and promote policy coherence.

Figure 3. Interlinked transformations across systems and coherent actions that can generate synergies and present trade-offs to be managed in pursuit of the SDGs (Source: Global Sustainable Development Report, 2023)



To support safe, healthy, equitable and just transitions, the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 issues five calls to action to accelerate implementation and SDG attainment by 2030 (Box 1).

Box 1. Calls to action for acceleration and SDG attainment by 2030

1. Establish by 2024 an SDG Transformation framework, including:
 - a. National plans, with global commitments and non-state actor partnerships;
 - b. Adequate financing and integration in budgeting; and
 - c. Science-based tools.
2. Build capacities for transformation, such as training, foresight, public engagement, and negotiation skills
3. Drive transformation through its phases and manage interlinkages by strategically using entry points, sequencing interventions and assessing interlinkages and spill over effects.
4. Improve critical, underlying conditions for SDG implementation, such as preventing conflict, ensuring fiscal space, and focusing on marginalised groups and groups experiencing vulnerability.
5. Work with science, including investing in evaluation research, research and development in the Global South, and knowledge sharing.



Panel discussion: Building forward economies and societies that deliver health and sustainable development

A panel of experts featuring Professor Göran Tomson, Dr Omnia El Omrani, Dr Amanda Shriwise, Professor Rhoda Wanyenze and moderated by Dr Kumanan Rasanathan, explored the question of how to build forward economies and societies that deliver health and sustainable development from different perspectives.

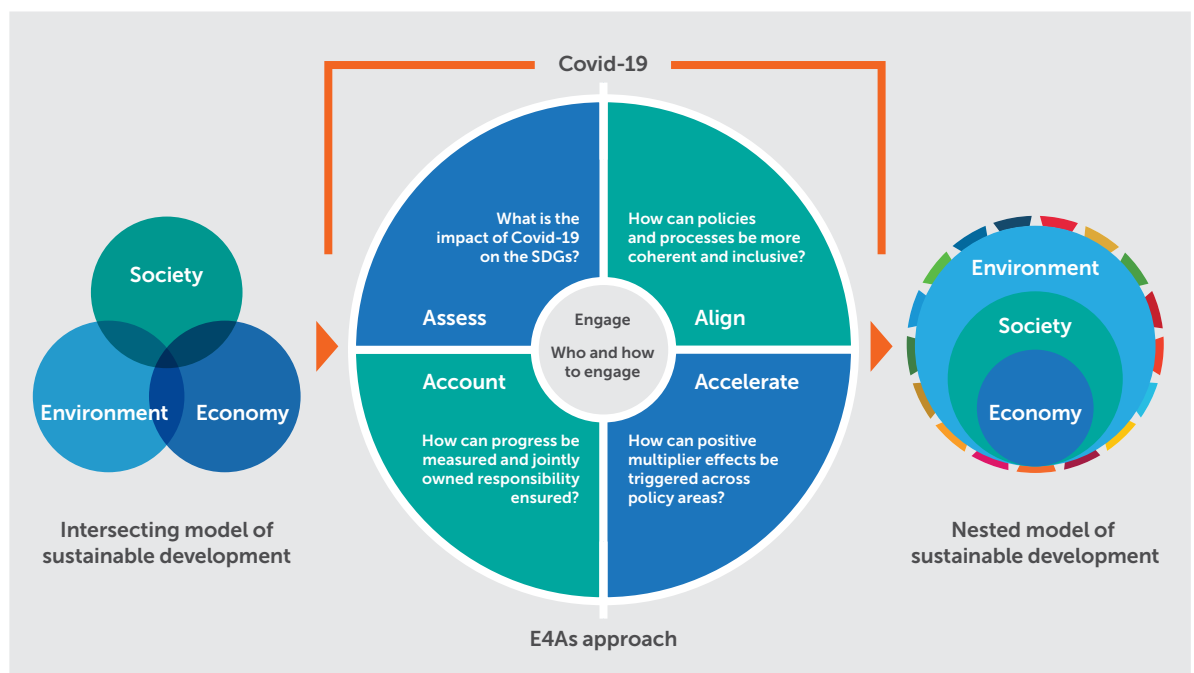
The following key points emerged as integral components to be included in a Rescue Plan for People and Planet:

1. Challenge conventional thinking by viewing economic development not as an end goal itself, but as a means to improve the health and well-being of people and planet.

Conflicts, emergencies and severe disruptions often remind us of what we value most and responding to these crises present an opportunity to rethink how we approach success. COVID-19 served as a reminder that human health is inextricably connected to planetary, economic, and societal health and wellbeing, and the pandemic demonstrated how rapidly economic and social behaviours can change.

One way to use disruptions as opportunity for transformation towards better health and sustainable development is to ensure that emergency and policy responses work towards a nested model of sustainable development (Figure 4). Nested models of sustainable development emphasise the need to ensure that economic systems and practices help to achieve our social and environmental objectives. Such a model would also help to promote social and environmental measures as indicators of developmental success, beyond traditional measures of economic growth, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In this vein there is renewed energy and momentum for progressing concepts such as well-being economies.

Figure 4. Moving from an intersecting to a nested model of sustainable development (Source: de León EA, Shriwise A, Tomson G, Morton S, Lemos DS, Menne B, Dooris M. (2021) 'Beyond building back better: imagining a future for human and planetary health,' Lancet Planetary Health)



2. *Meaningfully centre the needs, perspectives, and solutions on those most negatively impacted by multiple and ongoing crises and who are experiencing vulnerability, including children and adolescents, indigenous communities, and migrants. They should be at the decision-making table, not only when planning, but also when implementing, monitoring, and evaluating progress towards the SDGs.*

Young people are disproportionately shouldering the impacts of global environmental change, as well as some of the consequences of the pandemic, such as school closures. This impacted their mental health and well-being, and some have also struggled with access to food, water, education, and healthcare facilities.

In response to these shared experiences and challenges, young people are embracing a grassroots approach to identify what communities need, listening radically, and bringing their inputs, perspectives, and the gaps into policymaking spaces with credibility, being direct and bold, trying to influence change and calling for accountability and litigation processes with a human rights approach.

3. *Acknowledge and engaging effectively with the social questions that are implicit in economic and environmental changes early and upfront to ensure safe, equitable and just transitions and transformations that deliver better health and sustainable development.*

While often politically contentious, acknowledging and engaging effectively with social questions implicit in changes and policy recommendations for moving towards green and more sustainable economies is essential for ensuring safe, equitable, and just transitions and transformations. In addition to being important in their own right, continuing to adapt and invest in education, health, child and social protection and services, unemployment insurance, and pensions, and justice systems is essential for: i) promoting social cohesion and lessening tensions and strain generated by high levels of inequality; ii) ensuring equal opportunities for future generations; and iii) building resilience and ensuring preparedness of populations for facing future crises.

Indeed, as demonstrated in the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, seven of the SDGs most closely related to social well-being offer some of the most promising entry points for accelerating progress towards the SDGs (Figure 5). As outlined in the Report, evidence suggests that positive progress in any one of these SDGs often brings co-benefits for other SDGs, highlighting the extent to which the transformation of social systems is key for accelerating progress towards the establishment of sustainable systems and the SDGs.

Figure 5.





4. Strengthen science-to-policy pipeline and ecosystem to mitigate the negative impacts of ongoing crises and prepare the world to address future health and environmental challenges.

To prepare for future crises and challenges, greater attention needs to be given to using scientific insights and methods to identify, forecast, and assess the potential impacts of megatrends that are driving and increasing risks, vulnerability and inequalities for individuals and communities. This should be complemented by efforts to address these gaps, disparities and vulnerabilities in policy practice to ensure preparedness and absorptive capacity for assistance in the face of emergencies and crises. For example, various social groups and demographics are not experiencing the transformations related to climate change and digitalisation equally, with those in poverty, women, minority groups and indigenous people, and rural populations often experiencing the negative impacts of these transformations most intensely.

To build resilience and ensure that no one is left behind, additional investments need to be made in innovation and data, especially in regularly collecting and reporting gender- and sex-disaggregated data, to enable better and more sophisticated assessment of these megatrends and their disproportionate impacts – both positive and negative - on populations. These efforts should focus on those most at risk of experiencing negative impacts from pending transitions and transformation, and ideally, they should inform policy and decision making in real time.

Key points from participant discussion

“As young people, we are continuously asking – how can we improve and safeguard the health of our generation equitably, how can we prevent any further pandemics from taking place, how can we reduce non-communicable disease and protect our planetary and natural environments that are now deteriorating at unprecedented rates?”

The roundtable participants included stakeholders from diverse sectors, disciplines and global regions (e.g., international and national governmental organisations, policymakers and practitioners, Civil society organisations (CSOs), academics from medicine, public health and social sciences, technical experts, and other global, regional, national, and sub-national actors).

The main component of the roundtable was a facilitated discussion to explore: i) what are the main ways that the 2030 Agenda has advanced and enabled building sustainable economies that deliver better health and well-being?; ii) what are the main challenges that need to be made to accelerate progress towards health and developmental goals?; and iii) from the view of the health sector, what are the main barriers and opportunities for shifting towards a nested model of sustainable development?. The main points made by roundtable participants related to each of these themes are captured below.

What are the main ways that the 2030 Agenda has advanced and enabled building sustainable economies that deliver better health and well-being?

Understanding synergies and systems

The SDGs are part of an integrated, indivisible, and interdependent agenda. This global framework has helped to generate a consensus on the need for sustainable development across the social, economic, and environmental domains of sustainability. The SDGs have raised awareness of structural elements that affect health and well-being, including the need to embrace complex systems thinking, even though this may not always be reflected in implementation, monitoring, and evaluation to the extent that is needed.

Increasing participation of stakeholders and amplifying people’s voices

The SDGs are the outcome of a collaborative process. An Open Working Group with representatives from over 70 member states was established to develop the 2030 agenda, and the scale of the public engagement was unprecedented in UN history. It consisted of a three-year, transparent, participatory process that included the input of all parties and people, including those at risk of being left behind, to ensure ownership and agency to accomplish the goals.

Catalysing funding and collaboration

The SDGs have acted as a stimulant for funding and investment, encouraging agencies to be founded and collaborate, despite the UN’s projection that the world will need to spend between \$3 trillion and \$5 trillion yearly to accomplish the SDGs by 2030. Across the public and private sectors, joint funding initiatives and collaborations have taken shape, not only between the Global North and South, but also through South-South Cooperation and within global sub-regions to exchange knowledge and learning and accelerate progress.

Strengthening data, monitoring, and accountability

As well as establishing global norms and acting as a coordination framework at the global level, the SDGs have served as a useful tool for international and national governmental organisations, development partners and CSOs to ensure accountability. The SDG indicators and targets provide a foundation for data collection and monitoring to assess the effectiveness



and efficiency of concerted efforts and actions across the whole-of-government and society to progress towards these shared normative standards and developmental goals.

Embracing digitalisation

Digitalisation has profound effects on societies and economies and is an essential precondition for transformations needed to achieve the SDGs in several areas, including: strengthening human capital; promoting responsible consumption and production; moving towards a decarbonised energy system; ensuring healthy, affordable food and clean water; promoting sustainable cities and communities; and ensuring inclusive, equitable and rights-based digital government.

What are the main changes that need to be made to accelerate progress towards health and developmental goals?

“Despite challenges we had during COVID-19, the pandemic generated innovations and new thinking that is positive and important for accelerating movements towards the 2030 agenda goals. We need to invest in identifying them, nurturing them, and accelerating and expanding those that can add value towards attaining the 2030 goals”.

Shift towards a nested model of sustainable development

Shifting towards a nested model, instead of the intersecting model, of sustainable development is critical for delivering on the SDGs across all three of the domains of sustainable development. The health sector can be both a driver and a beneficiary of this shift, as recognised by calls for shifting towards well-being economies. As illustrated in Figure 4, this shift can be facilitated by strategically engaging partners and stakeholders across these domains to: i) assess progress towards health and developmental goals; ii) align efforts to ensure policy processes and implementation mechanisms are coherent and working smoothly; iii) accelerate progress by investing in interventions with positive multiplier effects, such as those focused on well-being; and iv) account for the joint endeavours and activities undertaken to ensure joint ownership and responsibility across levels (e.g., international, regional, national and sub-national) and across stakeholders and partners from multiple sectors.

Localise the SDGs and advance intersectoral action on the ground

Evidence-based interventions to accelerate progress towards SDG attainment are becoming more well-known, but capacity building and additional support is required to make it easier for local governments and decision-makers to connect to new interventions and ways of working across sectors that are relevant to the barriers and challenges they face and for their cultural and institutional context.

Protect and enhance civil society engagement within the UN

The opinions of citizens are represented at the UN in a variety of ways, including through governments, parliaments, the business sector, and UN officials and experts, among others. The UN must increase its capacity to engage civil society and cannot afford to ignore the vitality they bring to policy discussions, with a focus on engaging CSOs that are most legitimately representing and giving voice to the views of those most at risk of being left behind. In the health sector, CSOs should be represented not only at high-level meetings and other formal engagements, but more regularly throughout policy making and implementation processes

Strengthen private sector engagement

While Member States remain the key constituents in the UN system, they are simply no longer the only players affecting and even determining policy development and implementation. As a result, SDG attainment will require not only governments and civil society, but also multinational corporations, small- and medium-sized enterprises, private equity and finance to contribute substantial ideational, technical and financial resources to this endeavour. Governments and other stakeholders must work with the private sector to identify common ground, foster mutual understanding, and build trust, which will require standards to be set that effectively manage potential conflicts of interest and that establish defined interaction modalities.

Advance progress on data for SDG monitoring to improve people's lives

When the SDGs were created, it was readily apparent that measuring and evaluating achievement would be difficult due to insufficient capacity and funding for national health surveillance systems, as well as a lack of disaggregated data reporting. Continuing to invest in building effective health and development surveillance systems can enable more equitable targeting of policies and programmes, strengthen the assessment of impacts, outcomes and trends, including forecasting, monitoring, and evaluation, and increase transparency and accountability across development and implementing partners to ensure that no one is left behind.

From the view of the health sector, what are the main barriers and opportunities for shifting towards a nested model of sustainable development?

BARRIER 1: Absence of a robust definition of what constitutes a well-being economy and what distinguishes it from previous attempts to include welfare and well-being in developmental strategies.

A focus on 'economic growth as GDP' alone creates tensions that hinder us from moving towards a nested model that accelerates health and development progress. Without a clear definition and alternative metrics for economic performance within a sustainable development framework, it is challenging to assess progress towards a nested model in a swift, streamlined, and sound manner.

OPPORTUNITY:

As identified in the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, SDGs related to well-being offer many positive synergies or co-benefits for progress across the SDGs. In this way, the concept of well-being and the health targets related to it provide multiple entry points for making transitions and shifts towards a nested model that accelerates progress towards the SDGs.

BARRIER 2: Inadequate governance architecture to address complex policy problems:

To address complex policy problems, a diverse range of political voices, sectoral representatives, subject matter experts and civil society actors need to be engaged in dialogue, decision-making processes, and in policy implementation. However, governmental agencies face many barriers to this kind of multi-dimensional engagement, which makes it more difficult to ensure synergistic and coordinated action towards the health-related SDGs

OPPORTUNITY:

Disruptions from crises and emergencies and from the development and introduction of new technologies (e.g., technologies related to decarbonisation and digitalisation, including in the health sector) can be used as opportunities for introducing more effective and inclusive governance and coordination mechanisms that are fit for purpose and well-placed to address



these complex problems. To do this effectively, it will be critical for key parts of the health system to be directly and regularly engaged in these efforts. The health sector and health systems must also regularly pursue and participate in efforts to ensure health system preparedness by working to build resilience to ensure that these systems are ready to meet future challenges and that they are able to mitigate the negative impacts of future crises on population health and well-being.

BARRIER 3: Insufficient capacity to ensure a coordinated planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process for the SDGs at global, national and local levels.

OPPORTUNITY:

Addressing complex problems also requires additional capacity and new multi- and inter-disciplinary capabilities across both the public and private sectors to support coordination efforts, as demonstrated at the science-policy interface during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ongoing efforts to address short-termism in both financial support for national and multilateral health and development efforts and in the staff and consultancy contracts meant to deliver funded joint projects and activities can help to reduce turnover and instability in project delivery, thereby maximising value and accelerating progress. This will also require greater attention to, investment in, and the normalising of transdisciplinary research and innovation processes between academia and other sectors to address difficult conceptual and morally complex challenges that arise in shifting towards a nested model of sustainable development.

BARRIER 4: Lack of accountability to ensure ownership, responsibility, and automatic correction of negative spillover effects within and between countries, across demographic groups, and between sectors, including between the public and private sectors. Institutional processes that ensure meaningful participation and accountability are needed.

OPPORTUNITY:

Both youth engagement and economic transformations for environmental sustainability provide strong entry points for addressing asymmetries and injustices in the sources and sinks of health and developmental problems and the uneven and inequitable distribution of their consequences. For example, engaging young people as equal partners in advocating for health and environmental justice can help to hold leaders in both the public and private sectors accountable for their actions not only today, but for the consequences that they have overtime.

Conclusion

“When the SDGs were developed, we did not anticipate the scale of challenges that we would face. A lot of progress towards achieving the MDGs happened in the second half, hopefully these crises can also focus attention on that.”

In sum, while there have been unprecedented investments in social protection during the COVID-19 pandemic and while there is now a strong consensus around the need to address planetary health, there is a lack of clarity on how countries plan to ensure that ongoing economic development and transformations will address growing inequality and ensure that social objectives are met in a way that is equitable and inclusive amid multiple crises and fiscal pressures.

Transformation is not a linear process. To embrace it, we must clearly comprehend the capacities needed, as well as the urgency and scope of the change, and specify and invest broadly in the kinds of transitions that will need to take place to deliver on broader transformation. We frequently are unable to foresee when change will occur, but we must adapt and proactively direct in ways that deliver fairness, equity, and justice. We also need to think about how to communicate more effectively and understand how our work is being understood by all parts of society. Working with young people, fostering knowledge and capacity-building opportunities, and supporting multi-stakeholder collaborations are all positive steps towards advancing development and health.

In line with the five calls to action for acceleration and SDG attainment by 2030 in the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023, the roundtable calls for attention to the following:

- Ensure that SDG Transformation networks focus not only on amplifying work that is already underway in the health sector, but that they prioritise a focus on how health and health systems can be both a driver and beneficiary of shifts towards a nested model in line with current efforts to advance well-being economies.
- Complement efforts to build capacities for transformation with a focus on reducing short-termism in project funding and delivery support structures to deliver on the health-related SDGs.
- Drive transformation and manage SDG interlinkages through a focus on well-being and by strategically using entry points such as youth engagement and economic transformations for environmental sustainability to address asymmetries and strengthen accountability to improve health and strengthen health systems.
- Continue to adapt and invest in long-standing social programmes and systems, strengthen data collection and monitoring of progress and trends, and ensure that preparedness and response mechanisms lay the groundwork for new policy and governance structures to improve the underlying conditions that support attainment of the health-related SDGs.
- Build and normalise investing in the development of the capacity and new capabilities that are needed to effectively address complex problems at the science-policy interface.



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Roundtable participants

This report represents the collective insights of participants in the Roundtable:

- Adriana Pacheco
- Aku Kwamie
- Alice Namale
- Amanda Shriwise
- Amrit Virk
- Anibal Velasquez
- Astra Bonini
- Brian Li Han Wong
- Cameron Allen
- Chhavi Bhandari
- Chris Butler
- Dijlah Mounगतonga
- Emma Feeny
- Emma Wallengren
- Goran Tomson
- Iris Martine Blom
- Jaime Miranda
- Jennifer Sargent
- Kumanan Rasanathan
- Liz Arnanz
- Maarinke Van Der Meulen
- Mark Dooris
- Melody Ding
- Morven Roberts
- Ole Petter Ottersen
- Omnia El Omrani
- Poorva Prabha Patil
- Rawlence Ndejjo
- Rhoda Wanyenze
- Sarah Puddicombe
- Suzanne Kiwanuka
- Tanja Tomson
- Yannish Naik



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