



## How to engage with SDGs

### Net take-aways of *Strategic dialogue on the UN SDGs* – 7 December 2021

#### Panellists

**Barbara Guthrie**, Vice President Corporate Social Sustainability at UL

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#### Why SDGs?

The SDGs are a collection of **17 interlinked global goals** to achieve a better more sustainable future for all. They are essentially a common language, consisting of a series of well-defined aspirational goals. They include 169 targets and 231 indicators. Together they give companies a blueprint and the framework to positively impact the societal needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The difficulty is that they are covering many different dimensions and no one company alone can address them all. The targets and indicators allow companies to understand what they can really influence in the context of their own scope.

#### Why embrace sustainability at the corporate level?

No one organization, country or government, business or individual owns this planet on which we live. Only through our collective measurable actions are we able to realize the SDG goals.

Sustainability needs to be put in the right framework and objectives and really imbedded within the culture and the operations of the company. It needs to be put at the same level as safety or quality. Businesses cannot thrive unless both people and the planet are thriving.

Best-in-class companies put in place these essential principles:

- Match SDGs goals and targets with what is most relevant to the company and the business they are in. That's where the organization can make real impact, change outcomes and differentiate itself.
- Define the strategy, set ambitious, and sometimes uncomfortable, goals and measure progress
- Include all stakeholders (business partners, investors, employees, suppliers, etc.) beyond the own organization
- Don't expect that somebody else will provide you with the recipe or solution on how your company may engage with SDGs and SDG targets. Develop your own vision and direction. This will work best.
- Create and implement initiatives also at the local level to make a real difference

#### Tips from the panellists

- **Build a sustainability barometer** with very clear goals and public commitments, which force the organization to reinvent how it does things.
- **Look at SDG goals, targets and indicators.** Instead of just looking at the 17 goals (which read more like slogans), look at the underlying **targets**. Herein lies very clear direction which can be used by organizations of all sizes, orientation etc. to connect to specific targets and develop a focused SDG strategy for the company.
- **Set goals which are difficult to achieve.** This is uncomfortable but the best recipe to break silos and transform the organization. In the end what was thought to be almost impossible suddenly becomes possible. And if you miss that very ambitious target, it is still a great performance. That's why it is really important to

tackle environmental, social and governance dimensions for the SDGs that are relevant for your own business, all at the same time.

- **Make mistakes and learn from them.** We are not perfect, none of us are. And as an organization, we still have a lot to do and to learn. We will make mistakes, but it is OK to make mistakes. Look at the SDGs and set yourself ambitious targets. Try to achieve them. The SDGs allow you to look at topics you might not naturally look at. Each organization has a role to play. We are all in this together. Try, test, fail, try again and we will all succeed together.
- **Use consensus-based international standards.** Together with conformity assessment they provide a benchmark, a foundation that allows you to build sustainability into products. They are built with the help of subject matter experts and allow manufacturers to design safe, reliable, efficient and sustainable products.