

Advancing the Sustainable Development Goals:

Business action and Millennials' views



Foreword



Back in September 2015, all the world's governments met in New York and reached unprecedented agreement on a set of Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs) to guide us all – expressly including business – on the path to a more prosperous, equitable and peaceful globe as we head towards the year 2030.

Now, more than one year on, how is business responding to the challenge of these Global Goals?

In a word, timidly. Our research shows that awareness among companies is growing, but action to change is still minimal.

For sure, we have seen lots of announcements 'recognising' the Goals. A growing number of companies are mapping their strategies retrospectively to the Goals. In truth, we ourselves have helped quite a few to identify their material issues. It's a good start.

But what we haven't yet seen is much evidence of companies taking to heart **ALL** 17 goals and asking searching questions internally about the changes needed to respond to the challenge they present – how we innovate, who we employ, what we sell, where we raise our finance, when to work with governments and, ultimately, whether our business models are sustainable for a 2030 world.

In the belief that companies need to think ahead, here at Corporate Citizenship we've taken a deep dive to ask what Millennials think

– the 2 billion people born between the early 1980s and 2000. They are the employees, consumers, suppliers, regulators, bloggers and, increasingly, investors of the future. Not only is their own purchasing power growing, they are set to inherit (at least in the rich countries) over \$40 trillion in assets from the Baby Boomer generation.

So what do Millennials expect of business concerning the Goals?

The results will surprise and challenge. Well known already is their desire for brands with a social purpose and jobs that provide fulfilling work. Our survey finds a shockingly large 'trust deficit', the gap between their hopes and the reality of what business is doing today. Eight in ten say the private sector has a very important role in achieving the SDGs, but fewer than three in ten think business will do anything other than put short-term profit maximisation ahead of sustainability.

At the end of the day, business is there to create wealth – it's how we share that wealth, and ensure different groups benefit fairly, that could just be the defining feature of businesses role in creating a more sustainable world.

Read on for our full findings – and also the insights we've gathered from corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainability practitioners in business. We conclude with our **four-point plan** for what business should do in response.

Mike Tuffrey

Co-founder, Corporate Citizenship

About the Sustainable Development Goals

What are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?

They are 17 goals underpinned by 169 targets, which set the priorities for sustainable development through to 2030.

Also called the **Global Goals**, they were officially adopted on 25th September 2015 by 193 United Nations (UN) member states.

Who are the Goals for?

Everyone. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals, which were aimed at developing countries, the SDGs are universal goals for all countries (both developed and developing) and organisations (public, private and third sector) to collaboratively work towards.

Who decided on the Goals?

The Goals were shaped by world leaders from 193 nations, in partnership with non-profits and businesses.

The process, which began in 2012, involved 83 national surveys and over 7 million people, making it the biggest consultation process in UN history.¹

How are we keeping track of progress?

A total of 230 individual indicators have been developed by the UN's Statistical Commission's Interagency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators to monitor progress against the 17 goals and 169 targets. Some of the indicators will be refined over the next 15 years as country coverage, methodologies and data collection technology evolve.

Who's footing the bill?

It is estimated that investments of \$5–7 trillion a year are needed to achieve the World Global Goals.² This underscores the importance of a collective effort, including the power of business.

At a 2015 summit held in Ethiopia, 193 UN member states adopted the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which lays out a global framework for financing sustainable development and the implementation of the Goals.

Why should business care?

As Paul Polman, Unilever CEO and a Commissioner in the Business and Sustainable Development Commission, said, *'The Sustainable Development Goals are the fundamental cornerstone to secure future economic and business growth... It is not possible to have a strong, functioning business in a world of increasing inequality, poverty and climate change.'*³

The Global Goals are the new, de-facto global standard for businesses to design, measure and account for their contribution to sustainable development.



About our research

Over the last 12 months, Corporate Citizenship has been canvassing a range of perspectives on business action on the SDGs or Global Goals. This report forms part of a larger programme of work that began with their launch in September 2015.

During July and August 2016, we carried out a global survey, asking young people about their expectations of business in tackling big global challenges and contributing to sustainable development. Over 250 people responded, of which 216 were classified as Millennials. This paper summarises their perspectives and 'asks' of business leaders.

We also conducted a separate survey of practitioners working in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability roles in the private sector. This survey builds on the research we did in 2015 looking at how corporates are engaging with the Global Goals. We had over 175 responses, of whom 57% were practitioners working in companies.

Finally, we have interviewed leaders from the business and the non-profit world, and published their views on our website as part of our *Leader Insights* series. We have heard a range of unique perspectives during our research. Collectively, they make the case for greater accountability of corporations and a shift in how they generate wealth, grow prosperity, and tackle global challenges.

As Winnie Byanyima, Executive Director of Oxfam International, told us: 'business has been losing trust and needs to seize the opportunity of the SDGs to transform into something new, fit for the 21st Century.'

We are grateful to all participants involved in our research, particularly the companies, colleagues and partners in our global network for giving up their time to share their insights. We would like to extend a special thanks to those who participated in our *Leader Insights* series and informed this research:

Business and Sustainable Development Commission: [Alex Evans](#), *Research Director*

CIVICUS: [Dr Dhananjayan \(Danny\) Sriskandarajah](#), *Secretary General and CEO*

Dow Chemical Company: [Mark Weick](#), *Director for the Sustainability Program Office*

GSK: [Priya Madina](#), *Director, Government Affairs, Global Issues*

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Netherlands: [Hugo van Meijenfeldt](#), *Coordinator National Implementation Global Goals*

Oxfam International: [Winnie Byanyima](#), *Executive Director*

Pearson: [Amanda Gardiner](#), *VP, Sustainability & Social Innovation*

Save the Children: [Natasha Parker](#), *Deputy Director*

ShareAction: [Catherine Howarth](#), *Chief Executive*

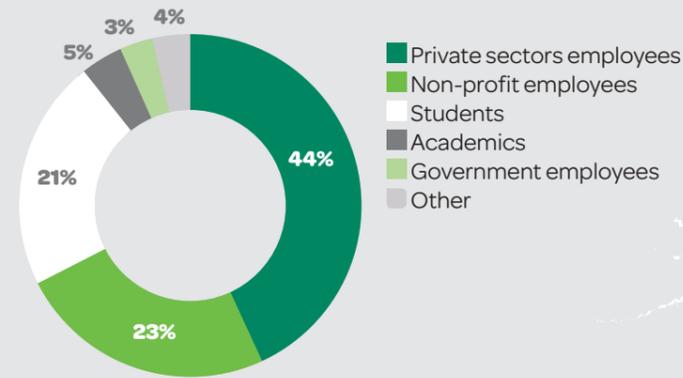
Tesco Plc: [Kené Umeasiegbu](#), *Head of Climate Change and Sustainable Agriculture*

Unicef UK: [Francis West](#), *Head of Private Sector Policy & Advocacy*

We hope that our findings can challenge, inspire and, above all, provide the practical guidance needed to help more companies seize the opportunities from the Sustainable Development Goals.

Advice from Millennials to business leaders

Our survey had respondents from around the world and all walks of life.



As part of the survey, we asked Millennials what advice they would offer to the CEO of a company about the SDGs if given the opportunity. We have shared some of the responses here.



'The SDGs are key drivers for our future and it's the responsibility of all sectors to make sure we achieve them. As a Millennial, I'm looking to corporations, who have so much power and a global reach, to lead the way. I believe that companies can – and that Millennial employees, customers and investors are all looking for companies to take positive action and make the world we want to see in 2030 a reality.'

Respondent, *Chile*

'Stop looking at your company as a single entity, instead recognising that you're part of a wider system. Talk, collaborate and work with competitors. It won't be easy but it's worth it.'

Private sector employee, *UK*

'Imagine a world where every country in the world had achieved all 17 of the SDGs. Surely that must be enough motivation to do your part towards achieving them.'

Student, *Ireland*

'I recognize the difficulty of convincing profit-leaning stakeholders to commit [to change]... but as a chosen CEO you should want to take on this challenge at full speed and convince your stakeholders why this is so necessary and ultimately beneficial to your business, your brand, and the world.'

Private sector employee, *US*

'Yes, it does sound like you are [being asked to be] a superhero; but with your power as CEO, you can be one. The SDGs are there to guide you... we all can act now.'

NGO employee, *Philippines*

'The SDGs are global efforts to fighting poverty and inequality. As such, to be a socially responsible company requires a collective effort to supporting the goals and investing in it.'

Government employee, *Ghana*

'Don't be overwhelmed by the volume & breadth of the SDGs. Start by assessing where your company can have the greatest, quickest impact & prioritise your efforts from there. Some Goals will be more relevant to some businesses than others – and that's ok.'

Private sector employee, *UK*

'Be clear and efficient about what needs to be done, and talk about it with the whole team. Keep motivating everyone, keep working with them, supporting each and every one, even if it takes a lot of time – time will show what happens.'

Student, *Spain*

'You're already a millionaire. Why not be a millionaire who saves lives?'

Private sector employee, *US*

'When you are not in this position anymore, say 30 years down the road, trust that the brand you have led and built is in the hands someone that you have empowered and developed – whether directly or indirectly. THAT is a legacy.'

NGO employee, *Malaysia*

'The Sustainable Development Goals offer a real opportunity for companies to turn societal challenges, such as unemployment and lack of healthcare services, into opportunities that enhance business growth and long-term competitiveness (positioned for sustainable success). The only way forward is for us to collaborate and business can play a key role in this.'

Private sector employee, *UK*

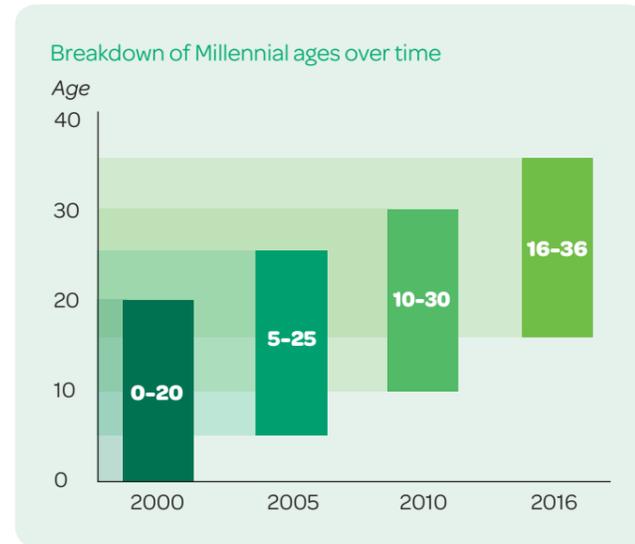
'Make sure you are being responsible throughout your supply chain. Nominate SDG champions within your organization and create business goals and social impact goals that complement each other.'

Private sector employee, *US*

Who are the Millennials?

Millennials make up the largest generation alive – nearly 2 billion people, more than 80% of whom live in emerging markets.⁴ Born between the early 1980s and 2000, Millennials have grown up during a time of rapid change. Technological, political, social and economic disruption has been a constant theme in their lives.

In 2015, the youngest Millennial became of working age and the oldest entered the prime of their careers.



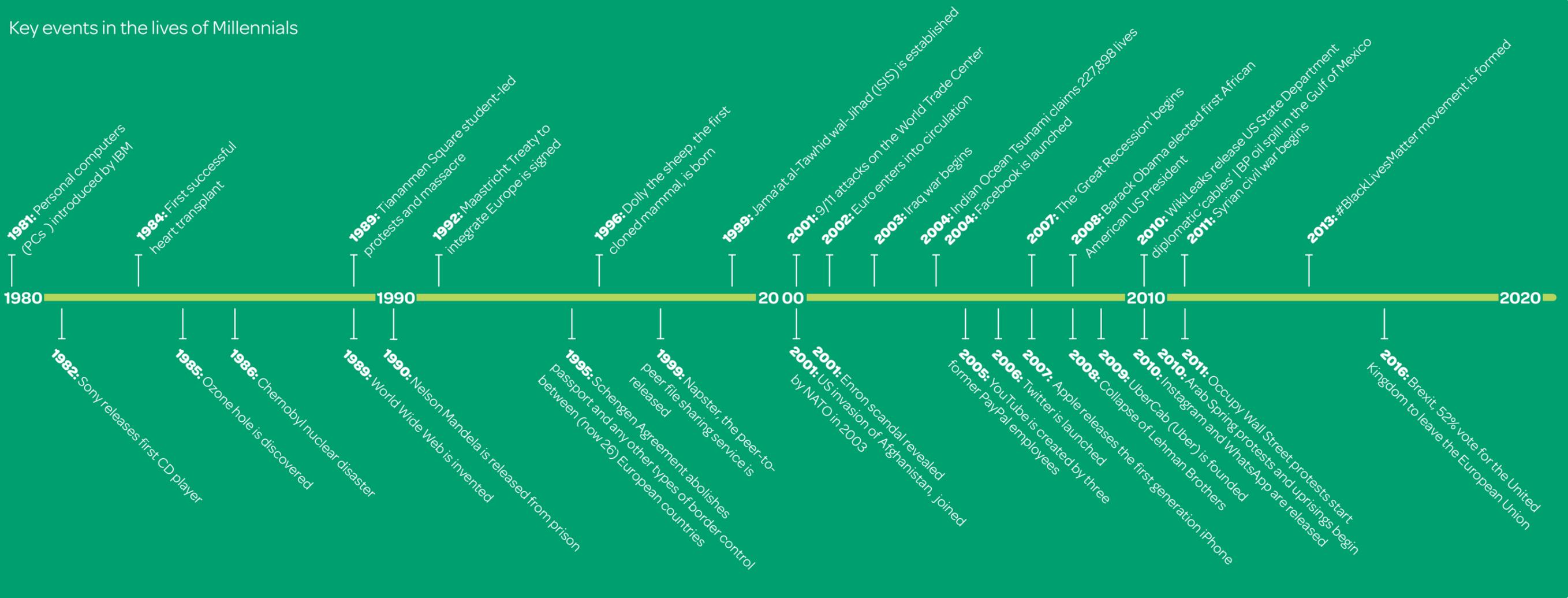
Often portrayed through extremely polarised stereotypes, Millennials have been described as lazy, entitled narcissists who still live with their parents and won't commit to big responsibilities.⁵ Yet they are also the innovative idealists who will save us all – presumably by fixing the global economy, solving climate change and creating a more just and fair society.

The reality is that Millennials are not a homogenous group. Although most may have traditional aspirations – getting a job they are passionate about, owning a home, marriage and family⁶ – the events and innovations that have

shaped the world during their lifetime make it likely that they will achieve these goals in non-traditional ways and at different stages of life than their parents. Their diversity of thought and self-identity means they don't fit traditional segmentation models.

Millennials are more flexible, agile, mobile, and connected than previous generations. Consequently, their values and decisions will be informed by many different factors and, perhaps most importantly, through direct and authentic engagement with those whose decisions they seek to influence.

Key events in the lives of Millennials



The business case for Millennials

Although Millennials are criticised and celebrated in equal measure, the influence of this group on business and the global economy is undeniable. As they move into their prime spending years they will play a significant role in society as employees, consumers, entrepreneurs, voters and investors.

Values-driven employees

Millennials are expected to account for 50% of the global workforce by 2020.⁷ However, the growing supply may not necessarily mean easy pickings for employers. Recent research shows that two-thirds of Millennials surveyed hope to have moved on from their current roles by 2020. Reasons for why young people don't stay very long in one job will vary; but it has been established that that they – similarly to previous generations at that age – want their work to be connected to a meaning or a purpose beyond just a pay cheque.⁸ Most will, however, often prioritise their personal values ahead of organisational goals or traditional notions of stability. This 'loyalty challenge' means that businesses must think about how they attract and nurture loyalty in their talent pipeline beyond the pay cheque.⁹

Alpha-influencers

Millennials are an influential demographic, impacting the purchasing decisions of peers and parents. Globally, 70% of the so-called 'alpha-influencers' believe it is their responsibility to share feedback with companies, whether positive or negative.¹⁰ This translates into potentially powerful brand advocates or critics whose voices are amplified through social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. By sharing, reviewing, liking and snapchatting their views, they shape public perception on a massive scale.

The voice of the Millennials

Just how pervasive is social media?

-  Facebook has 1.71 billion users (as of July 2016), more than the population of China (almost 1.4 billion). Users generate 4 million 'likes' every minute.¹¹
-  There are about 500 million Tweets sent each day. That's 6,000 Tweets every second. The average Twitter user follows five businesses. 54% of users surveyed by Twitter reported that they had taken action after seeing a brand mentioned in Tweets.¹²
-  There are 400 million Monthly Active Users on Instagram and 90% are younger than 35. Half of the Instagrammers follow brands. Engagement with brands on Instagram is ten times higher than Facebook and 84 times higher than Twitter.¹³

Economic shape-shifters

Whilst many Millennials have grown up in an era of economic disruption, income disparity and debt, they are driving economic shifts with long-term impacts globally. From China to the US, Millennials are re-shaping spending and consumption patterns whilst defining and fuelling the growth of the sharing economy.^{14,15} Also known as the collaborative economy, this is characterised by peer-to-peer lending, borrowing and exchange – light on asset ownership, heavy on enabling access and fuelled by technology as well as trust.

A transformative economic model

Services such as Uber and Airbnb are the best known examples of the sharing economy, with Airbnb operating in more than 34,000 cities and 190 countries and Uber in over 66 countries. It has also inspired innovative approaches to development issues. Cities such as Buenos Aires, Argentina; Montevideo, Uruguay; Santiago, Chile; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil are leveraging the potential of open data sharing through events such as ‘civic hackathons’. Using apps that promote collaboration and innovative thinking, they have tackled challenges in solid waste management, promoting local tourism and public transportation.¹⁶

The sharing economy is projected to generate revenues of up to \$335 billion worldwide by 2025.¹⁷ Globally, more than a third of Millennials already belong to a sharing service or expect to join one within a year.¹⁸

Though they may be saddled with debt and have come of age in a world with unprecedented levels of uncertainty and volatility, Millennials are navigating their future on their own terms; and businesses cannot afford to underestimate the influence of this demographic.

Their purchasing power is expected to rise with the so-called ‘Great Transfer’. In the US alone, Millennials are expected to inherit approximately \$40 trillion of assets from the Baby Boomers.¹⁹ Companies that want to benefit from the growing purchasing power of Millennials and attract the best and brightest talent must learn how to effectively engage this generation and build trust. They must re-think how they do business to create value for the company and wider society, in keeping with rising expectations of this generation.

Millennial perspectives on business and the SDGs

With the Global Goals set to be achieved by 2030, Millennials are quite simply the most important demographic in driving the agenda. Their views will shape the global economy, including the corporate landscape, as well as the broader development agenda in the years ahead. The outcome, however, is not solely up to the Millennial generation and will depend on collaborative, even cross-generational efforts.

Our research has found that Millennials overwhelmingly see an important role for business in addressing global challenges. They believe in collaboration on multiple levels, both within and outside the private sector, to achieve the Global Goals. But there is a major gap – a trust deficit – between the expectations of Millennials and the reality of business today.

In this regard, Millennials are not so different from some other corporate stakeholders. What makes them unique is their size and likely influence over corporates in the decade ahead. In short, Millennials are the demographic group that no company can afford to ignore.

The 'ask' of business from this generation is clear

Corporates need to show a public commitment to supporting sustainable development; demonstrate more focused engagement with a range of stakeholders, including investors, government, employees and suppliers; develop genuinely transformational new business models that scale social impact; accelerate innovation on products and services that address societal concerns; and deliver against their commitments transparently and with honestly authenticity.

'We should see the SDGs as another tool in our accountability toolbox and use this agenda for positive change. This means making the Goals relevant to young people and getting them to embrace it as their agenda too.'

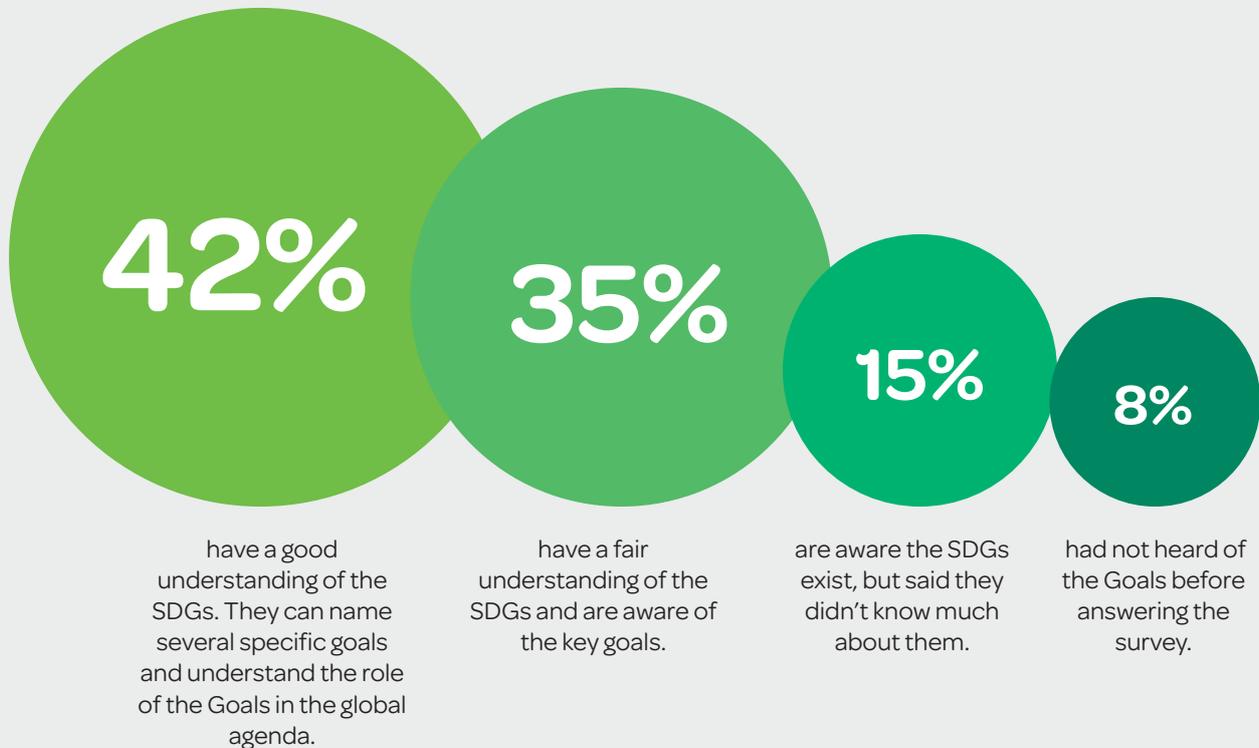
Danny Sriskandarajah, CIVICUS,
Secretary General and CEO

Millennials are paying attention to the Global Goals

Awareness of the SDGs was high amongst the Millennials that we surveyed, with over 90% having some knowledge about the Goals. This no doubt represents a response bias: those answering our survey who knew of the Goals

were probably more likely to respond. However, this also means that our sample is better informed about the issues and already thinking about the role of business in sustainable development.

Q. What is your current understanding of the UN Sustainable Development Goals?



Since the launch of the Global Goals in New York in September 2015, it has been an ambition to communicate them to billions. Initiatives like Project Everyone, founded by Richard Curtis, filmmaker and founder of Comic Relief, aim to share the Global Goals with all seven billion

people on this planet. High awareness of the goals amongst Millennials presents a real opportunity for business. It suggests that the SDGs could be used as a platform for strategy, actions and engagement to tackle sustainability challenges with this critical demographic.

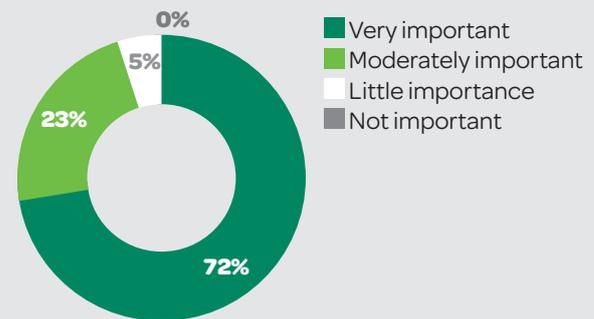
'The SDGs are an acknowledgment of what ALL young people already know, which is that the current global economic structure is enormously destructive and unsustainable. Young people feel cheated and ripped off by previous generations whose greed has left them with a planet on the brink of collapse. The firms that dominate future markets will be those who genuinely work towards achieving a sustainable economic model that is radically different to the current one. Young people will throw enormous support behind such firms while deliberately avoiding and demonising those that seek to uphold the status quo.'

Student, New Zealand

Job-seekers seek strong corporate social purpose

With Millennials expected to account for at least 50% of the workforce by 2025, companies must consider how to attract the best talent from this pool. Almost three-quarters of respondents said that, when considering working for an organisation, it is very important that the organisation have a public commitment to making a positive impact on society. This is in line with trends that suggest Millennials prefer to work for companies with a clear social purpose.

Q. When considering working for an organisation, how important is it to you that the organisation has a public commitment to making a positive impact on the wider society?



'Millennials and Gen Z – the next generation of employees, customers and consumers, will be expecting more from big business. We want to see value-driven employers and producers, so an adherence to the SDGs is a great way to structure your company's impact.'

NGO employee, United Kingdom



81%

of the Millennials said they believed that the private sector has a very important role to play in achieving the Global Goals.

Business must be part of the solution

This is a significant proportion and represents a widespread acceptance that business can, and must, be part of the solution to the big challenges facing the world.

Prevailing thinking during the era of the Millennium Development Goals was that the big development objectives were to be delivered by governments with the support of non-governmental organisations. However, with the SDGs, there is a much stronger call to action for the private sector to play a role in achieving the SDGs.

'Aligning business strategy objectives to SDGs is a way to prepare your company for the future, demonstrate innovation, and be prepared for change. In an ever changing climate, both the physical environment and business environment, world issues can no longer be ignored by businesses who must also be an active part of the solution.'

Respondent, Peru

For companies that do take up the mantle, the Global Goals can be a useful framework for future strategic planning and risk management. In response to the statement:

The SDGs will inspire companies that do take action to adopt new ways of operating and contributing to wider society:



18.5%

Strongly agree



43%

Agree



22%

Are not sure



14.5%

Disagree



2%

Strongly disagree

'Re-aligning business activities according to the SDGs makes good financial sense and offers a long-term planning horizon which can anticipate policy signals and thus overcome uncertainty.'

Student, UK

But, will business rise to the challenge?

Whilst Millennials see a significant role for business in the development agenda, there is scepticism amongst respondents that business will actually step up to this responsibility. About two-thirds believe that 'businesses will prioritise short-term profit ahead of longer term sustainability'.

Businesses will prioritise short-term profit ahead of longer term sustainability:



18.5%

Strongly agree



48%

Agree



22.5%

Are not sure



9%

Disagree



2%

Strongly disagree

Corporates must move beyond 'CSR as usual'

In order to help achieve the Global Goals, Millennials want to see corporates move beyond 'CSR as usual.' Most large corporations have longstanding and well-developed programmes for making charitable and other community contributions to benefit society. Whilst a growing number of corporates are aligning CSR or sustainability programmes with business strategy – yielding both commercial and social benefits – Millennials want to see radical new business models deliver products or services that address social and environment challenges.

Our survey of practitioners (see page 17) shows that most companies are still not substantively engaging with the Goals one year on; however, Millennials have very high expectations for the private sector to make a step change. This presents a trust deficit and potential gap that will drive sustainable business in the years ahead. The top three ways Millennials say business

Unilever tackles malnutrition through Knorr

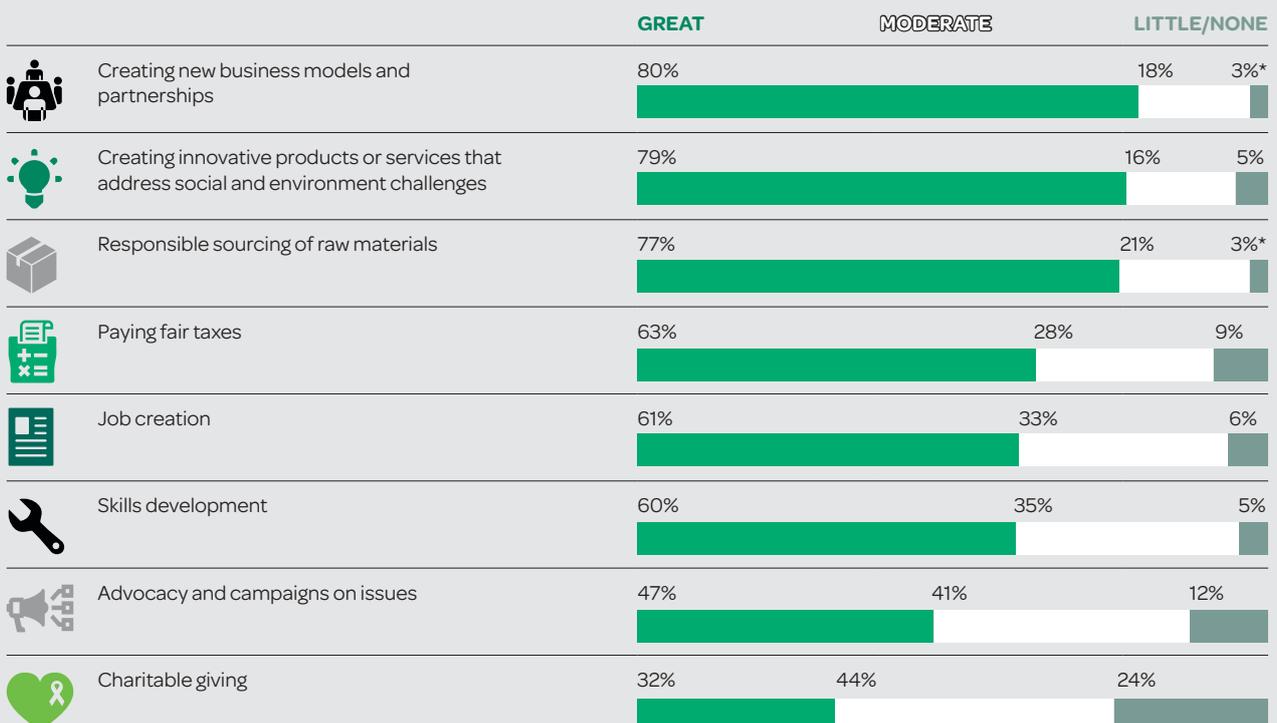
In Nigeria, anaemia affects almost one in two women of reproductive age and 72% of children under the age of five, resulting in chronic fatigue and dizziness. Half the cases of anaemia come from a lack of iron in the body, which is often diet related.

So in 2015, Unilever's biggest brand, Knorr, started selling bouillon cubes fortified with iron, accompanied by a nutritious cooking programme for mothers and teenage girls. The company also trains saleswomen to become Unilever ambassadors for good nutrition and smallholder farmers to source ingredients responsibly.

Since launching the programme, Unilever has seen an increase in sales of Knorr bouillon cubes whilst promoting healthy cooking and tackling iron-deficiency related anaemia.

can contribute to achieving the SDGs are by: 1) creating new business models and partnerships; 2) innovation of products and services; 3) firm commitments to responsible sourcing of raw materials.

Q. To what extent do you think the following business activities can contribute to achieving the SDGs?



*Due to rounding some percentage totals are over 100%

Whilst job creation and skills development were very close, respondents prioritised fair payment of taxes over these contributions, signalling a demand for better accountability and responsibility from corporates. It is noteworthy that charitable giving – the mainstay of much responsible business activity for many firms – comes bottom of the priority list for Millennials.

This, again, reinforces the potential gulf between current corporate practice and the expectations of this generation.

To close the deficit, either Millennials must lower their expectations of what corporates will deliver, or business must sit up and take more substantive action on the Global Goals.

'Use the SDGs to generate innovation and engagement in your company!'

Private sector employee, Switzerland

'Being innovative is the only option, profit will follow'

Academic, Indonesia

Accelerate progress by partnering with unusual suspects

It has been widely acknowledged that collaboration must be at the heart of achieving the Global Goals. Indeed partnership itself is one of the SDGs. But the types of partnerships envisioned by Millennials are somewhat surprising.

When asked what type of stakeholder business should collaborate in order to accelerate progress on the SDGs, the top three recommendations from Millennials were: 1) government and regulators, 2) investors and 3) suppliers.

This is in sharp contrast to the usual corporate – NGO partnership. The top choices of Millennials reinforce the view that government is still seen as a key driving force for the development agenda and Millennials clearly feel that companies need to work in tandem with them to achieve the Goals.

Business collaboration with investors, on the other hand, raises interesting questions about the role of investors and their contribution to the SDGs. Investor engagement with business has traditionally been based on a rigid set of financial and some non-financial data reported in financial reports to shareholders.

In a recent Corporate Citizenship interview on the SDGs with ShareAction, a Responsible Investment charity, Chief Executive Catherine Howarth emphasised the need for a stronger 'investor case' underpinned by practical metrics, tools, case studies and events to help build knowledge, capability and capacity for investors. This, she says, will enable investors to engage with the SDG agenda in a meaningful way. Our findings suggest that Millennials have much higher expectations of business involving investors in these issues than is currently the case for most companies.

Companies that are serious about being agents of social change will have to expand the boundaries of their strategy, engagement and impact assessments. The ambitious Goals cannot be delivered through siloed efforts; and many will need to collaborate outside their comfort zones. Collaboration with suppliers, for example, will require a holistic value chain perspective that may extend outside a company's direct sphere of influence and more robust engagement beyond third-party audits.

Dow's courageous partnership drives long-term success

Dow Chemical Company has adopted a principle of 'courageous collaboration' to achieve their ambitious 2025 Sustainability Goals. Mark Weick, Director of Sustainability and Enterprise Risk Management at Dow, shared with us the company's experience in forging constructive partnerships.

'In 1992 we started the Corporate Environmental Advisory Council where we brought in NGO, academic and government leaders. Speaking frankly, some of those groups would traditionally have been more comfortable protesting against

us rather than being in our Boardroom advising our Senior Management.

Twenty-five years later we have a whole different dialogue with a strong set of stakeholders who come in and advise our senior management and have been a part of developing our Sustainability Goals. They are very consistent in holding us to a much higher standard of behaviour.

These are the kinds of dialogues and collaborations that the private sector can have: very explicit, with a long-term outreach and collaboration to more effectively address global challenges.'

The SDGs have ushered us into an era where companies that want to succeed will need to engage in cross-sector collaborations across countries and value chains in new forms of "networked solutions". These networked solutions to global challenges draw on the skills and expertise of multiple parties to leverage necessary inputs, at scale, to achieve the Goals.

Look outside CSR departments for inspiration (and solutions)

Companies that seek to engage Millennials in tackling global challenges should look outside their sustainability and CSR teams and engage the wider business – particularly product development and marketing teams.

67% agreed that the most effective way to engage young people is through making and marketing sustainable products and services.

This ranked higher than social media campaigns, employee programmes and targeted engagement at events such as career fairs.

As Millennials are set to overtake Baby Boomers in spending by 2018, this presents a tremendous market opportunity. A 2015 global Nielsen survey²⁰ found that among the 66% of respondents that are willing to pay more for brands committed to making a positive social and environmental impact, three out of four are consumers aged 34 and under. The findings reinforce the message that Millennials want to buy products with a social purpose.

It should also sound a note of caution. We need to beware of 'SDGreen-washing' – branding products with SDG benefits that may only be skin deep. Many open comments from respondents called for greater authenticity and transparency in how companies market their goods and services.

'Being an advertising professional, I'd talk to my CEO about making our marketing efforts a lot more genuine especially keeping in mind the SDGs and focusing a lot more on youth.'

Private sector employee, Singapore

Business responses to the SDGs – one year on

We undertook a separate survey of practitioners working in businesses, specifically in corporate responsibility and sustainability roles (of any age, not just Millennials). We repeated the questions that we originally asked in July and August 2015, just prior to the launch of the Goals.

A jump in awareness of the SDGs

Just 6% of practitioners said that their organisation was not aware of the SDGs, down from 16% last year.

An upsurge in partnerships, but not enough action

Twelve months ago, just over one in five practitioners told us they were working on a collaboration connected to the SDGs. In 2016, that figure rose to almost 40%.

However, this still means that a majority of companies are only at the exploration stage and are not yet taking real action. This presents a real challenge: the expectation of Millennials is clearly for business to raise the bar, and transform the way commerce is conducted.

	2015	2016
Currently NOT aware of the SDGs	16%	6%
Aware of the SDGs, but has no plans to do anything about them	25%	13%
Aware of the SDGs and is actively exploring their implications through measures like monitoring their development or preparing to respond	40%	41%
Actively involved in a business-led, or cross-sectoral, collaboration that contributes to the SDGs	19%	40%

Another reporting framework?

We also asked practitioners about what their company was likely to do about the SDGs in the coming years. Strategy development, partnerships, reviewing targets and impact monitoring remain the favoured aspirations. However, the biggest jump appears to be in those companies thinking of using the SDGs as a framework for reporting. Just under 30% said they were looking at this 12 months ago, but now half of companies say they are.

Which of the following options do you think your organisation is likely to pursue with regard to the SDGs in the next few years? Please select as many as apply.

	2015	2016
Partner with others (e.g. non-profits, government, companies) on a shared project to contribute to one or more of the SDGs	67%	64%
Use the SDGs to review or set new targets for the organisation	57%	60%
Apply the SDGs to impact monitoring and measurement	35%	41%
Benchmark the SDGs against company policies and practices	47%	45%
Use the SDGs to inform strategy development	57%	62%
Use the SDGs as part of reporting, such as an SDG index	29%	49%
No action	6%	4%

The most popular Goals

We asked companies which Goals they thought their company could make the biggest contribution to addressing. Goal 8 on promoting decent work and economic growth remained the most favoured choice. But we also detected some dramatic shifts in other Goals. For example, in 2015, 14% of companies picked 'promoting peaceful and inclusive societies as one of their top three choices. This year, just 3% did. Responsible production and consumption increased from 11% to 31%. This may reflect a more realistic consideration of the Goals by business and a more nuanced understanding of where companies can and cannot make the biggest difference.

Is a substantial portion of your business helping accomplish the SDGs? Is it hurting our ability to accomplish them? How can you enlarge your company's contribution from something marginal/philanthropic to something central to your business model?'

Private sector employee, US

Taking action to close the deficit

There is clearly quite a wide gap between what Millennials expect of business when it comes to the SDGs, and what our survey of companies shows business is currently doing.

Millennials want companies to take the lead. But the majority of businesses have not moved beyond the planning stages. In order to close this gap, we need more companies to consider the Global Goals as a business opportunity. There are risks, of course, but most business change is brought about through a focus on the potential.

Millennials are the most important demographic for business over the course of the SDG timeframe to 2030. Without understanding what this group expects, business will always be behind the curve. But sustainable commerce requires innovation – it is essential to be ahead of the curve to seize the opportunities for growth. Without business stepping up to do more, we simply cannot create the world of zero poverty, zero hunger and zero emissions that everyone would benefit from.

Businesses have a huge responsibility and opportunity to demonstrate their positive influence on society.

WHAT BUSINESS CAN DO: OUR FOUR-POINT PLAN

Corporate Citizenship helps businesses to better align their corporate sustainability and responsibility practices with and engage on the SDGs. Below we set out a four-point plan to help business effectively contribute to the Global Goals.

Think

Simply mapping what the business can do to deliver the SDGs is only the start. Don't just assess where you currently are and how you align to the most material Goals appropriate to your company and situation. Think profoundly about what the whole Global Goal framework tells you about how the world is changing and what the implications are for your future business growth.

Act

Develop new, innovative and specific strategies and programmes to address the 2030 'stretch' goals. Look below the 17 headlines to the 169 specific targets. Involve the separate business functions like R&D, marketing, HR, procurement and finance in the implications. Don't just retrospectively align existing programmes.

Measure

What impact are you having – what's the long-term change that's been created as a result of your intervention? This can be aligned with the emerging suite of SDG indicators. You can then regularly communicate progress towards your own targets.

Engage

The Global Goals will only be achieved through new partnerships that involve others in your sector, civil society organisations and governments, regulators and public sector agencies. Our research shows that collaborations with suppliers, investors and governments are an under-explored area of considerable potential, one where the Millennials expect more action from business.

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Corporate Citizenship

Corporate Citizenship is a global business consultancy specialising in sustainability and corporate responsibility. The team uses expert insight and a simplified approach to sustainability to deliver growth and long-term value for business and society.

With teams in London, New York, San Francisco, Melbourne, Santiago and Singapore we work with clients on both a local and global level, to achieve their commitments to responsible business behaviours and sustainable practices.

We advise on a number of areas including strategy, community, engagement, environment, supply chain, socio-economic impacts, SDGs, reporting and assurance – helping clients to make the smart choices that will enable them to survive and thrive in an increasingly challenging business environment.

We have published a variety of resources and information for corporate responsibility and sustainability practitioners, which can be found on our website, www.corporate-citizenship.com. For further information about the report and our services, please contact Emma Upton: emma.upton@corporate-citizenship.com @CCitizenship



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