



This year marks the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, leaving us with seven-and-a-half years to make meaningful progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The SDGs entail an integrative approach, addressing economic, social and environmental dimensions to put us on track for a resilient and sustainable future. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda by all United Nations member states and their commitment to this holistic plan for action is essential given the abundance of global challenges we face today.

Globalisation has been a driving factor in humanity's unparalleled influence on the biosphere, leading to the term 'Anthropocene' to describe our powerful and irrefutable impact. Power always comes with responsibility – and unprecedented power entails unprecedented responsibility.

Achieving the SDGs requires a long-term outlook involving more than just financial investments; it calls for dedication, innovation, collaboration and strong leadership prioritising the well-being of people and planet

Axel R Pries, president, and Frederike Sontag, strategic engagement manager, World Health Summit

While previously, humans were responsible for their families, tribes or local regions, we are now, together, responsible for the living conditions of all life on earth.

The SDGs guide us on how to use our power and live up to our responsibility. Their intertwined nature makes it necessary to address the goals in a comprehensive fashion. Globalisation has the corollary that it is impossible to address a single element without closely examining its interrelated components. We cannot make sustainable progress in eliminating hunger if we are unable to reduce economic inequities, improve political stability, increase trust in multinational initiatives, provide universal health coverage and fight climate change – just to name a few.

A GRIM REALITY

The SDGs have the potential to generate impactful change towards a healthier, more

equal and livable planet. Yet, the latest SDG report highlights the grim reality that based on the current pace of progress, none of the goals is on track to be achieved globally by 2030. This should deeply concern all nations and stakeholders involved. The achievement of goals related to health, hunger, sustainable diets and environmental protection is particularly lagging behind, while global inequities are being exacerbated.

Despite the common goal of all UN member states to reach the SDGs, significant regional disparities in progress demand our immediate attention. Some high-income countries have shown commendable internal progress. However, we must be very careful to avoid a biased interpretation of such developments. It is often these nations that exhibit the largest impact on global resources and climate change. Thus, there lies a special responsibility with them not only to work towards the SDGs in their own regions but also to support other regions by addressing fundamental mechanisms of inequity. If current trends continue, the gap between SDG outcomes in high-income countries and low-income countries is predicted to widen by 2030 – a disturbing regression from the pre-pandemic convergence.

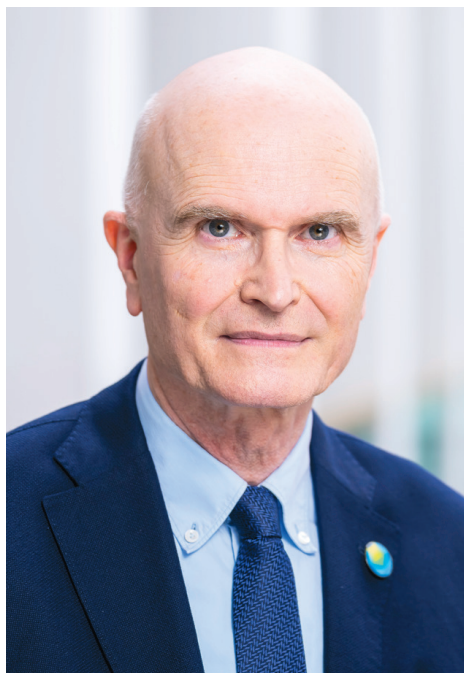
The Covid-19 pandemic has contributed immensely to the global stalling of SDG progress, setting us back significantly from the projected pre-pandemic trends. This demands that we refocus our efforts and ensure a resilient and equitable recovery from the devastating impacts of the pandemic. While Covid-19 was a truly global challenge, we are still grappling with responding to such threats as a global community. This makes it all the more important that the SDG Summit in September provides effective mechanisms to fulfil the promise of significant acceleration of progress towards the goals.

One key ingredient for progress is accountability. Until now, progress has been tracked in annual reports using the SDG Index, and until today, all but five UN member states have presented a Voluntary National Review – a nation's plan to achieve the SDGs – at the UN. This approach is biased towards a national view of global challenges and according to the SDG report, “most VNRs identify SDG priorities and actions within country borders, but fail to accurately capture

efforts to curb negative international spillovers and the potential transboundary impacts of their policies”. In addition to data gaps with respect to cross-border approaches within this voluntary approach, some major players such as the United States have still not provided a VNR.

VOLUNTARY IN NATURE

The voluntary nature of international commitments is a major problem – national participation may be “voluntary” in the legal sphere, but is not voluntary if we want a healthy future in a healthy world. Thus, the fostering of cooperation must overcome the status quo: countries should pool



AXEL RADLACH PRIES

Axel Radlach Pries became president of the World Health Summit in 2021. He was the dean of Charité from 2015 to 2022, having been head of the Charité Institute for Physiology from 2001. He has chaired the Council for Basic Cardiovascular Science and the Congress Programme Committee basic section in the European Society of Cardiology, was president of the Biomedical Alliance in Europe and CEO of the Berlin Institute of Health. He has received the Malpighi Award, the Poiseuille Gold Medal and the Silver Medal of the European Society of Cardiology.

✉ @WorldHealthSmt
 🌐 worldhealthsummit.org

resources, share best practices and address common challenges more collectively. Robust accountability measures are needed to ensure that governments adhere to their commitments, maintain transparency and are held responsible for their progress or lack thereof. Such mechanisms will not only promote trust and mutual accountability among nations but also foster a sense of shared responsibility for global well-being.

The sobering findings of the recent SDG report are a wake-up call to the urgent need for international coordinated action. The 2023 SDG Summit in September must mark a turning point, which provokes transformative and accelerated action. This will necessitate the empowerment of multinational mechanisms and institutions. In the health domain, the WHO must be strengthened financially and politically to fulfil its mandate. Only then will the WHO be adequately equipped to tackle future health challenges that could be even more devastating than the Covid-19 pandemic.

Achieving the SDGs requires a long-term outlook involving more than just financial investments; it calls for dedication, innovation, collaboration and strong leadership prioritising the well-being of people and planet. The World Health Summit has always supported multilateral interaction and collaboration aiming at coherent policies for sustainable development by fostering dialogue and the development of actionable solutions to global health challenges. The WHS will continue its work in the spirit of the SDGs and serve as an interdisciplinary platform to address challenges and solutions for the 2030 Agenda. As we aim for progress towards the goals, we must keep in mind that all 17 goals affect Health for All and remember the words of Arthur Schopenhauer that “health is not everything, but without health, everything is nothing”.

Acknowledgement: The support of Maeve Cook-Deegan and Alida Tiekötter in generating the manuscript is thankfully acknowledged.

