Global Overview
Integrated SDG Insights Reports

In support of transformative, national Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) commitments at the mid-point of the 2030 Agenda, UNDP collaborated with 95 countries to identify areas and patterns that exhibit the strongest potential to help accelerate sustainable development progress – starting from national priorities, SDG progress trends, and the real-world challenges that constrain choices.

The UN Secretary-General reminds us that: "There are no perfect solutions in a perfect storm." Our intention throughout the integrated SDG Insights initiative is to bring together the most important analysis so that we can tackle constraints head on – from the carbon intensity of growth pathways and restricted fiscal space - and seize opportunities to advance the SDGs.

There is an increasing gap between the 'development we want' and the 'growth we get.'

Leveraging the full potential of policy accelerators can only be realized when countries have the fiscal and policy space to make innovative, bold decisions.

Countries are trapped by the constant pressure to pursue economic growth at all costs. And 'the growth we get' is often driven by carbon-intensive fossil fuels, against the backdrop of soaring debt and domestic fiscal challenges. This default trajectory is therefore seeding further economic, social, political, and environmental turmoil and divergence.

On the other hand, the 'development we want', is based on mutually reinforcing forces for human and planetary well-being and is emerging through bold choices and courageous leadership. The ecosystem needed to enable this transformation involves lifting fiscal/financial constraints, but also strengthening institutional effectiveness, justice and governance.

The common refrain that "there is no trade-off between poverty and climate" often simplifies a more nuanced reality, as evident from country-level data. Without a course correction, nearly three-quarters of the analysed countries are exceeding their 2019 levels of fossil carbon emissions. However, the extent of this overshooting varies significantly, and it requires nationally anchored solutions tailored to people and geographies.

Since 2019, three-quarters of countries have reported increased carbon emissions, and just one-fifth have reduced poverty levels. Fewer than half of countries are forecasting high growth between 2023 and 2025, demonstrating the limitations of this approach.

- In countries like Mongolia, the Republic of the Congo, and Tajikistan, total emissions are increasing at annual rates ranging between 11.5 and 12 percent. In contrast, countries such as Sri Lanka, Malawi, or Namibia are experiencing much smaller annual increases, well below 1 percent.

- On the poverty reduction front, about 80 percent of the countries under analysis are falling short of their 2019 levels. This means that poverty rates are either increasing or remaining stagnant. Notable examples include Haiti, Chad, or The Gambia, where poverty rates at the $2.15-a-day threshold have surged by more than 5 percentage points. Similarly, in Nigeria or Sierra Leone, these rates are projected to be 2 to 3 points higher than in 2019.

Fiscal and financial constraints are prominent for the 2030 Agenda:

- Fiscal and financial constraints are also slowing down SDG progress. Debt overhang threatens to crowd-out social investment and energy transitions. 52 developing economies are in debt distress or at risk of high debt distress.

- 50 countries are expected to spend more than 10% of revenue on debt service this year1, in LICS __ economies are spending 2.3 times more on debt service than social assistance and 1.4 times more than health expenditures (citing UNDP global data).

But fiscal space alone is not enough; countries want expanded policy space to make bolder decisions. The enabling environment for digital and green transitions includes institutional effectiveness, functioning justice systems and strong governance. SDG

[1] The sample of countries analyzed in the SDG Insight Reports includes 93 economies. The indicator of debt service (% of revenue) is available for 86 countries.

policy space is about enabling both intrinsic SDG goals like climate action and gender equality, but also instrumental goals that catalyze other dimensions of social, economic or environmental well-being.

Key country references:

- Thirty-six of the analysed countries struggle with very low revenue (less than 20% of GDP), 16 of those are highly debt vulnerable. Revenue is particularly low in Somalia (7.8% of GDP), Sri Lanka (8.5% of GDP), and Haiti (8.8% of GDP).

- Seventeen of the analysed countries (11 of those being highly debt-vulnerable) are confronted with particularly high external debt servicing (more than 20% of revenue). The debt servicing burden is especially pronounced in Sri Lanka (72.1% of revenue), Pakistan (46.7%), and Djibouti (31.84%).

- Eight of the analysed (five of those highly debt-vulnerable) face very high debt burdens (more than 100% of GDP), particularly Sri Lanka (117.7% of GDP), Zambia (110.8% of GDP), and the Maldives (108.9% of GDP).

- Additionally, Sri Lanka, Ghana, and Zambia have defaulted on their debt and thus lost access to international capital markets.

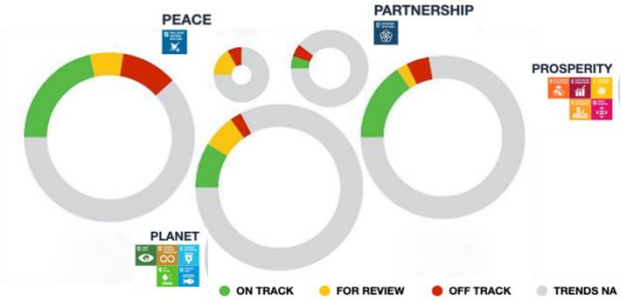
- 15 of the analysed countries (seven of those highly debt-vulnerable) are highly dependent on natural resources (with more than 30% of revenue stemming from natural resources). This dependency is particularly acute in Iraq (90% of revenue), South Sudan (84.1%), and the Republic of Congo (62.1%).

New ‘SDG Insights’ playbooks transcend development “as usual,” and leverages data innovation, AI and systems analysis to chart credible pathways that help countries meet the 2030 Agenda.

Policy choices under constraints reveal what is feasible today; predominant patterns of policy choices revolve around growth, jobs and infrastructure … and what policymakers are not able to prioritize.

Mapping hundreds of connections, UNDP’s Insights Reports have zeroed-in on key policy combinations that accelerate progress across multiple fronts. Our approach mixes methodologies to pinpoint interlinkages that have the most potential to accelerate progress – cognizant of the constraints it must navigate in the process.

1. Starting with SDG trends analysis, we reflect the most up to date information on SDG progress charted at the target level.

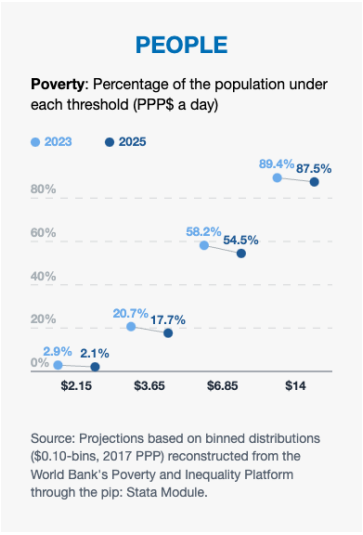


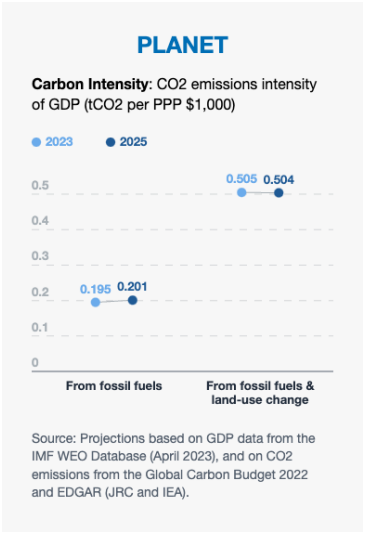
2. We combine this with analysis of national priorities and use machine learning to assess SDG alignment.

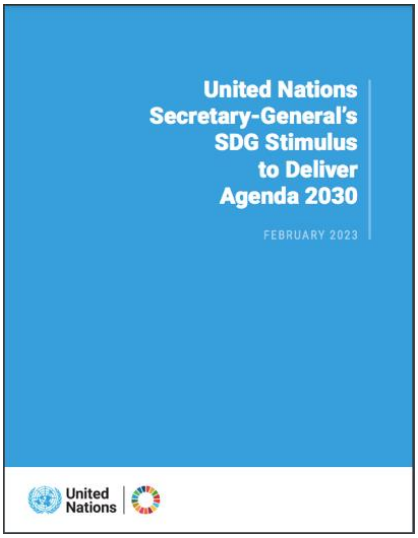
3. Understanding the development trends and anchored in where countries are making investments today.

4. We leverage a global framework of SDG interlinkages to chart pathways that move the needle across multiple issues: leveraging synergies and navigating potential trade-offs that policy makers navigate.

Proposed combinations also reflect new insights our reports provide environmental sustainability and inclusiveness of national growth pathways and consider both fiscal constraints and opportunities through stimulus to expand SDG policy space.







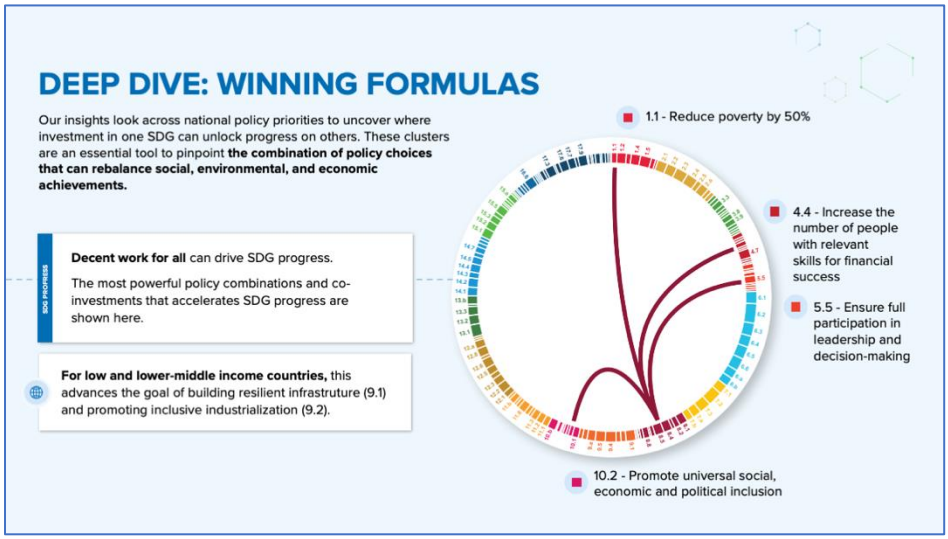
While contexts vary significantly, our research identified four themes which resonated across regions and country typologies and personify the kinds of policy combinations that unlock fair and sustainable progress:

Decent work for all can drive SDG progress – our reports find the most powerful policy combinations include co-investments in poverty reduction and inclusion – across political, social and economic spheres.

- **For example, Eswatini, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania and Zambia all prioritize job creation.** They articulate a powerful combination to advance decent work for all as an integrated policy package that advances women's voice and agency (target 5.5), poverty reduction and inclusion (target 1.2 and 10.2), and youth empowerment (target 4.4).

- **Key insight**: To drive industry and service sector growth, South Africa is focused on simultaneously creating jobs and matching skills in the labour market to demand. Together with strong social protection programmes, these efforts can make significant contributions to the country's overarching objectives of reducing poverty and inequality – but only when combined with a fiscal stimulus.

- **'SDG pathway' data points:** Decent work for all can drive SDG progress, and countries consistently chart the multiplier effect it has on reducing poverty (target 1.1), advancing social, political and economic inclusion (target 10.2), and amplifying youth (Target 4.4) and women's (target 5.5) empowerment. This is an 'SDG formula' that makes decent work more than simply jobs creation, but a driver of fair and inclusive development outcomes.

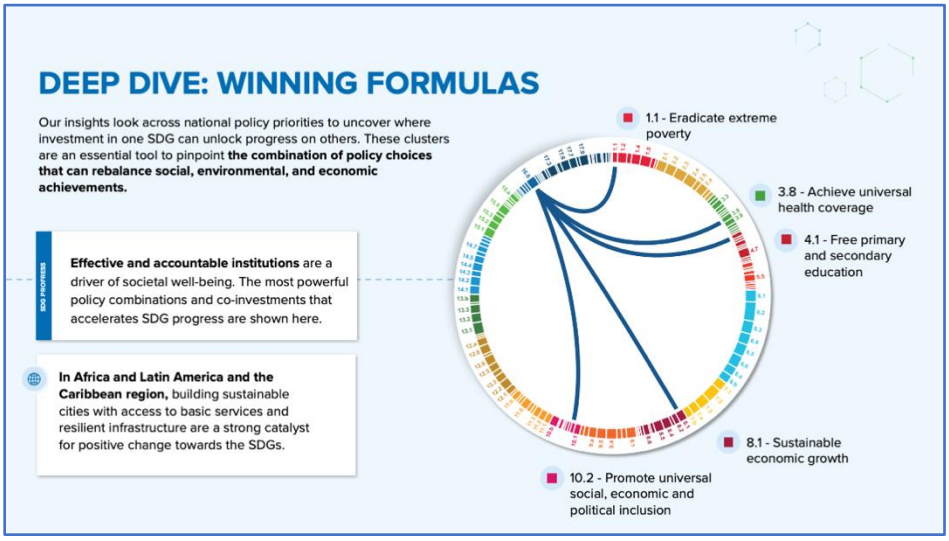


Effective and accountable institutions are a driver of societal well-being - and countries have identified how strong institutions can shape sustainable growth, reduce poverty and expand health and education through effective service delivery – directly building trust and reducing inequality.

- **For example, in low and lower-middle income countries**, effective institutions is often closely linked establishing robust foundations for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, promoting decent work and productive employment opportunities for all.

- **Key insight:** In Indonesia, effective institutions are understood as both a powerful 'horizontal' driver of progress across different sectors – especially through effective public service delivery for health and education and a 'vertical' driver of progress across different levels of government through SDG investments tailored to the hyperlocal needs of people in different places.

- **'SDG pathway' data points:** Advancing effective institutions have critical multipliers of progress across SDGs, and countries have pinpointed how policy combinations supports sustainable economic growth (target 8.1), poverty reduction (target 1.1), and advancing inclusion (target 10.2) especially through public service for greater access to health (target 3.8) and education (target 4.1). This is an 'SDG formula' that directly advances social well-being, supports the conditions for sustainable growth.

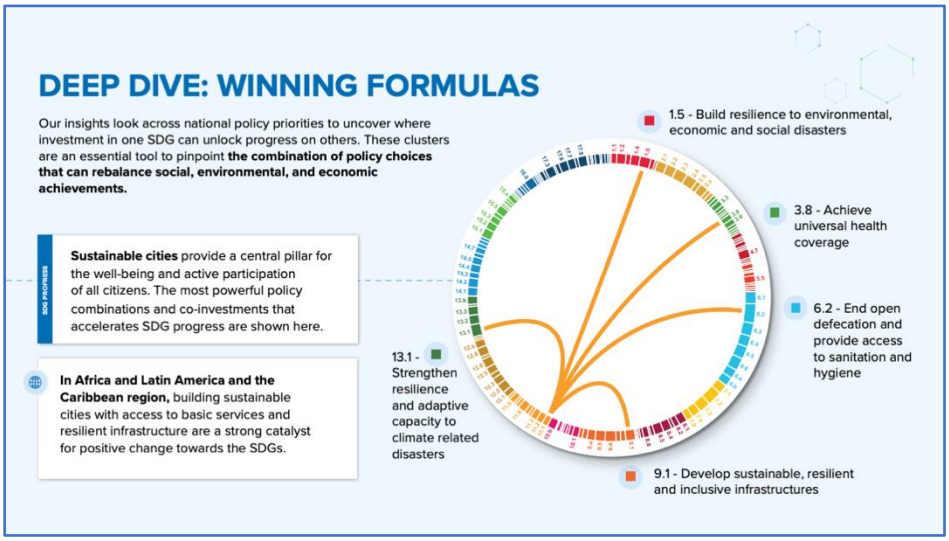

DEEP DIVE: WINNING FORMULAS
Our insights look across national policy priorities to uncover where investment in one SDG can unlock progress on others. These clusters are an essential tool to pinpoint **the combination of policy choices that can rebalance social, environmental, and economic achievements.**
SDG PHORESS
Effective and accountable institutions are a driver of societal well-being. The most powerful policy combinations and co-investments that accelerates SDG progress are shown here.
In Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean region, building sustainable cities with access to basic services and resilient infrastructure are a strong catalyst for positive change towards the SDGs.
1.1 - Eradicate extreme poverty
3.8 - Achieve universal health coverage
4.1 - Free primary and secondary education
8.1 - Sustainable economic growth
10.2 - Promote universal social, economic and political inclusion

Sustainable cities with access to affordable housing and basic services is a driver for well-being and participation of all citizens. Countries identified how these policy choices reinforce investments in resilient infrastructure, strengthen adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards, especially of the poor, and improve access to free health services and clean water and sanitation.

- **For example, in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean region**, building sustainable cities with access to basic services and resilient infrastructure are a strong catalyst for positive change towards the SDGs.

- **Key insight:** In Bhutan, rapid urbanization is putting populations at risk of severe weather events driving a strong policy focus on sustainable cities. The government has identified integrated SDG policy choices that are mutually reinforcing across water resource management, with climate responsive urban planning and investments in green infrastructure.

- **'SDG pathway' data points:** Sustainable cities with access to housing and basic services reinforces progress in hygiene and sanitation (target 6.2), advances universal access to health (target 3.8), supports investments in resilient infrastructure (target 9.1), and helps resilience to climate hazards (target 13.1) and other shocks and disasters (target 1.5). This is an 'SDG formula' with win-wins across poverty and climate.

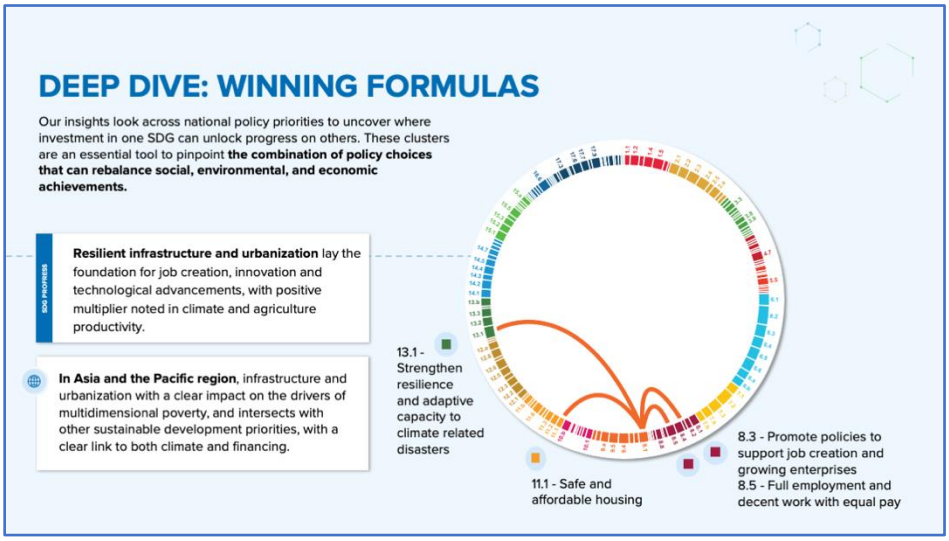


Resilient infrastructure and urbanization are also identified as drivers of SDG progress, laying foundation for job creation, innovation and technological advancements, with positive multiplier noted in climate and agriculture productivity.

- **For example, in Asia and the Pacific region**, infrastructure and urbanization with a clear impact on the drivers of multidimensional poverty, and intersects with other sustainable development priorities, with a clear link to both climate and financing.

- **Key insight:** In Malawi, sustainable infrastructure investment is considered a driver for growth that balances environmental sustainability and ecosystem impact. Cognizant of how rapid industrialization could negatively impact progress in other SDGs – notably energy - it is leading with an integrated package of polices to ensure is that expanded energy access does not sacrifice energy sustainability, noting the potential for adverse impacts on social, gender and territorial inequalities.

- **'SDG Pathway' data points:** Resilient and sustainable infrastructure leads SDG progress by amplifying decent work for all (target 8.5), and with policies that advance productivity and innovation (target 8.3), access to safe housing and basic services (target 11.1), resilience to climate hazards (target 13.1). This is an 'SDG formula' that amplifies the criticality of infrastructure as a driver of innovation that protects vulnerable people and advances a green transition.



Building a better way forward

Ahead of the UN 2023 SDG Summit on 18-19 September, our research lays out the strategies and tactics to deliver on inclusive sustainable development in the era of crisis, forming a playbook that can support all countries to make the best choices for their futures and for attaining the SDGs.

Integrated SDG Insights offer a first-of-its-kind strategic "playbook" building both strategies and tactics that start from the realities countries navigate today, and charting both the opportunity space and real-world constraints that decision makers must contend with to advance the SDGs.

We believe this initiative delivers something unique --a playbook to be used by each government to explore the strategies and tactics needed to advance their SDG pathways. All of these insights are practical and tangible contributions to the SDG Summit with policy pathways that can be deepened and accompanied through implementation in the second half of the 2030 Agenda.

Annex


METHODOLOGY
Click here to view the Methodological Note for the Integrated SDG Insights
SDG MOMENT
Methodology
Assesses challenges and opportunities in national growth trajectories with insights on environmental sustainability and inclusiveness.
Data Sources
Future trajectories to 2025 are based on IMF-WEO GDP projections, distributions of per capita income or consumption from the World Bank, and CO_2 emissions from the Global Carbon Budget 2022 and EDGAR (JRC and IEA).
TRENDS & PRIORITIES
Methodology
SDG trends tracks progress from 2015 to date for the 231 indicators. National priorities are analysed using machine learning to reveal the most prominent SDGs referenced in national policy documents.
Data Source
Trends utilizes official UN statistics to assess SDG progress, supplemented with national data when available. Priorities uses a custom-built model for SDG classification. The policy documents analyses are provided by Governments.
INTERLINKAGES
Methodology
Global target-level interlinkages are drawn from the KnowSDGs Platform by European Commission. SDG interlinkages were retrieved through a structured literature review in Scopus and Google Scholar to tap both grey literature and peer-reviewed publications as a source of information.
Data Source
The exercise globally considered a total of 454 documents published from 2015 to August 2022. (Miola et al., 2019 updated in 2021-2022)
FINANCE & STIMULUS
Methodology
Provides insight into indicators of fiscal and financial stress with options (INFF) for stimulus and other means to accelerate progress.
Data Source
Most recent resource data from UNU-WIDER GRD (between 2018 and 2021), debt and revenue from IMF WEO (between 2020 and forecasts for 2023), external debt from IDS (2023), yields from Haver Analytics (8 June 2023), credit ratings from S&P, Moodys and FITCH (2023), and DSA ratings from World Bank/IMF (31 May 2023).
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