



# Saving Resources

Actions that achieve both  
climate goals and the SDGs

Executive Summary and  
Recommendations

September 2021



THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP  
UN Global Goals

# Executive Summary

---

- Recent extreme weather events have vividly shown the consequences of climate change, while the latest UN reports urgently warn that we are missing key targets to slow these consequences. At the same time, the world is slipping on targets for several SDGs, and these have been further pushed off course by the global pandemic: the UN reported that during 2020 a further 41 million people became impoverished and 130 million undernourished.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the enormous costs of the Covid-19 pandemic have put tremendous pressure on public resources left to tackle global goals. As we begin to see beyond the pandemic we face an urgent double dilemma: we are missing targets for climate protection and sustainable development and yet there are fewer resources for reaching them. The reality is that countries and communities have even more to do, with even less. And action is needed now!
  - The good news is that there are many policies and measures that have *significant potential* to achieve *both climate goals and SDGs*. If scaled up and applied widely, these actions could provide an efficient way to achieve many global goals and save resources for doing more. This report compiles evidence of these policies and measures from an Inquiry of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the SDGs, from the research literature, and from country reporting under the Paris Climate Agreement.
  - “Significant potential” of joint climate-SDG policies is used here in the sense that a large population or geographic area will benefit from scaling up these policies. Examples include replacing fossil fuels with renewable energy, substituting traditional smoky cookstoves with energy efficient and clean varieties, and constructing green buildings. There is a particularly large number of policies of this type in the agricultural sector including the reduction of crop losses after harvest, increasing the carbon content of soils, and decreasing meat consumption.
  - By implementing these, and many other policies and measures, national governments can work towards achieving climate goals while advancing one or more other SDGs. Achieving multiple goals through single actions avoids a duplication of efforts within and between government departments and other organisations. It enables them to use their resources more effectively, freeing up resources for further actions. Studies show that this effectiveness can translate into financial gains.
  - National governments are best positioned to lead on harmonising the climate and SDG agendas because they are responsible for both implementing the global SDG framework and for achieving national climate targets. They should ensure that climate action is pursued vigorously but in a way that is consistent with the equity and other goals of the SDGs; climate policies must not leave the poor and disadvantaged behind. Likewise, governments should aim for overseas development aid being compatible with climate goals.
  - Harmonising the climate and SDG agendas will require a high level of government “policy coherence” i.e. effective cooperation among departments in achieving joint objectives. Evidence also shows that cooperation between government, the business sector, non-governmental organisations and affected communities further increases the effectiveness of coordinated actions.
  - Although these policies and measures have significant potential to achieve global goals, the extent to which they can be scaled up has not been determined. This scaling up will depend on their applicability to particular countries and communities, and this, in turn, will hinge on the national or local context, i.e. socio-economic conditions, organisational capacity, governance arrangements, climate and environmental conditions, and other considerations.
  - Many countries are already pursuing policies and measures that advance both climate goals and SDGs. These are reported in their NDC (Nationally Determined Contributions) plans under the Paris Climate Agreement. For example, Chile is pursuing several actions of this type including “Sustainable management and recovery of native forests” and “Improving insulation standards”. The large-scale potential of these and other such policies reported in NDCs has not yet been evaluated, but they may be transferable and useful to other countries.
-

- 
- Many countries are also working with business actors and civil society to promote economic development that advances both environmental and social goals. For instance, in Uganda, the government is working with businesses and community groups to address their housing needs. Smart Havens Africa, a social enterprise business, provides sustainable and affordable housing, and advocates for the interests of low-income urban households. Learning from such initiatives could help other countries exploit similar opportunities.
  - A very important point is that a coordinated climate-SDG policy is not necessarily an equitable policy. Unfortunately, there are many examples of actions to protect climate or encourage development that have led to injustices. For instance, there are cases in which developing hydroelectricity as a lower carbon form of energy has led to human rights violations against Indigenous people. Another example is that clean cookstove programmes have led to inequities with regards to the lower income women at the centre of these programmes.
  - But it is possible, and it is urgent, to make joint climate-SDG policies just and equitable. How to do this has already been laid out in principle by the international community in global agreements such as the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement. Other useful experience has been collected by UN institutions such as the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and the REDD+ programme (Reduction of Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation).
  - We draw on the preceding sources to propose guidelines that can be used by policymakers and stakeholders to help them incorporate justice and equity considerations into policies and measures that advance both climate goals and the SDGs. Many of the guidelines are relevant to all scales and stages of projects and policy processes. Some are more specific to the national and/or international level.
  - The guidelines address:
    - ▶ “Distributive equity” which focuses on fairness in the distribution of costs, contributions and benefits. Many actions can be taken to ensure distributive equity including assessing the negative impacts of policies and measures on other SDGs and climate goals; taking into account the impact of actions on vulnerable and marginalised groups; and respecting and protecting Indigenous peoples’ rights.
    - ▶ “Procedural equity” which aims to ensure fairness in the political processes concerned with the allocation of resources. Included here are, for example, taking steps to support tenure and resource rights of individuals and communities; ensuring flexibility in approaches and avoiding “one size fits all” solutions; and recognising and protecting gender rights.
    - ▶ “Contextual equity” which ensures that stakeholders have a fair position in negotiations about policies and resources that affect them. These guidelines include, for example, building the capacity of stakeholders to participate in policy processes; and creating international mechanisms that support countries to implement policies justly and equitably.
  - Summing up, the world urgently needs to get back on track to meet climate goals and the SDGs. Considering the global squeeze on resources, we also need to do this efficiently. One way is to align the climate and SDG agendas and exploit the opportunity that many policies and measures advance both climate goals and SDGs. There is ample evidence that this is an efficient way to achieve multiple goals, save resources, and have resources left over to do more. But “efficiency” does not always go far enough. Policymakers and stakeholders should try to actively build justice and equity considerations into these policies to aim for them to be not only *efficient* but also *equitable*. Achieving goals has to be an enterprise that is fair to all. National governments have an important role to play here. They should lead by aligning their national climate and SDG agendas. It is vital that actions to achieve SDGs contribute to achieving climate targets, and actions to achieve climate goals are undertaken within the framework of the SDGs. And they must work closely with local governments and stakeholders, the UN, and the business community to make it happen.
-

# Recommendations

There is a risk that actions to achieve climate targets could increase inequality and undermine development priorities, if not managed with care. But this report finds that it is possible to act on climate in ways that create opportunities to build equitable and sustainable communities. Based on the findings of this report, our key recommendation is for governments to align policy actions across climate goals and the SDGs as a matter of urgency. National governments, working within those global frameworks, should take the lead to build coordinated action across sectors.

But national governments alone cannot achieve the scale of change required. They must also create an enabling environment that encourages business and civil society initiatives. It is vital that actions to achieve SDGs contribute to achieving climate targets and that actions to achieve climate targets are undertaken within the framework of the SDGs. By creating and building on such synergies, we believe progress can be made on achieving both the SDGs and climate goals by 2030.

## National governments should:

Establish mechanisms, such as national commissions or cross-department working groups, to build policy coherence across national implementation of SDG and climate agendas. These mechanisms could include:

- Develop a national action plan that brings together strategies on SDGs and climate policies. To develop such a plan, governments should look at harmonising SDG-related Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) with climate-related National Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and disaster risk reduction strategies. This includes developing a joint set of national targets to ensure coherence across reporting and data collection mechanisms.
- Identify a set of joint policies with high potential within the national context that achieve both climate goals and SDGs. These can be identified through rapid assessments supported by the scientific community and civil society actors. Governments should consider subjecting proposed policies to a stress test to ensure that they fulfil guidelines for equity and justice.

- For those climate and SDG policies that cannot be closely aligned, governments should develop review processes to ensure that climate policies do not undermine SDGs, and aim for development policies that do not have a negative impact on climate and environmental policies.
- Consider including in Covid-Recovery Packages policies and measures that simultaneously advance both climate goals and SDGs, focusing particularly on reversing the unequal impacts of both Covid and climate change on the most vulnerable communities.
- Adequately finance actions to advance climate goals and SDGs, ensuring joint priorities are reflected in ministerial budgets. This includes establishing appropriate parliamentary processes to ensure adequate scrutiny and accountability regarding expenditure on actions to address joint climate-SDG priorities.
- Provide local level government bodies with the skills, resources and autonomy to implement national climate and SDG policy priorities in ways that meet the needs of local communities.
- Provide leadership, and an enabling policy environment, to private sector actors to help them develop practices and processes to reduce their environmental impacts across all relevant SDGs, including climate; and to uphold all social SDGs. This should include developing monitoring systems to ensure businesses adhere to national and international standards on human rights, labour laws and environmental protections.

## To support national governments, the UN should:

- Establish a virtual platform and organise activities to share experience and learning between countries on policies and measures that deliver climate goals within the framework of the SDGs. This could include establishing an interagency group to evaluate and catalogue policies that advance both climate goals and SDGs, focusing on the priorities of low- and middle-income states.
- Establish mechanisms to streamline and coordinate reporting systems on the SDGs and climate goals to encourage greater coherence across the two frameworks in national reporting.

---

### Businesses should:

Embrace business practices that advance both climate goals and SDGs. They can do so by:

- Measuring the social and environmental footprints of their products and supply chains, and then taking actions to reduce these footprints. Among other actions, they could, for example, set emission reduction targets and/or establish programmes to promote gender equality.
- Complying with climate and environmental protection standards while upholding human rights and labour rights. They should also adhere to national regulations and international frameworks such as the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

### Civil society organisations and non-government organisations should:

Identify and promote policies and measures within their remit that advance both climate goals and SDGs simultaneously. Furthermore, they should work with government bodies to ensure that joint climate-SDG policies and programmes (and all policies and programmes) provide benefits to marginalised and vulnerable communities.



