

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

The Sustainable Development Goals – Have You Heard?

Lisa Bowers · Wednesday, September 30th, 2015

The Social Good Summit (hosted by Mashable, the United Nations Foundation and UNDP) was coming up and I was really excited about attending for the first time. The likes of Jimmy Wales, Charlize Theron, Enric Sala, The Honorable Madeleine Albright, Bill McKibben, Adrian Grenier, and Morgan Spurlock were just a few of the names on the agenda. There were other equally important speakers, less well-known outside of international development and CSR spheres. Names like David Milliband, President & CEO of the International Rescue Committee (which helps people affected by the world's worst humanitarian crises), the precious and precocious Vivienne Harr, the 11 year old Founder of STAND, which uses lemonade to help make the 18 million children enslaved today free and safe, Kweku Mandela, Co-Founder of Africa Rising Project, Ahmed Mohamad, the YouTube sensation suspended from school for bringing a clock to school, Hugh Evans, CEO of the Global Poverty Project, Antonio Guterres, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and a host of other people passionate about making this world a better place.

The Summit started the day after 193 heads of state or their representatives approved the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 (listed at the end of this post). These goals represent a united declaration to tackle poverty, climate change, and inequality for all peoples in all countries. As the recipient of UN-related newsletters and tweets and posts via social media, I had heard A LOT about these goals. After all, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had declared 2015 a “once in a generation opportunity.” The SDG's would set the world's agenda for the next 15 years. Pope Francis spoke before their ratification by 193 global leaders. Two of the arguably most powerful men in the world – President Putin and President Obama – reinforced the importance of this event by meeting and making news at the proceedings. The fact that 193 countries were able to agree upon this historic agenda on Friday, September 25, 2015 is historic in itself.

The Social Good Summit would bring together people already doing things to make the achievement of these goals a reality, as well as a host of activists and citizens (many of them Millennials) anxious to get the word out, learn, rub elbows with influentials they admire, and activate their passion for making a difference.

Following the Summit, my head is swimming with new ideas. I'm inspired by moving stories and shocked by horrific facts. But overall, I feel hope. One of the central themes was the importance of everyone getting involved. Dr. Gro Harlem Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway and former head of the World Health Organization, said, “Every one of us is responsible for the future

of all of us.” Rebecca Milner, VP, Institutional Advancement at [International Medical Corps](#), emphasized, “you can educate your own network and make a difference.” Indeed, on the first day of the Summit, a lot of educating was occurring: there were 956mm impressions about the Social Good Summit on Twitter and Instagram alone!

Stacy Martinet, CMO of Mashable, stated at the summit, “This year, the world has really taken notice of social good and the global goals in particular.” But I wonder who she is referring to when she says the world. While my social cohort would represent a very small percentage of the NYC population, I would subjectively state that they are on the whole a pretty educated, with-it group of caring people, many with jobs of influence in their spheres. I couldn’t really remember one of them mentioning the SDGs in conversation or tweeting or posting about them.



11-year old Vivienne Harr speaking at the 2015 Social Good Summit about STAND and Putting Your Passion to Action. Photo Credit: Stuart Ramson / United Nations Foundation

I asked myself: Are the people I hang out with aware of these goals I’ve been hearing so much about? So, I started to ask them. One senior executive at a major investment bank did not know what they were. Another very smart friend, who always has her finger on the pulse of the latest in social trends, said they sounded familiar, saying “I’m guessing they are about land use.”

Wow, how could this be? I get so much mail about these Goals and 193 heads of state were converging on NYC to approve them – and even got a speech from [Pope Francis](#) beforehand. Was there a disconnect between what was going on in an increasingly global community and what typical Americans, some affluent, some with jobs and kids and lots of other things keeping them busy, were aware of? I was curious.

I decided to conduct a quick and dirty survey using SurveyMonkey. And indeed, the results bore out that my anecdotal sampling was not an aberration. 71% of those included in a random sampling of my contact list/social media universe had not heard of the Sustainable Development Goals and 14% were unsure. Of those who had heard, only 1/3 knew what they were. While the respondent base was very small and possibly skewed toward New York professionals who were Boomers and Gen X’ers (they self-identified as being in Business/Finance, Management, Healthcare, Education, or Retired with no one in international development), I still find it significant that NO ONE knew what subjects the SDGs addressed. Only one person even wanted to hazard a guess.

My hypothesis is that the disconnect between the hoopla and buzz about the SDG’s and the actual awareness is generational, and partly avocational. Yet people of every generation, including Baby Boomers, Gen X’ers and their children, will be affected if major inroads are not made in achieving these goals. Many work in organizations whose business strategies and practices over the next 15 years will have a major bearing on whether the SDG’s are achieved.

There is an increasing realization that collaboration is key. Collaboration among nonprofits and between the public and private sectors. There are terrific examples of nonprofits partnering with corporations to chip away at the old practices that led to the need for urgent action today. **This is good news.**

The nonprofits on the ground that have already been working on the issues that the SDG’s address

find the SDG's galvanizing. The international imprint – and the embrace by today's Millennial and their demonstrated ability to act – can fuel future donations. The loud collective voice of the Millennials can help established nonprofits tell global leaders that something needs to be done about today's very critical problems. **This is good news.**

As Carolyn Miles, CEO of [Save the Children](#), says: “The SDGs are an inspiring agenda for the world and one that Save the Children fully endorses. Our focus will obviously be on children and we'll continue to drive our work in health, education and protection of every child through the framework endorsed by 193 country leaders. For us, the most important issue will be about equity – how we ensure the poorest, most left out children benefit from progress. We'll focus on reaching the poorest and putting the last first.” And says Gary Knell, President & CEO of the National Geographic Society (just named a [UNEP Champion of the Earth](#)), “By creating the Sustainable Development Goals, the U.N. is charting the course for where we need to go. At National Geographic we look forward to telling the stories of creative solutions from individuals, companies and organizations aimed at meeting these goals and how people around the world are doing that.”



Carolyn Miles, Zheng Boong, Precious Banda, Chloe McGill discussing the role of children and the global goals. Photo Credit: Stuart Ramson / United Nations Foundation

Sienna Miller told Summit attendees: “In 2010, 11,000 people were displaced each day. In 2015, 42,500 people are displaced each day. It is really time to look at political solutions to these problems.” While today's Millennials are not necessarily engaging with traditional political institutions, they have distinguished themselves by their cause lifestyles. According to the [Case Foundation](#), “For Millennials, social activism has become a new marketplace where goods and services are exchanged not just for money, but also for social good.” This year, Millennials became the largest generation, eclipsing the Baby Boom generation in size. They are 75.3mm strong. **This is good news.**

Each influential that presented one of the goals at the Summit's start ended their presentation with “Please tell everyone.” This post is my start at heeding their words. If you are like the vast majority of people I know and don't know what the SDG's are, start with reading the list below, each accompanied by a quote or stat that reinforces their importance.

With our busy lives, to take on more than one may seem impossible. But as one speaker suggested, just pick one. Learn more. Educate yourself. Use your networks to educate others. Share stories. Donate if you are able. Volunteer. The world is at a tipping point. As Kumi Naidoo, International Executive Director of [Greenpeace](#) declared, “the most powerful consensus of people is coming together in recognition that all agendas must converge on climate change. There are no jobs on a dead planet.”

[embedvideo id="RpqVmvMCmp0? website="youtube"]

So, here they are. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals that will guide our world's future and that of our children. Thank you for reading them! 

1. No Poverty.

More than 850 million people are living in [extreme poverty](#) today.

2. Zero Hunger.

3mm people die unnecessarily from malnutrition every year.

“The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.”

Franklin D. Roosevelt

3. Good Health and Well-being.

The MDG's resulted in there being 45% fewer maternal deaths worldwide than in 1990. But 800 women still die every day from preventable pregnancy-related causes.

4. Quality Education.

Queen Rania of Jordan presented, saying: “Deprive children of quality education, and you deprive them of the opportunities that can help them break out of the cycle of poverty.”

5. Gender Equality.

We can't succeed if half the world is held back.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared that the new Global Goals could not be achieved “without full and equal rights for half of the world's population, in law and in practice.”

6. Clean Water and Sanitation

By 2050, at least one in four people is likely to live in a country affected by chronic or recurring shortages of fresh water.

7. Affordable and Clean Energy.

Energy is the dominant contributor to climate change, accounting for around 60 per cent of total global greenhouse gas emissions.

8. Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Global unemployment increased from 170 million in 2007 to nearly 202 million in 2012, of which about 75 million are young women and men.

9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

With no innovation, we cannot advance our planet and people.

10. Reduced Inequalities.

Human rights are inherent to each of us.

11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.

By 2030, almost 60 percent of the world's population will live in urban areas.

12. **Responsible Consumption and Production.**

“Replace what we consume & together create a planet where we put back where we take out of the earth.” Presented by Connie Britton, Actress and Activist

13. **Climate Action – Take urgent action to protect our planet and roll back climate change.**

“It is our moral, political and social obligation to act now for our generation and those to follow. -Environmental Activist Xiuhtezcatl Roske-Martinez

14. **Life Below Water – Restore and protect the life in our oceans and seas and in doing so, protect each of us.**

An estimated 19 billion pounds of plastic waste is dumped into our oceans every year.

“The more we pollute our waters, ignore its ecosystems, and take more than is necessary, the more we threaten our own humanity.” – Adrian Grenier

15. **Life on Land – Protect life on land and restore the richness of the earth.**

An estimated 18 million hectares of forest are lost each year.

16. **Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.**

“50mm people are currently displaced by war and unrest. Boys and girls are used as soldiers and are forced into sexual service. As long as there is violence, there will be poverty.” – Ishmael Beah, Author, Former Child Soldier, and Human Rights Activist

17. **Partnerships for the Goals.** All countries and their citizens work together in partnership of all kinds to work to make these global goals for sustainable development a reality for everyone, everywhere.

“Nothing we achieve can be done alone. We need one another. And we need to come together to tackle the worst crisis affecting humankind.”

Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever and Father of 3

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