

Delivering on the promise of sustainability

Creating value through
more responsible business



The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted our global interconnectedness and collective reliance on one another as never before. This unprecedented moment demands concerted action by businesses, governments and civil society to build an equitable, resilient and sustainable future for people and the planet.

Sustainable development drives resilience, which is one reason why stakeholders are demanding that businesses rebuild for the better. With the full engagement of the business community, we can still deliver the necessary impact to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and mitigate future economic shocks of COVID-19's magnitude.

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This report describes the scale of the challenges we face to rebuild for the better and outlines the opportunities for business to contribute to a more resilient and sustainable world.

Our analysis focuses on twelve industry sectors and how each is uniquely positioned to advance specific SDGs while benefiting from reduced costs and risks, strengthened trust with stakeholders and new opportunities for growth. The report serves as a guide for CEOs to identify paths to industry-specific reinvention and cross-sector collective action in the journey toward responsible business.

Business has a critical role to play in catalyzing that response, starting with a sustainability strategy refresh that maps specific ambitions to the most high-impact areas across the SDGs (see Figure 1). The guidance provided in the [SDG Ambition](#) serves as a North Star as company leaders integrate sustainability into their corporate strategies and systems, unlocking shared value for both their business and society. This renewed focus couldn't be more timely. In announcing the Decade of Action in 2019, António Guterres, UN Secretary-General said,

"It is abundantly clear that a much deeper, faster and more ambitious response is needed to unleash the social and economic transformation needed to achieve our 2030 goals."¹

Success hinges on collaboration. Industry leadership will be key to identifying partnership opportunities for collective action on challenges we cannot solve on our own. Pursuing these opportunities can translate into competitive advantage, supply chain resiliency and brand trust. The time to deliver is now.

Figure 1
The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



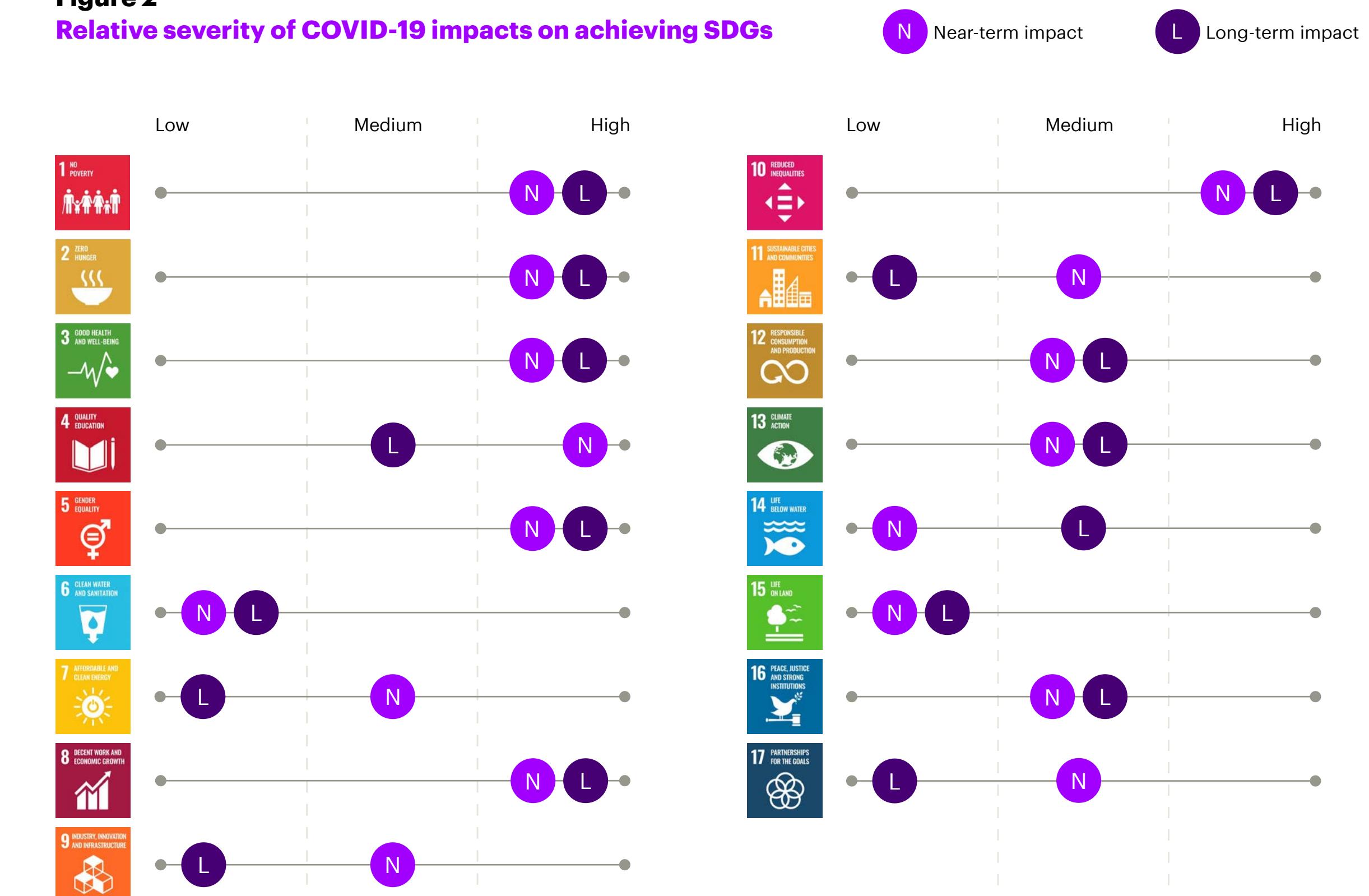
The scale of the challenge

Even before the pandemic, the world was not advancing at the speed or scale required to achieve the SDGs by 2030.

Extreme poverty was projected to still be at 6% in 2030. Hunger was on the rise for the third consecutive year. Greenhouse gas emissions continued to increase. Gender inequalities persisted. Institutions were not effective enough to address all of these challenges.²

Accenture Strategy mapped the near- and long-term impacts of the pandemic to the targets and indicators underlying each of the SDGs. The conclusion: The pandemic poses severe near-term challenges and hinders longer-term progress against all 17 goals (See Figure 2). While the pandemic impacts all SDGs, those relating to socioeconomic issues are disproportionately impacted.

Figure 2
Relative severity of COVID-19 impacts on achieving SDGs



The economic fallout from the global pandemic could increase global poverty by as much as half a billion people, or 8% of the total human population, reversing 30 years of economic improvement.³ Estimates suggest that two out of every five jobs lost during the pandemic may not come back.⁴ COVID-19 will also disproportionately affect women, who globally make up a larger share of low-paid, part-time jobs.⁵ Immediate business action is needed to achieve the targets by 2030.

Stakeholders expect business to step up

Stakeholder groups—including consumers, employees and investors—are demanding sustainable and responsible action from business. Accenture COVID-19 Consumer Research, which surveyed 8,529 consumers across 19 countries in June 2020, found that two-thirds of consumers (67%) expect companies to invest in longer-term, sustainable and fair solutions post crisis.⁶

Furthermore, 71% of investors agreed that COVID-19 will increase awareness and actions to tackle risks related to climate change and biodiversity losses (See Figure 3).⁷

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Stakeholders expect business to step up

All challenges present opportunities, however, and companies can proactively mitigate the risk of future crises, growing social unrest, and further disruptions to business by addressing these issues head-on. Companies are realizing value from integrating sustainability into their operations and products. Between 2013 and 2020, companies with consistently high ratings for environmental, social and governance (ESG) performance have outperformed their peers, achieving operating margins 3.7x higher than lower ESG performers and generating 2.6x higher annual total returns to shareholders.⁸

Companies can leverage the SDGs and their targets when measuring progress towards their sustainability goals and identifying sustainability pathways to drive shared value for their business and broader society. SDG Ambition is an initiative launched by the UN Global Compact, Accenture, and SAP to provide specific guidance for business leaders to implement business benchmarks into decision making and reporting. The latest guidance released during the UN General Assembly in September 2020 makes it easier for companies to set ambitious goals and measure SDG progress holistically alongside traditional business indicators.⁹ By integrating the SDG Ambition benchmarks into business strategy and operations, companies can lower costs and risk, strengthen trust with stakeholders, and find new opportunities for sustainable growth (See Figure 4).

Figure 3
Stakeholders are demanding responsible actions from business

Consumers	Employees	Investors
67% of consumers expect companies to invest in long-term, sustainable and fair solutions post crisis. ⁱ	40% of employees think their employers' actions during the pandemic are not demonstrating commitment to the planet or society. ⁱⁱⁱ	71% of investors agreed that COVID-19 will increase awareness and actions to tackle risks related to climate change and biodiversity losses. ^v
65% of consumers expect governments and businesses to prioritise climate change in the post-crisis economic recovery. ⁱⁱ		Companies with consistently high ratings for ESG performance achieved a cumulative return 6.3% higher than bottom performers during the COVID-19 market turmoil from January to April 2020. ^v

Sources: i) Accenture, COVID-19: New habits are here to stay for retail consumers, 2020. ii) Ipsos, Two thirds of citizens around the world agree climate change is as serious a crisis as Coronavirus, 2020. iii) Accenture COVID-19 Consumer Research, 2020. iv) J.P. Morgan, Why COVID-19 Could Prove to Be a Major Turning Point for ESG Investing, 2020. v) Accenture and Arabesque S-Ray Analysis, 2020.

Figure 4
Business value from pursuing sustainability pathways



Sources: i) Web Accessibility Initiative, [The business case for digital accessibility](#), retrieved March 11, 2021. ii) Accenture, [The circular economy handbook](#), 2020. iii) Aparna Krishnamurthy et. al., [Broadband access spurs jobs in hard-to-reach areas](#), World Bank, 2020. iv) Business Roundtable, [Business Roundtable redefines the purpose of a corporation to promote ‘An economy that serves all Americans’](#), 2019. v) Principles for Responsible Investment, [What is the Inevitable Policy Response?](#), retrieved March 11, 2021. vi) Ashish Lodh, [ESG and the cost of capital](#), MSCI, 2020. vii) Accenture Global Consumer Pulse Survey, 2020. viii) Accenture, [Generation P\(urpose\): From fidelity to future value](#), 2020. ix) Edelman, [Trust barometer](#), 2019.

Every industry has a role to play

All industries have a role to play when it comes to rebuilding for the better. Accenture Strategy examined how twelve industries are uniquely positioned to advance specific SDGs (See Figure 5).

Each industry's impact assessment is based on a combination of factors that span the entirety of its value chain—including its product and service offerings, the composition of its workforce, operational footprint and the regions in which it operates.

Delivering on the promise of sustainability

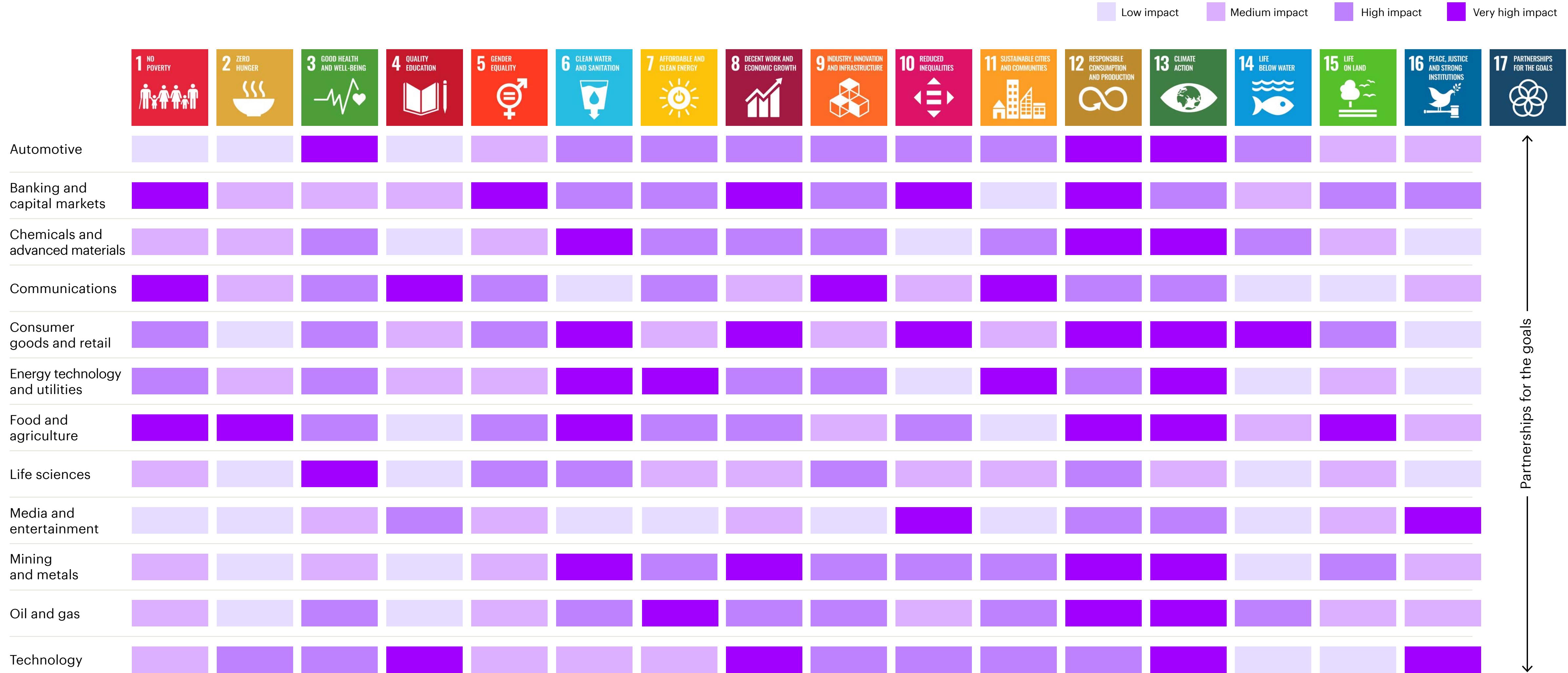
Every industry has a role to play

The report sets out three sustainability pathways for each of twelve industry sectors, the potential impact on specific SDGs and the resulting value. The pathways are not exhaustive but demonstrate possibilities. Some examples:

 Automotive	Circular manufacturing practices and net zero carbon mobility.
 Banking and capital markets	Financial inclusion, more transparent ESG metrics.
 Chemicals and advanced materials	New recycling technologies and less resource use.
 Communications	Closing the digital divide and enabling sustainable urbanization.
 Consumer goods and retail	Circular business models to reduce product and packaging waste.
 Energy technology and utilities	Clean energy transition with a focus on affordable access for all.
 Food and agriculture	Regenerative agricultural practices, promote sustainable food consumption.
 Life sciences	Equitable access to medicine and treatments, build business and societal resilience for health-related crises.
 Media and entertainment	Provide ethical & factual information, equitable content distribution.
 Mining and metals	Adopt circular business models that decouple economic growth from resource extraction.
 Oil and gas	Capture new value pools from the clean energy transition, support creation of clean energy jobs.
 Technology	Enable a more sustainable digital economy with sustainable technologies, design products with data privacy in mind.

The case for action in rebuilding for the better is compelling. At a time when the global economy needs an injection of innovation and society needs to grapple with unprecedented challenges, it is important to consider the enormous value at stake—an estimated US\$4.5 trillion in circular economy opportunities alone¹⁰—and redouble efforts into creating a new way forward.

Figure 5
Relative industry impact on the SDGs



Automotive



01 Support society's transition to net zero-carbon mobility

The transport sector accounts for 14% of annual greenhouse gas emissions, with 72% coming from road vehicles.¹⁴ By supporting society's transition to net zero carbon mobility, the automotive industry can reduce global greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13), and as a result reduce the number of deaths from air pollution (SDG 3).

The industry can drive growth by tapping into zero-carbon-mobility markets, from electric vehicles to e-bikes and charging. Electric vehicles represent a growth market: The number of electric vehicles on the road is expected to grow from 3.1 million in 2017 to 140 million in 2030.¹⁵

Volkswagen is spending US\$34 billion over the next five years to make an electric or hybrid version of every vehicle in its lineup. By the end of 2030, Volkswagen expects four out of every 10 cars it sells to be electric, and to overtake Tesla as the largest manufacturer of electric vehicles.

Source: [CNN](#)

02 Invest in circular business models

The value at stake in the personal mobility circular economy is US\$240-610 billion from 2018 to 2030.¹² Despite utilization rates in the 5-10% range, it is estimated that 100 million cars will be produced in 2030—and 20% of total greenhouse gas emissions for internal combustion engine vehicles are generated in the production phase.¹³

The automotive industry can lower production costs through circular manufacturing practices including remanufacturing components, incorporating other industries' waste streams as feedstock, and embracing smart manufacturing. Circular business models—car sharing/rental services and automated mobility—can improve the full life-cycle value of an automobile, promoting responsible consumption (SDG 12) and affordable and accessible transportation systems (SDG 11).

The Circular Cars Initiative is a public/private partnership focused on leveraging new technologies and business models to align the automotive industry with a 1.5°C climate scenario. A growing number of cross-industry partnerships are evolving between automotive manufacturers and mining and metal companies such as:

- The responsible copper initiative between BMW & Codelco.
- The closed-loop recycling partnership between Ford & Jaguar Land Rover and Novelis.

Sources: [WEF](#), [Copper Alliance](#)

03 Reduce road accidents

One of the targets contained within SDG 3, good health and well-being, is to halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road accidents.¹¹ Automotive manufacturers can unlock value and reduce risk by investing in technologies that reduce accidents.

They can invest in a variety of safety-related solutions including vehicle-to-vehicle technologies such as autonomous breaking. Companies that delay embracing such enhancements risk losing customers as these interventions become the norm of the industry.

Toyota plans to install vehicle-to-vehicle communications in models in the United States starting in 2021. By the middle of the next decade, most Toyota and Lexus models will have the capability.

Source: [Consumer Reports](#)

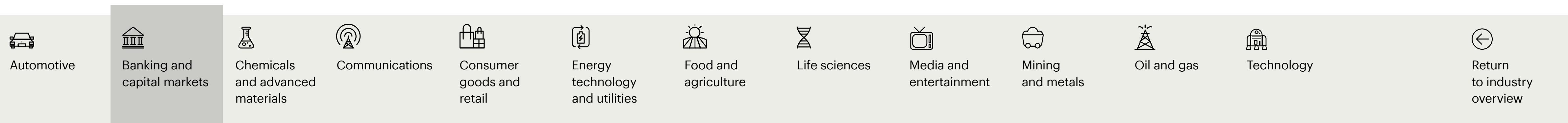
Banking and capital markets

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS			SDG IMPACT			VALUE TO BUSINESS		
	All SDGs	Primary SDGs		Improve growth	Reduce cost and risk	Increase trust and brand value		
01	Embrace innovative models to promote financial inclusion for a more diverse set of customers			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
02	Strengthen evaluation and transparency of ESG metrics			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		
03	Work across industries and sectors to identify greatest areas of opportunity to finance the global sustainability agenda			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			

Partnerships for the goals



01 Embrace innovation and inclusion

The banking and capital markets industry can support financial inclusion (SDG 1) by innovating and expanding their product and service offerings to reach a more diverse set of customers (SDG 10).

Companies can expand access to capital by adapting credit and lending processes, for example by using proof of employment or by accepting forms of collateral other than established credit histories, to increase lending to women and other underbanked groups (SDG 5 and 10).

The industry can also broaden its distribution channels, such as by utilizing mobile banking or offering microinsurance, to reach the two billion adults worldwide who do not have access to a bank account.¹⁶

Destacame provides an alternative credit scoring platform based on a customers' bill payment history. Mexico's largest financial institution, BBVA Bancomer, partnered with Destacame to expand credit to customers with little or no credit history making less than US\$100 per month. With traditional risk assessment models, only 10% of customers in this segment would have been approved.

Source: [Center for Financial Inclusion](#)



Automotive



Banking and capital markets



Chemicals and advanced materials



Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



Food and agriculture



Life sciences



Media and entertainment



Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



Return to industry overview

02 Evaluate and build transparency of governance metrics

Environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) is still evolving, and the banking and capital markets industry can help address the definitional standards, data gaps and measurement issues to ensure full participation from business. In doing so, the industry can encourage companies to adopt sustainable practices, integrate ESG information into their reporting (SDG 12)¹⁷ and decouple economic growth from environmental degradation (SDG 8).

They can do this in three ways: Converge on a common framework for assessing ESG metrics, advocate for standardized corporate reporting to solve ESG rating discrepancies, and advocate for automated corporate reporting to ease complexity of measuring and reporting.

The Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures is a framework for companies to develop more effective climate-related financial disclosures through their existing reporting processes. More than 450 investors have signed Climate Action 100+, pledging they will work to secure commitments from the companies they invest in to provide enhanced corporate disclosure in line with the task force.

Source: [TCFD](#)

03 Finance the global sustainability agenda

The banking and capital markets industry has a pivotal role to play in the advancement of the SDGs due to its influence on capital funding. An estimated US\$2.4 trillion per year is required to achieve the SDGs by 2030.¹⁸ The pandemic has further revealed the importance of social impact and driven investment in social bonds: US\$11.6 billion as of May 15, 2020, compared to US\$6.2 billion in the same period of 2019.¹⁹

Companies can support the shift to a sustainable economy by directly investing in projects and facilitating the participation of both the public and private sector (SDG 17). Companies are collaborating with the public sector by investing in renewable energy and infrastructure projects as well as raising capital for climate risk mitigation and climate adaption.

The UN's Task Force on Digital Financing of the SDGs paves the way for harnessing digitalization in accelerating financing of the SDGs. The Task Force cites three features of digitalization that help to overcome barriers to financing the SDGs: More and better data, reduced transaction and intermediation costs, and innovative digital business models.

Source: [Digital Financing Task Force](#)

Chemicals and advanced materials



01 Support responsible consumption

Polymers are used to make plastic goods and constitute about 80% of the chemical industry's production output.²⁰ As such, the chemicals industry holds immense potential for driving circular business models and downstream innovation (SDG 12).

Companies can capitalize on this opportunity by driving transparency into waste streams, establishing end-of-life collection systems for different material classes, implementing digital interventions across the value chain, and developing chemical recycling processes.

SABIC has developed food packaging solutions for its clients using certified circular polymers.

- Unilever's Magnum ice cream tub is the world's first food brand made from recycled plastic.
- Vinventions, a leader in wine closure design and engineering, and SABIC plan to reveal a fully sustainable and certified circular wine closure prototype.

Source: [SABIC](#)

02 Invest in infrastructure for broader sustainability goals

By leveraging government stimulus and targeted investments, chemicals companies can cement their place in the energy transition and their role in realizing ambitious sustainability goals.

For example, the chemicals industry can enable the growth and affordability of the green hydrogen fuel economy, a key pillar of the energy transition. By improving key aspects such as the electrolysis process, companies can decrease the cost of green hydrogen fuel to the point where it becomes cost competitive with traditional fuel sources like oil and gas. Furthermore, companies can invest in research and development to create cheaper, smaller, and more energy-dense batteries to improve their cost effectiveness and accelerate their adoption.

Mitsubishi Chemical and PTT have teamed up to create a bio-based plastic using polybutylene succinate (PBS) and polylactic acid. PBS is compostable and is currently used in straws, paper lamination, and films.

Source: [Bioplastics News](#)

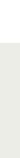
03 Accelerate net-zero emission and minimize resources

The chemicals industry generates about 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions.²¹ It is also the world's largest industrial energy consumer.²²

Companies can reduce their environmental impact and associated costs and risks by employing strategies like leveraging low-quality, mixed plastic waste as feedstock, using renewable energy inputs, and safely disposing of materials that cannot be repurposed or recycled.

The ChemSec Business Group is a collaboration among companies to accelerate progress on toxic use reduction. It gathers market-leading companies for the development of effective corporate practices in the substitution of hazardous substances.

Source: [ChemSec](#)



Automotive



Banking and capital markets



Chemicals and advanced materials



Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



Food and agriculture



Life sciences



Media and entertainment



Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



Return to industry overview

Communications



01 Close the digital divide

An open Internet with full access, speed, information, fair handling of traffic, and high-quality service for all can close the digital divide. The communications industry is uniquely positioned to advance SDG 9: “Provide universal and affordable Internet access in least developed countries.”

The industry also has the potential to create opportunities for economic growth and demand for new skills. Companies can facilitate children’s universal completion of primary and secondary education (SDG 4) by expanding into new markets where homes lack online access.

Ensuring people have equal rights to economic resources (SDG 1) requires innovative solutions. For example, mobile payment systems, such as Kenya’s M-PESA, have the potential to serve the two billion people globally who are currently unbanked.²³

Verizon, in collaboration with NGO partners, education and technology experts, launched the Verizon Innovative Learning program to help students achieve, learn, and create more by providing free internet access, devices and next-gen, technology-infused lessons. The program has provided over US\$535 million in market value to date towards STEM education, helping under-resourced communities bridge the digital divide.

Source: [Verizon](#)



Automotive



Banking and capital markets



Chemicals and advanced materials



Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



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Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



Return to industry overview

02 Build sustainable urbanization and resilience

The communications industry has a large role to play in building sustainable and resilient infrastructure (SDG 9 and 11).

Investing in 4G and 5G solutions will enable cities to better connect their infrastructure, devices, and people—with the potential to optimize traffic flow and safety, improve efficiency of urban operations, enhance energy efficiency and waste management, and monitor air quality.

Communication companies can also proactively protect their operational infrastructure by investing in natural disaster response and recovery, which will in turn strengthen cities’ resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards (SDG 13).

Cisco partnered with the City of Copenhagen to help them become carbon neutral by 2025 through the Smart + Connected Digital Platform. The platform utilizes sensors to monitor parking, waste, and environmental changes. It also strengthens the Danish Outdoor Lighting Lab program, digitizing urban spaces and creating the future of smart cities.

Source: [Cisco](#)

03 Enable downstream emission reduction

The communications industry can enable companies to integrate climate change measures into strategic planning (SDG 13) and reduce downstream greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2018, mobile technology enabled more than two billion tons of CO₂-equivalent emission reduction, approximately 10x the carbon footprint of the mobile industry itself.²⁴ Possible interventions include telecommuting, smart metering/demand response units, and machine-to-machine and internet-of-things based fuel and energy savings.

Telenor Pakistan partnered its mobile money solution, Easypaisa, with Pakistani energy service company Roshan Energy, to launch an innovative solar home solution. Developed on a pay-as-you-go model, the product enables customers to purchase solar solutions with an upfront payment of 15%, with remaining payments made within 18 months through Easypaisa. This initiative will empower nearly 40% of the Pakistanis who live off the grid with access to clean and affordable solar energy.

Source: [GSMA](#)

Consumer goods and retail

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS

Not exhaustive, see over for detail

01 Reduce operational environmental footprint by adopting water recycling and grey water utilization, implementing net-zero goals, and understanding product disposal impacts

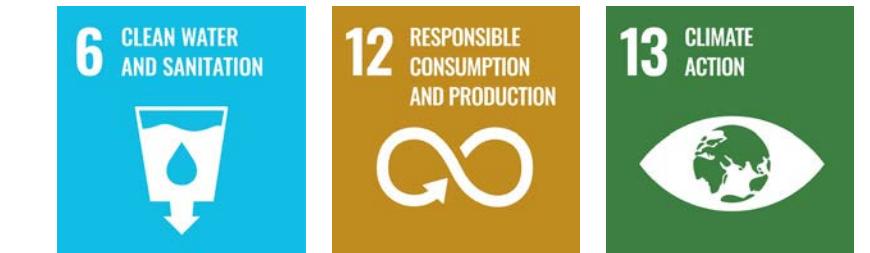
02 Implement circular business models to reduce product and packaging waste and promote responsible consumption

03 Build robust and inclusive value chains by implementing equal opportunity practices, protecting human rights, and ensuring all workers are paid a living wage

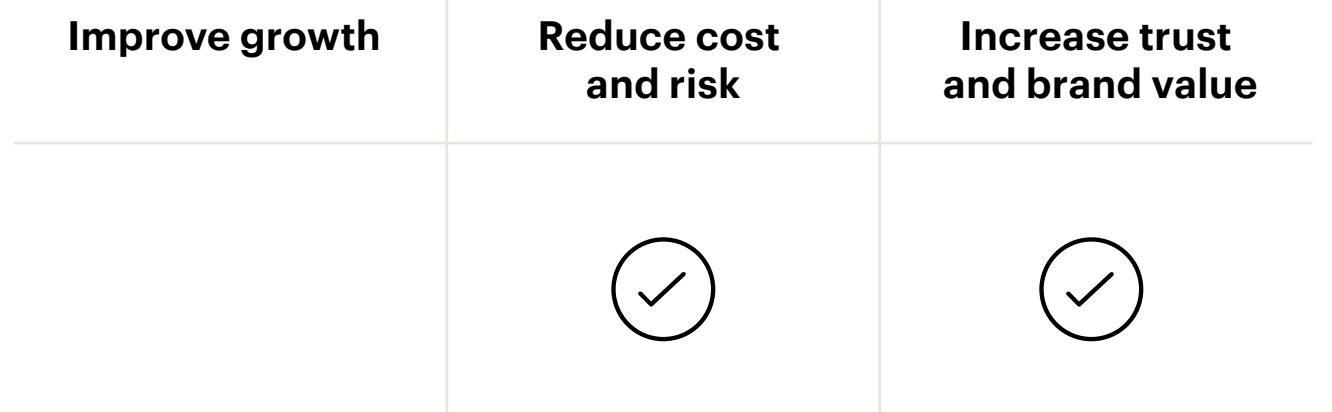
All SDGs



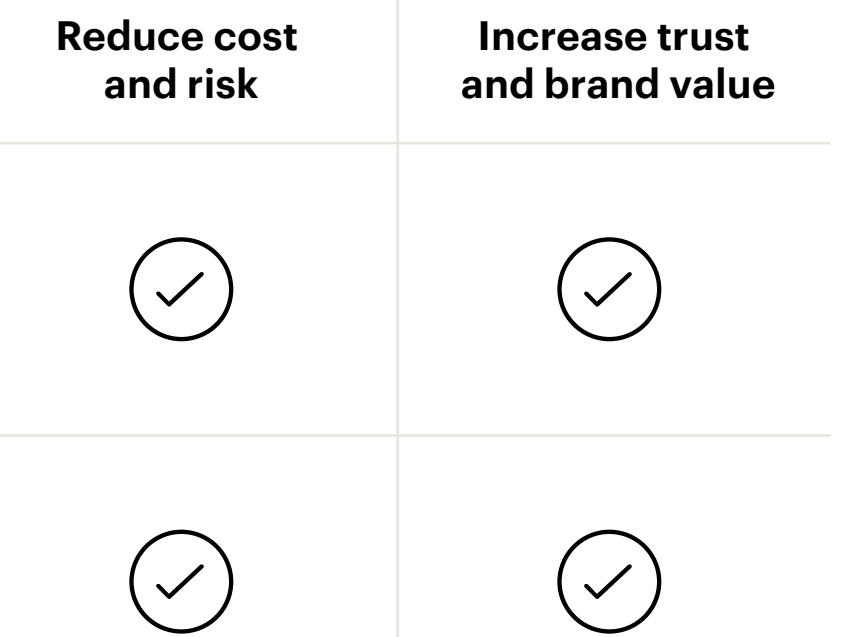
Primary SDGs



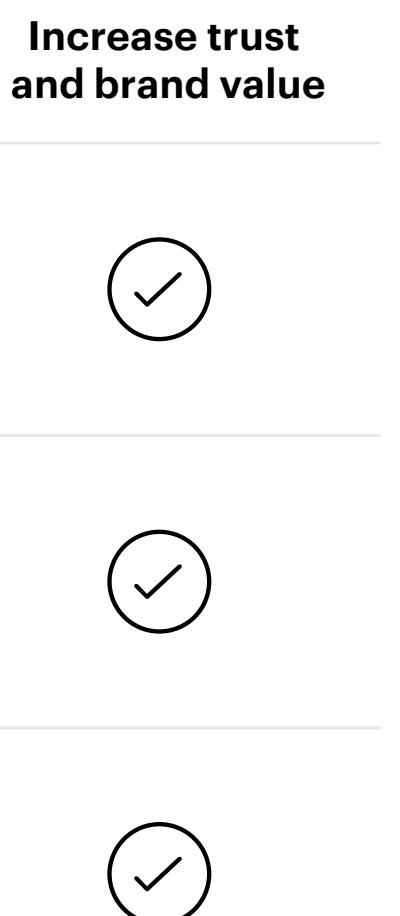
Improve growth



Reduce cost and risk



Increase trust and brand value



Partnerships for the goals



01 Reduce operational environmental footprint

Consumer goods and retail have a large operational environmental footprint. The fashion industry alone is responsible for 10% of annual greenhouse gas emissions and consumes 93 billion cubic meters of water every year—more than 10% of the water used by all types of industry.²⁵

Consumer goods and retail companies can reduce their waste and material usage—and associated risks and costs—by increasing their use of renewable energy, sourcing recyclable materials, using byproducts from their own industry and others, implementing water recycling and grey water utilization into production systems, and maintaining lower inventory levels.

Closed Loop's Beyond the Bag initiative brings together partners from both the retail sector and environmental advocacy groups to reinvent the single-use plastic retail bag. The initiative explores using innovative materials, reusable models, and bagless solutions. Partners include Target, Walmart, and the Ocean Conservancy.

Source: [Closed Loop Partners](#)



Automotive



Banking and capital markets



Chemicals and advanced materials



Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



Food and agriculture



Life sciences



Media and entertainment



Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



Return to industry overview

02 Implement circular business models

Companies can unlock business value and promote responsible consumption and downstream waste reduction by implementing circular business models, with over US\$59 billion in economic value at stake annually in the reusable packaging market alone.²⁶

Companies can take advantage of consumer demand for more sustainable products by developing innovative business models, such as clothing rental subscriptions, used goods retailing, or revisiting the “milkman model” where a company is able to reduce waste by collecting and reusing its product packaging.

TerraCycle's Loop provides brands from CPG giants, such as P&G, with durable packaging designed for reuse rather than recycling. Retailers are now re-designing their in-store experiences for Loop's reusable packaging. Kroger, Tesco, Loblaw, Woolworths, and Aeon are all making room for in-store Loop corners.

Source: [WSJ](#)

03 Ensure robust and inclusive value chains

An estimated 170 million children are engaged in child labor (SDG 8), many in the textile and garment industry.²⁷ Additionally, wages for workers in garment, leather, and footwear supply chains in the least developed countries can range between 14-36% of living wages (SDG 10).²⁸

The industry can advance the SDGs by taking responsibility for ensuring the social protection of their extended workforce. Companies can embed and promote/enforce inclusion, diversity and human rights standards throughout their value chains.

These measures will improve productivity and strengthen brand value. Examples of measures include adopting equal opportunity policies (SDG 5) by enforcing labor rights, standards and living wages, implementing new-skilling programs to improve access to professional opportunities, and developing the capacity of small-scale entrepreneurs. By ensuring that suppliers meet these same standards, companies can build robust and inclusive value chains.

Better Work brings together all levels of the garment industry to improve working conditions as well as boost competitiveness of apparel businesses. Members include Ralph Lauren, ASOS, REI, PUMA, and others.

Source: [Better Work](#)

Energy technology and utilities

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS

Not exhaustive, see over for detail

01 Adopt a system value approach towards the clean energy transition and accelerate investments in renewable generation, energy efficiency, and grid enhancements

02 Support cities and industrial hubs in achieving their net zero targets through innovation and cross-sector collaboration

03 Embrace innovative and inclusive business models to ensure equitable access to energy for LDCs (least developed countries) and to respond to shifting consumer preferences for low carbon energy services

All SDGs



SDG IMPACT

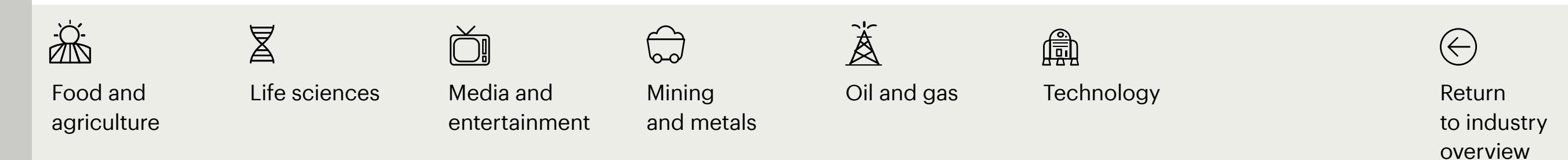
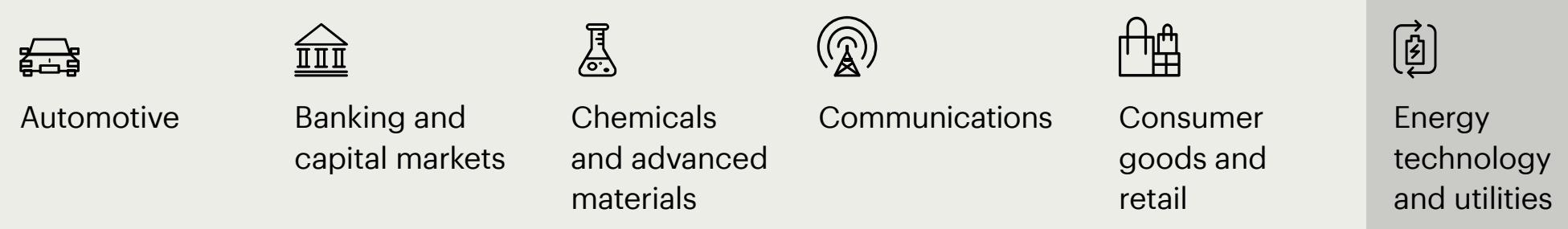
Primary SDGs



VALUE TO BUSINESS

Improve growth	Reduce cost and risk	Increase trust and brand value
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Partnerships for the goals



Return to industry overview

01 Adopt value approach towards the clean energy transition

A [system value approach](#) towards the clean energy transition considers not only the cost of energy but also the broader impact on society—including emissions, water footprint, air quality, job creation, and energy access and resilience.²⁹

This framework takes a holistic view of the impact of renewable generation, energy efficiency, and grid enhancements on both the economy and society. Such an approach can better inform long-term investment decisions and their impact on SDGs. Renewables outperform traditional energy sources in terms of emissions, water footprint, and job creation. The IEA's Sustainable Recovery Plan has energy efficiency delivering the greatest reductions in emissions and creating over 9.5 million job-years.³⁰ Finally, grid enhancements will further facilitate renewable penetration and increases in electrification.

In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the United States invested heavily in utility scale solar energy programs. This created more than 200,000 jobs in the renewable energy sector through 2012 and 33 gigawatts of power.

Source: Mundaca and Richter, ResearchGate



Automotive



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02 Achieve net-zero targets

Currently over 100 global cities get at least 70% of their electricity from renewable sources,³¹ and that number is only going to increase as more governments commit to a clean energy future.

The energy technology and utilities industry can support cities (SDG 11) and industrial hubs (SDG 9) achieve their net-zero targets by decarbonizing power generation and investing in new value pools emerging from the clean energy transition, including renewables, utility scale storage, electric vehicles, and green hydrogen. Collaborative partnerships and knowledge sharing amongst different industry groups and public-sector organizations can help companies innovate on these solutions and improve their cost competitiveness, reliability, and storage capacity.

The Hydrogen Council is a global initiative of leading energy, transport and industry companies with a united vision and long-term ambition for hydrogen to foster the energy transition. The coalition plans to accelerate investment in the development and commercialization of the hydrogen and fuel cell sectors, and to encourage key stakeholders to increase their backing of hydrogen as part of the future energy mix with appropriate policies and supporting schemes.

Source: [Hydrogen Council](#)

03 Ensure equitable access to clean energy and low-carbon energy services

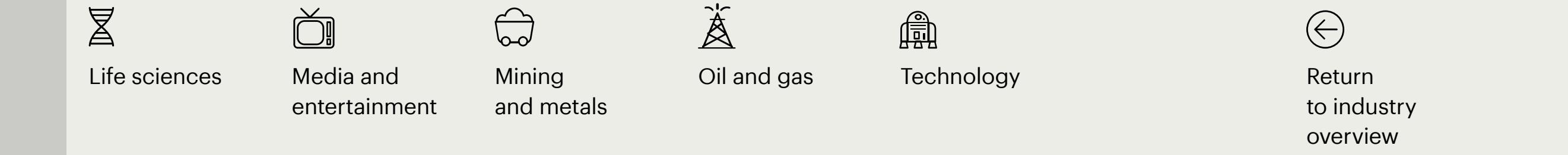
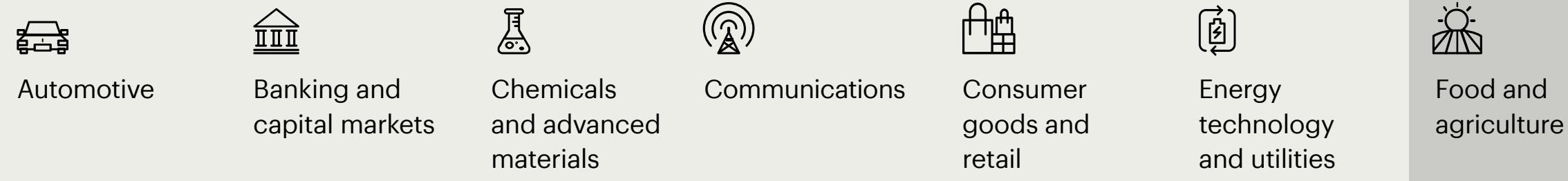
The energy technology and utilities industry must meet the growing demand for clean energy access across the spectrum of consumers. This includes supplying modern and sustainable energy services for all (SDG 7) and responding to consumer preferences for low-carbon energy services and digital interactions.

Companies can expand energy access in least developed countries and to other off-grid communities by investing in low-carbon microgrids, low-cost community solar systems, and other off-grid clean energy projects. Additionally, customer-centric business models can enable companies to provide low carbon energy services, including electric vehicle charging, green power plans and connected home services to sustainability-minded consumers.

Rockefeller Foundation's Smart Power for Rural Development initiative, in partnership with Indian utility Tata Power, aims to install 10,000 mini-grids in India to serve 5 million households and 25 million people.

Source: [PV Magazine](#)

Food and agriculture



Return to industry overview

01 Reduce operational environmental footprint

The food and agriculture industry has a pronounced effect on the environment and its natural resources. Food production accounts for 26% of global greenhouse gas emissions and 70% of the world's freshwater is used for agriculture.³²

The industry can implement regenerative agricultural practices—and source commodities from companies who employ these practices—to reduce their water and land use (SDG 6 and 15). Companies can reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by increasing energy efficiency across value chains and implementing an internal carbon price to inform decisions. Developing climate resilient agriculture (SDG 13) will reduce risks posed to production systems and save operational costs.

Earthwatch and Starbucks formed a unique partnership to increase the sustainability of coffee farming, prevent soil degradation and pollution, and enhance sustainability outcomes for coffee buyers like Starbucks. By the end of the program, 85% of the 200 trained farmers were using more sustainable coffee farming methods.

Source: [Earthwatch](#)

02 Enable sustainable food consumption and production

Approximately 30% of food produced globally is either lost or wasted, representing US\$1 trillion in annual economic losses, US\$700 billion in environmental costs and US\$900 billion in social costs.³³ Some methodologies for reducing food waste include donating food that would otherwise go wasted, standardizing expiration labels, and increasing the sale of irregular fruits and vegetables.³⁴

The industry can also enable healthier lifestyles for its customers by aligning products with recommended daily calorie intakes and portion sizes, and developing new, healthier food products. Plant-based alternatives are becoming increasingly competitive against animal products and as a result can reduce the environmental footprint of animal agriculture. For example, beef production uses 20 times the land and produces 20 times the emissions as growing beans per gram of protein.³⁵ The market for plant-based foods that directly replace animal products has grown 29% in the past two years to US\$5 billion.³⁶

Italy's Bolton Food Group committed to 100% sustainable fishing by 2024, and transformed its operations to establish a best-in-class sustainable fishing operation in the Solomon Islands, where it employs 1,000 locals. They also obtained the Marine Stewardship Council certification and partnered with World Wildlife Fund to improve sustainability across the industry.

Source: [Eco Business](#)

03 Build equitable agricultural value chains

The food and agriculture industry can promote inclusive and resilient value chains to protect their workforce and their business from exogenous shocks. The workforce faces hazardous working conditions, including pesticide exposure, heat stress, and dangerous machinery. Companies can invest in their workforce and reduce the number of people living in poverty (SDG 1) by enforcing labor rights and standards and living wages (SDG 8 and 10), while reducing occupational hazards by promoting safer agricultural practices and investing in technology that improves safety.

Equitable agricultural supply chains are more resilient to disruptions. Additionally, food and agriculture companies can both improve women's representation in leadership roles within their own companies, while advancing women's full participation throughout their value chains (SDG 5). For example, by working with the financial services sector, companies can improve women's access to capital for improved farming technologies.

Divine Chocolate, which produces and markets chocolate in the United Kingdom and United States, is 44% owned by the 45,000 farmer members of the Kuapa Kokoo cooperative in Ghana, which supplies the cocoa.

Source: [Oxfam](#)



Automotive



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Chemicals and advanced materials



Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



Food and agriculture



Life sciences



Media and entertainment



Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



Return to industry overview

Life sciences

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS

Not exhaustive, see over for detail

01 Ensure equitable access to medications and treatments through market expansion and improved affordability

All SDGs



SDG IMPACT



02 Enable business and societal resilience to health-related crises by partnering within the industry to strengthen R&D efforts and data management



03 Build equitable and sustainable value chains by protecting the rights of the workforce and reducing the environmental impact of drug development



VALUE TO BUSINESS



Improve growth



Reduce cost and risk



Increase trust and brand value



Partnerships for the goals



Automotive



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01 Ensure equitable access to medications and treatments

Life sciences companies are uniquely positioned to advance progress on good health and well-being (SDG 3) compared to other industries. Collaborating with governments, companies can help strengthen countries' health systems by developing innovative, low-cost treatments for communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Mark-ups on these medications and treatments can impede vulnerable populations' access to essential medicines and exacerbate the inequality gap (SDG 10). To expand access, companies can adopt low-price-high-volume models.

The industry can also promote access to sexual and reproductive health (SDG 5) by supporting global partnerships for maternal and newborn health and by improving reproductive healthcare in least-developed countries by expanding access to information, contraception, and medical supplies and services.

The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health is the world's largest alliance for women's, children's, and adolescents' health hosted by the WHO. Private sector life sciences companies partner with NGOs, governments, donors, and academic research organizations to drive impact in focus areas including sexual and reproductive health, as well as adolescent health and well-being.

Source: [WHO](#)



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Oil and gas



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02 Improve business and societal resilience to health-related crises

COVID-19 has demonstrated that not enough progress is being made on pandemic preparedness, also evidenced by the fact that vaccines represent only 3% of the US\$1 trillion global pharmaceuticals market.³⁷ The Life Sciences industry can improve business and societal resilience to health-related crises by adopting open innovation models in their research and development practices.

Increasing disease complexity and research costs make open innovation models more competitive for the industry. As collaboration increases, so does the importance of secure data management. By investing in solutions that prevent, control, and eliminate global diseases, companies can not only help build society's resilience to health-related crises but also expand their product portfolios and boost their brand value.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations is a public-private partnership with the goal of increasing access to immunization in poor countries. The private sector vaccine industry has partnered with WHO, UNICEF, World Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to help vaccinate approximately 760 million children in the world's poorest countries, preventing an estimated 13 million deaths.

Source: [GAVI](#)

03 Ensure equitable and sustainable value chains

Life sciences companies can protect the rights and livelihoods of their workforces and value chains by implementing equal opportunity policies, promoting inclusion and diversity, and providing essential benefits such as healthcare and paid parental leave. The industry can also reduce its environmental impact by sourcing materials responsibly and improving energy efficiency, especially that of heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) systems, which can account for 60-75% of drug product manufacturing's energy use.³⁸

Responsible management of pharmaceutical waste is especially important, as failure to responsibly dispose waste can contribute to antimicrobial resistance. Only nine of 118 assessed pharmaceuticals were successfully removed during wastewater treatment,³⁹ indicating that companies must design processes to prevent pharmaceutical waste from reaching the environment. Companies can reduce operational costs by managing natural resources use and waste production throughout the lifecycle of their products.

GSK collects carbon, water, and waste data via its Ecodesk, a collaborative database available through a supplier exchange platform. Data is collected from more than 200 of the largest materials suppliers covering some US\$1.3 billion of raw materials spending used in research and manufacturing.

Source: [3BL Media](#)

Media and entertainment

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS

Not exhaustive, see over for detail

01 Ensure equitable content distribution, affordability, and accessibility

All SDGs



Primary SDGs



02 Provide ethical & factual information, ensure viewpoints are diverse & inclusive content representation, and mitigate misinformation & harmful content



03 Reduce waste and inefficiencies in content creation by implementing standards and solutions and offer circular products in content distribution



Improve growth



Reduce cost and risk



Increase trust and brand value



Partnerships for the goals



Automotive



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Return to industry overview

01 Enable equitable content distribution, affordability, and accessibility

Media systems are biased: Towards Western-language speakers, the able-bodied, and the more wealthy. This exacerbates existing inequality gaps (SDG 10).⁴⁰

To reduce these gaps and expand their reach, the industry can use different platforms and distribution channels to reach a more diverse customer base, for example by meeting standards for people with disabilities and providing information via more affordable channels. These standards also have implications for educational attainment (SDG 4), as school learning materials are increasingly being provided not by the state but by commercial media companies.⁴¹

NBC News Learn partners with corporations, non-profits, and foundations, such as the National Science Foundation, the Kellogg Foundation, and the NFL. Together they create original video series and live educational events. Schools can purchase site licenses for teachers, students, and parents.

Source: [NBC](#)



Automotive



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Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



Food and agriculture



Life sciences



Media and entertainment



Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



Return to industry overview

02 Create ethical and inclusive content and representation

The media and entertainment industry plays a unique role in supporting public dialogue, enhancing knowledge of ways to support sustainable development, and holding governments accountable (SDG 16). Companies can also build resiliency and trust through socially responsible content, ensuring diverse representation in its content and workforces (SDG 5 and 10).

Collectively, the industry can continue to tackle harmful content by adopting common definitions and tools to categorize unsafe content, such as what the Global Alliance for Responsible Media, launched in 2019, seeks to do.

Women are the subjects of stories in only a quarter of television, radio, and print news. The BBC's 50:50 The Equality Project began in 2017 as a challenge for one news program to source 50% of its content from women. It has since grown to include 5,000 commissioners, producers, journalists, and presenters. Audiences responded and 40% of viewers aged 16-34 said they derived greater enjoyment from BBC content as a result of hearing more from women, and 32% of women aged 25-34 said they now consume more BBC online content because of greater female representation.

Source: [BBC](#)

03 Reduce waste and inefficiencies in content creation

The media and entertainment industry can reduce costs associated with waste and inefficiencies throughout their value chains, from content creation to distribution and consumption. Companies can integrate sustainability strategies into their facilities to minimize operational waste, energy, and water consumption, such as by increasing renewable energy use or water-cooling efficiency of data centers.

Furthermore, circular content delivery networks and open source compression technology can scale digital content distribution while improving efficiencies and bandwidth limitations. Companies can shift towards app-based delivery or "thin clients" to reduce material use of digital-based content and use recycled material in print media.

The Green Sports Alliance is rallying sports in the United States to work towards the SDGs. The NBA, among others, has adopted the UNFCCC's Sports for Climate Action Framework, a set of five principles design to move sports organizations closer to climate neutrality.

Source: [Sports Pro Media](#)

Mining and metals

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS		SDG IMPACT			VALUE TO BUSINESS		
	Not exhaustive, see over for detail	All SDGs	Primary SDGs	Improve growth	Reduce cost and risk	Increase trust and brand value	
01	Accelerate shift to circular business models and downstream innovation, decoupling economic growth from resource extraction		13 CLIMATE ACTION, 12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION, 8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Partnerships for the goals
02	Contribute to equitable and sustainable growth of both mining communities and workforce by protecting human rights and promoting re-skilling		8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH, 11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES, 10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
03	Accelerate towards net-zero goals for emissions and energy, water and land use to reduce climate related risks		13 CLIMATE ACTION, 6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION, 15 LIFE ON LAND		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	



01 Accelerate shift to circular business models

The top circular opportunities for the mining and metals industry include renewable inputs, capitalizing on upstream waste, and implementing new business models for downstream recovery.⁴² The increase of car sharing/rentals, manufacturing waste to value, and resale of recycled materials and batteries can take share from the mass-market, enabling the industry to generate value through de-commoditization.

The industry can also make an impact on downstream circular business models by embracing smart manufacturing and implementing digital solutions that reduce recall rates and reduce costs for faulty parts.⁴³

GEMChina, an urban mining company, processes about 300,000 tonnes (~10%) of waste battery per year, and extracts nickel, cobalt and other resources for battery producers such as Samsung SDI and Ecopro.

Source: [Ellen MacArthur Foundation](#)

02 Contribute to equitable and sustainable development of mining workforce and communities

Not only do mining and metals companies have an obligation to their own workforce, but also to the communities in which their mines and plants operate. Companies can facilitate equitable access to employment opportunities and focus on new-skilling their current workforce through training and apprenticeship programs.

They can also work directly with communities to understand their potential positive and negative impacts in order to better invest in economic and social initiatives. In doing so, emphasis should be placed on expanding opportunities to strengthen the voice of marginalized groups, including women, and to support local decision-making regarding mining operations, to reduce inequality in economic opportunities (SDG 10 and 11).

Rio Tinto and the Western Australian Government led the formation of the Resource Industry Collaboration in Western Australia, with the objectives to identify the future skills needs of industry, invest in new-skilling the workforce and develop qualifications relevant to all industries experiencing technological change.

In 2021 alone, Rio Tinto is investing US\$60 million in training and development in Western Australia as part of its commitment to support the development of these critical skills needed by the mining workforce.

Source: [Rio Tinto](#)

03 Accelerate towards net-zero goals

Material extraction currently employed by the industry has severe environmental consequences, from greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13) to water (SDG 6) and land degradation (SDG 15). The mining and metals industry is responsible for roughly 7% of greenhouse gas emissions,⁴⁴ while emissions elsewhere in the value chain contribute to approximately 30% of greenhouse gas emissions, largely through the use of coal.⁴⁵

The industry can reduce its resource intensity—and the associated costs and risks—by employing strategies such as using renewable inputs, reducing freshwater used for ore processing via recycling or using alternative water sources , and fostering landscape level planning.

At Vale's Sossego metallurgical plant in Brazil, 99.99% of water used to produce copper concentrate is recycled, saving 900,000 cubic meters of freshwater annually.

Source: [Vale](#)



Automotive



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Chemicals and advanced materials



Communications



Consumer goods and retail



Energy technology and utilities



Food and agriculture



Life sciences



Media and entertainment



Mining and metals



Oil and gas



Technology



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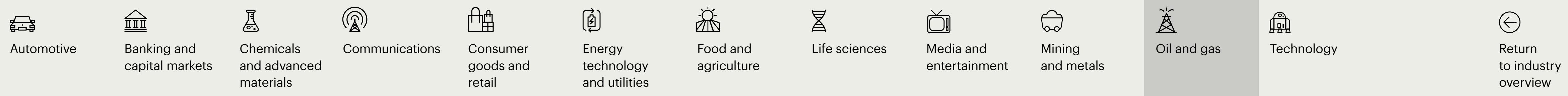
Oil and gas

Low impact Medium impact High impact Very high impact



SUSTAINABLE PATHWAYS			SDG IMPACT			VALUE TO BUSINESS		
Not exhaustive, see over for detail			All SDGs	Primary SDGs	Improve growth	Reduce cost and risk	Increase trust and brand value	
01	Capture new value pools emerging from the clean energy transition				<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
02	Collaborate with suppliers to accelerate towards intra-company net-zero goals and work with industry partners and other hard-to-abate sectors to create net-zero industrial clusters					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
03	Support creation of clean energy jobs and provide re-skilling opportunities for workers to minimize disruption of livelihoods from the energy transition					<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

Partnerships for the goals



01 Capture new value pools from clean energy

The oil and gas industry has been expanding its portfolio to capture new value pools from clean energy, including electrified transport, renewable energy, biofuels, carbon capture and utilization, and green hydrogen. So far, these investments outside their core business areas have represented less than 1% of total capital expenditure.⁴⁶

In the past, companies resisted diversification opportunities outside the oil, gas and chemicals value chain to prioritize shareholder returns. The impact of COVID-19 on the industry is altering these traditional lenses on risk and stakeholder value, while accelerating an already transformative moment for the industry. Companies can use this moment to transform their portfolios and operating models and advance the SDGs.

BP has recently announced planned investments in renewables, hydrogen, electric vehicle charging, and a reduction in oil and gas production by 40% by 2030.

Source: [Bloomberg](#)

02 Commit to net-zero goals

In 2017, the oil and gas industry was directly responsible for 15% of global energy sector greenhouse gas emissions, but its value chain emissions were more than triple that amount.⁴⁷

Therefore, not only does the oil and gas industry need to reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions (SDG 13), but it can also make a powerful impact by driving the clean energy transition and collaborating with other sectors to accelerate progress towards net-zero goals (SDG 9). According to Accenture Strategy analysis, oil and gas operators can meet 90% of their 2030 emission targets and generate US\$6 billion in additional value on an annual basis by deploying technologies that are already available.⁴⁸ In addition to their own operations, oil and gas companies can help develop net-zero industrial clusters with hard-to-abate sectors such as cement, steel, chemicals, plastics and heavy transportation.

The Zero-Carbon Humber project is a consortium of 11 energy companies and government bodies. The project aims to transform the largest emitting cluster in the United Kingdom, responsible for 14 million ton of CO₂ equivalents and 55,000 jobs, into a zero-carbon industrial cluster by scaling up bioenergy carbon, capture, and storage technology and developing green hydrogen infrastructure.

Source: [Zero Carbon Humber](#)

03 Offer clean energy jobs and new-skilling

Nearly six million people are directly employed by the oil and gas industry. Ten times as many are employed in jobs indirectly created by the industry.⁴⁹ The industry's reach makes a timely transition to the clean energy imperative: In addition to the environmental reasons, millions of livelihoods are at risk.⁵⁰

Companies should seek to minimize disruptions by new-skilling their employees for new roles and opportunities created not only by the energy transition but also by the adoption of technology, including automation and blockchain. This can include expanding business capabilities and creating new roles dedicated to cleaner fossil-fuel technology and renewable energy. Not only will these interventions help prepare the workforce for the clean energy transition, they will help it withstand future shocks to the industry.

Royal Dutch Shell, Tullow Oil and others have united to support the Skills for Oil and Gas Africa (SOGA) project, a partnership between public agencies for development cooperation in Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom. 47,700 people have received training, nearly 12,000 people have secured employment.

Source: [E4D SOGA](#)



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Technology



01 Enable a sustainable digital economy

The technology industry can enable other industries' sustainability goals by providing sustainable technology products and services, while increasing companies' ability to mitigate business risk.

For example, companies are embracing the sustainable cloud to increase their systems resilience and agility. As more companies make the [sustainable cloud journey](#), hyper-scalers can enable sustainable transformation by procuring renewable energy, incorporating innovative techniques to reduce the energy consumption of data centers, and reducing e-waste.

E-waste is one of the world's fastest growing waste streams with a 21% increase over the last five years.⁵¹ Technology companies can unlock growth, lower costs and reduce material intensity by incorporating circular business models such as product as a service, investing in reverse logistics, sourcing recyclable materials, using byproducts from their own industry, and redesigning products and packaging.

Siemens's MindSphere is an industrial IoT as a service solution. Industrial consumers can make decisions, such as predictive maintenance, based on their operational data stored in Mindsphere. The system is being used in areas including automated production and vehicle fleet management.

Source: [Siemens](#)



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02 Design with accessibility and data privacy in mind

As technology becomes increasingly integrated into everyday life, accessibility and data privacy will be critical to ensure an inclusive and secure digital landscape. Technology companies can reduce inequalities of outcome (SDG 10) not only by incorporating tenets of accessibility into their current products and services, but also by tapping into new value pools by developing assistive technology.

In addition, effective, accountable, and transparent institutions depend on data privacy and security (SDG 16). In the first six months of 2019, more than 3,800 data breaches exposed 4.1 billion records.⁵² Technology companies can increase customer trust and reduce risk by investing in keeping software and devices secure.

Microsoft has an AI for Accessibility program which has committed US\$25 million to build technology that improves accessibility for disabled people. It also released Seeing AI in 2017, a free app that assists the visually impaired.

Source: [Digit](#)

03 Expand technology access and solutions

Technology companies can drive both societal benefit and inclusive economic growth by expanding access to technology solutions, all while accelerating operational efficiency and enterprise-wide growth. Artificial intelligence has the potential to double economic growth rates by 2035 and increase labor productivity by up to 40%, advancing progress towards decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). However, automation could also place 20 million jobs at risk by 2030.⁵³

Technology companies can help by addressing digital and cross-functional skills gaps and investing in online training and digital degree programs. The industry can also invest in underserved communities by improving access to hardware and software. There will be 450 million e-learning degrees in 2030, enabled by investments in cloud servers to support video conferencing tools and auto-translation capabilities.⁵⁴ COVID-19 has certainly demonstrated the importance of technology in facilitating quality and access to education (SDG 4).

The Reboot project, founded by Nominet in partnership with Accenture and FutureDotNow, aims to help underserved communities and schools access and repurpose unused devices. Reboot is a follow-up to DevicesDotNow which helped secure 10,000 devices for those in need in the UK during COVID-19.

Source: [Nominet](#)

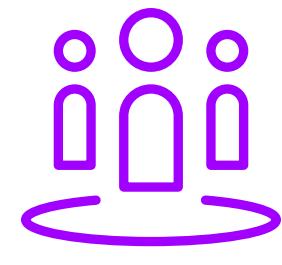
Each industry's goals towards helping achieve the SDGs should and will look different, yet three common objectives will shape the future of responsible business across industries:

01



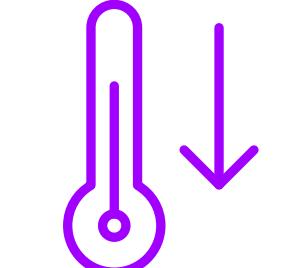
Initiate change through a sustainability strategy refresh in accordance with the SDG Ambition.

02



Embed diversity, equity and inclusion principles and labor standards throughout value chains.

03



Align targets to the 1.5°C decarbonization pathway and accelerate bold ambitions.

Several key investments will enhance the ability of businesses to achieve these goals:

+ Using real-time ESG data to inform business strategy, transform business models, and enable sustainable decision making.

+ New-skilling the workforce to respond to the demands of a rapidly changing labor landscape.

+ Investing in technology and innovation to fuel economic recovery and societal impact.

This is a watershed moment in history. The shift toward stakeholder capitalism will be accelerated and amplified, and the focus on sustainable development will be the key to competitiveness and sustained success for businesses moving forward.

We are only at the beginning. As our world continues to grow more complex, new demands will require leaders to remain vigilant. Staying at the forefront of these issues is critical.

Purpose-driven leadership will create new value in the future. A new bar has been set. Now who will rise to the occasion?

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