

Concept Note

The UN Sustainable Development Goals: The master key to unlock doors for American unity.

INTRODUCTION

It is critical to highlight how the U.S. can and should adopt the UN Sustainable Development Goals (commonly known as the SDGs) as an American policy. The SDG framework consists of 17 goals that all 193 member states of the United Nations General Assembly agreed to meet by 2030 solving issues such as access to clean water, quality education, and health.

Based on the 2022 Social Progress Index, meeting the SDGs has been stagnating in the U.S. since 2011 and actively sliding backward since 2017, which is impacting American youth the most. For example, youth suicides have risen since 2020 severely hampering achieving SDG 3 Good Health and Well-being for themselves and their families. Reading and math test scores have also declined considerably since COVID-19, which impedes meeting SDG 4 Quality Education. Lastly, the

poverty rate also is the highest for youth compared to all age groups by 4.2 percentage points, endangering the opportunity to meet SDG 1 No Poverty.

U.S. QUICK FACTS

NOT ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE A SINGLE SDG BY 2030

- 2023 SDG Index Rank: **39** out of 166
- SDG Effort Rank: **74** out of 166
- Status of SDG Targets: **35% Worsening**

As these examples demonstrate, it would benefit the United States to re-examine and prioritize what issues need urgent solutions and who can champion and operationalize this approach.

— MEETING THE SDGS: LIBERTY, JUSTICE, AND LEADERSHIP FOR ALL —

The United Nations Foundation's American Leadership for the SDGs wrote the eye-opening 2022 article on [what Americans think about the SDGs](#) which reveals the following in the table and figures below:

U.S. PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON THE SDGS

1. **3 out of 4 U.S. adults** have either never heard of them or even if they have heard, do not know what they are.
2. After reading the SDGs description, **76% U.S. adults** said the SDGs were important.
3. There is also **broad support (81%)** for a regular and public accounting of progress towards the SDGs across political affiliations (Republican, Independent, and Democrat).

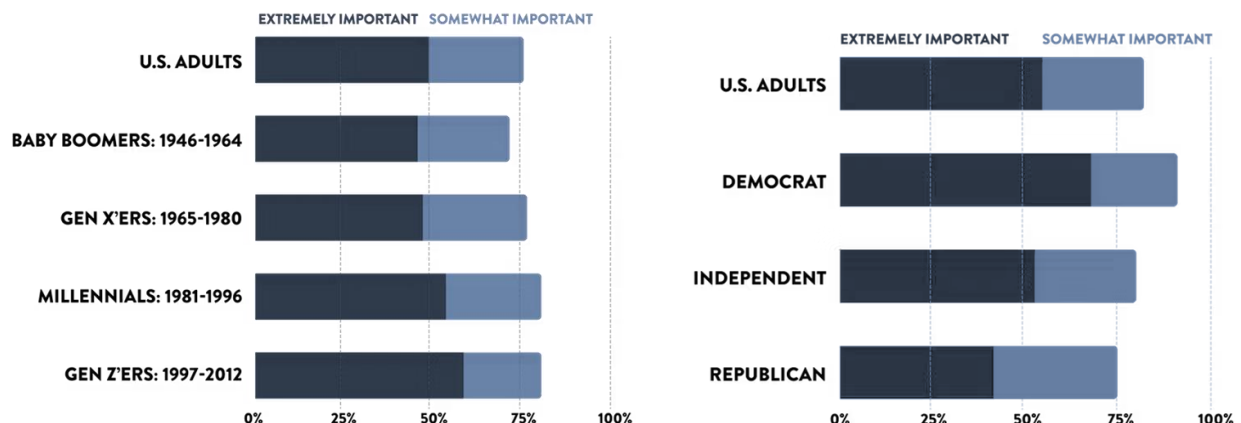


Figure 1 and 2: Survey of 8,000 U.S. adults who believe the SDGs are important based on age and political affiliation, respectively.

Based on this evidence, the SDGs has the potential to serve as a master key for unlocking intersectional cooperation to tackle major issues the country faces today.

Therefore, this event works to catalyze a public, youth-led campaign to raise awareness about the SDGs and strengthen support through investments on reinforcing data systems for national, state, and local engagement and activation. The campaign's vision for long-term

impact is to assist with generating bi-partisan support for passing a bill committing the U.S. to support the SDGs, originally crafted as [H.Res.30](#) by Rep. Barbara Lee for the 117th Session of Congress.

OBJECTIVES & OUTCOMES

SYMPOSIUM OBJECTIVES

This event will convene in-person the partners, community, and U.S. government representatives to share background knowledge, learnings, and to strengthen capacity in institutionalizing and expanding support for committing the U.S. to the SDGs.

By building our network of partners, the symposium's specific objectives are the following:

- Bring forward clear support for committing the U.S. to the SDGs.
- Have members that have participated in American policymaking highlight how the SDGs and its youth drivers have been catalytic in furthering the reduction of poverty, health systems strengthening, and violence reduction.
- Update and build capacity on local SDG guidance, tools, and innovations for raising awareness.
- Create a ceremonial passing of the baton between generations to start their advocacy journey.

OUTCOMES

The outcome of the symposium is a powerful network connecting the current **and** next generation of leaders, translated into action-based projects and awareness raising initiatives after the event. Participants will leave the event equipped to seize opportunities and make a difference in their societies and communities. We expect participants to experience the symposium not as an event, but as part of the first steps of a journey that helps them actualize positive change on the ground for their communities and the nation.

To continue their impact journey, participants are encouraged to stay in touch with our shared network as part of a growing national movement of changemakers developing groundbreaking solutions to tackle the world's greatest agenda. Furthermore, participants are encouraged to take on leadership roles within partner programs, embodying the change they seek for their communities.

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

PARTICIPATION REQUIREMENTS AND SUPPORT

The Global Futurist Initiative and UNA-USA Columbia University will lead the organization of the symposium but as scope and participant list expand, additional support from partners is being sought. It is envisioned that partners will be able to fund their participation in terms of travel and accommodation.

SYMPOSIUM FORMAT

The symposium will be a face-to-face event. An initial survey conducted amongst members in the collaboration informed the development of the symposium agenda, and a steering committee has been established to further refine content and guide the organization of the event. The symposium format will aim to be as interactive as possible, a blend of diverse information and dialogues.

ATTENDEES

Four types of attendees will be invited to share lessons learned from their experiences:

- I. Elected and appointed officials of the U.S. representing municipalities, states, and/or federal agencies.
- II. Hosts (Global Futurist Initiative and UNA-USA Columbia University).
- III. Various local organizations that participate in SDG advocacy (e.g., Foreign Policy for America, USGLC, UN Foundation, Brookings Institution, UNA-USA, UNICEF USA).
- IV. Community members (paired by intergenerational leaders) who will be invited to share experiences and knowledge from the community perspective.

FACILITATION

Individual session leads will be responsible for facilitating their session(s) supported by a professional facilitator and visual note taker to ensure overall flow and well-documented outcomes.

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Tools for external communication such as a hashtag and advocacy toolkit with e.g., social media messages which can be shared by organizers and participants before, during, and after the symposium will be developed. A professional photographer and videographer are also being considered to support with documenting the symposium.

PROGRAM SCHEDULE

TIME	SESSION	OBJECTIVE
Time	Session	Objective
3:30 pm	Doors open & Networking	Guests can register and casually network
4:00 – 4:15 pm	Welcome and Opening Address	Welcome guests and set ground rules
4:15 – 4:45 pm	Data Panel: Leveraging Localized data for the SDGs	To set the scene for a productive discussion and meaningful engagement led by evidence.
4:50 – 5:20 pm	Youth Leadership Panel: Community Development from the Youth Perspective	To provide updates on youth inclusion progress and highlight where we need to accelerate.
5:30 – 6:00 pm	Keynote Panel: Passing the Baton – Our Vehicle to Secure America’s Future	To reinforce our shared vision of community-centered, youth-driven development.

