



The Strategic Development Goals and your Business

The Strategic Development Goals Summit

September marked the mid-point of implementing the 17 Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda agreed in 2015 and saw Heads of State and Government gather at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to follow-up and review the implementation.

The Summit carried out a comprehensive review of the state of the SDGs, responded to the impact of multiple and interlocking crises facing the world, and provided high-level political guidance on accelerated actions leading up to the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs. The outcome of the Summit is a negotiated political declaration.

Supporting the SDGs

Supporting and working towards the SDGs is a key focus for Chambers Ireland and will require business and wider society to seek new solutions to achieve the SDGs. The SDGs also offer new business opportunities, and to seize these opportunities requires new methods of approaching issues and the need to look at upskilling our teams. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9) and Climate Action (Goal 13) are just two key goals that will impact business.

Taking these two Goals as an example, Chambers Ireland and ourselves here at Cobh & Harbour Chamber are working in partnership with **Ireland's Knowledge Centre for Carbon, Climate and Community Action (IKC3)** to responding to upskilling needs. Recently established by the Government's Future Jobs Initiative and funded by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) under the Human Capital Initiative 3 (HCI3).

IKC3 is led by Munster Technological University in collaboration with Trinity College Dublin and University College Dublin and involves a wide network of partners, companies and civic and social innovators. In forthcoming editions, we will be providing members with insights from our IKC3 partners with briefings on a wide range of sustainability-related topics and trends.

Good for Business?

So, what are the SDGs and what opportunities are there for business? The SDGs comprise of 17 Goals and were launched by the United Nations (UN) in 2015 and act as a shared framework for managing sustainable development on a global scale. Many larger organisations are already aligning their strategies to the SDGs, but the role for SMEs, making up more than 90% of all businesses worldwide, will be critical in advancing the Goals.

Companies who have taken steps to incorporate some of the Goals into their activities report a range of benefits across their business, including increasing profit margins and savings, growing their customer base by attracting sustainably-minded consumers, winning new contracts by appealing to businesses looking to implement a more sustainable supply chains and improving employee retention by working towards a common goal.

Getting Started

Familiarising yourself with targets and indicators that sit behind each Goal is your starting point. Here is an opportunity to see how the SDGs might impact on your business, and naturally, identify market opportunities to take into consideration when looking at your strategy and planning, the options available to you and where best to make investments. Asking your colleagues whether your customers might pay more for your offering if it was produced more sustainably, or asking them to consider how you might enhance processes to decrease emissions is a good start. A ‘yes / maybe’ to these types of questions could indicate there is potential to increase profits and make cost savings, and a compelling reason to revisit your planning.

The Chambers Ireland SDG Toolkit for Business provides you with an ‘at a glance’ guide to getting started, whether you are large or small business, and includes advice on key steps on how to get started:

- **Mobilise** – get to grips with the SDG fundamentals, lead a discussion and generate initial interest to explore further, seek support from senior management.
- **Assemble** – ask for volunteers from different sections of the business to form a working group and begin to brainstorm initial ideas.
- **Assess** – gather information on how the SDGs affect your sector, look at best practice elsewhere. Consider aligning with key trends shaping your sector and the wider market.
- **Prioritise** – draw up a list of issues and possible solutions and agree as a team which ones you will prioritise, balancing needs and wants, and set out what you will seek to achieve.
- **Plan** – develop a plan of how you will achieve prioritised activities, the resources you will require, the support from managers, consider upskilling and report good news as you progress.

Have undertaken this preparation you can begin to roll out activity, measure and evaluate your progress and look to how you can learn and improve on future activity. The important message is to make a start, even if only small steps to begin with.

Skills for Sustainability

Achieving specific Goals, such as addressing climate change and sustainability, will most likely require you and your team to gain new skills. ‘Skills for sustainability is fast becoming an in-demand skillset,’ says Dr Helena McMahon, Head of IKC3, ‘identifying the skills and knowledge needs of business and developing flexible, university-accredited programmes to help business make the transition to net zero is at the core of what we do. We have already developed a range accredited programmes which have proved popular, but we are very much in listening mode and welcome input from business about their knowledge needs. This will help us to respond quickly in developing flexible programmes that will have an immediate impact on embedding sustainability with the business and support those looking to accelerate a career in sustainability.’

Find out more

Further details about the annual Sustainable Business Impact Awards can be found at the chambers.ie site where you can also download the SDG Toolkit, a useful guide highlighting other

steps you can take in embedding the SDGs in your business. See chambers.ie/sustainable-development-goals/

if you are looking to upskill your team or yourself through accredited programmes or, wish to arrange an informal discussion about sustainability skills needs for you or your organisation, contact David Williamson, Industry Liaison, at IKC3.ie or via e-mail david.williamson@mtu.ie