



ACCELERATING IMPACT IN THE DECADE TO DELIVER

**How international development
implementers can amplify their role
in progressing the United Nations
Sustainable Development Goals**



Foreword

A great deal needs to be accomplished over the next decade – the decade to deliver – for the world to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the 2030 deadline.

The Society for International Development – Washington Chapter is the largest and most active chapter of the Society for International Development, an international network founded in 1957 to serve as a global forum dedicated to sustainable economic, social and political development. Our members span all sectors – including NGOs, for profit international development companies, the private sector, consulting firms, universities, government agencies, small businesses, large corporations, and more. These organizations will be critical players in the decade to deliver.

Earlier this year, we polled our members and others in the Society for International Development – Washington Chapter network to understand their perspectives on the contribution and impact their organizations are making towards achieving the SDGs by 2030. From the nearly 100 responses received, it was clear that 1) much remains to be done to reach these goals and 2) greater collaboration across sectors will be crucial. The survey was conducted in early March, when the COVID-19 pandemic was on our radar, but few of us understood the long-term impact it would have on our lives and on the field of international development. However, even as we reimagine development in a new normal, partnerships remain key and the SDGs can help guide us as we work together to achieve a better and more sustainable future by 2030.

As such, the Society for International Development – Washington Chapter is focusing its 2020 Annual Conference on the decade to deliver. We are pleased to be able to help gather the perspectives of diverse constituents to stimulate dialog about this important topic and look forward to continuing to foster partnerships across all sectors to advance equitable development.

Katherine Raphaelson
President, Society for International Development – Washington Chapter

The membership of the Society for International Development – Washington Chapter features the best in class of U.S.-based companies, NGOs, civil society, and enterprises dedicated to solving the toughest social and environmental challenges around the world. At the leading edge of development practice, Society for International Development – Washington Chapter members pride themselves on being innovative and effective.

That is why the publication of this report on the occasion of their annual conference, one focused on bringing attention to what needs to occur over the next ten years to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals, could not be more timely.

Most Society for International Development – Washington Chapter members – indeed, most organizations in the field of international development – would suggest that their work contributes to progress on the SDGs. Yet the ambition and interdependencies of the SDGs pose a significant challenge: Most statistical reviews of progress find the world falling far short of the SDGs by 2030, a signal that to achieve them or even make substantial progress will require an intentionality and a change from business as usual.

This report offers an excellent starting point for organizations working in international development. It suggests a methodology to align their internal and external operations against the SDGs, to assess and ultimately maximize their respective contributions. Following the lead of cities and mayors, universities, and multi-national corporations, developing such a roadmap will enable organizations to identify concrete opportunities and demonstrate their impact in the common language of the SDGs, which is now the *lingua franca* of global development.

For global development organizations to meet the urgency of the moment, especially in the era of COVID-19 and the heightened attention on racial and other inequities, will require a strategic commitment to advance evidence-based, ambitious interventions that help solve multiple problems at once. This report can help them continue to lead the way.

Anthony F. Pipa
Senior Fellow – Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institution

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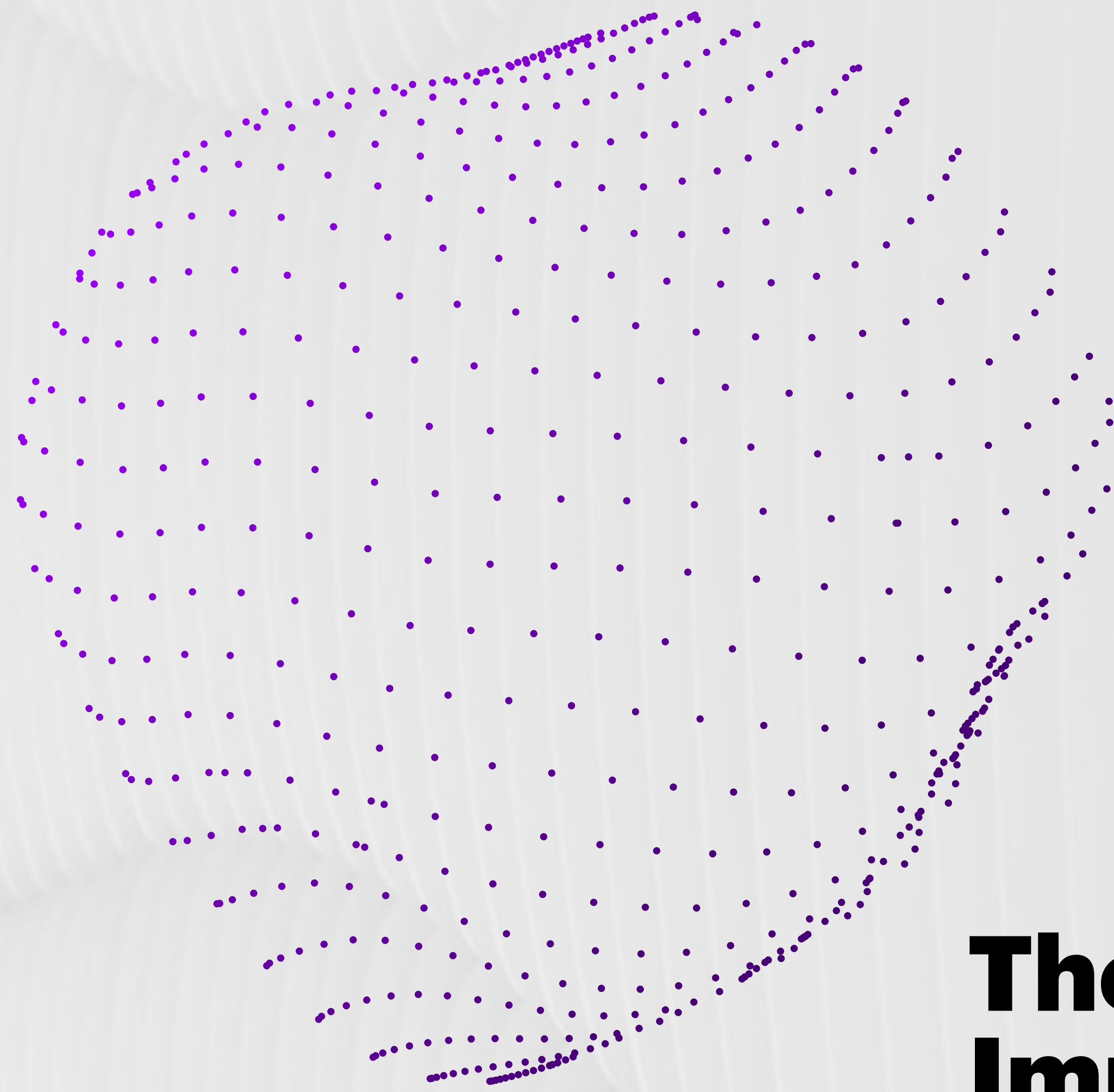
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The time is now: Implementers and the SDGs

The United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more important now than ever before. COVID-19 has wreaked havoc not only on health systems around the world, but it has also impacted every element of our society, economy and environment. As the world plans for and begins the process of recovery, the SDGs offer a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future by 2030. The 17 goals and 174 measurable targets underlying those goals provide a shared framework for guiding the global recovery effort.

In the UN’s 2020 SDG report, Liu Zhenmin, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, states, “One third of the way into our SDG journey, the world is not on track to achieve the Global Goals by 2030. Before the COVID-19 outbreak, progress had been uneven, and more focused attention was needed in most areas. The pandemic abruptly disrupted implementation toward many of the SDGs and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress...[however] the principles on which the SDGs were established are key to building back better in the post-COVID-19 recovery.”¹ By accelerating focus on the SDGs at this critical moment, the global community can make the significant gains needed in the upcoming decade to deliver on the SDGs.

International development implementers (herein referred to as “Implementers”)² have a unique opportunity to take an even more important role alongside the private sector and governments as the world works to rebuild stronger and more resiliently in the wake of COVID-19. After all, Implementers are often the ones closest to the communities, on the front lines, driving impact.

Figure 1: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



¹ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>
² Implementers include for-profit and nonprofit organizations (e.g., NGOs) whose primary business is to implement and consult on international development initiatives around the world.

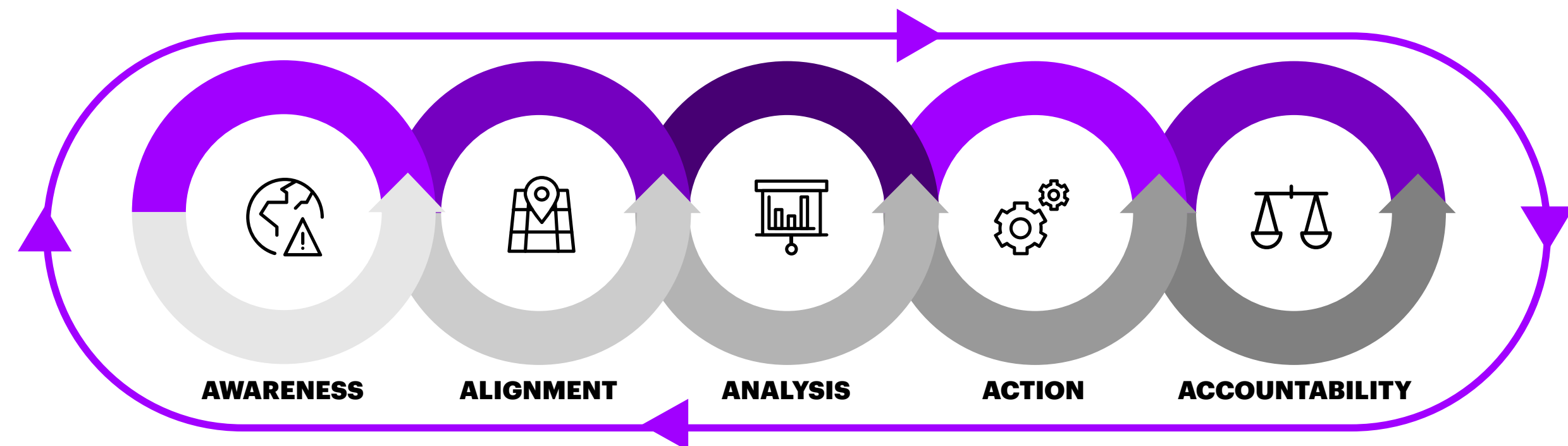
“International development organizations are increasingly looking to partner with the private sector for funding as well as to deploy strategic initiatives. The private sector is progressively leveraging the SDGs as a consistent language for their impact programming. We think the SDGs can provide a common framework for Implementers to partner, measure and articulate shared value with all stakeholder groups, especially the private sector.”

F. Roger Ford, Managing Director, Accenture Development Partnerships

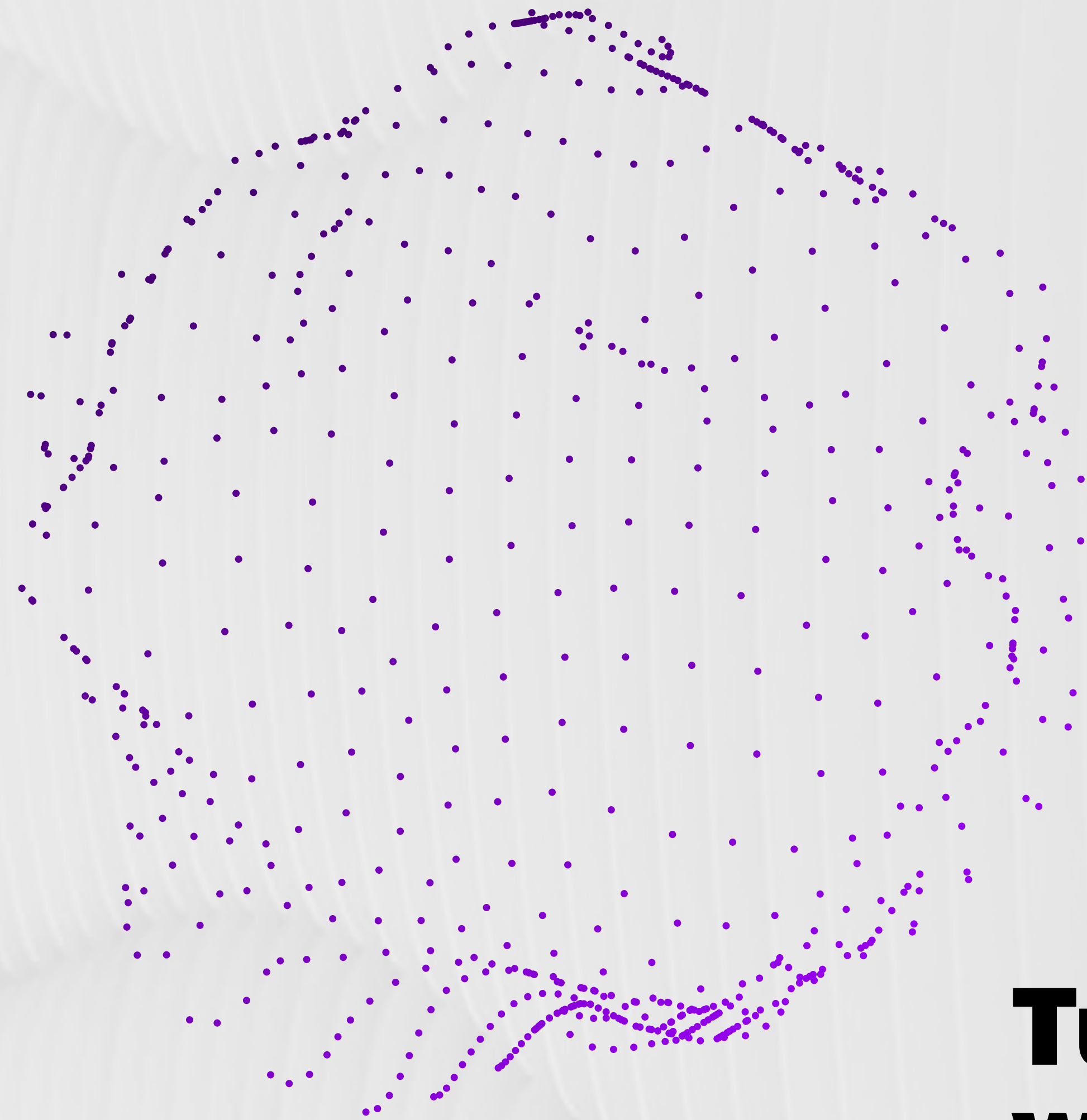
In a recent survey of 98 member organizations of the Society for International Development-Washington Chapter—largely consisting of Implementers—half of the interviewees said they had the opportunity to support the SDGs. However, only one-third of respondents indicated having a strategy that addresses how their organization advances the SDGs through their programs and operations. In an environment where the private sector and many international donors are focusing more and more on the SDGs—and diversification of funding is becoming increasingly critical for Implementers’ success—Implementers must think more strategically about their role in progressing the SDGs. By doing this, they can enable greater responsibility, accelerate performance, gain influence and ultimately scale impact.

A necessary first step in thinking strategically about the SDGs is to perform an organizational review to reflect on how Implementers can build their responsibility, performance and influence on the SDGs. An organizational review is an iterative and agile process involving five key elements—the “5 A’s”: awareness, alignment, analysis, action and accountability.³

Figure 2: The 5 A’s – Roadmap for an organizational review on the SDGs



³ The 5 A’s framework was developed by Anthony F. Pipa and Max Bouchet at the Brookings Institution. More information can be found in their report: Anthony F. Pipa and Max Bouchet, “Next Generation Urban Planning: Enabling Sustainable Development at the Local Level through Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs),” Brookings Institution, February 2020.



Turbulent times call for new ways of thinking...and doing

The financial and operational impacts of COVID-19 are accelerating several trends that have been impacting Implementers over the last several years, well before the onset of the pandemic. Three key themes in these trends revolve around localization, funding and digitization.

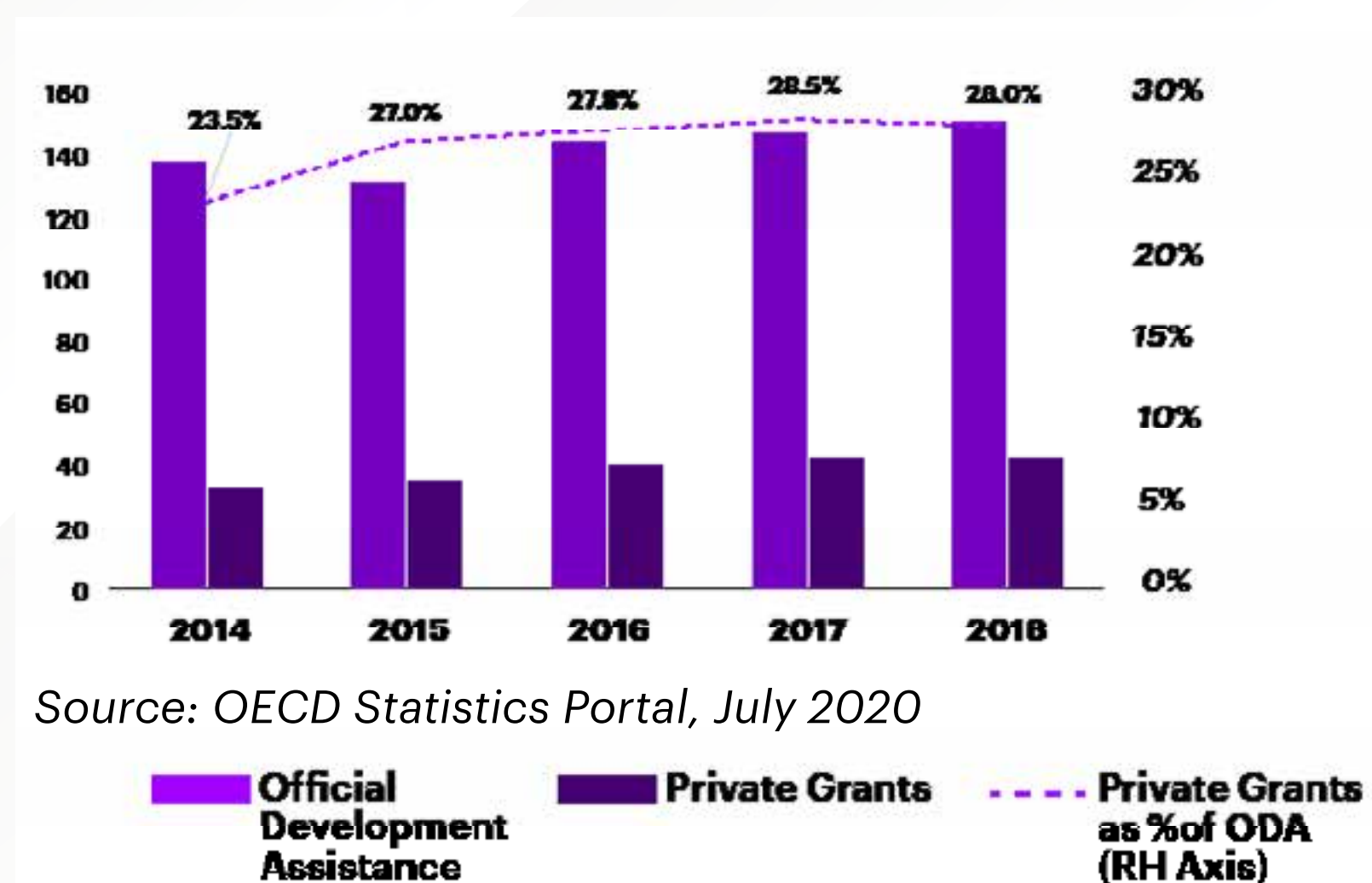
Localization

Over the last decade, many Implementers have relied more and more on local country staff to deliver development programs, at times with more than 80% of their staff being hired locally for large donor programs.⁴ With travel restrictions resulting from the pandemic, this trend is now accelerating. Moreover, in this environment, there is an ever-greater reliance on local partners to ensure business continuity of programming.

Funding

Donors are tightening purse strings or diverting funds to focus on the immediate challenge of addressing the global health and economic impacts of COVID-19.⁵ With uncertainties in funding streams from traditional donors, such as USAID, Implementers are increasingly looking to diversify their funding sources. At the top of the list of new partners is the private sector. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that between 2014 and 2018, private grants consistently increased (5.4% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR)), outpacing growth in Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) (1.7% CAGR).⁶ Over this period, the ratio of private grants to ODA grew from 23.5% to 28%.

Figure 3: Funding sources: ODA vs private sector grants (\$B)



⁴ For example, 85% of Mercy Corps' team members originate from the countries where they are working. <https://www.mercycorps.org/who-we-are>

⁵ Refer to this NetHope infographic for a snapshot of the global flow of funds in response to COVID-19. <https://create.piktochart.com/output/47221252-covid-19-infographic-1-copy>

⁶ <https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=TABLE1>

Digitization

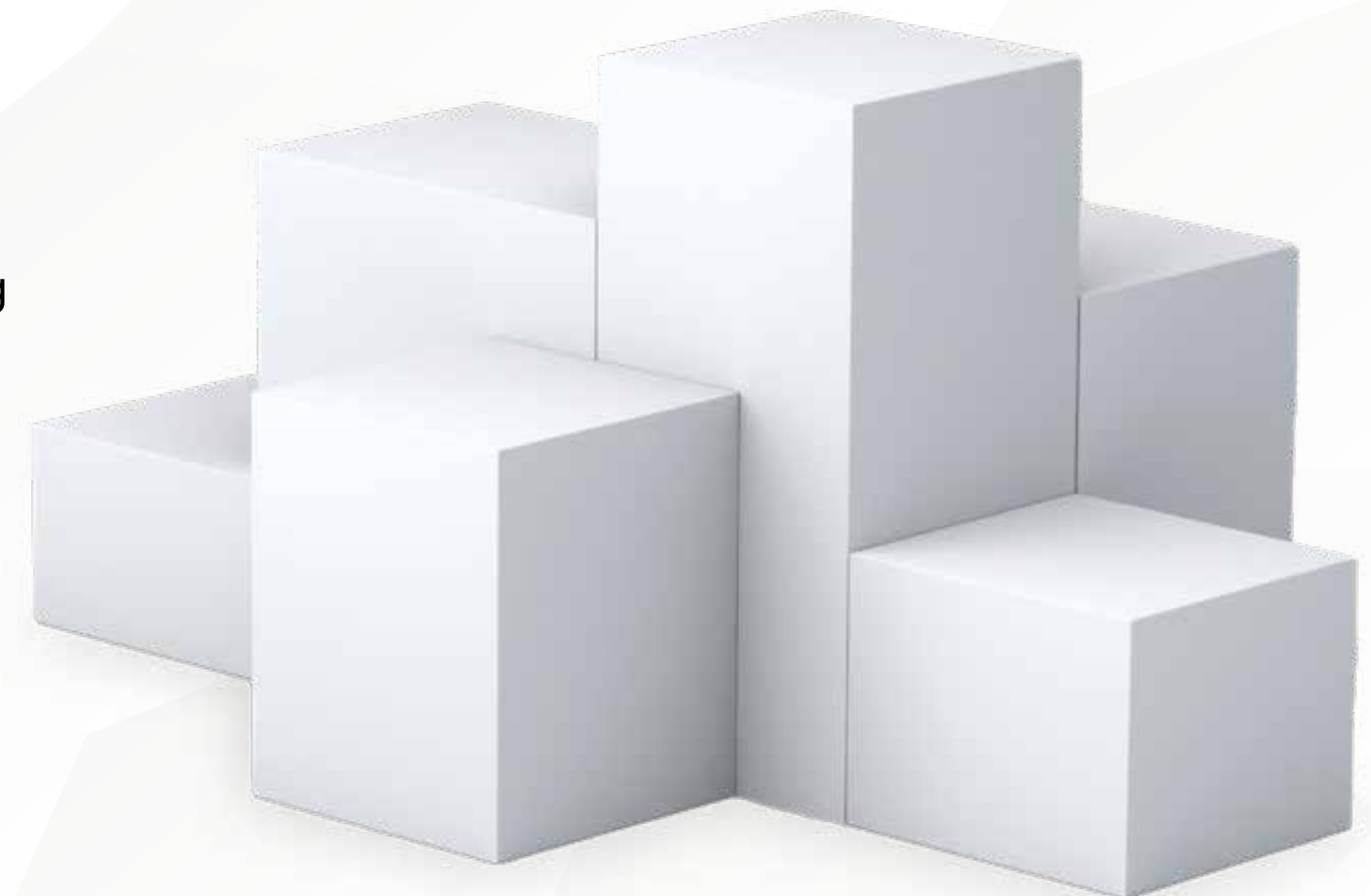
The international development community has been increasing adoption of digital solutions—though it still lags behind the commercial world.⁷ In 2020, USAID launched its first-ever digital strategy which charts the path for “development and humanitarian assistance in the world’s rapidly evolving digital landscape.”⁸ COVID-19 is accelerating the need for digital innovation. Implementers that are effective in digital engagement of local partners during this time are not only able to sustain their business continuity, but also establish new business models with inherent cost-savings. Moreover, digital tools facilitate more effective, efficient and robust data collection, analysis and reporting—leading to more real-time ability to pivot and improve programming. Implementers successful at providing the digital infrastructure and digital capacity building for themselves and their local partners to succeed in community engagement may be able to significantly reduce overhead costs while accelerating speed to impact.

In many contexts, local partners have significant capacity constraints. They may not have the digital maturity required to engage virtually, or they simply may not have the requisite technical expertise that Implementer staff bring to the table. In these situations, disruption may occur in who the local partners are. For instance, an Implementer deploying a livelihoods program in the Middle East needed to shift to digital engagement of local partners at the onset of COVID-19. They soon realized that a new cohort of partners emerged to work alongside them—a more innovative group, primarily consisting of millennials. Digital engagement can unlock younger, more energetic local partners to play a greater role in community development.

The need to diversify funding streams, specifically prioritizing private sector partners, to focus more on localization and to invest in digital innovation means that Implementers will need to re-think their strategies. The SDGs should be central to any such strategy refresh.

“Post-COVID-19, policy makers have been talking about building back better—the SDGs are the framework to build a society and economy that is more resilient.”

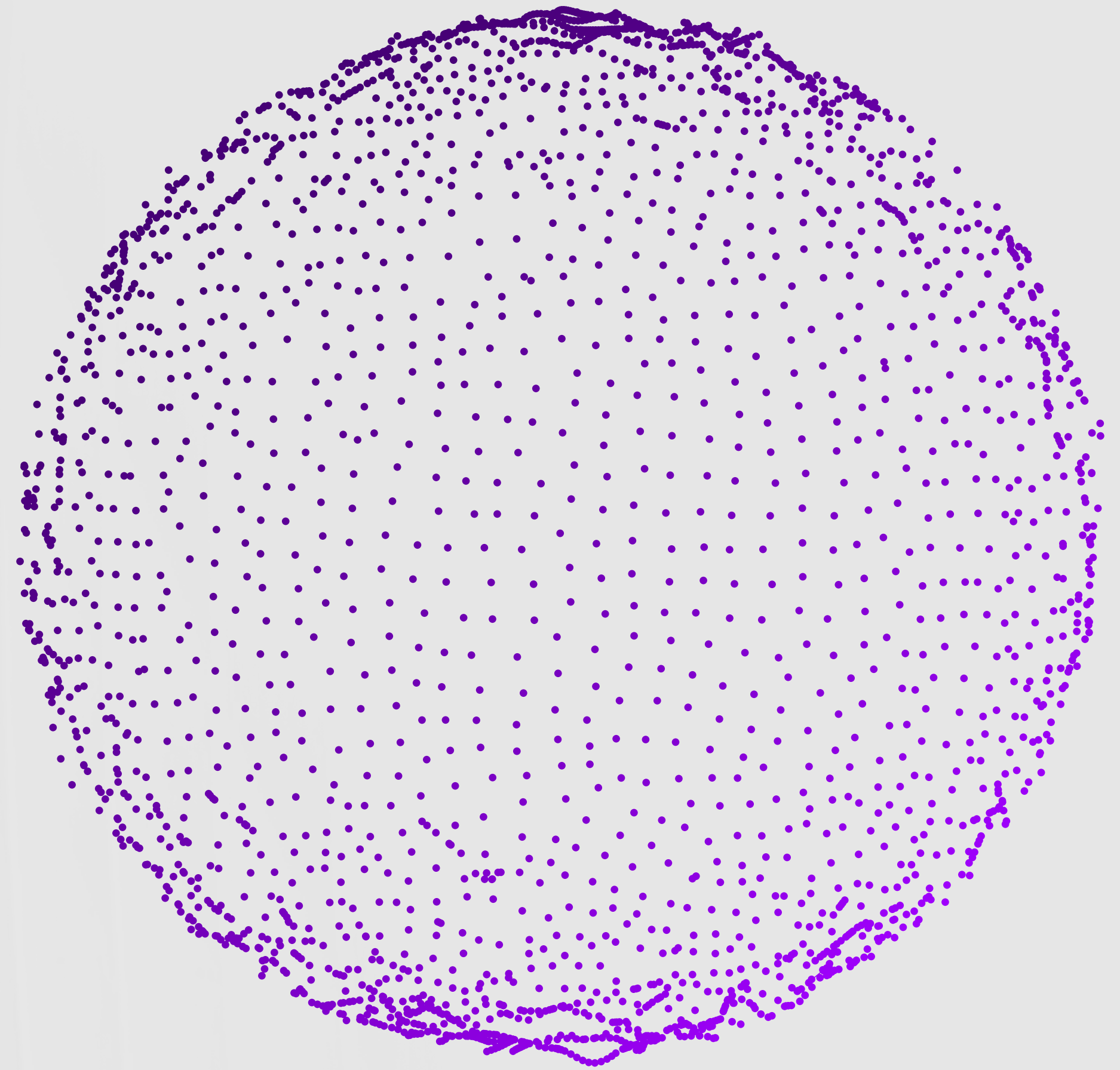
Anthony F. Pipa, Senior Fellow - Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institution



⁷ <https://www.brookings.edu/research/global-development-disrupted-findings-from-a-survey-of-93-leaders/>

⁸ <https://www.usaid.gov/usaid-digital-strategy>

Implementers are not at the **SDG** table



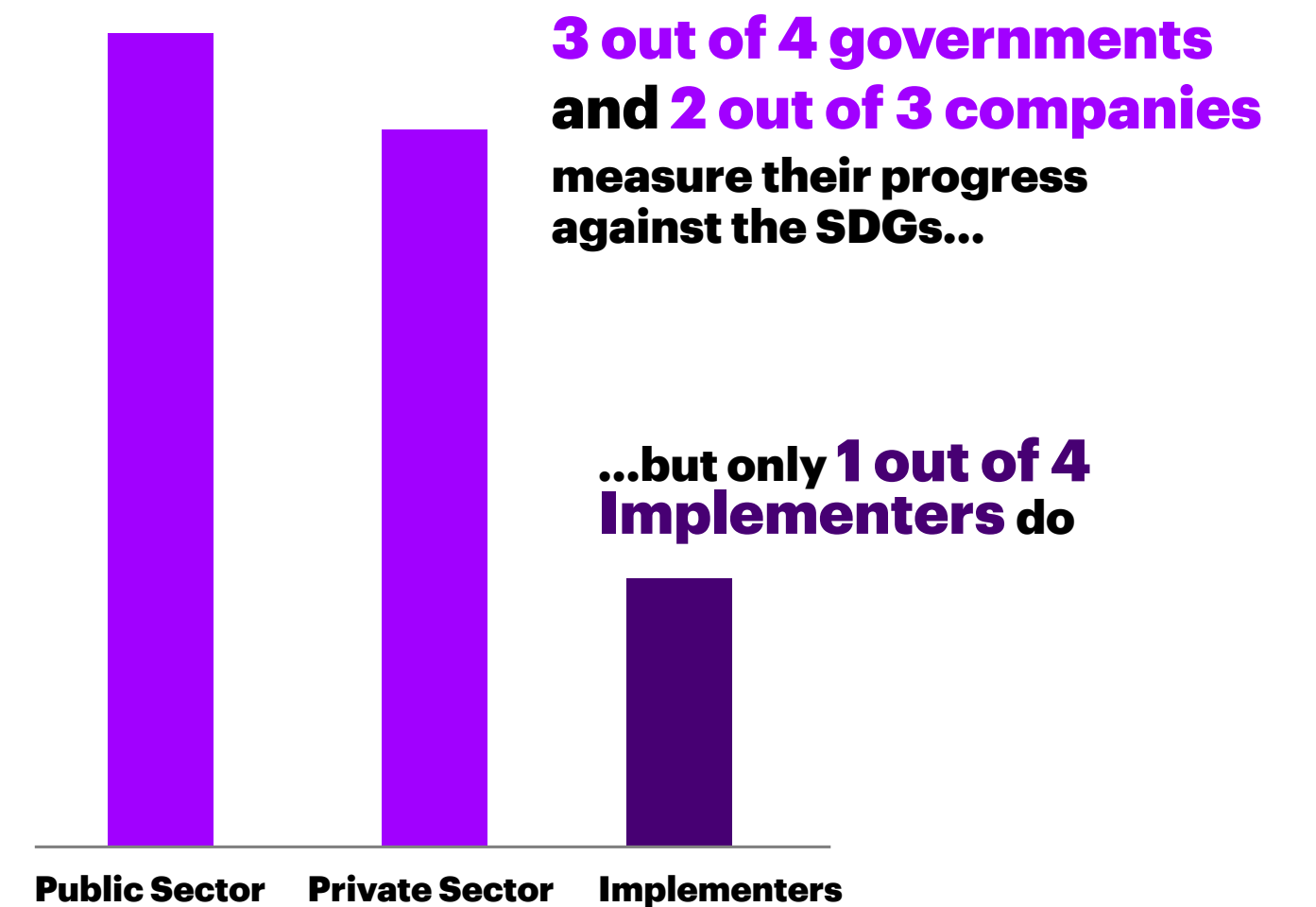
Implementers agree that SDGs are important for growth and impact. However, they do not typically align their organization’s strategies in terms of the SDGs, nor do they have measurements or indicators established to measure their progress towards the SDGs. In a recent survey of 98 member organizations of the Society for International Development-Washington Chapter, only one-third of respondents indicated having a strategy that addresses how their organization advances the SDGs through their programs and internal operations. While over half of the respondents indicated that the SDGs were important for the organization’s growth and impact, less than a quarter believed their organizations have measurements or indicators established to measure their progress towards the SDGs. By comparison, in the private sector, roughly two-thirds of CEOs surveyed in the 2019 UNGC CEO survey⁹, conducted by Accenture, indicated that their companies actively measure their impact towards the global goals.

In the public sector, roughly three-quarters of countries around the world have completed a Voluntary National Review against the SDGs,

illustrating the number of countries that heavily value the SDGs in their countries’ policymaking.¹⁰ While certain governments (and their development agencies) have been notably absent from the SDG dialogue, it is important to note that as leadership changes, so do policies around global ambitions such as the SDGs. For instance, in the early days of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Bush administration was reticent to provide explicit support of the goals¹¹, but upon inauguration in 2009, President Barack Obama declared the MDGs as “America’s Goals.”¹²

Due to Implementers’ lack of strategy and measurement approach around the SDGs, they are often not considered in the dialogue around which stakeholders are key to progressing the SDGs. For instance, Accenture’s 2019 UNGC CEO survey found that CEOs rank NGOs among the least influential stakeholder groups when it comes to their views on sustainability and the SDGs (only 12% of CEOs say that NGOs influence how they manage sustainability, see figure 5). Moreover, there has been a downward trend in CEOs’ perceptions of NGO influence over the last 12 years (see figure 5).

Figure 4: Progress measured against the SDGs



Source: UNGC CEO Survey, 2019; UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs Review of Voluntary National Review Reports (2016-2019)

⁹ <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/insights/strategy/ungcceoostudy>

¹⁰ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26012VNRStakeholdersResearch.pdf>

¹¹ While the Bush administration offered little endorsement of the MDGs themselves, the president called for considerable increases in US foreign aid and supported numerous initiatives with ambitions similar to the SDGs, including the Millennium Challenge, Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the UN Millennium Declaration.

For more information, see <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/own-the-goals-what-the-millennium-development-goals-have-accomplished/>

¹² https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/attachments/Spotlight%20on%20the%20Obama%20Administration%20Updated%20April%202010.pdf

Figure 5: CEOs identify the stakeholders that will have the greatest impact on the way they manage sustainability

CEOS rank NGOs low on their perceived influence over the SDGs...



Survey Question: Over the next 5 years, which stakeholder groups do you believe will have the greatest impact on the way you manage sustainability?
Source: UNGC CEO Survey, 2019

... this perception has continued to drop over the past 12 years

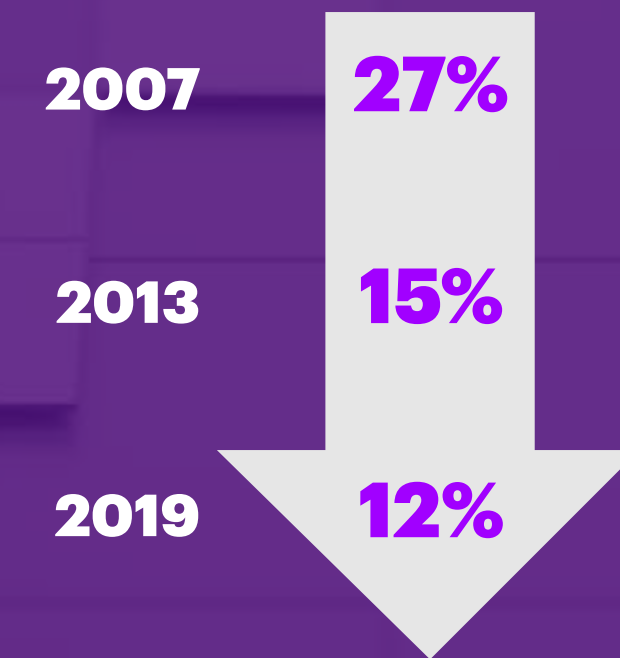
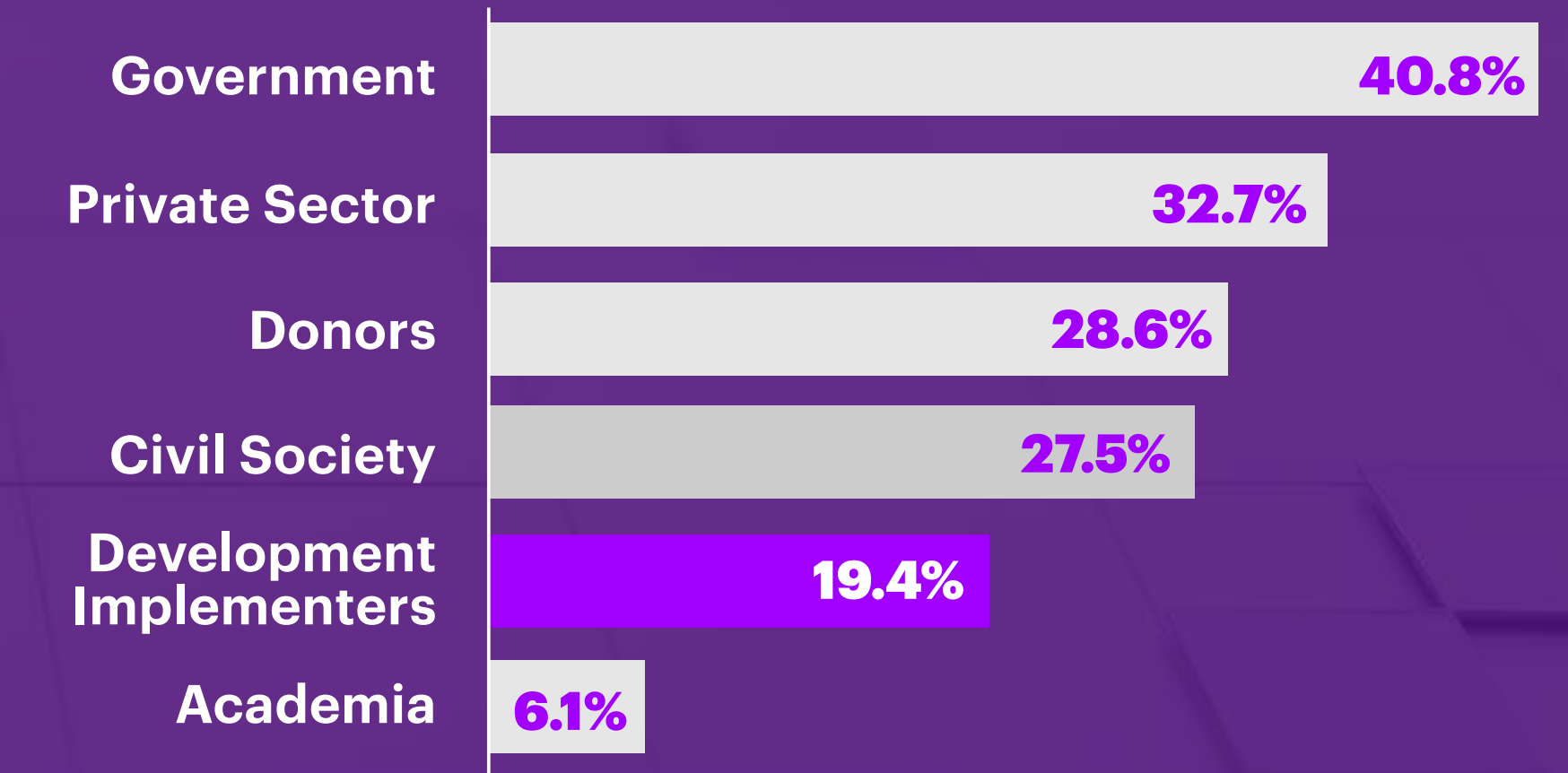
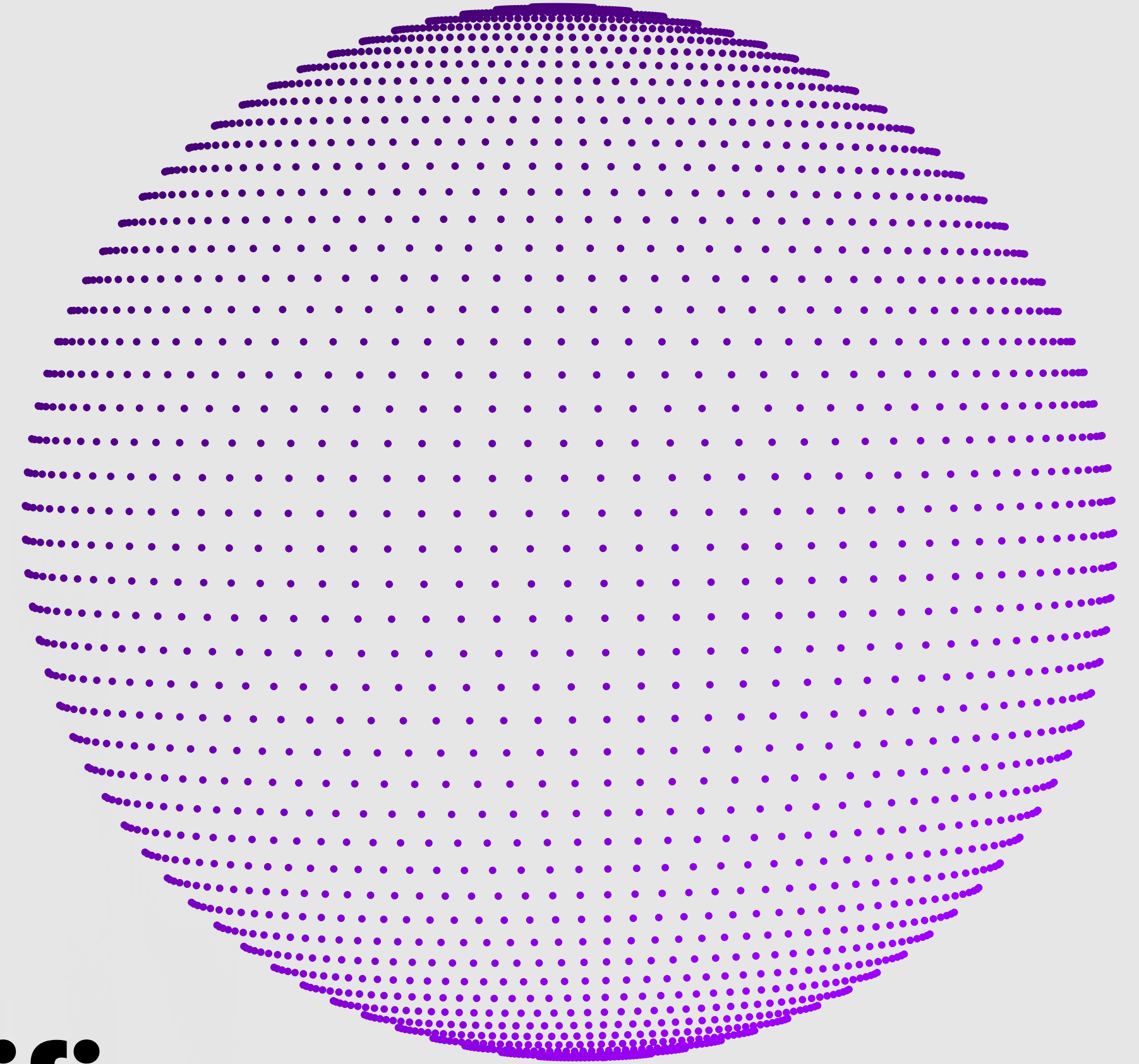


Figure 6: Respondents identify the most important and influential organization for achieving the SDGs



Survey Question: Which stakeholder/actor do you feel is most important and influential for achieving the SDGs?
Source: Society for International Development-Washington Chapter Member Survey Results on the Sustainable Development Goals (n=98); Respondents included Consultancies, Government Agencies, NGOs, Donors, Small Businesses, Think Tanks, and others.

Furthermore, Implementers interviewed in the Society for International Development-Washington Chapter survey agreed that they were less important and influential in achieving the SDGs than government, private sector and donors.

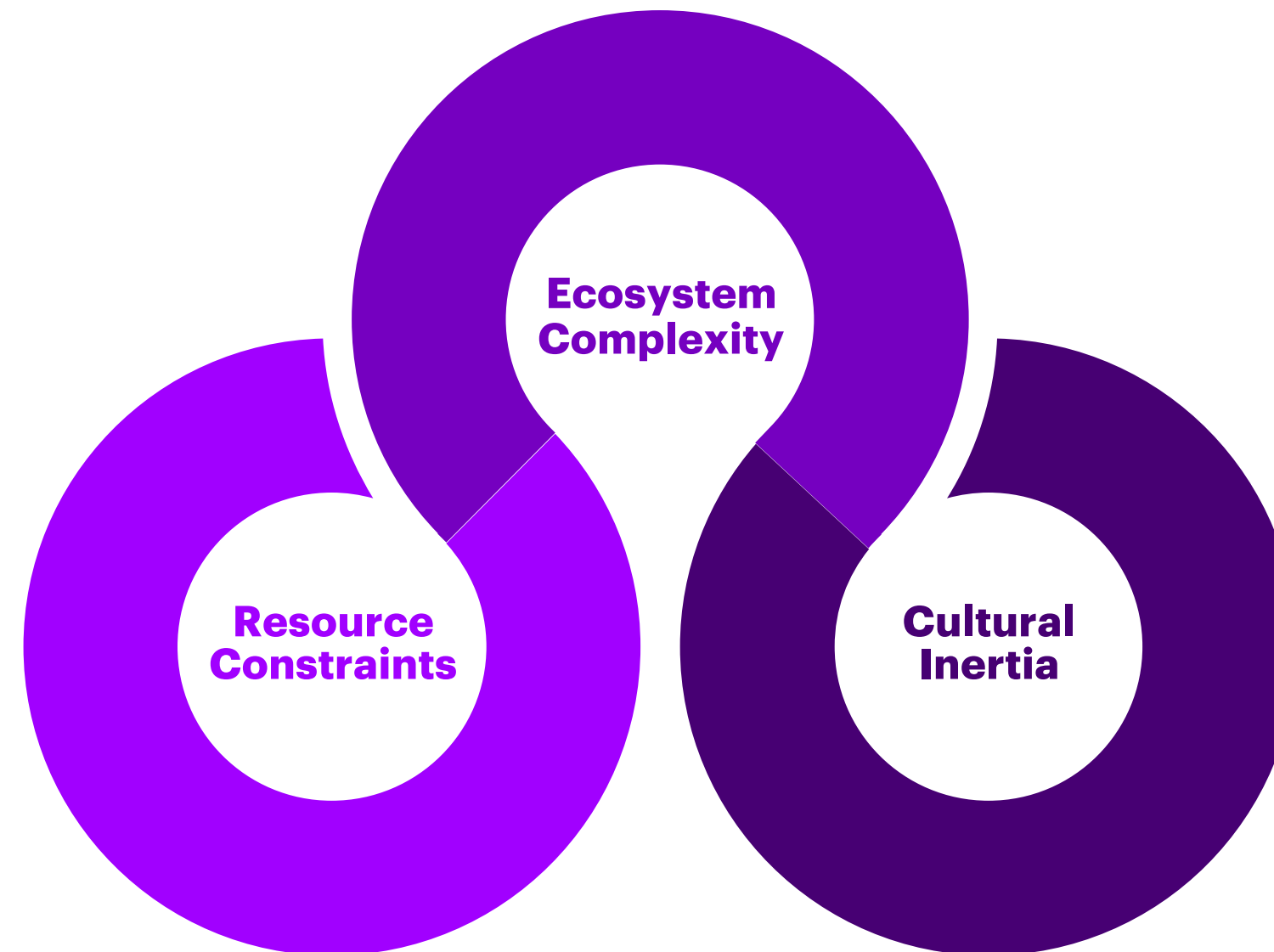


Focusing on the SDGs amplifies Implementers' responsibility, performance and influence

Several factors prevent Implementers from orienting their strategies around and measuring effectively against the SDGs. These barriers can be categorized into three areas: resource constraints, ecosystem complexity and cultural inertia.

Implementers must overcome these barriers in order to stay relevant in the future of global development and with the right investment and focus, they can. The benefits of investing in breaking through these barriers far outweigh the costs. When Implementers focus on SDGs and invest appropriately in their ability to support them and articulate their SDG story, they can enable greater responsibility, accelerate performance and gain influence.

Figure 7: Current inhibitors preventing organizations from focusing on the SDGs



RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

- Funding
- Organizational capacity
- Lack of investment in talent

ECOSYSTEM COMPLEXITY

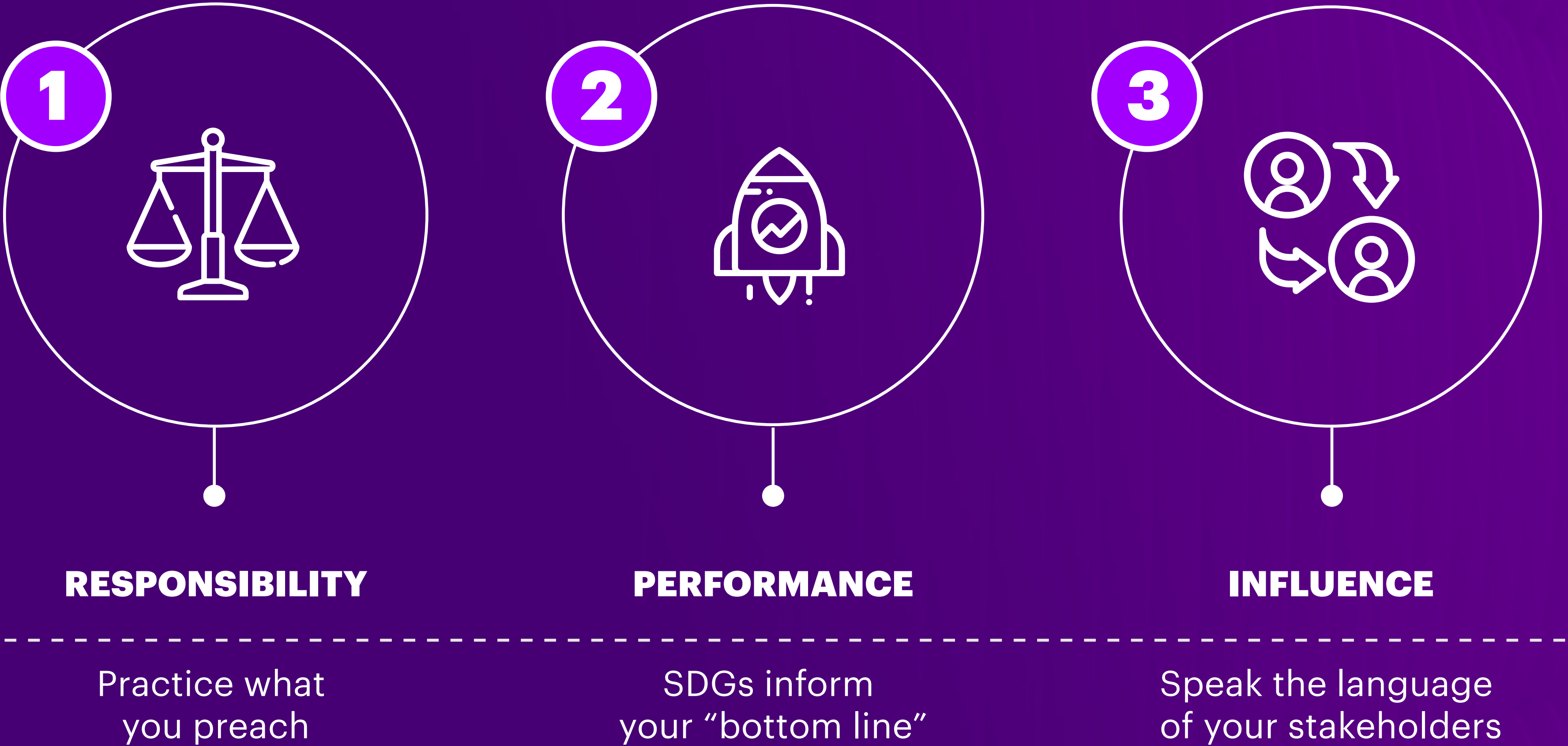
- Different donor metrics
- Risk averse system

CULTURAL INERTIA

- Lack of donor requirements
- Difficulty in introducing new ideas
- Lack of concerted vision
- Not part of our mandate / Other strategic priorities
- General lack of awareness on the SDGs

Source: Society for International Development-Washington Chapter Member Survey Results on the Sustainable Development Goals (n=98); Respondents included Consultancies, Government Agencies, NGOs, Donors, Small Businesses, Think Tanks, and others.

Figure 8: Benefits realized by Implementers' focus on the SDGs



RESPONSIBILITY

By virtue of their missions addressing international development challenges, Implementers often believe they are inherently working toward the SDGs, whether or not they articulate their work in terms of the SDGs. However, often their own organizational practices do not align with their programmatic focus areas.

For instance, amidst recent protests regarding police brutality and systemic racism in the United States, one US-based international NGO conducted a review of its own diversity and inclusion (“D&I”) practices. This organization prides itself on implementing development programs that are highly inclusive of women, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations. However, when it assessed its own D&I practices, it found they fared quite poorly on several D&I metrics as compared to their Implementer peers. If this Implementer had defined a strategy that prioritized SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), it is likely that they would have met both internal and external indicators.

Ultimately, the internal indicators would have made them more responsible for practicing what they evangelize through their programming in their own organization.

“As civil society organizations, we have a duty to not just be an implementing partner but an advocate for better, more ambitious programming and better measurement of those initiatives.”

**Dr. Tessie San Martin,
Chief Executive Officer,
Plan USA**



“An organization aiming to contribute to the SDGs faces a double-barreled challenge: first, doing all it can to ensure its external programmatic activities contribute as much as possible to relevant SDGs of interest; second, doing all it can to ensure internal consistency with the SDGs, and thereby promoting legitimacy for advancing the goals elsewhere. An organization can focus its external activities on reducing child mortality, for example, but its internal activities also need to promote gender equality and pursue low-carbon energy strategies. Many of the internal questions will also be affected through the oft-overlooked matter of procurement.”

**John McArthur
Senior Fellow – Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institution**

PERFORMANCE

Organizations that properly internalize and measure against their priority SDGs can focus on what matters most to them—creating sustainable development impact. As publicly traded companies that maximize net earnings are rewarded with greater market capitalization, Implementers that can articulate their impact on and contribution to specific SDG metrics can claim to be the highest performing organizations in their sector. This performance will enable them to influence and align value propositions with key stakeholders, especially the private sector.

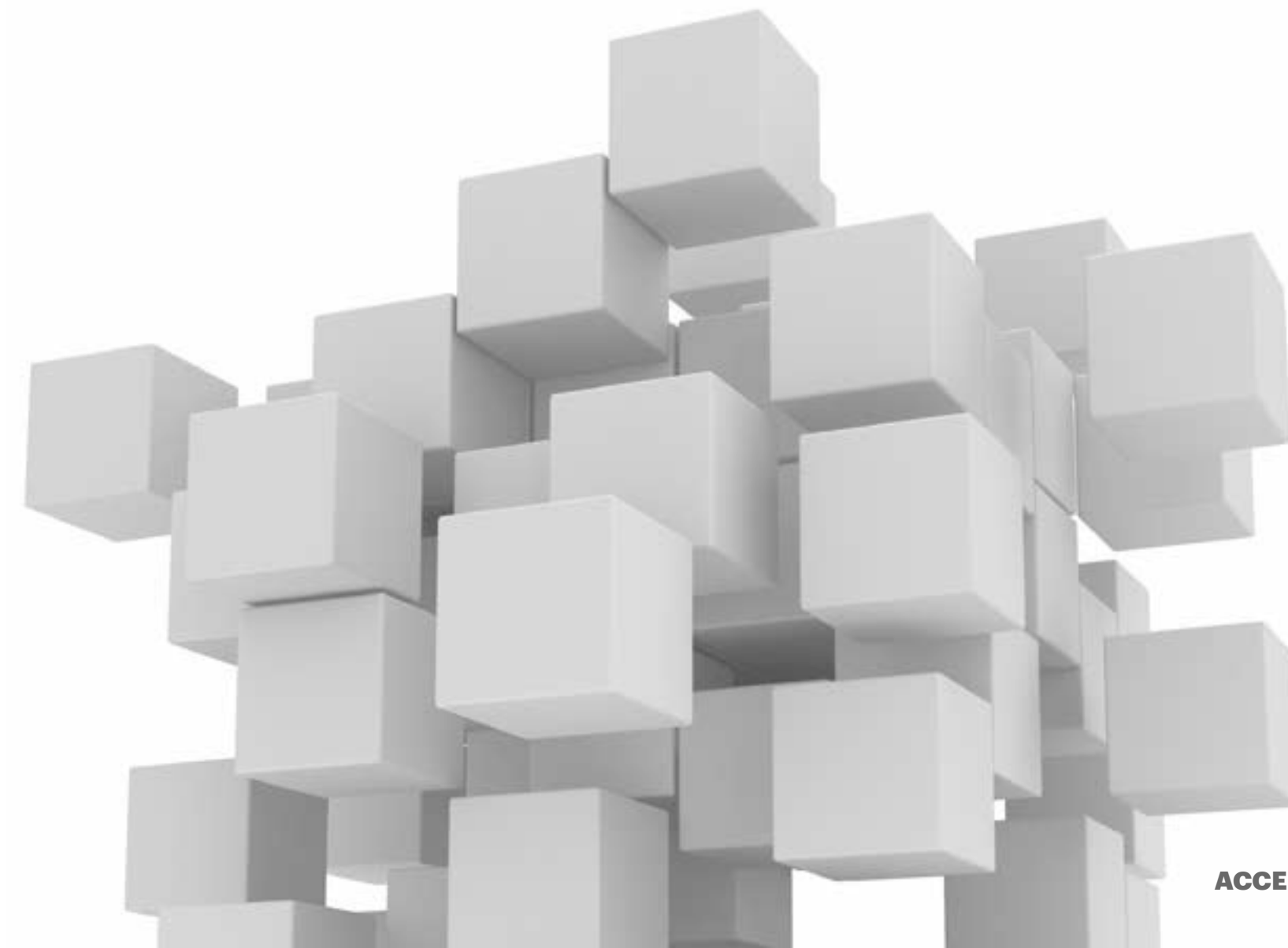
“A key benefit of the SDGs [for Johnson & Johnson] is getting to the common language with our partners—it reduces complexity early on, and we can align on what a desired outcome looks like. It’s easy to get distracted in these programs, and if you don’t have the right definitions, you might lose the original intent and objectives.”

Shaun Mickus, Senior Director of Local Giving, Global Community Impact, Johnson & Johnson

In addition, Implementers that can prove their scale or scalability are most likely to secure funding from donors—whether bilateral agencies, private sector partners or philanthropic foundations. As a result, the average revenues of large international NGOs (those with revenues greater than US\$100 million) has doubled over the last 20 years.¹³ Another way to articulate Implementers’ scale is through the lens of the SDGs. If an organization can reach more beneficiaries, and that reach is quantified in terms of SDG targets, they are likely to be rewarded.

“We want to work with development partners that have a vision of scaled impact. Localized programs or innovations are good, and there is always more to learn from these stories. We think the power of Mastercard’s network, and other international firms, is taking those achievements and helping them tell the story of scaled and quantifiable impact.”

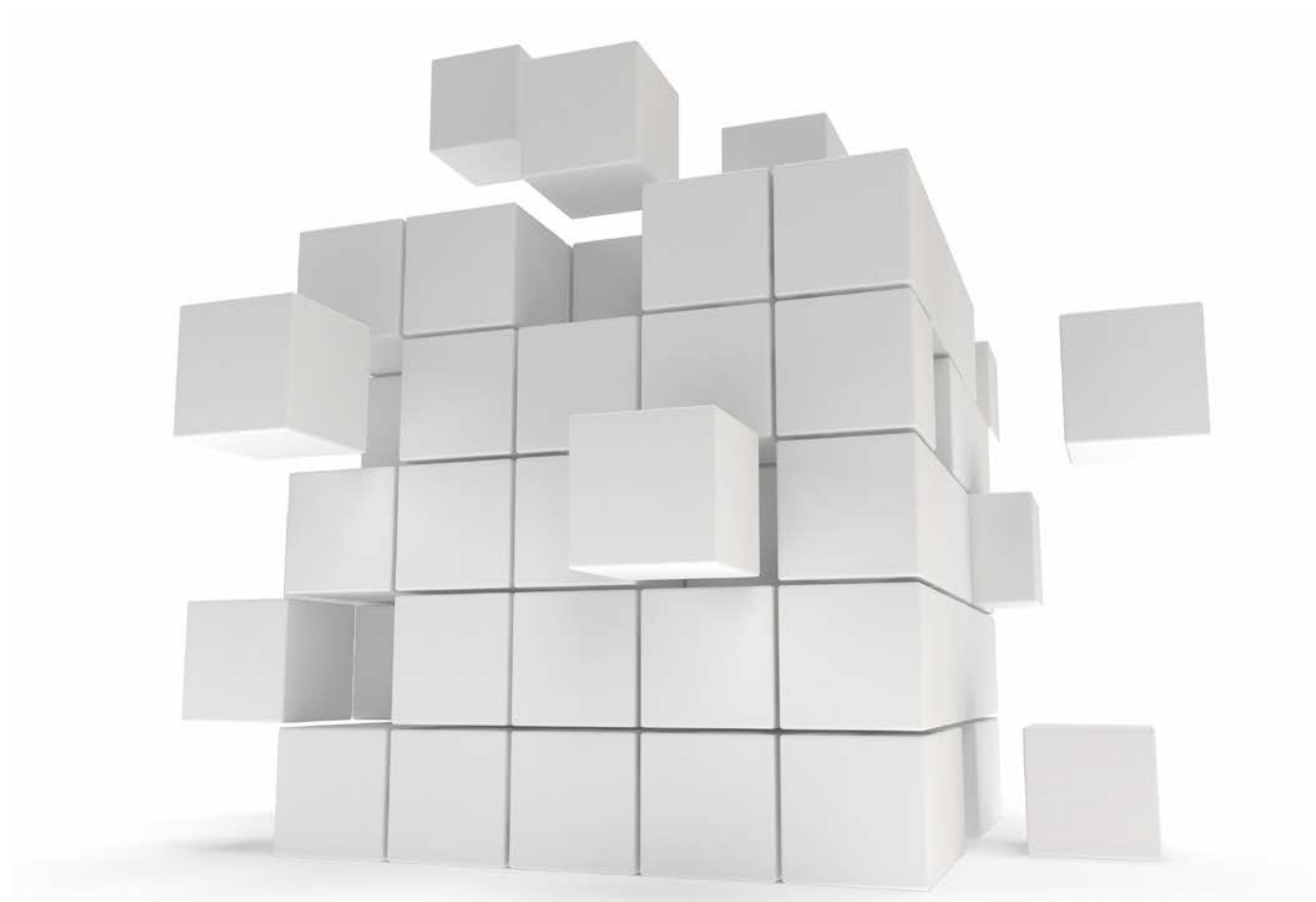
Paul Musser, Senior Vice President, Global Humanitarian & Development Partnerships, Mastercard



¹³ The Urban Institute, National Center for Charitable Statistics

Alignment to the SDGs also presents additional opportunity during the new disruption caused by COVID-19. As Implementers face significant financial uncertainty, funding diversification will become a necessity. One private sector stakeholder asserted, “Given the current environment, our business will put more money into the public domain than we ever have. However, many organizations are optimized to receive government funds. They need to figure out how the private sector measures impact in order to diversify.” Organizations that can appeal to these new funding sources will be better positioned to weather this period of uncertainty. Anthony F. Pipa from the Brookings Institution advises, “Investors who are interested in the SDGs are doubling down.”¹⁴

Finally, philanthropic funders are also increasingly seeking alignment with the SDGs. Foundations seek out partners who are working on similar themes and who are monitoring and tracking their influence against the SDGs.¹⁵ These partners provide a significant source of funding to address the SDGs—estimated at more than US\$100 billion.¹⁶



¹⁴ Interview with Anthony F. Pipa, Brookings Institution

¹⁵ Interview with Heather Grady, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors

¹⁶ United Nations, “Philanthropy & the SDGs,” 2019

INFLUENCE

By demonstrating progress and impact on priority SDGs, Implementers can “speak the same language” as many potential stakeholders. The private sector especially relies on the SDGs to drive its decisions around partnership for social impact. While donors like USAID may have developed robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks over decades of working in international development, companies are relatively new players in development. Impact metrics are equally important to corporations, and rather than creating their own frameworks, companies rely on the SDGs to inform their metrics and impact strategies. The SDGs are also influencing the

way private capital providers are making investment decisions based on Environment, Social and Governance (“ESG”) criteria. In January 2020, Larry Fink, CEO of Blackrock, wrote a letter to the world’s CEOs sharing that Blackrock would be rethinking its US\$7.4 trillion portfolio to align with companies that have positive ESG records.¹⁷ To do this, they are actively mapping ESG considerations to the SDGs.¹⁸ PIMCO is another example of a major financial institution that has integrated the SDGs into their investment decisions, having championed the SDGs as a reference framework for sustainable debt issuance and issuers’ sustainability reporting through “SDG Bonds.”¹⁹

The Implementers that can speak in terms of the SDGs are given priority audience by potential private sector partners—donors, investors and strategic partners alike.

“[Mastercard] focuses on partnership conversations with organizations that share a belief in the power of metrics. Metrics provide a way to prioritize our investments and test our beliefs. The SDGs provide one example of metrics that we use with partners to align on common goals. We find we can move more rapidly with our partners when we speak the same language and targets like the SDGs can help a great deal getting to that common language.”

**Paul Musser, Senior Vice President,
Global Humanitarian & Development
Partnerships, Mastercard**

¹⁷ <https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/investor-relations/larry-fink-ceo-letter>

¹⁸ <https://www.blackrock.com/corporate/literature/publication/blk-engagement-priorities-aligned-to-sdgs.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://global.pimco.com/en-gbl/insights/viewpoints/sdg-bonds-their-time-has-come>

Three case studies from the private sector

UNILEVER

In 2010, Unilever launched the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan (USLP), prior to the creation of the SDGs. The USLP centered on three ambitious goals underpinned by nine commitments:

- 01 **Improve the health and well-being of more than one billion people**
- 02 **Reduce environmental impact by half**
- 03 **Enhance livelihoods for millions**

After the SDGs were unveiled in 2015, Unilever recognized their similarities with the USLP and subsequently worked to match the SDGs to the three main goals outlined in the plan (USLP Goal 1 aligns with SDGs 2, 3, 6 & 17; USLP Goal 2 aligns with SDGs 7, 12-15 & 17; USLP Goal 3 aligns with SDGs 1, 3-5, 8, 10 & 17).

In support of the SDGs, Unilever annually publishes its progress toward the USLP and associated SDGs through its Sustainable Living Report.²⁰ This report covers Unilever's direct operations, value chain and the customer. To ensure all data is robust, Unilever has a USLP metrics team to provide strategic guidance on the metrics while ensuring accuracy and appropriateness.

²⁰ <https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/our-sustainable-living-report-hub/>

ACCENTURE

Core to Accenture's approach to development work is a blended model of impact based on partnerships across the public sector, development implementers and the private sector. Through Accenture Development Partnerships, the company advises its NGO clients on how to work across the spectrum of partnerships, in particular positioning themselves with the commercial sector and speaking a shared corporate language.

Accenture explicitly prioritizes SDGs and SDG targets where it can have the greatest impact through its operations in its Corporate Citizenship Report. This includes aligning key ESG material issues, goals and progress with SDGs and/or SDG targets. Accenture recently co-authored a paper with the UN Global Compact and SAP entitled, "SDG Ambition: Introducing Business Benchmarks for the Decade of Action,"²¹ that proposes a two-pronged solution to increase private sector engagement around the SDGs. The approach includes:

01

Establishing a set of 10 initial business benchmarks with the greatest impact on the SDGs

02

Outlining a process for businesses to integrate these benchmarks into their enterprise processes and systems to facilitate their role in decision making and reporting

"The time for increased commitment and action is now, and SDG Ambition is a bold and practical response to this timely and urgent call to action. We are proud to stand with the UN and SAP as partners in unleashing the massive potential for innovation and disruptive technology to help address and solve critical issues at speed and scale across the globe."

**Julie Sweet, Chief Executive Officer,
Accenture**

²¹ <https://unglobalcompact.org/take-action/sdg-ambition>

JOHNSON & JOHNSON

When the SDGs were unveiled, Johnson & Johnson significantly expanded on their previous MDG commitments. In their alignment to the SDGs, Johnson & Johnson opted for a more narrow focus, concentrating on three core SDGs that are central to the firm's strengths and unique positioning for impact: SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 17 (Partnership for the Goals).

To address these SDGs, Johnson & Johnson's commitment is divided into five focus areas: Health Workforce, Women's and Children's Health, Essential Surgery, Global Disease Challenges and Environmental Health. For each of these focus areas, Johnson & Johnson has identified a five-year target, for which it reports progress through its annual report, Health for Humanity.²²

²² <https://healthforhumanityreport.jnj.com/>

The governments of developing countries, both at national and local levels, are also framing their development strategies around the SDGs. Kenya, for instance has integrated the SDGs into its performance contracting, actions plans and sub-national County Integrated Development Plans.²³

Implementers that effectively articulate their work in terms of the SDGs when engaging with governments are aligning interests, and ultimately ensuring pathways, for more successful and sustainable program implementation. Daniel Speckhard, CEO of Corus International, emphasized that the SDGs act as a helpful guiding principle, facilitating the integration of local ownership with the broader national and international agenda.²⁴

Beyond speaking the common language of the public and private sector, the SDGs provide an opportunity for Implementers, particularly NGOs, to improve their sector's role in advocacy and agenda setting.

Dr. Tessie San Martin, CEO, Plan USA, reflects, "Without a framework of measurement, it is hard to align anyone, within the organization, within a coalition, within the sector. It is a conversation around how to be a more effective sector, and daring to think beyond just my own organization and its mission."

One senior business executive challenged Implementers to use the SDGs to better position themselves as proactive forces in agenda setting, asserting: "How can you be a leader if you are not speaking the same language as donors and the private sector?"

"The mapping of our local government program to the global agenda is giving the possibility of engaging into a dialogue with a larger set of partners, most importantly, private investors."

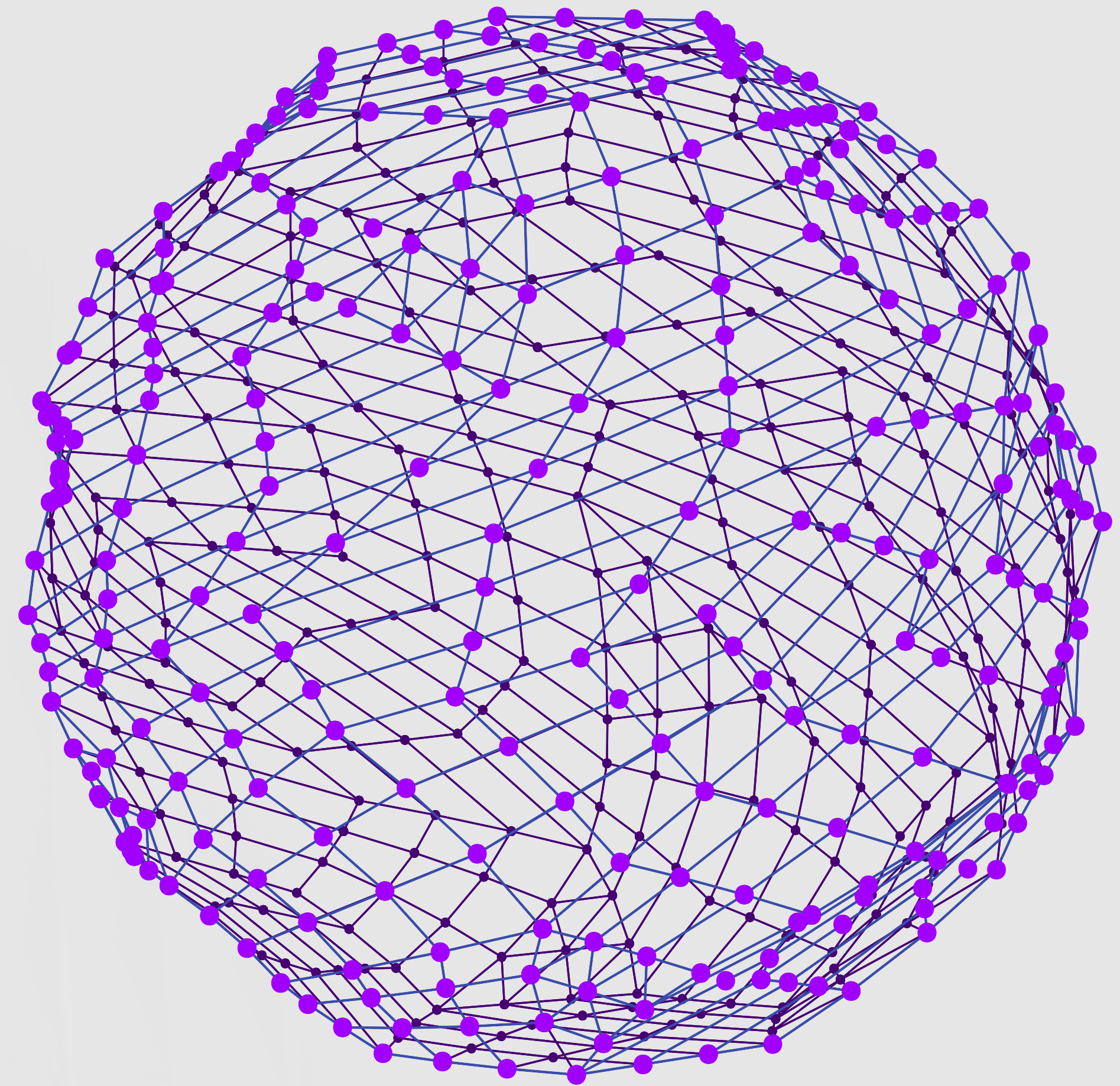
Diana Alarcón González, Chief Advisor and Foreign Affairs Coordinator, Mexico City Government²⁵

²³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/kenya>

²⁴ Interview with Daniel Speckhard, President & CEO, Corus International

²⁵ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/29/how-the-sustainable-development-goals-can-help-cities-focus-covid-19-recovery-on-inclusion-equity-and-sustainability/>

The SDG organizational review: An on-ramp to shared value

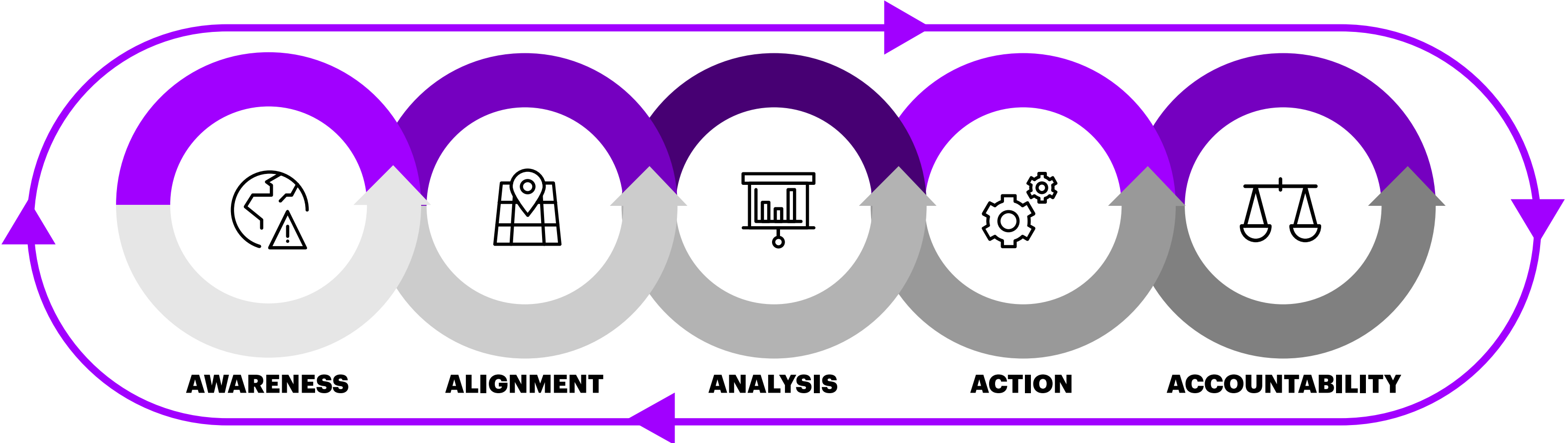


How can Implementers overcome the resource constraints, ecosystem complexity and cultural inertia that prevent them from dedicating focus toward the SDGs? The first step is to conduct an SDG organizational review. Our proposed approach for conducting an organizational review is based on the “5 A’s” Framework initially developed by Anthony F. Pipa and Max Bouchet at the Brookings Institution to summarize how communities adapt and localize the SDGs in their voluntary local reviews.

This approach enables Implementers to systematically overcome these barriers by building **awareness** around the importance of focusing on the SDGs, gaining **alignment** around how to do this, taking an **analytical** approach to what should be prioritized, defining **actions** that should be taken and establishing frameworks for **accountability** against the SDGs. Just like national governments that have launched Voluntary National Reviews²⁶, local governments that have initiated Voluntary Local Reviews²⁷,

and universities that have commenced Voluntary University Reviews²⁸, Implementers can take a significant step toward defining how they will commit to progress the SDGs in the decade to deliver through an organizational review. The SDG organizational review consists of a five-stage iterative and agile process, shown in figure 9.

Figure 9: The 5 A’s – Roadmap for an organizational review on the SDGs



²⁶ See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/> for outputs of Voluntary National Reviews
²⁷ See <https://sdg.lamayor.org/> for example local review conducted by the City of Los Angeles
²⁸ See <https://www.cmu.edu/leadership/the-provost/campus-comms/2019/2019-09-23.html> for Carnegie Mellon University’s announcement of its Voluntary University Review
²⁹ Source: Adapted from T. Pipa & M. Bouchet, “Next Generation Urban Planning,” Brookings Institute, 2020.

AWARENESS

Building awareness of the SDGs and internalizing their relevance across the organization is a pre-requisite to any effort to re-think and assess the organization's influence on the SDGs. This starts with working to make sure every employee—from the most senior to the most junior—is familiar with the SDGs and how existing programming and operations drives toward the SDGs. This is a process that requires leadership to believe in the importance of the SDGs for their organizational strategy and emphasize the SDGs in internal messaging to the organization.

One emerging tool for organizations to build this awareness is by undertaking the 17 Rooms meeting approach. 17 Rooms is an initiative spearheaded by the Brookings Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation as a new approach to catalyzing action for the SDGs.³⁰ The original 17 Rooms meeting, in New York in 2018, brought together people from across organizations whose work impacts the SDGs in some way and had them identify the most impactful actions that could be taken in the next year or so. These people were divided into 17 rooms, one for each of the 17 SDGs, and without panels or presentations, informal conversations took place among peers. The outcome was tangible actions on the SDGs after each participant attended each room.³¹

In the context of an organizational review, this process was adopted by Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) to build awareness and buy-in around the SDGs, and assess what the university is already doing to progress the SDGs. CMU brought together staff from across the university in a 17 Rooms initiative. As a first step, in each of the 17 rooms (divided into the 17 SDGs), staff were “educated” on the SDGs, and there was an in-depth conversation on how participants' work is contributing to progressing those SDGs. As a result of the session, there was renewed excitement around the SDGs organization-wide, including the university's role in supporting them. This provides opportunities for a subsequent step (outlined below) of using a similar 17 Rooms process to identify opportunities for action.

“The 17 Rooms initiative was as much of a process [for building awareness] as it was about the outcome of the session.”

**Sarah Mendelson, Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy and Head of Heinz College
Carnegie Mellon University**



³⁰ <https://www.brookings.edu/events/17-rooms-global-flagship-meeting/>

³¹ Ibid.

The 17 Rooms initiative

The first 17 Rooms initiative was launched by the Brookings Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation in New York in September 2018. The goal was to accelerate collective action toward the 17 SDGs. The initiative aims to simultaneously convene 17 small, informal group discussions to identify high-priority collaborative actions that can be completed over a 12-18-month timeframe.

The Brookings Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation are continuing to develop and refine the underlying approaches to the 17 Rooms initiative, including plans for basic toolkits that will support other organizations who want to pursue SDG-oriented conversations.

As an overview, the 17 Rooms initiative can be broken down into four main steps:

- 01 Designate 17 distinct breakout rooms and assign each a specific SDG.** These can be physical conference rooms or virtual conference rooms. Each room should be dedicated to one of the SDGs. Helpful materials for the physical breakout rooms can include whiteboards, paper, markers and sticky notes.
- 02 Assign moderators and participants for each SDG-specific breakout room.** Ideally, participants will be assigned to SDG-specific breakout rooms based on the alignment with their specialization and interests. Where appropriate, it is helpful to include a mix of stakeholders (representatives from NGOs, universities, government, private sector) to provide a broader perspective on the SDG under discussion. To facilitate creativity and collaboration, it is recommended that the group size per breakout room be kept small (about 10 individuals per room). Ideally, a subject specialist serves as moderator to help guide each conversation.
- 03 Host SDG-specific breakout sessions.** During the breakout sessions, participants discuss opportunities to advance some element of their SDG of interest through collaborative activities that can be completed over the coming 12-18 months. During the breakout, there should be no panels or presentations, only informal conversations and brainstorming exercises.
- 04 Reconvene breakout groups to debrief session.** Following the breakout session, participants join a central debrief session, and each SDG-specific breakout room shares (in randomized order) the highlights from their discussion. The debrief is intended to educate participants on priorities outside of their area of expertise and to identify potential opportunities for collaboration across goals. The debrief session should be moderated.

For more information, visit <https://www.brookings.edu/17rooms/>.

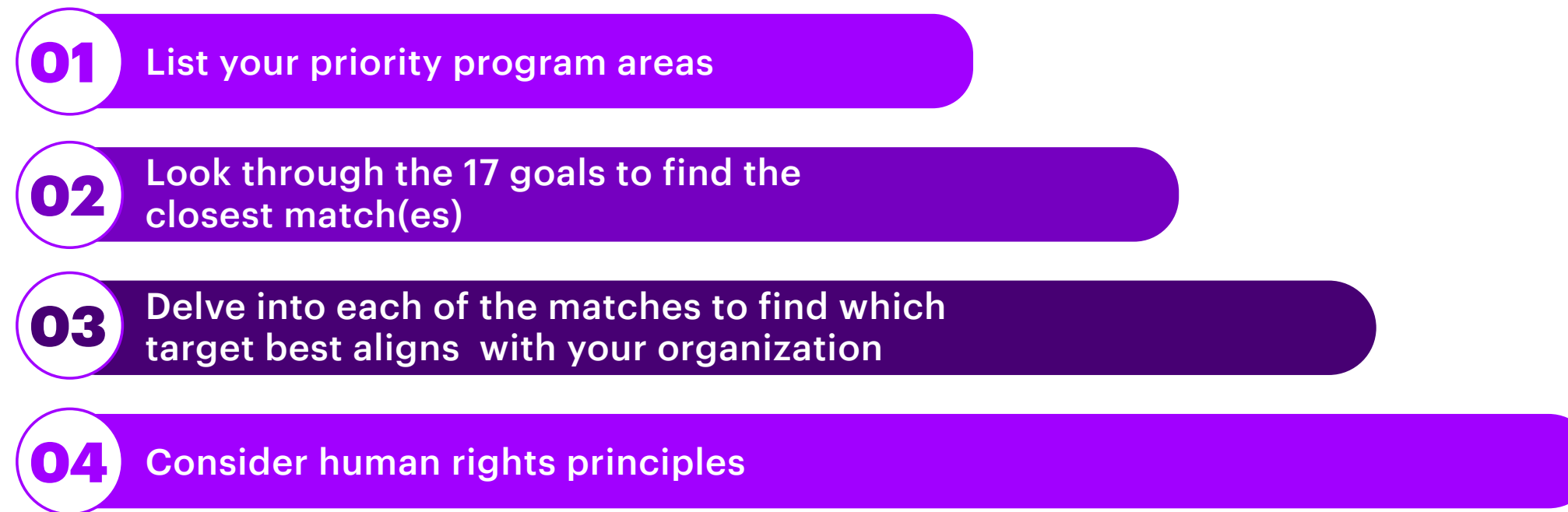
ALIGNMENT

Few organizations (outside of national governments) have the bandwidth to focus energy on every one of the 17 SDGs or commit to supporting all 174 targets across the 17 goals. It is imperative that organizations align on which SDGs are important for them and focus their efforts on establishing strategies around those SDGs in particular.

Before aligning on which SDGs and corresponding targets should be prioritized and how to progress to them, it is crucial to first align across the organization on why leadership should facilitate dialogues that helps people agree on the importance of investing time and resources on establishing strategies and measurement frameworks in service of progressing toward SDGs and corresponding targets.

If Implementer leaders can align on why, then the what and how will follow naturally. Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors (RPA) developed a useful framework to help identify priorities for SDG alignment (see figure 10).³² For Implementers and other mission-driven institutions, it is not enough just

Figure 10: Framework for SDG alignment



Source: Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, “Philanthropy & the SDGs: Practical Tools for Alignment.”

to focus the dialogue on how their programs are contributing toward the SDGs, but they must also look internally at their own operations. An organization may deliver transformational girls’ education programming in Sub-Saharan Africa, but if its own leadership and board does not reflect the gender parity it seeks to create in the world through its mission, the organization risks being viewed as hypocritical. Therefore, aligning operational priorities against the SDGs is also crucial.

This alignment on both a programmatic and operational level must be done in a collaborative and inclusive manner. Design-thinking workshops are one format that can be helpful. Such workshops can be virtual.³³ In addition, tools such as B-Lab’s SDG Action Manager³⁴, provide an excellent mechanism to help organizations align on which SDGs and targets are most relevant for them, as well as reflect on both the operational and programmatic level. The simple process of key members of the organization engaging with such a tool can go a long way to building alignment, as it is a great way to facilitate internal dialogue.

Finally, the organization must decide whether this SDG organizational review exercise will be an internal process or a public statement. Each approach has its merits, but it is important to agree on which to take and tailor messaging appropriately.

³² <https://www.rockpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/04-12-RPA-SDG-Guide-B-Final-WEB.pdf>

³³ https://www.accenture.com/_acnmedia/PDF-127/Accenture-Virtual-Ways-Working.pdf

³⁴ <https://bcorporation.net/welcome-sdg-action-manager>

Practitioner's toolkit: Frameworks and tools to help manage progress on the SDGs

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors' "Philanthropy and the SDGs" Guides

Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors has published two guides to help assist funders in planning, assessing, reporting and acting upon the SDGs: "Philanthropy and the SDGs: Getting Started" and "Philanthropy and the SDGs: Practical Tools for Alignment." While originally written for the funding community, the guides can be leveraged by any organization. RPA proposes three main steps to help organizations align to the SDGs:

Plan: Align the organization's priorities with the SDG goals and targets

Assess progress: Determine how to measure progress and results

Report and use data: Report findings to target audiences and leverage data-driven decision making

01

02

03

Each step is broken down into actionable sub-steps, alongside examples, words of advice from practitioners and best practices.

For more information and to access the guides, visit <https://www.rockpa.org/project/sdg/>.

B-Lab's SDG Action Manager

In January 2020, B-Lab launched the SDG Action Manager in partnership with the UN Global Compact. The SDG Action Manager is an impact management solution to assist with the setting and tracking of goals to maintain progress toward action on the SDGs. While originally created for businesses, the SDG Action Manager can be used by any organization. The tool specifically helps across three areas:

Finding a starting point: Find which SDGs matter the most to the organization and ideas for action

Goal setting and improvement tracking: Set goals within the tool and visual progress using the Action Manager dashboard

Understanding and sharing impact: Learn how operations, supply chains and business models can create positive impact

For more information or to get started using the tool, visit <https://bcorporation.net/welcome-sdg-action-manager>.

ANALYSIS

Implementers can start to reflect on the following (non-exhaustive) questions:

- How do our programs contribute to targets?
- What additional resources do we need to get to these targets?
- How do we compare against our peers on these targets?
- How do our internal operations and organizational practices measure up against targets?

This organizational analysis can be incorporated into a strategic planning effort. Next time a three-, five- or ten-year strategy is developed, it would be prudent to include an analysis of programs and operations against priority SDGs and corresponding targets. For example, the city of Los Angeles began its voluntary local review of the SDGs by mapping existing programs to the SDGs, and building an understanding of what data was being captured and

reported. Once the mapping was complete, the team was able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their existing programming and prioritize gaps that needed to be addressed.³⁵ In some instances, the team redefined the SDG targets to be more aligned to the organization's goals, an effort called "localization." In Los Angeles, this led to identifying a significant gap in the maternal mortality rate across race and ethnic groups by adjusting SDG Target 3.1. (In 2016, California reported fewer than 7.3 maternal deaths per 100,000 while deaths among African American and Black women were three to four times higher.) The localization of this SDG target highlighted the need to work alongside the County of Los Angeles as the overseer of public health resources.³⁶

Implementers may consider how to amend and/or refresh their strategies to include such an analysis if they do not already do so. Tools such as the SDG Action Manager can be very helpful as a guide and springboard for internal discussion during the "Analysis" phase.

It is important to note that Implementers typically have robust monitoring and evaluation systems already in place. Often, these systems were created to align with existing donor requirements on a project-by-project basis. If these existing donors do not align their targets with SDG targets, Implementers should look for the least complicated ways to bridge the gap between existing processes and what is needed to consider the selected targets. Regardless of historic donor requirements, we must recognize that future donor requirements (especially when the private sector is involved) are very likely to necessitate SDG alignment. As such, it is worthwhile to put in the effort to bridge the gap. At this stage, however, the objective is to merely establish a mechanism to assess the organization against its prioritized SDGs and targets rather than do any form of comprehensive reporting.

³⁵ Interview with Erin Bromaghim, City of Los Angeles; For more information, see Thematic Research Network on Data and Trends, "Revising National SDG Targets for the City of LA," April 2019

³⁶ Thematic Research Network on Data and Trends, "Revising National SDG Targets for the City of LA," April 2019

ACTION

The “Analysis” phase sheds light on the organization’s opportunities and weaknesses with respect to the SDGs. The next step is to take action to capitalize on the opportunities and address the weaknesses. This requires another collaborative dialogue to build consensus on where resources should be dedicated for action to occur. Once again, the 17 Rooms initiative can be a very helpful tool to facilitate agreement on a tangible starting point for cooperative action over the next 12 to 18 months. Based on the organization’s priorities agreed to in the “Align” phase, the exercise can be customized to focus only on the priority SDGs. Through thoughtful facilitation—including making sure the right stakeholders are in the right rooms—the ultimate outcome of the exercise can lead to truly catalyzing action.

It is important to define a roadmap for the agreed-upon actions which can be implemented in short-, medium- and long-term increments. Certain institutions, like the City of Los Angeles (with funding from the Conrad Hilton Foundation), have hired or appointed individuals focused exclusively on managing the SDG Action Plan to hold the organization accountable.



ACCOUNTABILITY

Implementers can enable accountability by setting big goals around their priority SDGs and corresponding targets, and establishing dashboards to track those goals.

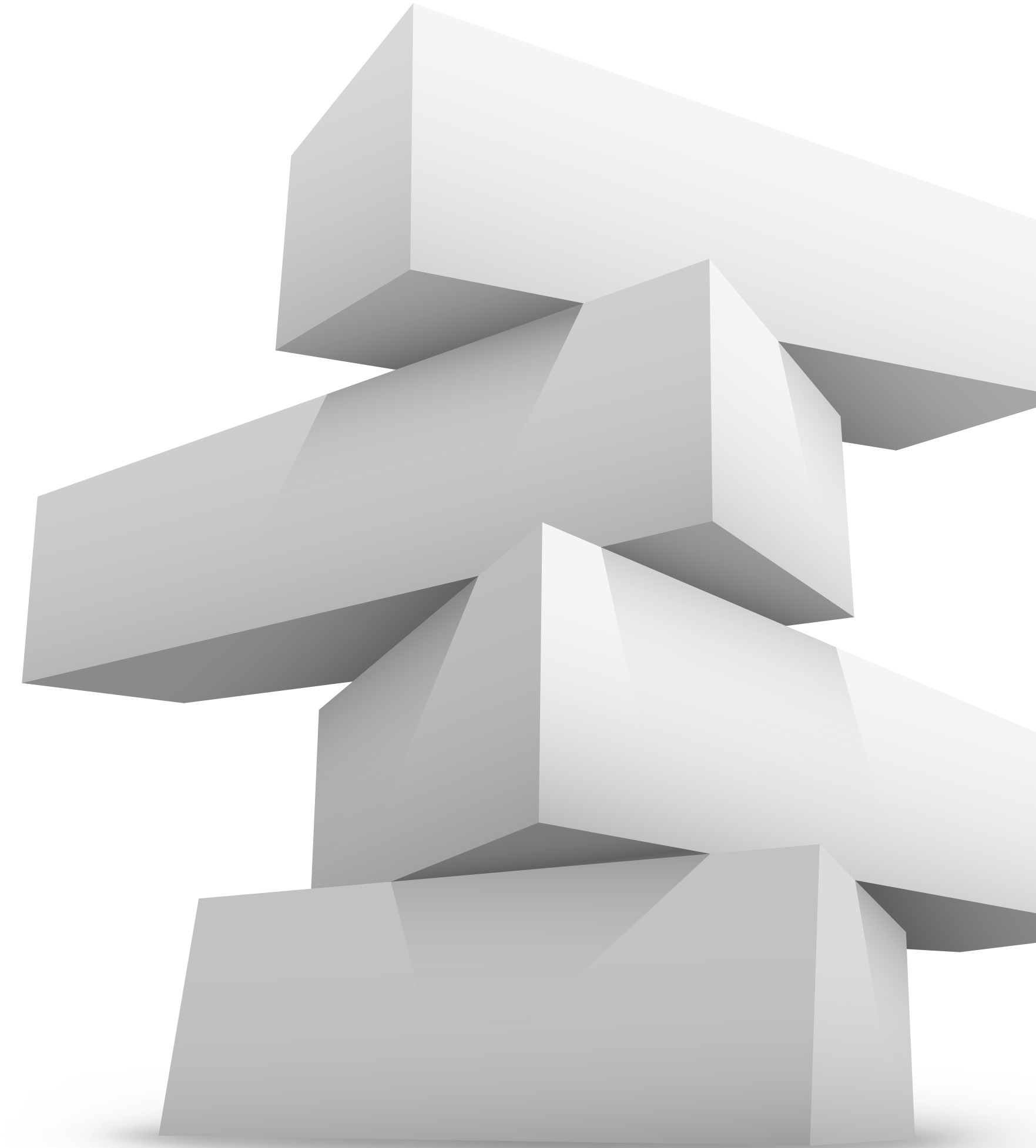
Goals should help the organization align on a shared vision while also being “SMART” (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely). This is particularly important in the context of “speaking the same language” as potential private sector partners—many of whom have truly taken this goal setting to heart. For instance, Mastercard has publicly announced a commitment to connecting one billion underserved people to the digital economy by 2025 (an extension of their 500 million by 2020 goal).³⁷ They measure their progress very closely and have inclusion targets for business units. They have aligned the way they measure toward this goal to their priority SDGs 9, 10 and 11, which were identified as central to Mastercard’s core competencies.

Unilever is another example. Its Sustainable Living Plan is a crucial part of its business strategy, and the company takes significant action to measure and publicly report against its priority SDGs and corresponding targets—(i) improving health and well-being for one billion people; (ii) reducing environmental impact by half; (iii) enhancing livelihoods for millions. On its website, Unilever offers a view of the specific SDG targets it focuses on, the goals it has set for impacting those targets and how it is progressing toward those goals.³⁸ Mastercard and Unilever are just two examples of the countless companies that have taken this approach to being accountable.

Implementers who can articulate their goals and effectively monitor their progress can win big in the eyes of potential private sector partners. When Implementers’ metrics can directly feed into the sustainable development metrics of private sector partners, true shared value can be unlocked.

³⁷ <https://www.mastercardcenter.org/press-releases/mastercard-commits-to-connect-1billion-by-2025>

³⁸ www.unilever.com/sustainable-living





**Conclusion:
Implementers can take the
driver's seat in the decade to deliver**

Implementers have many challenges to overcome—from thinking about their own operational viability to worrying about how they continue to support the most vulnerable people and environments during a pandemic. This is the time to double down on the SDGs to help navigate these challenges and land in a place of greater influence and impact on the sustainable development dialogue. In doing so, Implementers can play a central role in achieving the SDGs in the upcoming decade to deliver.

For Implementers, doubling down on the SDGs requires extensive reflection. While this process may require some resource investment, organizations can limit the investment required by thinking about it as a process of reflecting on activities that already exist to shape a coherent narrative that is aligned with what the global community has prioritized—the SDGs.

There are three key success factors for beginning this journey:

01

Top-level buy-in

If this is not part of the C-suite conversation, it will not happen. Some of the activities suggested in this paper require a behavioral shift from leadership, including the board.

02

Cross-organization participation

While executive buy-in is needed, the dialogue cannot live only at the C-suite. The entire organization must be involved.

03

Alignment with organizational strategy

The SDGs are a way to achieve Implementers' missions. Integrating the process into strategic planning will make the journey much more meaningful.

We believe the Implementers that take these actions are better positioned to accelerate their role in impacting the upcoming decade to deliver and contribute to SDG 17, Partnership for the Goals. By bringing together organizations from all sectors of development, networks such as the Society for International Development – Washington Chapter are uniquely positioned to help Implementers navigate this journey.

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