

# Business's Commitment to Sustainable Development Goals: An analysis using the Five Ps framework

Dr. Soma Ghosh

Department of Business, Accounting and Economics, Roessner Hall, Albright College

13<sup>th</sup> & Bern Streets, Reading, PA 19612, USA

Tel: 610-929-6724 E-mail: sghosh@albright.edu

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## Abstract

There has been a long-standing demand on businesses to play an increasingly larger role in sustainable development. This demand is for issues that contribute to the creation of a sustainable world; ranging from poverty alleviation to climate change. The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were unanimously adopted by 193 UN member states in September 2015 and calls upon the central and diverse role that the private sector can play to deliver on the SDGs during the 15-year period, 2016-2030. This paper has two major contributions: First, it analyzes member companies of Business Call to Action (BCtA), an international initiative launched at the United Nations in 2008, to identify SDGs that are most impacted by the private sector. Second, the global analysis draws attention to the role of the private sector in addressing the sustainability challenges in five geographical regions of the world, through their contributions to the SDGs. Using the 'five Ps' framework, the results show that some SDGs are more impacted than others, thereby implying that these SDGs will substantially benefit from the success of the private sector while others could be left behind. The findings provide practical recommendations for businesses and stakeholders to use BCtA members as role models to integrate specific SDGs into their business activities and thereby contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Sustainable development, 2030 Agenda, Base of the Pyramid (BoP), Private sector

## 1. Introduction

All 193 member states of the United Nations agreed in September 2015 to unanimously adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to be achieved by 2030. The 17 SDGs officially known as 'Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' calls

upon the central and diverse role that the private sector can play to deliver on the SDGs<sup>1</sup> (Agarwal, Gneiting, & Mhlanga, 2017). There has been a long-standing demand on businesses to play an increasingly larger role in sustainable development. This demand is for a wide variety of issues that contribute to the creation of a sustainable world; ranging from poverty alleviation to climate change. All businesses are profit-seeking entities, but their long-term profits may not be achievable if their social and environmental issues are not properly managed. This is because companies from all sectors have to confront and adapt to a range of disruptive forces including climate change, uncertainties associated with rising energy costs, intense competition for raw materials and natural resources, financial reforms and regulations, while responding to greater scrutiny with higher accountability and demands from stakeholders, all at the same time. Hence, embedding sustainability into decision-making and core strategies is becoming a mainstream approach to business-as-usual-a priority for business to bring scalable and profitable solutions to market-that benefit society and business performance simultaneously (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015).

The post-2015 era presents a historic opportunity for the international business community to contribute to the attainment of worldwide sustainability and development objectives (The United Nations Global Compact Leaders Summit 2013: Architects of a Better World). Pertinently, the global goals (environmental protection, economic and social progress, inclusive growth, building partnerships with all stakeholders) are aligned with key business goals (creating shared value, risk mitigation and management, growth opportunities) and create a business case for how the private sector can support the achievement of the SDGs. A January 2017 report of the Business & Sustainability Development Commission, lays out the business case for the SDGs. It explains why corporations will benefit from factoring the global goals into their business strategies. Although business incentives to engage with the SDGs exist, business does not, at least in the short term, rely on the SDGs for its financial success. Consequently, private sector participation is voluntary, relying on market pressure and incentives. In addition, there is still no agreed set of clear baselines and metrics for evaluating, measuring and reporting on companies' contributions to SDGs. Hence, four years into the UN's 15-year timeline, it is important to question whether the private sector is taking actions to actually leverage the SDGs to create change or simply embarking on a massive global public relations charade.

This study makes two major contributions: first, it analyzes Business Call to Action (BCtA) member companies to identify SDGs that are most impacted by the private sector. Using the 'five Ps' framework, the results show that some SDGs are more impacted than others, thereby implying that these SDGs will substantially benefit from the success of the private sector while others could be left behind. Second, the global analysis focuses on companies across

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<sup>1</sup> Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called directly on the business community to get involved: "I'm counting on the private sector. Now is the time to mobilize the global business community as never before. The case is clear. Realizing the Sustainable Development Goals will improve the environment for doing business and building markets. Trillions of dollars in public and private funds are to be redirected towards the SDGs, creating huge opportunities for responsible companies to deliver solutions."

five geographical regions of the world. This draws attention to the role of the private sector in addressing the sustainability challenges in each region through their contributions to the SDGs. Hence, by analyzing companies that have integrated SDGs into their business actions, this paper provides a relevant and useful framework for businesses and stakeholders to use BCtA members as role models to create new SDG partnership initiatives.

The paper proceeds as follows: The next section outlines the role of business in implementing and achieving the SDGs through the ‘five Ps’ framework. A description of the data and methodology is then provided, followed by a discussion of the major findings and policy implications.

## 2. The Business Case of Engagement with SDGs Using the ‘Five Ps’ Framework

All business activities are inevitably linked to the SDGs by contributing positively or negatively to the economy, society and the environment. Businesses around the world are already engaging with the SDGs because they “offer an effective way to look at opportunities and risks, to translate the impact of ... investment activities into real economy outcomes and provide a useful means of engaging with stakeholders (Baker, 2017).” The goals provide companies with a useful framework to *examine* their economic, governance, social, ethical and environmental (EGSEE) issues and map their *specific* corporate sustainability goals to contribute to the *relevant* SDGs (Villeneuve et al., 2017). Further, it also provides an opportunity for companies to use the SDGs as another framework to re-evaluate their corporate sustainability strategies and publicly demonstrate their commitment to the advancement of the global goals.

Currently, various benchmarking efforts,<sup>2</sup> including a large number of tools and “business indicators,” are underway to develop an agreed framework to assess whether a company is in alignment with the SDGs. However, in the absence of a standardized reporting system, companies are struggling to define their next steps to align their strategies with the SDGs and to measure and manage their impacts.

The outcome document of the United Nations summit highlights five areas of critical importance for humanity and the planet, commonly known as the ‘five Ps’. The 2030 Agenda is an aspirational plan of action for People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership-the ‘five Ps’; the five critical sustainability dimensions that shifts the world onto a sustainable and resilient path for global development over the next decade (Jayasooria, 2016, Caiado et al., 2018).



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<sup>2</sup> The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) together with Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the UN Global Compact (UNGC) have created SDG Compass. The UNGC and KPMG are partnering on the SDG Industry Matrix project while WBCSD’s SDG Sector Roadmap showcase brief industry-specific examples and ideas for corporate action related to driving progress on the SDGs. Also, consulting firms such as EY, KPMG, and PricewaterhouseCoopers have developed their own tools to help companies interested in understanding how their strategies can support the SDGs. In addition, there is a multitude of resources available through the websites such as the World Benchmarking Alliance, Businessfor2030, and SDG Business Hub to name a few.

Table 1 provides a description of the 17 SDGs and places each SDG in one of the five sustainability dimensions. It is important to note that due to the interlinkages and integrated nature of the SDGs, a SDG can belong to more than one dimension. For instance, SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) is listed under ‘Prosperity’ but could also fit into the ‘Planet’ dimension.

The ‘five Ps’ model can be used as a general evaluation framework, and may help assess the legitimacy of sustainability commitments as aligned with the 2030 Agenda priorities. However, the relevance of the ‘five Ps’ as an evaluation framework depends on the sector that the company belongs to and the sustainability issues faced by a company. For example, certain SDGs such as “Decent Work and Economic Growth” (SDG 8) should be important for all organizations whereas “Life Below Water” (SDG 14) or “Life on Land” (SDG 15) may not appear very material for a given organization. Conversely, for businesses whose operations impact a wide range of sustainability issues, their activities can support most of the SDGs and the ‘five Ps’ can be used as a compass to assess the extent of commitment of the private sector in advancing the 2030 Agenda. The following section identifies a wide range of opportunities for the private sector to invest in specific SDGs using the ‘five Ps’ framework.

Table 1. The 17 SDGs and the ‘five Ps’ framework

The ‘five Ps’ framework	The 17 SDGs and their description
<p><b>People</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. No Poverty. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.</li> <li>2. Zero Hunger. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.</li> <li>3. Good Health &amp; Well-Being. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages</li> <li>4. Quality Education. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</li> <li>5. Gender Equality. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Planet</b></p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. Clean Water and Sanitation. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.</li> <li>7. Affordable and Clean Energy. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.</li> <li>13. Climate Action. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.</li> <li>14. Life Below Water. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.</li> <li>15. Life on Land. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Prosperity</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Decent Work and Economic Growth. Promote sustained, inclusive and</li> </ol>

  	<p>sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.</p> <p>9. Industry, Innovation &amp; Infrastructure. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.</p> <p>12. Responsible Consumption &amp; Production. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.</p>
<p><b>Peace</b></p>   	<p>10. Reduced Inequalities. Reduce inequality within and among countries.</p> <p>11. Sustainable Cities and Communities. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.</p> <p>16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.</p>
<p><b>Partnership</b></p> 	<p>17. Partnership for the Goals. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.</p>
<p><b>Planet</b></p>     	<p>6. Clean Water and Sanitation. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.</p> <p>7. Affordable and Clean Energy. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.</p> <p>13. Climate Action. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.</p> <p>14. Life Below Water. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.</p> <p>15. Life on Land. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.</p>

Source: Adapted from United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform

### 2.1 People

Goals 1 to 5 are ‘people’ goals and support the role of business in society; through the management of issues related to human rights; food and nutrition insecurity; access to basic, quality services such as health care, education and sanitation; local economic development; protection of poor vulnerable groups and responsible business practices. The expectation is that the private sector will contribute to these goals in return for a license to operate. From creating the jobs and opportunities that benefit those at the Bottom of the Pyramid (BoP), to lobbying governments to introduce effective poverty-fighting economic policies, all companies, regardless of industry sector can implement measures to achieve no poverty (Goal 1). In contrast, zero hunger (Goal 2) is more aligned with the goals of companies in the agriculture, food and beverage and nutrition sector while good health and well-being (Goal 3) is clearly the forte of the health care sector. More indirect health impacts are likely to be found in the supply chain, particularly for food and drink companies, and those in the

industrials, materials, and technology sector. The business case to invest in quality education (Goal 4) can range from long-term strategic investments in education that will lead to a larger, more skilled workforce, facilitate access to new markets and stimulate innovation to improving brand leadership. Further, the technologies, infrastructure, business models, and capacity building required to deliver on the wider SDGs are hugely dependent on an educated and skilled workforce. Gender Equality (Goal 5) is a fundamental human right and is central to achieving all the other SDGs. Recent research indicates that achieving gender equality can add \$12 trillion to the global economy and gender diversity at all levels of the organization leads to increased productivity, profitability and organizational success (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015). Thus, business leaders have a strong case to support the empowerment of women and girls by developing and adapting core business practices and policies, implementing social initiatives, and through public policy engagement and partnerships.

## *2.2 Planet*

The private sector impacts the environment either through the use of nonrenewable, natural resources as inputs in production or through harmful releases into the environment. Climate change stands as a serious threat as society and economy will cease to function when damage to the environment reaches a certain level. So for both humanitarian and business reasons, it is imperative that companies of all sizes take action in achieving the associated SDGs (the ‘planet’ goals). The most viable planet goals are affordable and clean energy (Goal 7) and climate action (Goal 13). These goals offer companies opportunities not only to invest in renewable energy resources, prioritize energy efficient practices and adopt clean energy technologies and infrastructure but also to deliver products and services in future markets that will drive competitive advantage. Furthermore, the role of the private sector in supporting Goal 13 is diverse and significant; ranging from decarbonizing and adapting environmental targets to lobbying governments to support climate coalitions.

To deliver on clean water and sanitation (Goal 6), companies need to take action on improving water efficiency, reducing water footprint, investing in wastewater treatment, water reuse or teach their consumers the basics of sanitation. The opportunities presented by the broader goals such as climate action (Goal 13), life below water (Goal 14) and life on land (Goal 15) varies across sectors. For example, the financial sector can support climate action through the issuance of green bonds and green credits (Weber, 2018). Similarly, Goal 14 has higher priority with fisheries, marine and dredging and tourism sector, while Goal 15 is significant for the agriculture, extractives and forest companies.

## *2.3 Prosperity*

The ‘prosperity’ goals (Goals 8, 9 and 12) are more directly tied to the business goals and present more clear opportunities for the private sector. Goal 9 is based on three interconnected pillars: Industry, innovation and infrastructure. Innovation is not only central but vital to the existence of any business bringing in new business models that transform industries, value chains and lives of people, including marginalized groups, who might not have access otherwise. Innovation often requires businesses to contribute to development efforts in the regions in which they operate through upgrading local infrastructure,

communications, technologies and making long term commitments to sustainable industrialization. Further, Goal 9 has direct linkages to decent work and economic growth (Goal 8) because innovation drives productivity and building productive capacity helps sustain per capita economic growth, particularly in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Goal 8 addresses issues that affect the productivity of employees, management of labor relations, health and safety of employees and the ability to create a safety culture. Hence, every company has a vested interest in investing in Goal 8 since the management of a company's human resources is fundamental to delivering long-term value and fostering economic growth. Economic growth will inevitably increase demand for already constrained natural resources. Therefore, it is in the interest of business to find new solutions that enable sustainable consumption and production patterns (Goal 12). This goal calls upon the innovative power of business to identify "hot spots" within the value chain, design and implement effective solutions to improve the environmental and social impact of a product.

#### *2.4 Peace*

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development notes that "Sustainable development cannot be realized without peace and security; and peace and security will be at risk without sustainable development." For businesses to succeed, they require good governance and sustainable economic development, among other fundamental factors. The 'peace' goals (Goals 10, 11 and 16) present a vital role for the private sector to reduce inequality and foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies. Although reduced inequality (Goal 10) is mainly an issue of political institutions, all businesses have the responsibility to protect human rights. The private sector can partner with governments to have a significant impact on reducing inequality through inclusive business models that benefit the BoP population. Among the most direct examples are companies in the information technology and health sector that develop products and services tailored for poor customers, insurance companies that fill gaps in social systems and companies that recruit, train and employ local community members and integrate them in the supply chain. By 2050, 70 % of the world's population will live in cities, making cities critical in achieving a sustainable future for the world. Business can play a vital role in making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Goal 11). Cities can leverage the capability of business to make infrastructure investments, identify innovative and cost-effective technology, services and financing solution to urban sustainability challenges. Although peace, justice and strong institutions (Goal 16) is mainly an issue of government and politics, the role of the private sector in institution building cannot be overestimated. A 2017 SDG Fund report titled 'Business and SDG 16: Contributing to peaceful, just and inclusive societies,' recommends ways for the public sector to incorporate Goal 16 into business planning and provides success stories and case studies from around the world.

#### *2.5 Partnership*

Finally, Goal 17 is about building partnerships with all stakeholders for implementation of the SDGs. With its reach and unique capabilities, the business community can be a powerful partnership practitioner; to scale up collaboration and impact to develop more integrated

solutions to global challenges. Taking action on Goal 17 is highly connected to all other goals, and its success undergirds the realization of the other SDGs. Hence, in practice contributions to Goal 17 are mostly from companies that have taken action to promote other goals. Leaders like Unilever, General Electric and Novo Nordisk have started several alliances that promote the SDGs and specifically SDG 17.

### **3. Data and Methodology**

Data for this study comes from Business Call to Action (BCtA), a unique multilateral alliance among donor governments<sup>3</sup>. BCtA is “a global advocacy platform that works to accelerate progress towards SDGs by challenging and supporting companies to develop Inclusive Business (IB) models as market-based solutions to contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and benefit those at the Base of the Pyramid (BoP).<sup>4</sup>” (Business Call to Action). Launched at the UN in 2008, BCtA began with 18 founding members and today it has grown to more than 200 companies, ranging from multinationals to social enterprises, across 70 countries. BCtA is a significant initiative to be examined; particularly in a political climate where there is much uncertainty over the scope and direction of international cooperation on sustainable development issues.

As of December 2019, BCtA’s website listed information on 222 companies<sup>5</sup> from 16 different sectors, impacting five geographical regions of the world with commitment to all the 17 SDGs. The number of SDGs chosen by each company ranges from one to seven, with the exception of Helioz choosing eight SDGs and Unilever Bangladesh which has not specified any SDG. In order to identify the SDGs with the most and least commitments, we aggregated the companies by each of the 17 SDGs. As shown in Figure 1, SDG 1 leads with commitments from 99 companies, followed by SDG 5 (86), SDG 8 (82), SDG 3 (54), and SDG 2 (49), respectively. On the other end, the less popular SDGs with commitments from fewer companies (12 or less) are SDG 11, 10, 15, 16 and 14.

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<sup>3</sup> This includes the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and Finland’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the United Nations Development Programme with UNDP.

<sup>4</sup> G20 Inclusive Business Framework: Base of the Economic Pyramid (or BOP) is used to describe men and women who are low-income or who lack access to basic goods and services. The low-income segment is commonly considered to include people earning up to \$8/day in purchasing power parity terms (PPP).

<sup>5</sup> Of the 222 members, 159 are active, 49 are alumni and 14 are listed as inactive due to non-reporting.



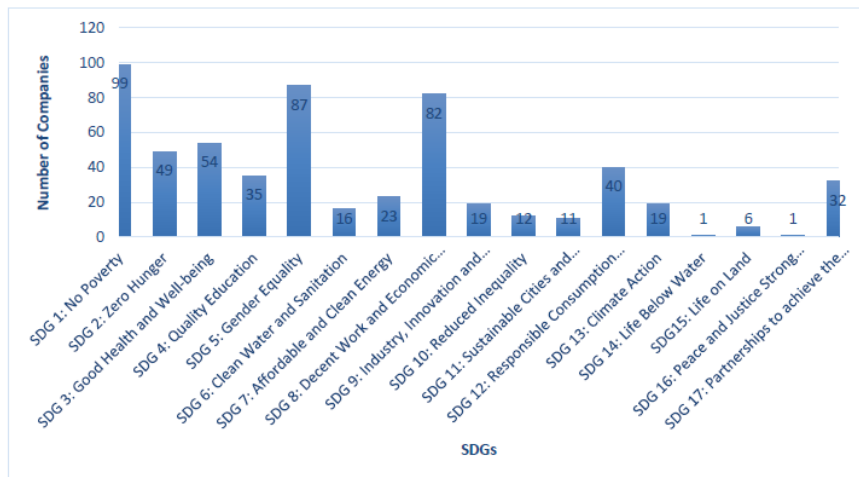


Figure 1. Number of BCtA Member Companies by SDGs

Top 5 SDGs in rank order: 1, 5, 8, 3 and 2

Bottom 5 SDGs in rank order: 10, 11, 15, 14 and 16

#### 4. Findings and Discussion

The data on BCtA companies were analyzed based on the ‘five Ps’ framework and the ‘region of initiative’. The findings are presented in the following sections.

##### 4.1 The ‘Five Ps’ Framework Analysis

As noted above, SDGs 1 through 5 represent the ‘people’ goals or the social dimension. Figure 2 shows the percentage of commitments for each of the ‘five Ps’. The BCtA members have made the highest number of commitments for the people goals (55%), followed by prosperity (24%), planet (11%), partnership (6%) and peace (4%). To get a better sense of how BCtA members are involved in supporting multiple SDGs, one example is presented for each of the five dimensions.

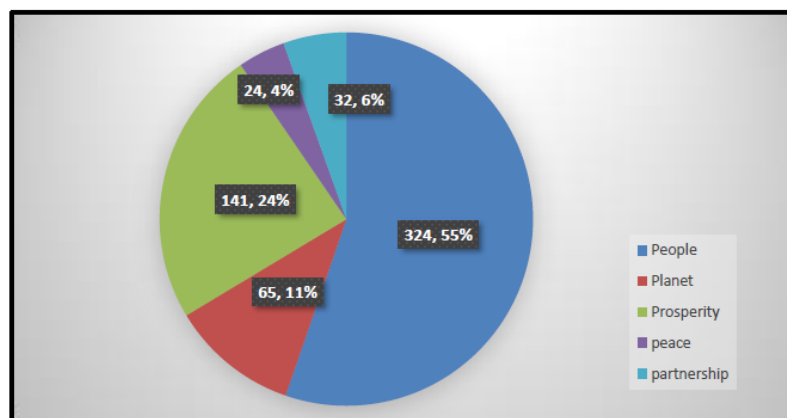


Figure 2. Percentage of companies by commitment to the 'five Ps'

*iKure*, a tech start-up providing primary healthcare to 25 million people across seven states in India joined BCtA in December 2018, with a commitment to support SDGs 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10. In India, 70 percent of the rural population (or over 840 million people) are served by less than 30 percent of the country's combined medical force. *iKure* addresses the challenges of access to health care in rural communities, lack of infrastructure, lack of education and poverty through *a combination of health outreach initiative, skills development, and technology intervention*. *iKure* is a unique example that illustrates how a single company can align its business goals to support the interconnected 'people' goals.

The 'planet' goals are deemed as urgent for survival of the society and economy and has been selected by a total of 65 BCtA companies. Not surprisingly, the Energy and Utilities sector is in the forefront of supporting the 'planet' goals with commitments from 29 BCtA members. *Helioz* is a clean energy company that joined BCtA in September 2017 and has pledged to support three of the five 'planet' goals, namely SDGs 6, 7 and 13. For millions in rural East Africa, accessing clean water is a serious challenge and water-borne diseases are a leading cause of death, especially among children. *Helioz* relies on green technology, solar-powered disinfection solutions and sustainable products to deliver clean drinking water to millions in the BoP population in East Africa and Asia.

The three 'prosperity' goals are more directly tied to the business goals. A total of 141 companies have made commitments to one or more of the 'prosperity' goals. *Nutriset*, a world-renowned company and BCtA member since 2016, is a notable example as it has committed to support all the 'prosperity' goals and SDG 2. For over thirty years, it has pioneered research and development of specialized products for the treatment and prevention of malnutrition. It offers localized sustainable solutions to malnutrition by transferring proven technology and know-how to the local level. Through the creation of franchise-like network in developing countries, it empowers independent producers and contributes to building autonomous food value chains that can meet their countries' nutrition needs into the future.

Among the 24 companies that made commitments to one or more of the 'peace' goals (SDGs 10, 11 and 16), *Coffee for Peace* is the only BCtA member that supports SDG 16. It works with indigenous people and rural poor in the Philippines to promote economic empowerment, peace and reconciliation, and environmental stewardship. It has made a commitment to train conflict-affected farmers to receive certification for coffee farming, using the principles of peace and reconciliation – including advocacy and the promotion of active non-violence to resolve conflicts.

Finally, the 'partnership' goal has received attention from 32 BCtA members. The data shows that there is a strong link between SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 17 (partnership for the goals) since 17 of the 32 companies have signed up for both. In fact, the financial sector plays an important role in this linkage as 7 of the 17 companies come from this sector. The financial sector is responsible for steering funds toward the most productive investments, thereby strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships that are critical for achieving the SDGs (see Weber (2018) for a list of financial products and services addressing each SDG). A suitable example is *Mastercard* which is a BCtA member since 2017. It has made a commitment to

reach 500 million people previously excluded from financial services by 2020, in line with World Bank’s goal of Universal Financial Access. Mastercard is building effective public-private partnerships in emerging markets to increase financial literacy, ease the adoption of electronic payments and provide flexible point-of-sale technologies.

#### 4.2 The ‘Region of Initiative’ Analysis

This section presents an analysis in global perspective, highlighting the impact of each company in the five regions of the world. Each company listed on the BCtA website has business activities that impact one or more geographical regions of the world. There are five regions that are impacted and are labeled as ‘regions of initiative’, namely: Africa, Arab States, Asia & Pacific, Eastern Europe & Central Asia and Latin America & Caribbean. Figure 3 illustrates the percentage of companies in each region. The Asia & Pacific region is impacted by more than half of the companies (114) in the sample, followed by Africa (95), Latin America & Caribbean (45), Eastern Europe & Central Asia (10) and Arab States (6). Table 2 provides a more in-depth analysis and lists the number of companies per SDG for each of the five regions.

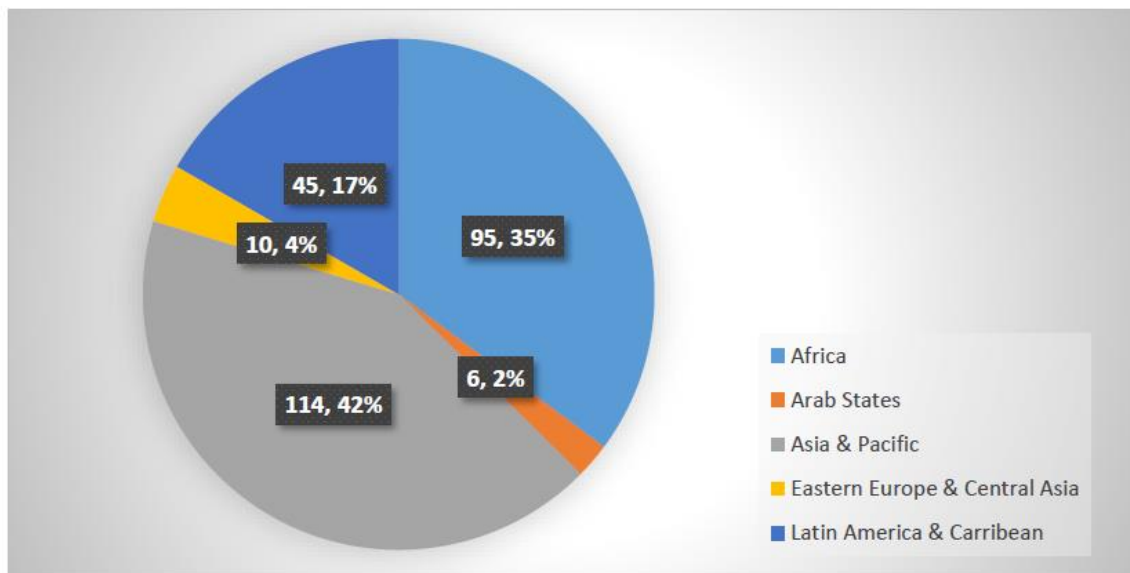


Figure 3. Percentage of companies by region of initiative

##### 4.2.1 Asia and Pacific

Between 2010 and 2013, the poverty rate (the proportion of people living on less than \$1.90 per day in 2011 PPP) in the Asia-Pacific region fell to 10.3 percent of the total population, down from 29.7 percent for the period 2000–2004. According to a recent monitoring report on progress towards the goals (Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2019, United Nations ESCAP), there has been significant progress made in reducing poverty (SDG 1), ensuring all have access to quality education and lifelong learning (SDG 4) and access to affordable and clean energy (SDG 7). For three goals (SDGs 6, 8 and 12), negative trends must be reversed and urgent action is required for environmental sustainability (SDGs 11 to

14). The current analysis supports the above trend as SDG 1 has received the highest commitment (55), closely followed by SDG 5 and 8 with commitments from 50 and 48 companies, respectively. Conversely, SDGs 11, 13, 14 and 15 are impacted by very few to no companies. Hence, it is vital that these goals must receive immediate attention from the private sector if targets are to be met by 2030 for this region.

#### 4.2.2 Africa

In Africa, out of the 95 companies, about 40% have made commitments to both SDGs 1 and 5 followed by SDGs 3 and 8, each of which are impacted by over a quarter of the businesses. On the other end, there were six SDGs with commitments from few (less than 8) companies while SDGs 14 and 16 had no commitments at all. These results are expected, since the African Continent is one of the world's poorest regions and faces challenges in ending extreme hunger and poverty, aggravated by high rates of population growth, droughts and instability and conflict in some regions. Many of the challenges affecting the progress of SDGs 3, 5 and 8 are interlinked and the initiatives taken by one single company can have a substantial positive impact. For instance, AFRIPads, a social enterprise that manufactures environmentally-friendly menstrual hygiene products, has pledged to provide one million reusable sanitary pads each year to low-income communities across Africa by the end of 2020. The company also commits to provide training and employment to 250 low-income people – 80 percent of them women.

#### 4.2.3 Latin America and Caribbean

In Latin America and the Caribbean, insecurity and violence, barriers to access to essential social services, lack of infrastructure, poor health and education system present the major challenges to sustainable development (Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean: challenges and axes of public policy, 2018). Poverty has been reduced from 43% in 2002 to 30.7% in 2016 with 186 million people still living in poverty and the region has made considerable progress in reducing inequality. Data on BCtA members show that with 45 companies having an influence on this region, SDGs 1, and 8, have received the most attention from 46% of the total companies. Following come SDGs 5, 2 and 12, with 35%, 26% and 24%, respectively. An individual company can play a significant role in the progress of multiple SDGs. Consider, for example, Bancalimentos, a social enterprise established in 2015 in Boyaca, Columbia. It contributes to SDGs 1, 2, 5 and 12 by providing essential household goods such as food, medicine and agricultural inputs in exchange for household organic waste and recyclables. Bancalimentos' innovative business model not only provides a sustainable and low-cost source of basic household items and a nutritional insurance, but it also encourages a change of habits in waste disposal and contributes to improved living environment, emissions reductions and recycling infrastructure. Further, 85% of Bancalimentos' clients are female heads of households leading to empowerment of women through the generation of real purchasing power.

#### 4.2.4 Eastern Europe and Central Asia

Over the last decade, the economies of Eastern Europe and Central Asia have gained social


and economic prosperity, bolstered by ambitious market and public-sector reforms (Sultanoğlu 2018). Large movements of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants, persistent rural poverty, slow progress in gender equality, sluggish and job-less growth, are some of the key issues faced by the region. Fortunately, the region's private sector in partnership with governments are working proactively to promote sustainable development efforts. In the current sample, there are ten companies that have initiatives in this region; with the most addressed SDGs being 8, 1, 5 and 12, respectively. Conversely, SDGs 7, 9, 13, 14, 15 and 16 were not chosen by any of the companies implying that the 'planet' goals require more attention in this region. According to the current sample, the financial sector plays a critical role in advancing the SDGs since three (Crystal, KMF and Mastercard) of the ten companies belong to that sector. Crystal, a leading Georgian microfinance lender and BCtA member since 2018 is a fitting example. It provides access to finance to about 30,000 low-income clients in rural Georgia and has pledged to disperse 1,000 new loans for green/solar solutions and energy efficiency projects by 2020. Through its business activities, it fosters economic opportunity for farmers, women and micro entrepreneurs and thereby supports SDGs 1, 5, 8 and 11.









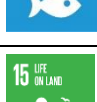




#### 4.2.5 Arab States




Finally, only six companies have business activities that affect the Arab States and mostly impact SDGs 1 and 5. On the other hand, there are five SDGs (SDGs 3, 4, 8, 9 and 17) each of which have commitments from one company only.

According to the Sustainable Development Report 2019, poverty eradication and strengthening equity remain important policy priorities around the globe while on average countries obtain their worst scores on SDGs 13, 14 and 15, which are in line with the results of this research. Overall, the 'people' goals have gained priority among companies across all regions with SDG 1 leading in this category, followed by SDG 5 and 3, respectively. Next in line are the 'prosperity' goals, followed by the planet, partnership and peace goals. As suggested in the literature (Allen et al, 2018; Leal Filho et al., 2018; Salvia et al., 2019), how each region will implement the goals depends on context-specific challenges, political preferences and their own priorities. The ideal situation is one where the main challenges of each region being the SDGs with the most commitments from the business community. Therefore, the current analysis highlights both the greater and lesser committed SDGs in each region and identifies the areas that could receive more attention in order to help meet the targets.

Table 2. Number of companies per SDG by region

SDGs/Regions	Africa	Arab States	Asia & Pacific	Eastern Europe & Central Asia	Latin America & Caribbean
Total number of companies (Ranking)*					
<b>PEOPLE</b>					
	39 (2)	3(2)	55(1)	5 (2)	21 (1)

	22(5)	0	19	2	12 (3)
	27(3)	1	28 (4)	1	9
	8	1	24 (5)	2	8
	40 (1)	4 (1)	50 (2)	3 (3)	16 (2)
<b>PLANET</b>					
	7	0	8	2	0
	14	0	14	0	3
	13	0	8	0	3
	0	0	0	0	1
	2	0	2	0	3
<b>PROSPERITY</b>					
	25 (4)	1	48 (3)	7 (1)	21 (1)
	7	1	14	0	3
	12	0	20	3 (3)	11 (4)
<b>PEACE</b>					
	3	0	6	1	3

	2	0	5	1	3
	0	0	1	0	0
<b>PARTNERSHIP</b>					
	11	1	20	2	10 (5)

Note: \* Numbers in parentheses indicate ranking for SDGs based on the number of companies that have committed to it.

## 5. Conclusions

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an aspirational plan to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The aim of this paper has been to investigate the linkages between the private sector and the SDGs and provide a better understanding of opportunities and challenges in the process of implementation of the SDGs.

This study of the BCtA member companies helps draw three important insights and raises questions for future research. They are summarized as follows: First, and perhaps the main contribution of this study is that it is the first to use the ‘five Ps’ framework to explore 222 companies that are members of BCtA and their commitments to the SDGs. The diversity of companies and perspectives obtained from examples, provide clear and abundant evidence that businesses across the globe are actively engaging in the progress of the SDGs. Overall, the ‘people’ goals have gained priority among companies across all regions, with SDG 1 leading in this category, followed by SDG 5 and 3, respectively. The BCtA members can serve as role models for companies and stakeholders who want to integrate specific SDGs into their business activities, set priorities, and measure the impacts of these initiatives.

Second, the analysis reinforces the idea that companies tend to prioritize the goals that are most relevant to their existing corporate sustainability and core business strategies. Companies’ motivations behind supporting the SDGs lie in aligning and tracking their specific business goals and activities to the relevant SDGs. Companies in this sample tend to identify and apply specific, measurable, action-oriented and time-bound indicators to support a limited number (a maximum of seven SDGs per company) of SDGs. The focus on specific goals with measurable actions motivates companies to develop implementation strategies, allocate resources accordingly, measure progress and help ensure accountability of all stakeholders for achieving the SDGs. Moreover, picking too many goals runs the risk of diluting their efforts and consequently, the results that they can achieve. Hence, to build meaningful public-private partnerships and garner the support of the private sector, it is critical to help companies think about where best to apply and enhance core capabilities of business for SDG impact. There is also a strong need to develop core indicators that will be meaningful for businesses.

Finally, the analysis reveals that some SDGs that have gained priority among business, while others are left behind. Although this research is only exploratory, it allows identification of the most and least committed SDGs at the global level. Future research will be served in exploring how the potential of the private sector can be harnessed in addressing the sustainability challenges in each region. Also, there is a clear need for building collaborations among companies within a sector to find a common framework and develop concrete approaches to support SDGs, specific to their idiosyncratic needs. When companies in a sector align around a common purpose, governments and other stakeholder recognize the gravity of the issue and look to raise their collective ambition and scale.

In conclusion, the private sector is, of course, a vital stakeholder in the SDGs and business opportunities to support the SDGs are real and extensive. This role is even more critical in emerging economies where majority of the business activities support the BoP population while advancing the SDGs. It is encouraging that the private sector is making considerable progress as a powerful global agent in securing a more sustainable future for humanity and the planet.

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