2020–2021
SDG SCAN
SUMMARY
REPORT
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VRIJE
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SUSTAINABILITY
LEADERSHIP HUB

ASI Amsterdam
Sustainability Institute

VU

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SDG Scan is a sustainability consulting methodology developed by the VU Sustainability Leadership Hub and the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute via the framework of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Its main objective is to help organisations see opportunities for sustainable change within their business by offering recommendations on how to tackle their own specific challenges in ways that align with their values and create opportunities for sustainability transformation. In this way, the SDG Scan helps initiate sustainable change processes within organisations both for challenges faced today, and challenges yet to come.

In November 2020, 162 master students conducted 26 SDG Scans with client organisations based in Europe (including the Netherlands, Germany and Italy), Asia (including India and Thailand) and North America (United States). The most frequently mentioned SDGs were SDG 12, Responsible Consumption and Production (mentioned in 54% of the reports), SDG 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth (mentioned in 38% of the reports), and SDG 3, Good Health and Wellbeing (mentioned in 35% of the reports). All 26 companies participating in the SDG Scan experienced the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and related measures in one way or another. Consequently, the impact of this global societal change shows in the results of the SDG scans: many companies primarily focused on tackling challenges related to social sustainability, and aimed at implementing measures focusing on improving the health and well-being of their employees.

1. THE SDGS AND BUSINESS

1.1 Sustainable Development Along the SDGs

Over the last decades, our planet has been facing increasingly serious economic, social and environmental challenges. Since the late 19th century, the earth's average surface temperature has risen by approximately 1.18 degrees Celsius.[1-2] Moreover, we have lost more than two thirds of our biodiversity,[3] almost 9% of the global population still live in extreme poverty,[4] and some of the most extreme income disparities are emerging.[5] According to Credit Suisse's Global Wealth Report (2020), the world's richest 1% own 44% of the world's wealth; yet, 57% of the entire world's population holds less than 2% of global wealth.[6-7] Despite these worrying statistics, we shouldn't feel disheartened. The progress we have been witnessing on the sustainability front has been unprecedented, and we are now aware of solutions for many of the wicked problems we face; by mobilizing a wide societal collaboration of all affected stakeholders, we have the chance to make a positive difference.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent the global priorities of the coming decade. These 17 goals are deliberately formulated, and contain a series of sub-targets within each broader goal. In addition, the goals are interdependent, and thus touch upon multiple angles of sustainability simultaneously. As a result, the SDGs represent an unparalleled opportunity to halt climate change, alleviate extreme poverty and wealth inequalities, and reverse biodiversity loss.

The SDGs have been approved by all UN governments, but their success strongly depends upon the commitment and collaboration of a wide range of societal actors towards this sustainability mission. Therefore, it is our responsibility, as individuals, communities, organisations, institutions, industries and sectors, to dedicate our time and efforts to work toward a sustainable future for the generations to come.

1 Vostok ice core data; NOAA Mauna Loa CO2 record Gaffney, O.; Steffen, W. (2017). "The Anthropocene equation," The Anthropocene Review (Volume 4, Issue 1, April 2017), 53-61.

2 Climate Change Evidence: How Do We Know? (2021). Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet. https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/

3 IPBES. (2019, May). Summary for policymakers of the global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services.

4 COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021. (2020, October 7). World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021

5 WID - Wealth and Income Database. (2018, April 23). World. WID - World Inequality Database. https://wid.world/world/#sptinc_p99p100_z/US;FR;DE;CN;ZA;GB;WO/last/eu/k/p/yearly/s/false/5.4825/30/curve/false/country

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7 Shorrocks, A. S., Davies, J. D., & Lluberas, R. L. (2020, October). Why wealth matters. The Global wealth report. Credit Suisse. https://www.credit-suisse.com/about-us/en/reports-research/global-wealth-report.html

1.2 SDGs and Sustainable business

Business cannot flourish in an unequal, socially and environmentally troubled world: the future of business entirely depends upon the future of our planet. The Agenda 2030 of the United Nations recognizes that business and commerce play a crucial role in addressing the SDGs. Consequently, business leaders increasingly recognize their role in creating a more peaceful, inclusive and environmentally secure planet and are thus aligning their organisational strategies with the SDGs framework. However, despite 71% of business leaders expressing willingness to engage with the goals when they were first introduced in 2015, only 13% believed their organisations had the necessary resources to do so. Worse still, these numbers have changed minimally in the past few years. Oftentimes organisations lack the concrete resources to help them align their business strategies with global priorities, as well as a sustainability vision to guide them along the process. [8]

1.3 SDG Scan by SLH & ASI

At the VU Amsterdam, the Sustainability Leadership Hub and the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute have co-developed an 'SDG Scan' to accompany organizations in their sustainability journey and guide them on how they can best align their business strategies with global sustainability priorities. The SDG Scan is based on leadership and change management expertise, and works with a systemic approach based on the recognition that the various sustainability challenges and goals are interdependent. In other words, we view the SDGs as an interconnected framework, taking into account the feedback processes, overlaps and possible tensions between the various goals and solutions.

Businesses can address and contribute to an SDG independently, or by collaborating with other organisations. Through project-based partnerships or multi stakeholder platforms, businesses can unite to achieve systemic change through changing their business activities, or becoming part of a larger ecosystem advocating for sustainable development. In order to be successful in this as a business, and contribute to real systemic change, we help organisations identify the ways through which they can best harness their strengths and take responsibility for their weaknesses, thereby enhancing their positive and lowering their negative impact on their social and natural environment.

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[8] GRI, UN Global Compact, World Business Council for Sustainable Development (2015). SDG Compass Guide. www.SDGcompass.org

2. SDG SCAN SUMMARY

2.1 Summary of Findings

In November 2020, 26 SDG Scans were conducted by 162 master students at the VU Amsterdam. As the table below demonstrates, the participating organizations largely differed in size (ranging from over 230,000 employees, to under 50 employees); industry (public sector, education, finance, pharmaceutical, catering, food, IT, cosmetics, textiles); and country of origin (including the United States, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, India and Thailand).
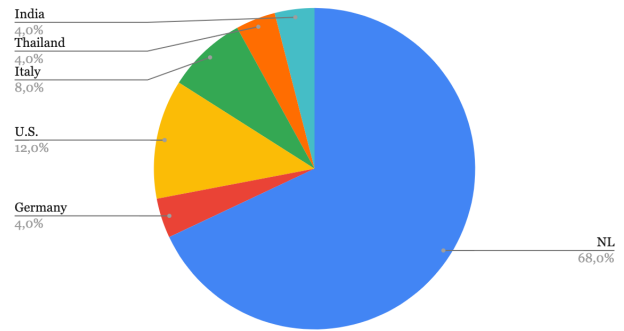

Figure 1: No. of reports vs Country

ORGANIZATION	INDUSTRY	LOCATION	SIZE (NO. OF EMPLOYEES)
1	Public Sector	Netherlands	n/a
2	Education (Art & Design)	Italy	n/a
3	Recruitment, HRM	Netherlands	11000+
4	Floral Industry	Netherlands	20-
5	Financial Services	Netherlands	14000
6	Pharmaceutical Industry/ Glass and Plastic manufacturing	Italy	4200+
7	IT-outsourcing	Netherlands	4300+
8	Food & Beverages	Netherlands	232000+
9	Catering	Netherlands	60-
10	Financial Services	Thailand	1000+
11	Consulting	Netherlands	n/a
12	Food & Beverages	Switzerland	352000+
13	Cosmetics	Netherlands	5-
14	Sports	Netherlands	50+
15	Food & Beverages	Netherlands	200+
16	Business Services (Construction)	Netherlands	50-
17	Wholesale	Netherlands	500-
18	Advertising	United States	100+
19	Clothing	Netherlands	10-
20	Education	Netherlands	10-
21	Consulting	Netherlands	10-
22	Financial Services	India	10-
23	Cybersecurity software	United States	1000+
24	Healthcare	Germany	10-
25	Consulting	Netherlands	50+
26	Specialty Chemicals	United states	50000+

Table 1: Participating organizations and respective industry, location, and size (no. of employees)

2.2 Priority SDGs

Figure 2: SDGs addressed

The 26 SDG Scan reports defined hotspots for change for businesses in **12 of the 17 SDGs**, and, in total, **75** SDG targets were assessed.

Analysis of the 26 SDG scans shows that 4 SDGs were of first priority - i.e. those SDGs that were addressed in 8 reports or more - and 4 SDGs were of second priority - i.e. those SDGs that were addressed in 5 reports or more (see below).

1st priority SDGs

54% of scans identified SDG 12 as priority

38% of scans identified SDG 8 as priority

35% of scans identified SDG 3 as priority

31% of scans identified SDG 17 as priority

2nd priority SDGs

27% of scans identified SDG 4 as priority

23% of scans identified SDG 9 as priority

19% of scans identified SDG 5 as priority

19% of scans identified SDG 13 as priority

2.2.1 Zooming In: First Priority SDGs

SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production

54% of the scans identified SDG 12 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to...

- Play a part in contributing to consumer sustainability awareness
- Source more sustainable materials
- Improve waste management
- Ensure sustainability across supply chain (e.g. incoming packing materials from suppliers)
- Promote sustainable consumption internally

SDG 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth

40% of the scans identified SDG 8 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to...

- Promote safe and healthy working conditions and culture
- Ensure sustainable, controlled and stable growth
- Increase knowledge sharing among employees
- Overcome market insecurity
- Increase internal positive feedback

SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing

35% of the scans identified SDG 3 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to...

- Improve mental well-being and health of employees (connection with SDG 8)
- Improve work-life balance
- Improve well-being of priority stakeholders
- Have an impact on children's health through products

SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals

31% of the scans identified SDG 17 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to...

- Encourage participation and communication with stakeholders to improve services
- Increase transparency between partners
- Accelerate collaborations between EU states
- Promote collaborations to become plastic free

2.2.2 Zooming In: Second Priority SDGs

SDG 4 Quality Education

27% of the scans identified SDG 4 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to...

- Accelerate European collaboration to improve sustainability education
- Appreciate and derive benefit from cultural differences
- Cooperate with external institutions such as training centres
- Educate consumers on benefits of products

SDG 9 Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

23% of scans identified SDG 9 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to..

- Increase infrastructure efficiency
- Build a sustainable infrastructure with eco-friendly logistics
- Increase employee' digital knowledge to innovate and shift to sustainable operations

SDG 5 Gender Equality

19% of the scans identified SDG 5 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to..

- Improve gender equality among workforce
- Attract female employees
- Create a more diverse workforce

SDG 13 Climate Action

19% of the scans identified SDG 5 as a hotspot for change. Companies want to..

- Make supply chains and logistics more ecologically friendly
- Redirect consumption patterns to ecological alternatives

2.3 Case Summary: Oma's Soep

> **Oma's Soep** is a social enterprise that aims to create a community for the elderly, an age group vulnerable to loneliness. They on the one hand sell soup to the catering industry, retail and events through their private company. On the other hand, the "Oma's Soep" Foundation connects youth with the elderly by hosting social cooking activities.

Oma's Soep: Needs, Challenges & Hotspots for Change

Restrictions due to COVID-19 have posed severe obstacles to Oma's Soep's business model, a model that uses community-driven methods to carry out its activities. COVID-19 restrictions turned maintaining and starting collaborations with companies difficult, which negatively impacted soup sales and caused the suspension of core aspects of their business, such as cooking days for the elderly. A strategic plan in line with the UN Sustainable Development goals (SDGs) was formulated by student consultants to help tackle the challenges brought on by COVID-19. Four priority SDGs (SDG 3, 12, 13 and 17) and a number of priority targets were identified in line with Oma's Soep mission. These can be seen in Table 2.

The recommendations on how to tackle the companies' challenges while contributing to the priority SDGs and targets centered around finding creative ways for the company to continue engaging both familiar and new target audiences.

The recommendations aimed at contributing to the priority SDGs while also advancing three driving values/objectives of Oma's Soep: encouraging creative and low-cost ways to promote social engagement; maintaining and initiating partnerships with other entities; and emphasising material sustainability.

Areas for recommendations	Related SDGs	Targets
Partnerships with Grocers	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION, 13 CLIMATE ACTION, 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	12.2 Sustainable Management 12.3 Half Global Food Waste 12.8 Sustainable Awareness and Lifestyle 13 Climate Action 17.17 Effective Civil Society Partnership
Volunteer Delivery	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION, 17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS	12.8 Sustainable Awareness and Lifestyle 17.17 Effective Civil Society Partnerships
Collaborative Cookbook & Online Classes	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	3. Good Health and Well-Being

Table 2: Recommendations and related SDGs & targets

2.4 Implications of Covid-19 on the SDG Scan

The year of 2020 has been a challenge for everyone due to the unfortunate outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, all organisations participating in the SDG Scan were affected by the pandemic in one way or another. Specifically, all of the Scans mentioned one of the following challenges:

• Abruptly changing and adapting to working in an online environment
• Absence of informal interaction with colleagues
• Limited communication
• Feelings of isolation
• Difficulty of maintaining an appropriate work-life balance

In this light, it will be interesting to observe in upcoming (and hopefully COVID-19 restrictions-free) scans what new challenges arise, how priorities will shift and what subsequent SDGs will be addressed. For example, following the new Single Use Plastic (SUP) directive to be implemented by July 2021, future scans may focus on SDG 13: Protect the Planet; SDG 14: Life Below Water, or SDG 15: Life on Land.

 In any case, SLH is excited to help more organizations become sustainable, and ultimately, contribute to improving our future.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The SDG Scan is not only an opportunity for students to get acquainted with the world of sustainability consulting, but also to deepen their understanding of the complexities of the sustainability transition and sustainability leadership. From this perspective, we hope students can find a purpose and passion for sustainability, and ultimately, find the sustainable leader that lives within each of us.

The next round of SDG Scans are scheduled to be conducted in the fall of 2021. If your organisation would be interested in participating in an SDG Scan, you can apply via the SLH website vuslh.org/sdg-scan. For more general information, feel free to visit our website, linked in page, or contact us directly at https://www.vuslh.org/ .

VU Sustainability Leadership Hub: About Us

The VU Sustainability Leadership Hub (SLH) is a centre for sustainability education and advocacy. SLH is contributing to the targets of the VU 2020-2026 strategy by mainstreaming sustainability into educational, leadership and organisational practices.

Vision & Mission

Our vision at SLH is to foster a thriving, healthy and caring VU committed to the sustainability transition, by awakening the sustainability leader within each of us. Our means to achieve this vision is by educating, inspiring and mobilizing a VU community ready to make sustainable impact across fields, sectors and industries.

Why SLH?

Our educational and evidence-based approach is designed for a systemic impact: at SLH, knowledge transfer derives from expertise in (sustainability) leadership, (change) management and participatory methods.