

The Global Agenda Requires Rigorous Measurement:

# The Contribution of the Social Progress Index to the 2030 Agenda

“In an increasingly performance-oriented society, having the right metrics is very important. What we measure affects what we decide and do. If we use incorrect measurements, we will drive the wrong priorities.”

–Joseph Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi

## The SDGs and the necessity of a measurement tool for their success:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an ambitious commitment by the world’s leaders to improve the wellbeing of all people and ensure environmental sustainability by 2030. They represent an unprecedented universal agenda that embraces economic, environmental and social aspects of the progress of societies – an agenda that is people- and planet-centered and applies to all countries, irrespective of their level of wealth.

As a complex set of goals and targets, the SDGs intrinsically pose numerous challenges to world leaders, businesses and civil society organizations alike. While these challenges are perhaps overshadowed by the historic ambition of the goals, they nevertheless present significant risks for the implementation – and, consequently, achievement – of the SDGs.

How can the SDGs be translated into specific actions for countries, cities and communities? How will various actors and initiatives align around 17 different goals? What does success look like? How are the goals measured and understood in different corners of the world?

While there is no simple answer to these questions, the **Social Progress Index** tackles many of the challenges. It is a proven tool that helps countries, regions, cities and communities achieve the goals. Sitting alongside economic indicators as a core benchmark for national performance, the Index provides a systematic, empirical foundation that can inform the 2030 Agenda. The Social Progress Index represents the first comprehensive framework for measuring social progress that is independent of, and complimentary to, traditional economic indicators.

It is certainly important that an official SDG monitoring and performance tracking system is established and followed. However, the Social Progress Index also offers a well suited rapid-assessment approach to help facilitate the understanding, engagement and implementation of the SDGs.

Currently, the Social Progress Index measures outcomes related to all 17 goals and reflects 131 out of 169 targets in one simple framework, which makes the implementation, visualization and actionability of the SDGs a tangible reality for social innovators all over the world.



## Addressing four challenges for SDG implementation:

**Eliminating silos:** The Social Progress Index facilitates cross-sectoral stakeholder engagement, which will be critical to achieving the SDGs. Thanks to its comprehensive framework, which can be easily understood by diverse stakeholders accustomed to seeing problems through different lenses, the Index represents a shared foundation for collective impact projects.

**London, United Kingdom:** the borough of Barking and Dagenham – one of the fastest changing areas of the country – has adopted the Social Progress Index framework to ensure the council’s plan benefits all residents and leaves no one behind.

**Rio de Janeiro, Brazil:** the Instituto Pereira Passos, the municipal administration’s head of information production and development planning, brought together over 50 organizations from the public and private sectors to contribute to the creation of a Social Progress Index for Rio’s 32 administrative regions. The Index serves as a powerful decision-making tool for the local government, and enables citizens to see for themselves the challenges facing different parts of their city and verify that public resources are being allocated appropriately.

**Localizing implementation:** The Social Progress Index is a flexible tool that can be adapted to any level of geography and any sector, from communities to metropolises to public institutions to local businesses. This ensures that development initiatives, including SDG implementation, account for and address local needs and challenges. Latin America has led the way in using the Index to localize the SDGs, and leaders from across the world can learn from these examples:

**Goal 6 – Water and Sanitation:** Alarmed by the low levels of social progress in an important region for their supply chain, Coca-Cola and Natura partnered with Ipsos to create a community-level Index in the Amazon region of Carauari, Brazil. This Index has been the foundation for a new development program – a collaboration between citizens, government, business and civil society. Guided by the social progress data, this program has improved water

and sanitation infrastructure, providing households with consistent sources of clean water for the first time. They also constructed new river piers to improve transportation during seasonal flooding and increase connectivity with neighboring communities.

**Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-Being:** In Paraguay, the national government has incorporated the Social Progress Index into its National Development Plan 2030 as a tool to guide public and private investments and to track progress. The insights revealed by the Social Progress Index are already leading to concrete actions: the government doubled budget allocation for nutrition programs and has set a target to reduce child malnutrition to 2% or less by 2018.

**Goal 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure:** In Costa Rica, a Social Progress Index for the country's 81 cantons has been adopted as the basis of the new national social innovation strategy Costa Rica Propone, which is led by the Vice President of the Republic and the Presidential Council for Innovation and Human Talent. This Index is part of a national collaborative process to determine the best tools to measure and report on SDG implementation at the local level.

**Goal 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities:** With over one-half of the global population living in urban settlements, cities are key pathways to development and to achieving the SDGs. Making cities safe and sustainable means ensuring access to safe and affordable housing, investing in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in a way that is both participatory and inclusive. For these reasons, the Social Progress Index has been used to inform and drive policy in cities like Bogotá, Medellín and Manizales in Colombia, Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, London in England, Kopavogur in Iceland, and Madrid in Spain, among others.

**Goal 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth:** In Costa Rica, the Social Progress Index in Tourism Destinations has given the government new insights about the impact of tourism on local communities and led to a review of the National Tourism Strategy. For this innovative approach to understanding the interplay between social and economic progress in the tourism sector, the government of Costa Rica received an Award for Innovation in Public Policy & Governance at the UN World Tourism Organization Awards.

**The Measurement Challenge:** According to the latest communication by the Expert Group on SDG Indicators, barely a third of the 200+ indicators can currently be measured in a rigorous manner for a majority of countries. The Social Progress Index uses 51 indicators drawn from official UN data but also from globally respected research institutions and polling organizations. This flexibility on data sources allows the Social Progress Index to provide a comprehensive estimate of SDG performance even where the formal indicators do not yet exist and customize them for the local context.

**India:** the Institute for Competitiveness India, in support of the government's think tank – NITI Aayog – is using the Social Progress Index in a multi-year endeavor to assess progress in 28 states, 562 districts and 50 cities. The Index captures all 17 SDGs, as well as specific targets, enabling policymakers and business leaders to understand and take action on key priority areas.

**Salta, Argentina:** the province of Salta created a provincial Social Progress Index composed of 52 indicators aligned with the SDGs. The provincial government relied on the Index as they designed Plan Salta 2030, their newly-adopted sustainable development strategy, and will continue to use it as they track the results of their development initiatives. On the national level, a Social Progress Network led by the Secretary of Planning (The Cabinet of the Ministers), and comprising approximately 90 organizations, is mapping social and environmental metrics to effectively monitor efforts to meet the SDGs.

**The Aggregation Challenge:** Unlike the Sustainable Development Goals, which are by definition a list of goals rather a conceptual model, the Social Progress Index has been designed and tested over a number years to provide an aggregate assessment of country performance. Because it was designed as a composite indicator, the Index can provide a snapshot of a country's overall progress towards the SDGs in a way that the goals themselves, with their wide array of unweighted indicators, cannot.

Many governments have committed to earmark spending according to the SDGs. However, an increase in government spending may not lead to an improvement in people's lives. The Social Progress Index **measures outcomes, not inputs**, in order to more accurately measure life as everyday people experience it. What really matters is whether people have adequate shelter or live long and healthy lives, not how much money the government allocates for housing or healthcare. In the context of the SDGs, this means that the Index captures real progress towards the goals rather than the effort expended to achieve them.

Social Progress Indexes allow for the selection of indicators in alignment with SDGs for specific contexts and regions. Each index becomes a customized tool for social change that captures what really matters to local people. Some examples of local Social Progress Indexes that have been created or are in development include: Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Regions of Peru, Provinces of Thailand, regions of the European Union and US states. These indexes are providing leaders around the world with the comprehensive measure they need to guide and benchmark their efforts to achieve the global goals.

To learn more about the Social Progress Index and how it can help the world achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, please contact us:



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