How business leadership can advance Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities

Over half of the world’s population live in urban areas; this is expected to increase to two thirds by 2050. Cities are centers of commerce, generating more than 80 per cent of global GDP, and play a key role in boosting productivity needed for economic development. Urbanization can make it easier to put in place the infrastructure needed for essential services such as grid-connected energy, water and sanitation. However, urbanization also brings significant challenges. All over the world, cities are facing critical levels of air pollution. Many cities in developing countries face rapidly growing numbers leading to slum dwellers and unplanned urban sprawl, as infrastructure provision has not kept pace with population growth. Much of this urban sprawl is in geographies vulnerable to disasters, risks that are being magnified by climate change. These challenges call for better urban planning and management to make the world’s urban spaces more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Businesses are core to the development of cities, livelihood, and services to urban populations. They are well positioned to deliver on Goal 11’s promise of universal access to quality housing, transport, green spaces, and utilities including electricity, water, and waste management services. Businesses can also leverage their convening power and expertise to protect and invest in cultural and natural heritage. Further, they can play a central role in supporting access to essential services across the workplace, marketplace and community.

Leading companies can contribute to Goal 11 through research, development, and deployment of products and services that improve access to resilient buildings, transport, green spaces, and utilities including electricity, water, and waste management services. Businesses can also leverage their convening power and expertise to protect and invest in cultural and natural heritage. Further, they can play a central role in supporting access to essential services across the workplace, marketplace and community.

As the social and environmental impact of rapid urbanisation increases, businesses can benefit from opportunities to develop more connected, resilient and sustainable urban areas. A concerted effort to improve the sustainability of communities will necessitate investment across a range of sectors including transport, energy, waste management and recreation. The next 10 years will require $78 trillion of investment in city infrastructure. This is likely to be delivered through private sector solutions including public private partnerships. A concerted effort to improve the sustainability of communities will necessitate investment across a range of sectors including transport, energy, waste management and recreation. Benefits of more sustainable cities and communities include a healthier more productive work force, and improved labour market functioning and market access as a result of better transport links.

By improving mobility and reducing pollution, developing more sustainable cities will contribute to the SDGs related to health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), sustainable energy (Goal 7), decent work (Goal 8) and equality (Goals 5 and 10). Life on land (Goal 15) and climate action (Goal 13) can be positively impacted by ensuring that urban areas have a reduced environmental footprint. While investment in sustainable cities will improve the quality of life for their residents, it may also have negative impacts on housing affordability, the tax burden, and accelerate urban migration. This may lead to pressures on employment (Goal 8), food (Goal 11), water (Goal 6) and peace (Goal 16). Leading companies contribute inclusive, sustainable infrastructure that manages these risks to deliver prosperity and stability.
## Targets of Goal 11

1. **Ensure universal access to quality housing**
2. **Ensure universal access to quality transport**
3. **Ensure inclusive and sustainable urbanisation, planning and management**
4. **Protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage**
5. **Reduce human impacts of disasters**
6. **Reduce environmental impact of cities**
7. **Provide universal access to green and public spaces**

## Business Actions

1. Research, develop, and deploy products and services which improve access to resilient buildings, transport, green spaces, and utilities
2. Protect and invest in cultural and natural heritage
3. Support access to essential services across the workplace, marketplace, and community
### Intentional
- Is your company committed to supporting the achievement of Goal 11? Have you developed a holistic strategy that reflects this commitment, covering end-to-end operations and the wider community?
- Are you committed to learn from your actions and do you have processes in place to improve them accordingly?
- Is your strategy supported by the highest levels of management, including the Board of Directors?

### Ambitious
- Do your actions achieve long-term outcomes that greatly exceed those resulting from current industry practice?
- Are your actions aligned with what is needed to achieve Goal 11?

### Consistent
- Is support for Goal 11 embedded across all organizational functions?
- Are staff and board incentives aligned with achieving Goal 11?

### Collaborative
- Do you proactively look for opportunities to partner with Governments, UN agencies, suppliers, civil society organizations, industry peers and other stakeholders to inform how to advance Goal 11?

### Accountable
- Do you publicly express your commitment to advance Goal 11?
- Do you identify, monitor, and report on impacts, including potentially adverse impacts?
- Do you mitigate risks associated with your action?
- Do you remediate negative impacts associated with this action?
- Do you engage stakeholders in a meaningful way?

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### Key Considerations for Goal 11

**Actions to deliver sustainable cities and communities require a top-level strategic commitment to ensure that all parts of the organization are motivated and incentivized to contribute for the long-term, in accordance with the long lifetimes of city and infrastructure assets.**

**Ambition on Goal 11 requires companies to take a holistic view of urban and infrastructure needs, taking all stakeholders into account, and providing solutions that can have the long-lasting impacts required for achieving the Goal 11 outcomes.**

**Consistency is essential as the complex nature of city and infrastructure investment requires many different departments, including procurement, legal, and government relations. Ensuring sustainability requires that sustainability is ingrained in all the company’s departments.**

**Collaboration on Goal 11 means companies will partner and engage with local, national and regional Governments to prioritise infrastructure and urban planning projects to deliver the maximum access to services given available resources, in a way that is compatible with sustainable development.**

**City and infrastructure projects have, due to their sheer size, lifetime, and frequency of use, a significant risk of negative impacts on people and communities which should be carefully managed. Safeguards must be in place, and companies must report on progress towards their goals.**
**How taking action on Goal 11 is interconnected with other Goals**

The Global Goals are inherently interconnected. Action taken toward one Goal can support or hinder the achievement of others. Identifying and addressing these interconnections will help business to build holistic and systemic solutions that amplify progress and minimize negative impacts. To help build a greater understanding, we have illustrated some of the ways in which the Goals connect. These are not exhaustive, and we encourage business to consider how they apply in their own operations.

### Maximise likelihood of positive impact on:

By improving access to the services offered in cities and communities, progress on this goal will reduce inequalities tied to income levels or residential location, which are often higher in urban areas than others (Goal 10). Improved connectivity through transport infrastructure and smarter urban design links people to employment (Goal 8), education (Goal 4), health (Goal 3), energy (Goal 7) and green space (Goal 15). Reduced emissions through sustainable infrastructure and design (Goal 9) and less demand for transport will also support climate action commitments (Goal 13).

### Minimise risk of negative impact on:

While investment in sustainable cities will improve the quality of life for their residents, it may also have negative impacts on housing affordability and the tax burden, and accelerate urban migration. Concentrating increasing amounts of economic activity in urban areas may imply that rural areas lag behind, increasing inequalities between rural and urban areas (Goal 10) and poverty in rural areas (Goal 1). Local communities at the fringes of expanding urban developments may be displaced with infringement on their human rights (Goals 1, 2, and 3) and losing access to decent jobs (Goal 8). Rapid urbanization and infrastructure build may further negatively impact on the environment if risks of negative impacts are not carefully managed (Goals 14 and 15).
BUSINESS ACTION 1
Research, develop, and deploy products and services that improve access to resilient buildings, transport, green spaces, and utilities

Businesses own property, develop physical assets, and offer services throughout the urban space, positioning them to have a large role in shaping sustainable urban areas and connecting residents to essential services. All businesses are expected to show that urban projects do not negatively impact on environment and social assets, including natural and cultural heritage sites. Leading businesses can research, develop, and deploy products that contribute to the development of sustainable, resilient urban areas. In the construction sector, business leadership can include the development and delivery of resilient infrastructure, buildings, and materials that maximize mobility and access to green space while minimizing resource use, pollution, and negative impacts on vulnerable groups in society. This would include minimizing impacts of infrastructure projects’ end-of-life. Companies involved in service provision can lead through developing innovative ways to extend their offerings to consumers across all geographies and socio-economic strata. In doing so, it is important to collaborate with other stakeholders involved in urban planning and other activities in the urban space to understand the areas of need and opportunity. Given the challenge of sustainable urbanization in developing countries in particular, leading companies would seek out ways to tailor products and services for use in these areas.

Example practice

- A sports team designs a multi-use stadium which provides local populations with access to green space for recreation when events are not scheduled.
- An infrastructure company ensures that waste management strategies encompass the entire process from demolition, disposal of waste, waste haulage, and final disposal. From the outset, it considers the type of waste that will be created in the demolition process in construction design.
- An agriculture company develops innovative vertical farming products using closed-loop irrigation systems to provide access to local, fresh vegetables in urban areas throughout the year.
- A financial institution partners with city government to structure and launch a green bond to attract investment for sustainable infrastructure within city region.

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Collaboration: with a high level of public and shared spaces, urban areas involve a large group of stakeholders that must be included in decisions on how to structure and connect residents to services. Governments, private sector, and local communities all have different needs from urban areas that must be balanced.

Interconnectedness: delivering products for sustainable urban areas coincides with many other SDGs, including those related to access to employment (Goal 8), healthcare and exercise (Goal 3), educational institutions (Goal 4), electricity (Goal 7) and green space (Goal 15). Delivering sustainable infrastructure products supports Goal 9 and improved connectivity in urban areas will reduce the need for long-distance travel, which can contribute to climate change Goals (Goal 13).
BUSINESS ACTION 2
Protect and invest in cultural and natural heritage

Cultural and natural heritage sites provide livelihoods for local communities and valuable educational and recreational experiences for visitors. All businesses should, at a minimum, identify the impacts of their operations on cultural and natural heritage assets, including through using environmental impact assessments. Leading businesses leverage their reach, expertise, and resources to connect residents and visitors to heritage assets to ensure their preservation and enhancement. This could include investing in environmental protection, supporting museums, and creating transport infrastructure in communities surrounding own and supply chain operations. They could lead through implementation of policies and practices that factor natural capital and cultural heritage into corporate decision making, including physical design and building the capacity of suppliers to do the same.

Example practice

• A property developer designs and manages a business park around natural features to preserve natural ecosystems and existing habitats, as well as ancient land structures
• An outdoor retail company invests a significant share of its profits in preserving natural and cultural heritage sites featured in marketing materials
• A hotel company coordinates across its supply chain to eliminate wastewater discharge and air pollution near UNESCO World Heritage sites

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Collaboration: action should involve long-term partnerships with all stakeholders involved in governance of cultural and natural heritage, including local and national governments, civil society organizations, and local communities

Accountability: companies should have adequate safeguards in place and carefully manage the risks of negative impacts on human rights and vulnerable ecosystems

Interconnectedness: implementing this business action can also help deliver Goal 15 (life on land) and Goal 14 (life on water) by respecting and protecting natural habitat areas, supporting biodiversity and the natural ecosystems on land and in water
BUSINESS ACTION 3
Support access to essential services across the workplace, marketplace, and community

In many communities, essential services such as education, housing, and healthcare may not be available or may not be of sufficient quality. Leading companies can take action to ensure that employees across own operations and the supply chain have access to quality essential services by directly providing those services in places where they are not available. They can also design and market affordable and accessible services that reach beyond their own employees to address gaps in service provision in the communities surrounding their operations. Further, they can lead on providing access to green spaces across the workplace, marketplace, and community. In all cases, leading companies take care not to interfere with existing initiatives from Governments and others by consulting all relevant stakeholders to understand where they might complement them.

Example practice

- An insurance company works on an app that would connect women in danger or in need to the nearest police station, hospitals, banks, law and order institutions, and vocational training institutes. The app aims to empower women and promote gender equality in locally

- A national telecommunications company partners with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the relevant government agency, to create an automated registration system that gathers birth information via mobile phone at the community level, and a web based application at hospitals, creating a legal identity record for each person. Legal identity is essential to ensuring access to basic services such as health care and education, and for the protection of individuals’ fundamental rights, including against exploitation and violence. It provides individuals with the ability to contribute to the economy through employment and consumption of goods and services.

Consider the leadership qualities and interconnectedness of your action, including...

Ambition: ambitious action results in outcomes that are aligned with what is needed for achieving Goal 11. Ambition in most cases would entail that action reaches well beyond own operations to include the value chain and communities surrounding end-to-end operations

Interconnectedness: providing services supports the delivery of several other Goals, including decent work (Goal 8), access to health (Goal 3), nutrition (Goal 2) and educational training (Goal 4). Company-specific services should not undermine publicly provided services including housing, transport and food systems
References

SDG Compass

UN Global Compact Industry Matrix

Global Opportunity Explorer

Navigating the SDGs: a business guide to engaging with the UN Global Goals

Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, SDG 11

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Green infrastructure: connected and multifunctional landscapes

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Business for the Rule of Law Framework – Business Examples