

Sustainability Matters: Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



SUSTAINABILITY STARTS WITH CORE VALUES

Sustainability and social responsibility are increasingly at the core of a business' values and included in a client's project brief. Indeed, the decisions and work practices of architects and specifiers can have a positive or negative impact on environmental, social and economic sustainability. Building design, materials, technology, fixtures and fittings, as well as the choice of collaborators, such as builders and engineers, can have short-term and long-term impacts on sustainability.

Architects and specifiers can have significant influence in promoting awareness of these issues, educating clients and industry professionals, and moving the design and development of the built environment in a more sustainable direction. They should therefore be knowledgeable of ethical and sustainable design options, as well as local and global initiatives to achieve more sustainable development. This white paper will introduce the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and how architects and specifiers can help contribute to a more sustainable future.





A VISION FOR A BETTER WORLD: THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, are a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development and a more sustainable future for all. The 17 SDGs form part of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. They address global challenges related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace and justice.¹ The worldwide call to action seeks to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure all people live in a peaceful and prosperous world by 2030.²

The ambitious targets recognise that sustainable development must balance social, economic and environmental factors, and that action in one area will affect outcomes in others.³ Ending

poverty and hunger is intrinsically connected with improving health, education, equality and economic growth, while also dealing with climate change and preserving the natural environment.⁴

The planning, design and construction of the built environment plays a role in achieving every SDG, to a greater or lesser degree. The built environment is a major consumer of energy and natural resources, a producer of waste and it can negatively affect wellbeing and exacerbate inequalities.⁵ However the built environment can also positively contribute to sustainable development with architectural and design solutions that help preserve the planet and improve quality of life.

ACHIEVING A BETTER WORLD: THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

SDGs 1, 2 and 3 are designed to end poverty, **end hunger and promote health and wellbeing**. More than 700 million people live in extreme poverty and do not have access to the most basic needs, such as healthcare, education, food, water and sanitation.⁶ The built environment can reduce the impact of poverty through safe and affordable housing, buildings and institutions that support good health and the wellbeing of people of all ages and abilities.

Education is a crucial investment in the future and the foundation of sustainable development. SDG 4 ensures inclusive and equitable **quality education** and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. This will improve quality of life and help people develop innovative solutions to the challenges facing the world. This SDG is designed to ensure equal access to education and gaining relevant skills, and to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.⁷

Quality education goes hand in hand with SDG 5, achieving **gender equality**. Providing women and girls with access to education, healthcare, decent work and political and economic representation inarguably benefits societies and humanity.⁸ Promoting diversity and supporting female equality in the workplace, including pay parity, is crucial to ending gender-based discrimination. Buildings and urban areas must also be inclusive, safe and incorporate the necessary and appropriate facilities for all genders.

SDG 6 seeks to make **clean water and sanitation** available to all. There has been great progress in the past decade to provide clean, accessible water and adequate sanitation, however there is more work to do.⁹ Buildings and urban areas are being designed to collect and purify rainwater, and more attention is being given to the sanitation and hygiene needs of people of all genders, abilities and age.

SDG 7 ensures access to **affordable and clean energy**. Highly pertinent to the architecture and construction industry, increased energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy is crucial to sustainable development, preserving the environment and stimulating new economic and job opportunities.¹⁰ Buildings and infrastructure must be designed to limit energy consumption through passive solar design and choice of materials and by integrating renewable energy and innovative technology.

SDG 8 promotes **decent work and economic growth**. People of all ages, abilities and genders should have access to full and productive employment, and jobs should stimulate the economy while not harming the environment.¹¹ The considered design of workplace environments will support healthy and productive work, with good working conditions aiding a company's economic growth.

Decent work and economic growth will help support and stimulate SDG 9: **industry, innovation and infrastructure**. This goal is focused on building resilient infrastructure, fostering innovation and promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation.¹² The building industry consumes large

amounts of natural resources and energy and produces massive amounts of waste. The development of products, new ways of producing and assembling, and safer, healthier and more sustainable solutions will improve the built environment and economic growth without detriment to the natural environment. This requires research, development and quality education and training (SDG 4) at all levels.¹³

Economic, social and environmental development is required to achieve SDG 10: **reduced inequality**. Related to the architecture industry, building design and development must meet the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised populations or it can otherwise amplify and reinforce inequalities.¹⁴ Building access, such as steps and stairs, can impede the movement of older people and people with disabilities, and the poor design of fixtures and fittings, such as bathroom products, can potentially inhibit their use.

Similarly, SDG 11 – **sustainable cities and communities** – promotes built environments that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Five billion people are projected to live in cities by 2030.¹⁵ Urban planning, management practices and building design will be crucial to achieving sustainable cities and communities that are accessible, affordable and support health and wellbeing.

This will be achieved, in part, through **responsible consumption and production**. SDG 12 promotes resource and energy efficiency along the entire supply chain, from producer to final consumer. Achieving this goal requires educating consumers on sustainable consumption and lifestyles, providing them with adequate information through standards and labels and engaging in sustainable public procurement.¹⁶ The building industry is a major contributor of resource use and waste. Designing for a long lifetime, low maintenance and potential adaptation of existing buildings is key to sustainable consumption and production in the built environment.¹⁷

The need for **climate action** – SDG 13 – is urgent in order to combat climate change and its impacts. Without action, it will continue to disrupt national economies and affect lives long into the future. Reducing the CO₂ footprint of the built environment and designing buildings for the changing climate will help achieve this goal, as will SDGs 14 and 15: **life below water and life on land**. Careful management is required to conserve oceans, seas and marine resources, and to protect and restore forests, deserts, land, ecosystems and biodiversity. The preservation and sustainable use of these resources is necessary for climate action and the health of the planet and civilisation.

SDG 16 promotes **peace and justice-strong institutions**, which are necessarily for inclusive and fair societies, while SDG 17 recognises that a joint effort is required to achieve the SDGs. Sustainable development needs global **partnerships** between governments, the business sector, civil society, academia, communities, families and individuals.¹⁸ At the global, regional, national and local level, these partnerships need to be built upon shared principles, values, vision and goals.



Adaptability helps reduce inequality by making people more self-reliant.

PRESSALIT'S COMMITMENT TO THE UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN SDGs provide a framework through which governments, businesses, organisations and individuals can contribute to sustainable development and a more sustainable future. Social responsibility has always been an important part of the company culture of Danish manufacturer Pressalit since its establishment in 1954. The production of premium commercial bathroom solutions is based on the core values of dignity, design and equal access.

In 2016, Pressalit selected three SDGs that address areas close to its core business, and where its knowledge and experience can make the greatest positive impact on sustainable development. These goals are key areas for new and progressive projects and initiatives, as Pressalit does its small part to create a better world and be a role model in its field.

SDG 4: Quality education: Pressalit develops educational opportunities within the company to help staff learn and grow. Pressalit recruits refugees and unskilled workers; trains them to become skilled workers; and provides job sharing arrangements that enable employees to also attend school and gain further education. Pressalit's approach to education also comprises an internship program that spans marketing, communications, engineering and supply chain management providing interns with knowledge and hands-on experience.

SDG 6: Clean water and sanitation: There is a greater demand in commercial, education and aged-care sectors for more inclusive solutions and flexible environments that cater for the needs of people with disabilities, allowing them

to learn, work and live without extra assistance. Pressalit is a leader in accessible bathroom solutions, producing products that meet the needs of elderly, less-abled and vision-impaired users. Its international Changing Places campaign helped raise awareness of the need for larger accessible toilet and changing facilities for people with disabilities.

SDG 12: Responsible production and consumption: Pressalit invests in new technology that increases the energy efficiency of production and minimises environmental impact. Highly skilled engineers experiment with low-carbon, high-performance materials to reduce emissions and waste in production. Its toilet seats are made from thermoplastic, an oil and gas product that contains no environmentally hazardous substances and is 100 per cent safe for human use. Packaging is FSC-certified, with 71 per cent of packaging made from recycled materials.

Pressalit is committed to creating a better and more sustainable future at local and global levels. In 2002, the company integrated the 10 principles of the UN Global Compact into its Code of Conduct. This shapes the internal ethical rules for all employees and suppliers, as Pressalit only works with suppliers who comply with the 10 principles.

Pressalit products have been used in Australia for more than 30 years. Its products meet the sustainability and social responsibility values at the core of many architecture firms, specifiers and clients. It believes that if everyone does their part for sustainable development, it will be a more sustainable future for all.

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