

## What they do not know: Strategic Priorities for Leadership Advancement of SDGs

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The pandemic has literally brought home the saying that “you are only as healthy as your sickest neighbors.” Using a global frame, this is also true about sustainability –we are only as sustainable, inclusive, and just, as our most marginalized communities. It is unacceptable that marginalized perspectives are not heard. From Asante (1987) “not knowing that they do not know what it is that they do not know, yet they speak as if they know what all of us need to know.” To engage with marginalized communities, means to empower them through the power of representation, power to question and challenge common practice, and power to have their concerns prioritized for action. Research shows that to be heard, marginalized voices need allies and alliances as well as high status disciplinary experts and other leaders to recognize, validate, and follow through. Without such partnerships, knowledge and contributions will be ignored, discounted, dismissed, co-opted and appropriated. Too often in the past, power has been neglected from consideration of the SDGs, especially by the global north, including scientists, our funding sources, publication venues, and meetings.

It is imperative that we establish strategic partnerships to identify, amplify and support marginalized voices as well as to incentivize promotion of inclusion, co-creation and recognition in collaboration. The recent American Academy of Arts and Science’s Emerging Partnerships analysis and report found that many countries in the global south are using the SDGs as a frame for organizing science and technology priorities. This means that, to be supportive partners, the scientific enterprise of countries like the United States needs to understand the SDGs. It also means that the global north needs to invest in development of young scientists, particularly women and those in other marginalized groups, in order to lay the foundation for the future.

While the framing of the SDGs is a powerful organizing principle, it is critical that leadership apply the lenses of gender and marginalization, across all of the goals. Along with others, the Gender Advisory Board of the UN Commission on Science & Technology for Development and Gender InSITE (gender in science, innovation, technology and engineering) have drawn attention to the fact that water, food, energy, and sanitation are women’s work in most places. Women and other marginalized groups need to be heard in the agenda setting, prioritization, research and development of technologies as well as the siting and maintenance of facilities.

Going beyond being heard, leadership is needed to actualize the power of knowledge. Research and education partnerships can aid in the design, implementation and impact of SDG initiatives through advancing the concept of inclusion through research and information sharing. As just one example, several of the student proposals in response to an international ideathon “Envision 2050: Designing Sustainable Futures,” focused on ways to monitor hyper local conditions and provide alerts to communities about issues such as air pollution and heat extremes. Because most of the time the evidence does not speak for itself, support also needs to be provided to emerging scientists to conduct the necessary research with the intent that local organizations and governments will have the foundation to advocate for mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Partnerships that are representative from the beginning, and action-oriented, allow us to find mutually beneficial outcomes and a way forward that is equitable and inclusive.

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