



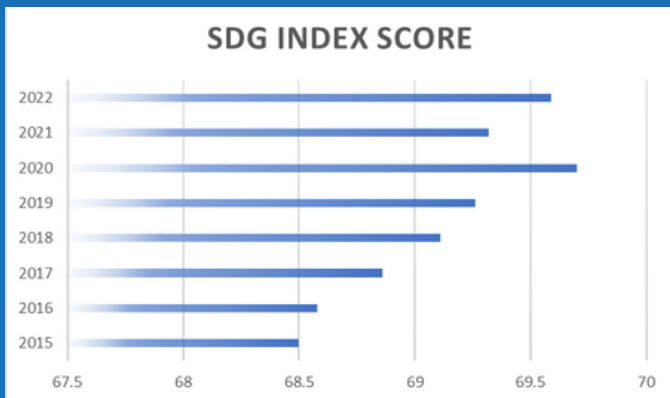
A partnership between United Nations Jamaica and the Department of Economics at The University of the West Indies (UWI) Mona

# Six Transitions for Accelerating the SDGs



Recent global assessments on the Sustainable Development Goals show that at the half-way point, progress is behind where we should be. The 2023 Sustainable Development Report showed that only 1 in 8 of the SDG targets were on track and UNCTAD's 2023 World Investment Report further revealed that the annual investment deficit to achieve the SDGs had increased to US\$4 Trillion up from the US\$2.5 Trillion in 2015 when the SDGs were adopted. Jamaica's SDG performance currently ranks 82nd globally. While its SDG performance index score (69.6) lies above other Small Island Developing States (63.9) and Caribbean (65.9) averages, it is evident that with the clock ticking, substantial challenges remain for it to deliver on its Goals. Time is very much of the essence.

Graph 1: Jamaica's Overall SDG Performance 2015-2022



Over the past few year's attention has turned to exploring measures that have the potential to accelerate countries' performances towards the Goals. Collectively termed here as SDG aggregators, such nuanced thinking has sought to uncover sustainable development interventions that when rolled out in countries can engage and enhance groups of goals together. In 2019, Economist Jeffrey Sachs and others published an article in the international journal, Nature Sustainability, titled 'Six Transformation to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals' following calls for greater support on how to operationalise measures to achieve the 17 Goals.

By prioritising investments on the six building blocks of SDG achievement - education, gender, and inequality; health, well-being, and demography; energy decarbonization and sustainable industry; sustainable food, land, water, and oceans; sustainable cities and communities; and digital revolution for sustainable development - countries would be better placed to meet their SDG targets.

As the analysis of the Six Transformations drew insights from the many previous studies that have explored the interconnectedness of the SDGs, new work has refined the six transformations to highlight key transitions that can have catalytic and multiplier effects across the SDGs. Titled 'Six Transitions: Investment Pathways to Deliver the SDGs' this new guidance to countries both recognises that the Global Goals are deeply intertwined and that an integrated policy approach is needed to achieve the SDGs. Since the Six Transitions build upon previous analyses, it is not surprising that they overlap and affirm the guidance of others. These six investment pathways are food systems; energy access and affordability; digital connectivity; education; jobs and social protection; and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution, which when complimented by four engine room actions - shifting policy and regulatory frameworks,



investment pipeline development, developing a deal room for financing; and capacity building support to public institutions and civil society – have the potential to lift countries performance on the SDGs. Integrating this guidance into development planning processes will enable countries to better navigate the synergies and trade-offs in the courses of action they take to meet their priorities.

As new methodologies and data sources have come to the fore, the capacity to take more informed and nuanced approaches to advancing the SDGs is possible. A recent example of this has been UNCTAD's development of a new Productive Capacities Index, which enables countries to measure and track their own performance as well as benchmark their performance against others. By enhancing productive capacities – notably capacities in human capital, natural capital, energy, transport, ICT, institutions, the private sector, and structural change – empirical evidence show this to be a leading indicator of future prosperity and sustainable development. Taken together with existing as well as forthcoming sources of information, countries are better placed to identify, develop, design, and implement new investments that support these transitions for sustainable development.

The focus of this JEP discussion paper is to explore what the Six Transitions can mean for Jamaica by taking stock of where Jamaica's development priorities are already consistent with these transitions; highlighting which transitions, as well as engine room actions, can be elevated in future development planning; and if not included among the Six Transitions, what other areas are also a priority for Jamaica to advance sustainable development.

### Current Developments

When we look at what has already been achieved, Jamaica has already made notable progress on some of the Goals, namely SDG 5 (Gender Equality), which when observed through the narrower lens of youth employment has made tremendous advances in recent years and of key importance to the transition, jobs and social protection. Dr. Kevin Williams, a Senior Research Fellow at the University of the West Indies, attributes Jamaica's success to the absence of gender barriers in education – 'government support through grants and loans plays a crucial role in enabling qualified individuals to finance their education'. In addition, there was agreement and recognition among JEP panellists on the substantial progress Jamaica has made on health and well-being. Priyanka Mais, Junior Professional Officer at the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office noted that 'important measures have been taken by the Government of Jamaica to reallocate resources to improve health systems across Jamaica since the COVID-19 pandemic.'

### Challenges and Opportunities within the top SDG Transitions for Jamaica

JEP panellists were asked about the challenges and opportunities associated with the transitions underway in Jamaica. Dr. Patrice Whitely, the Head of the Department of Economics at UWI Mona, noted that the 'pivotal role education plays in the overall growth and development of a nation could be recognised more fully by development planners'. With education intrinsically linked to countries' structural transition, development planning today can have far-reaching and longstanding implications for future prosperity and development, which is underscored in the 2023 Sustainable Development Report for Jamaica. Dr. Anne Crick, Senior Lecturer at the Mona School of Business & Management, UWI, Mona, also notes that Jamaica's 'brain drain has also resulted in the loss of some of our most proficient educators'.

While not among the Six Transitions, many panellists highlighted the need for further advancement in certain areas of Health and Well-Being, such as subjective well-being and universal health coverage. Dr. Anne Crick highlighted the changes Jamaican's face in areas of 'affordability, lifestyle changes, and dietary habits'. Digital was a further area highlighted by panellists having the potential to enhance productivity, diminish production costs, decrease emissions, broaden access, refine market matching, and facilitate greater availability of public services. However, Dr. Patrice Whitely cautioned that to achieve this potential, citizens may face challenges over 'insufficient funds [and] a lack of fundamental IT knowledge" that may impede and undermine Jamaica's ability to fully capture the benefits of digital in future years.

### Looking Forward

For the years remaining for the SDGs, there is need for increased progress in the relevant SDG areas in order to get back on track and achieve these Goals. The JEP panellists were asked to rank the transitions in order of priority in Jamaica for redressing the shortfall in SDG progress to accelerate the Goals.



Transitions related to food systems and food security, digital connectivity and climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution were among those which the panel viewed as priorities for the coming years. In addition, and in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic, health and well-being were also cited as key areas for Jamaica to focus on. Dr. Christine Clarke emphasized the need for further investments in 'education, health, agriculture, and transport', which were echoed by Dr. Patrice Whitely who highlighted that 'a healthy, educated, and well-fed workforce is imperative for advancing the SDGs'. Dr. Kevin Williams further added that 'for Jamaica to attain developed nation status, it is imperative to earnestly pursue and achieve substantial milestones in these transformative goals, extending well beyond 2030'.

The JEP panellists also observed that for countries like Jamaica there is a need to localise the Six Transitions. When compared to the earlier transformations developed by Jeffrey Sachs and others both health and sustainable cities are no longer among the six transitions but as the recent past has shown are also critical for SIDS sustainable development. In addition to these Dr. Patrice Whitely emphasized the pressing need for transition pathways that addressed the pervasive effects of crime and violence, stating that 'Jamaica is in dire need of a comprehensive initiative to address issues related to crime and violence'. Of those transitions cited, it was unanimously agreed that none were redundant in supporting Jamaica to advance and accelerate the SDGs.

#### Dr. Nadine McCloud states:

**'The SDGs are essential metrics for measuring the improvements in our citizens' lives and livelihoods. Thus, we must recognise the importance of achieving marked progress. Despite being stymied by the pandemic, Jamaica's significant upward trend in the SDG goals deserves commendations. This upward trend must continue, and the next few years are critical. Jamaica must devote more resources to building resilient food security mechanisms, digital connectivity systems, climate change buffers, and deepening our human capital to continue on this positive path. Given the global technology revolution, we must consider utilising artificial intelligence to expedite reaching the SDGs'.**



**DR. NADINE McCLOUD**  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, UWI Mona

#### Dr. Stuart Davies further explains:

**'With the clock ticking, designing investments and development pathways to accelerate multiple SDGs will be critical if Jamaica is to meet its sustainable development targets by 2030. How Jamaica takes the best from global guidance and practice on transformation, and fine tuning this to its sustainable development needs in the coming years will be an important determinant of success'.**



**DR. STUART DAVIES**  
Senior Economist, UN Jamaica

#### Conclusion

Since the SDGs were introduced in 2015, Jamaica's progress towards its SDG targets has been steady yet slow, impacted in part by challenging geo-political and other crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has put a significant damper on what needs to be achieved by 2030 to meet the goals. While significant progress has been made in some areas, like gender equality and decent work, The Six Transitions are among the options available to Jamaica to accelerate progress by advancing many goals at the same time.

Meeting these goals will require continued and collective efforts in partnership with multiple stakeholders to design, finance, and implement aggregating policies, projects, and programmes in the coming year. On the eve of Jamaica designing its next development plan for 2024 to 2027, making use of the available new sources of data, methodologies, and best practice to inform transformational actions will be critical in the years ahead.

