

Opinion Piece

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Achieving the SDGs in the UK will help us fight climate change

Sue Riddlestone OBE, Bioregional

The latest round of global negotiations on tackling climate change, COP23, came to an end on Friday.

These UN talks are hugely important, highly complex and will never end, because climate change is going to loom larger and larger as an issue of concern through this century.

But I hope one big picture which the negotiators from nearly 200 countries won't ever lose sight of is the need to closely link action on reducing emissions and coping with climate change to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals – the SDGs.

These goals provide a golden opportunity to help nations make sustained progress on addressing global warming – both individually and collaboratively.

The 17 wide-ranging goals were developed in a ground-breaking way with civil society organisations, including Bioregional, and agreed by world leaders in 2015.

The SDGs recognise how the environmental and social aspects of sustainability are interconnected. There is a standalone Goal, number 13: "Take urgent action to tackle climate change and its impacts". But they acknowledge that national policies and global programmes on climate change won't be effective if they are devised in isolation; they need to join up with action on poverty reduction and inequality, health, education and so on.

They also recognise the roles and responsibilities of all – governments, business, civil society and citizens – in creating positive and necessary changes. And they are meant to apply everywhere, in countries rich and poor.

We often hear about UK showing international leadership on climate change, but to date, this has not been the case for the SDGs. The government's unwillingness to adopt, or even discuss, how we can achieve the SDGs at a national level has been very disappointing. Ministers seem to see them only being relevant to UK overseas aid. Two years on from the SDGs being agreed by all nations, there is no UK

national plan for implementing them, unlike in neighbouring countries such as Finland.

We now have an opportunity to demonstrate UK leadership on the SDGs – and by doing so, will help us make progress on tackling climate change – while bypassing our Brexit-distracted and over-burdened government.

We're starting work on the world's first [stakeholder-led national action plan](#) to implement the SDGs.

Who are we, you may ask? We're a [very wide-ranging network](#) of business and civil society organisations who share a belief that the SDGs are truly important and useful for unravelling and solving the deep and challenging sustainability problems we face in the UK. Bioregional is proud to be involved as co-founders and co-chair of UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development.

Our plan will have 17 chapters, each one devoted to one of the SDGs. It will show where the UK is falling short against the SDG targets, the opportunities they present, and the challenges we will need to address to achieve them. Together, the UKSSD network will present it to the UN's High Level Political Forum on the SDGs in New York at a dedicated launch event.

We want our plan to be a model for other nations to follow, and we hope that our own UK government will want to get involved.

If you would like to get involved in supporting the development of this plan – and in helping the UK to become a fairer, happier nation, while living within planetary limits, let us know [here](#).

ENDS

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Note to editors:

Bioregional is a charity and social enterprise which works with partners to create better places for people to live, work and do business. www.bioregional.com

What is One Planet Living?

If all people lived like the average European, we would need three planets' worth of resources to support us. The solution is the corollary: a world in which people everywhere can lead happy, healthy lives within the means of our one planet, leaving space for wildlife and wilderness.

Bioregional's One Planet Living framework comprises ten simple principles, backed up by a series of sustainability goals and guidance on how to implement them.

The One Planet Principles are:

- Health and happiness
- Equity and local economy
- Culture and community
- Land and nature
- Sustainable water
- Local and sustainable food
- Travel and transport
- Sustainable products and materials
- Zero waste
- Zero carbon energy

Sue Riddlestone Biog:

Sue co-founded Bioregional with Pooran Desai in 1994 and together they created the One Planet Living initiative in 2003. She has worked with partners to help them take big steps towards One Planet Living, including UK home improvement retailer B&Q on One Planet Home, Chinese real-estate developer China Merchants on their Jinshan 6,000 home eco-community in Guangzhou, and with the London Borough of Sutton on its local authority wide One Planet Sutton enterprise.

Sue worked with the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games bid team to write the sustainability strategy for the bid, *Towards a One Planet Olympics*. She and her team then worked on delivery; from carbon footprint through on-site sustainability support to running the One Planet sustainability exhibition in the athletes' village.

Sue also has extensive experience of influencing government policy. In 2003, in her role as a London Sustainable Development Commissioner, she wrote the influential paper *All New Homes Should Be Zero Carbon*, which subsequently became policy.

As a member of the UK Government Eco-towns Challenge panel Sue was lead author of its *What Makes an Eco-town* report, published in 2008, which informed the UK government's eco-towns planning policy statement. Bioregional continues to work on eco-towns today.

During 2011-12, Sue led Bioregional's work to engage with the UN's Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20. Bioregional is now the NGO focal point for Sustainable Consumption and Production, a category she lobbied to be included in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals programme. The organisation now has accreditation and a staff presence at the UN.

In 2009 Sue won a prestigious [Skoll Award](#) for Social Entrepreneurship. In 2012 she was voted one of the UK's Top 50 Green Leaders by Building Design and Inspirational Leader by Climate Week. Sue was awarded an OBE in the 2013 New Year Honours list by the Queen for services to sustainable business and to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.