CVSA is a consultative and coordinating body of nongovernmental, voluntary service organizations based primarily in North America as well as around the world. CVSA's mission is to promote, interpret, coordinate and extend the field of independent voluntary service and action programs serving people and communities in need of systemic solutions to economic, social and environmental problems. By exercising its Special NGO Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the UN, CVSA provides a voice for independent, nongovernmental voluntary service and action organizations and the constituencies they serve, bringing local needs into global context and global context to local efforts. CVSA affirms the tenets of the UN Charter and is committed to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the U.S. and around the world.

CVSA mobilizes involvement of U.S.-based volunteer organizations and their allies for the achievement of the universal, transformative and indivisible Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in order to end all poverty in all its forms everywhere.

We thank all the CVSA volunteers who assisted with the communications, recording, filing, writing, editing and designing of this report.

We thank the dozens of organizations whose work gave inspiration to this report and who contributed information and perspectives contained within it.

Cover design by Curren Mandon utilizes photos given to CVSA by member organizations, each of which was previously published in CVSA’s INVEST YOURSELF: A Guide to Action catalogue of volunteer opportunities.
INTRODUCTION

This marks the second annual U.S. People’s Report on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals compiled by Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA). The 2024 report focuses on review of conditions in the U.S. in relation to Goals 1 (End all poverty), 2 (End hunger), 13 (Climate action), 16 (Access to justice for all), and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). Aligned with the theme of the 2024 High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development, held annually at the UN Headquarters, this report delves into the status of these five pivotal goals under the overarching theme of “Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient, and innovative solutions.”

Readers are encouraged to also refer to CVSA’s inaugural 2023 U.S. People’s Report on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which reviewed all 17 goals, with proposed actionable strategies to attain them, compiled with input from over 30 nongovernmental community-based organizations. (You may contact CVSA for a printed copy or download a PDF copy from www.cvsa-investyourself.org.)

The 2023 Report was the first comprehensive report compiled and submitted to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations on behalf of grassroots voluntary service and action organizations and the communities they serve across the U.S.

National representatives from countries of every continent gather every July to discuss the status of the Goals they are striving to achieve. They are joined by hundreds of NGOs from around the world and staff and experts from UN agencies. Gains are measured, obstacles are defined and evaluated, solutions to break through the obstacles are identified, and action to speed up the achievement of these critically needed goals are discussed.

Since the historic 2015 unanimous General Assembly vote to carry out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in each nation, only three of the 193 member nations have brought no reports on their progress in their country: Haiti, Myanmar... and the United States.

We find it unacceptable that U.S. officials and representatives continue to claim full support for the Sustainable Development Goals when speaking in international arenas, while domestically the federal government has yet to appoint an office or commission in charge of coordinating the implementation of the SDGs in the U.S. The United States has launched no public education campaign domestically. There are no official efforts to mobilize the people, the business community, industries or the academic fields to build an all-of-society drive for accomplishing the SDGs in the U.S.

A few U.S. cities such as New York, Los Angeles and Orlando took the initiative to attend the HLPF and submit reports on their local work toward the Goals in 2018 and 2019. An increasing number of universities are now offering study courses on the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in their business administration or earth science programs. This is encouraging and we need much more subnational, municipal and academic involvement.

We call upon our federal government to invest the personnel and funding necessary to realize all 17 SDGs for the people of the U.S. by the year 2030. The U.S. and all other 192 Member States of the UN agreed to adopt the full content of “Transforming Our World; The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” It reads, in part:

“Follow-up and review processes at all levels will be guided by the following principles: They will be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders...”

“National level: We encourage all Member States to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate.

“We also encourage Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country-driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes.”
All stakeholders, particularly those who suffer most from the lack of achievement of these goals, must be involved in the process of analysis, planning and monitoring the 17 Goals in the U.S. Otherwise, a top down cherry-picking approach by select groups of officials who package the existing, government programs and label it an SDG report, are simply SDG-washing what is actually business as usual. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – agreed to by all nations – calls for a transformation, not lip service.

As the temperature of Earth’s atmosphere and oceans continue to rise, the people proceed to be battered by more extreme weather, and the economic inequality gap continues to grow. We cannot afford to allow this Agenda for people and planet to be nullified by official inaction domestically and internationally.

CVSA has been coordinating a grassroots, volunteer-run, nationwide community education campaign for the implementation of the 2030 SDGs since 2016. CVSA promotes the SDGs through a newsletter, speaking engagements and community events; meetings with educators; talks delivered in college classrooms, churches, temples, professional and business associations and all manner of leaders within community-based, volunteer-driven organizations.

The threefold purpose of CVSA’s U.S. People’s Reports on the 2030 SDGs in the U.S. is:

1. Organizing Tool: A resource in the hands of committed volunteers, non-profit staff, community leaders, organizers, teachers, students, business people, professionals, clergy, and all who wish to mobilize for SDG implementation.

2. Advocacy: Bring to the attention of those in the U.S. government, at all levels, grassroots support and demand for the implementation of the 2030 SDGs.

3. Contribute to the HLPF: Provide a comprehensive report to the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on the SDGs in the U.S. from the perspective of diverse stakeholders engaged in SDG pursuit.

CVSA remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to its fruition. We continue to look forward to the day our government begins to take the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals seriously and puts the honest work into concrete plans to achieve them as quickly as all the resources at their disposal certainly could make possible, with the full involvement of those who are currently very much “left behind.”

Please contact CVSA for more information, for assistance in building SDG involvement and partnerships, and to provide needed support for this world-changing campaign.

Thank you.

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A study conducted in 2023 by The Fund for the City of New York and United Way of New York City, in collaboration with the non-profit Part of the Solution (POTS) in the Bronx and other NYC non-profits, highlighted the dire situation. Over 1,298,212 working-age households — 2,991,973 people — lack sufficient income to cover their basic needs, such as housing, food, health care, and transportation. This trend is not confined to New York City. CVSA has heard from community service organizations across the country that address the needs of growing numbers of working age people struggling just to make ends meet, pay basic bills, keep food on the table and a roof over their heads.

Access to inexpensive consumer goods in the U.S. that get cheaper each year, such as cell phones or TVs, does not eliminate poverty. Owning a few low-cost appliances does not lead to stable housing, affordable medical and dental care, nutritious food or adequate child care — all of which have gotten more expensive each year while wages have not kept up with inflation. From 2000 to 2022 the cost of fuel and utilities increased by an average of 115%. Prices jumped again in 2023.

Moreover, there exists a bottom layer of “deep poverty” defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as those who live below 50% of the official poverty line, which means single persons living on less than $6,380 a year, or families of four living on less than $13,100. According to 2020 U.S. Census statistics one in 18 people in the U.S., including some five million children, endure deep poverty.

Despite the adoption of the 2030 SDGs nine years ago, neither U.S. cities nor federal agencies have devised comprehensive plans to address Target 1.2 in alignment with the outlined implementation process described in “Means of Implementation.” Books chronicling poverty in America abound, but no effective plan by federal or state governments to address the causes of this economic and social injustice is ever the result. Instead, federal welfare reforms implemented in 1996 precipitated a surge in poverty levels, with the number of individuals living on less than $2 a day doubling by 2015.
The U.S. is the richest developed country and home to 735 billionaires, yet poverty is growing and the U.S. government has no plan to eliminate it. Ending this persistent injustice will require engaging those who suffer from poverty in determining viable strategies for transformative change – and realizing all 17 of the SDGs.

Part of the Solution (POTS), located in The Bronx, New York, is partnering with other groups to gather data needed to gauge the “True Cost of Living” in New York City. They engage community members in discussion and decision-making about poverty eradication and bring their decisions to public officials.

**Target 1.3 Social protection systems:**
Union Station Homeless Services in San Gabriel Valley, California, serving a populace exceeding 1.5 million across numerous cities and communities, sheds light on the protracted homelessness crisis fueled by systemic inequalities and economic disparities. Generational poverty is perpetuated and made worse by lack of affordable housing, inadequate health care, mass incarceration and insufficient support for veterans and other vulnerable populations.

Up to 60% of homeless people in the U.S. work full-time jobs while living in their cars, shelters or encampments because wages are too low to pay for housing, food and utilities. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition found that, on average, a worker needs to earn $24.90 per hour to rent a modest two-bedroom home in California, New York and 15 other states.

The National Council on Aging reports that for three years in a row, more Americans aged 65 and older are living in poverty, robbed of their ability to age with dignity. The poverty rate of the elderly rose to 14.1%, in 2023. According to Community Solutions, a non-profit based in New York City, 225,000 of the city’s homeless population will be aged 50 or older by 2030.

The federal government installed financial restitution requirements for states to “recover” the financial value of Medicaid services for recipients aged 50 and older; states can seize real estate assets inherited by family once the Medicaid recipient is deceased.

**Target 1.4 Equal rights to economic resources and financial services:**
The racial disparities in homeownership and the skyrocketing cost of housing in the U.S. have put homeownership out of reach for many people. A University of California Los Angeles study shows white households in Los Angeles study shows white households in Los Angeles have a median net worth of $355,000, while Mexican and African American households have a median net worth of $3,500 and $4,000, respectively.

The Center for Responsible Lending reports that the largest U.S. banks charged Americans $11.68 billion in overdraft fees in 2019 – the affected account holders carried an average balance of less than $350.

**Target 1.5 Build resilience, reduce vulnerability to disasters:**
Community organizations and non-profits across the country report story after story of the extreme difficulty people face to recover from external shocks like inflation, unemployment and the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Most social service and advocacy organizations, largely dependent on volunteers, reported increases in the number of people coming to them in need of food, health care, help with utility bills, housing and legal assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. This increase continued in 2023 through to today due to the high inflationary price increases on everything essential and the termination of state and federal assistance programs initiated during the pandemic.

Weather-related disasters, including floods and fires displaced roughly 2.5 million people from their homes in 2023, according to the Census Bureau. States are unprepared for the influx of individuals and families in immediate need of emergency housing when disasters hit. Long-term or permanent alternative housing is becoming more and more difficult for survivors to find, and no agency is in charge of monitoring the growing number of climate refugees.

Eight months since the August 2023 uncontrolled fire in Maui, Hawaii wiped out the historic town of Lahaina, killing at least 100 people, over 5,000 people who lost homes, jobs, family members and friends are still stranded in emergency hotel housing, waiting for aid to rebuild their homes while facing pressure to move out and no where to go.

Two years after a series of powerful tornadoes tore through southwestern Kentucky in 2021, families are still waiting for housing and there have been more deadly record-breaking tornadoes since. Due to climate change, tornadoes are becoming more frequent and moving farther east towards more populated areas of the country.
**Solutions**

Overall, addressing poverty comprehensively in the U.S. necessitates bold leadership and a paradigm shift in fiscal priorities. Establishment of true living wage levels to be paid to all workers is a critical element. Control of the exorbitant cost of medical care, which has been entirely privatized in the U.S., bringing huge profits to pharmaceutical corporations, insurance corporations and privately owned hospital corporations is another critical element in ending the downward spiral of poverty in all its forms. An end to government subsidies to the giant corporations reaping huge private profits in the energy, pharmaceutical, medical, food, agribusiness and housing industries would free up money for investments in more jobs for education, health care, infrastructure and more.

- Elevate opportunities for and materially support the needs of those with physical disabilities by allocating public funds, resources and personnel necessary to ensure access to education, health services, skills training, jobs, transportation and vision and other self-help aids.

- Create and sustain free, reduced cost and accessible public transportation in every city.

- Stop predatory lending by 2030. Restrict the percentage of interest permitted to be charged by “payday loan” enterprises; shut down those that refuse to comply.

- Promote lending programs that offer affordable loan terms to those groupings that have faced racial and ethnic disparities, historically blocking them from home ownership, buying a new energy-efficient car and/or starting a small business.

- Empower stakeholders – or their designated delegates – from all regions of the U.S., who represent low-income and historically oppressed peoples, to definitively decide upon viable solutions to poverty.

- Guarantee workers are paid a truly living wage and job benefits in all sectors historically excluded from living wages, including the fields of education at all levels, childcare, elder care, agriculture, cleaning, maintenance, part-time, seasonal, service and independent contractor labor.

- Develop new jobs at truly living wages in the fields of renewable energy, forest management and creation of sustainable water resources.

- Replace the extant “federal poverty level” with criteria realistically reflecting the costs of living for supporting a family of six.

- Allocate the public funds, resources and personnel necessary to install any and all mechanisms to lift all in the U.S. out of poverty by 2030, without being done at the expense of working people of any other nation.

- Make adequate quantity and quality of housing, home utilities and nutritious foods available and affordable by 2030, including for all Native Americans, Blacks, Hispanics and other historically oppressed peoples.
Goal 2  End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Targets:

2.1   By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round

2.2   By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons

2.3   By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment

2.4   By 2030, ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and that progressively improve land and soil quality

2.5  By 2020, maintain the genetic diversity of seeds, cultivated plants and farmed and domesticated animals and their related wild species, including through soundly managed and diversified seed and plant banks at the national, regional and international levels, and promote access to and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge, as internationally agreed.

Problems

2.1 End hunger by 2030:
The number of Americans who did not have enough to eat over two one-week periods increased by 40.8% between September/October 2021 and September/October 2023, according to the U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey.

In the Washington DC metropolitan area alone, nearly half a million people face hunger or “food insecurity” – being rendered incapable of knowing where one’s next meal will come from. Each year since 1980, Capital Area Food Bank has been working with hundreds of retail grocers, manufacturers, and local growers, along with thousands of donors to distribute over 30 million meals worth of food to those in need through a network of over 450 regional non-profit partners. Similar non-profit, volunteer-involving food banks operate in each major U.S. city. Yet hunger continues to grow.

According to AARP, one out of 10 seniors is at risk of going hungry in the U.S. Feeding Texas, a non-profit organization supplying food banks across the state, reports one in five children suffer food insecurity. For more than three million Texas children, a subsidized school lunch is often their only full weekday meal.

Nationwide, locally organized programs retrieve and distribute fresh produce, breads and other foods that businesses would otherwise throw away, making them available free of charge to low-income U.S. households. These “distressed” foods are often their only means to avert malnutrition.

Systems for distributing food such as these non-profit operations are a necessity when people are hungry, and we need more of them in more places in the U.S. now.

But meal programs, food distributions and programs that rescue and redistribute food that is otherwise wasted in the U.S. – while urgently needed in the short-term – do not eliminate the systemic causes of the need for these programs in the first place.

For decades the U.S. has had the capacity to grow enough healthy unprocessed food to feed the vast majority of the world’s population;
yet it has not ended hunger in the U.S., much less globally. To understand why, one must look to key economic and political underpinnings of today’s industrialized food production, partnered with speculative finance capital and application of U.S. federal government food subsidies.

In 2022, the top five corporations engaged in financial speculation of agricultural futures contracts doubled and in some instances tripled profits as compared to 2016–2020. By 2010, annual U.S. government farm subsidies averaged $52 billion. Producers of four common components of “junk food” are recipients of U.S. farm subsidies, namely: corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), corn starch and soy oils – all of which contribute to America’s serious obesity and diabetes problem.

Studies conducted by University of California, Davis, found consumption of large amounts of HFCS induced insulin resistance and impaired glucose tolerance, high levels of insulin, boosted a dangerous fat in the blood and caused high blood pressure in test animals.

The Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations, a non-profit think tank based in The Netherlands, documented that the top five traders in agricultural commodities hold a monopoly in the global market for grain, corn, soy and sugar, greatly influencing their pricing on a global scale.

2.2 End all forms of malnutrition:

The U.S. diet is the most unhealthy of all developed nations, says EAT, a non-profit based in Norway dedicated to ending hunger by transforming the global food system and, thereby, saving the planet. The U.S. “fast food” industry pushes widely accessible lower-cost meals that, too often, are the only thing the low income can afford; they are permeated with addictive high fructose corn syrup, creating cravings for more “fast food” in a vicious cycle.

The Union of Concerned Scientists reported in 2023 that high rates of diabetes and high blood pressure in low-income communities of color in the U.S. are directly correlated to the lack of access to healthy food. Today 60% of Americans have a chronic health condition; 40% have two or more. More than half of Americans take a prescription drug; the average person takes four. The obesity epidemic is also a significant public health crisis in the U.S. and continues to escalate.

America is the sickest country in the developed world, with the highest incidence of diabetes and cancer and the worst infant mortality rate.

According to the USDA, 11 to 27% of the U.S. population live in “food deserts” — areas of poverty without accessible supermarkets. A recent study of food deserts in Black neighborhoods of Chicago found the closest grocery stores to be twice as far away as closer fast food restaurants. In rural areas such as the Mississippi Delta region, many food advocacy groups describe conditions there as a “food apartheid.”

2.3 and 2.4 Productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, sustainable food production systems:

The vast majority of U.S. federal farm subsidies, rather than supporting smaller, often multigenerational family farms, bolster agribusiness. In Kansas, for example, out of the state’s total of 58,500 farms, three-fourths of the state’s food production comes from only 2,900 farms. With approximately $1 billion in federal farm payments allocated to the state over the past 30 years, only 20% of Kansas farms received 88% of that funding.

Data from the Department of Agriculture show the current farm safety net programs disproportionately benefit large, high-income agricultural operations and private companies, often at the expense of small to mid-sized farmers with diverse crops that can feed the local population.

An organizer with National Family Farm Coalition in the U.S. said about a recent visit to Congressional offices in Washington DC: “It is quite clear, even to the untrained eye, that professional lobbyists fill the halls and cafeterias of Congress. Their voice is heard every day, in every office, and they represent the voice of consolidated agribusiness. Farmers like us are lucky if we get to enter those same offices once a year to make the voices of actual farmers and fishermen heard over the noise of those corporate interests that threaten our livelihood, a just food system and a safe environment.”

Farmers and ranchers receive only 14.3 cents of every dollar that consumers spend on food. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture, off-farm costs, including marketing, processing, wholesaling, distribution and retailing, account for more than 80 cents of
every food dollar spent in the United States. According to the National Rural Health Association, the rate of suicide among farmers in the U.S. is 3.5 times higher than the general population, due to the multiple economic challenges that are outside of their control.

Decades of pro-agribusiness farm policy have created a powerful corporate-run food and farm system. Organizations of farmers, ranchers, fishers, workers, and consumers, along with urban food garden coalitions in cities across the country are organizing to rebuild an alternative farm and food system at community level.

**Solutions**

- Transform federal and state policies to revitalize farms and rural communities with farm workers receiving living wages and promote sustainable and indigenous agricultural methods over agribusiness control and financial speculation.

- Install national controls on food prices and roll back inflationary increases driven by private profiteering.

- Deprioritize subsidies to corporate industrial farming, and shift support to local, sustainable and indigenous methods of farming.

- Take food out of the realm of derivatives and futures contract trading and into the hands of the actual farmers and consumers.

- Increase investment in urban agriculture, with the goal of having one food garden per community or per mile, and provide support to organizations already on the ground doing the work of providing access to healthy, sustainable and fresh food.

- Mandate all states provide free healthful school lunch programs in all public schools, for all grade levels. Prioritize sourcing fresh produce from local area farms and having cafeteria staff cook nutritious meals vs. contracting with fast food vendors. Ban cooking with or serving products that contain high fructose corn syrup.

- Ban sales in public schools of food products high in fats, sugars or salt. Make locally sourced fresh fruit and vegetables readily available for meals and snacks.

- Impose and enforce regulations on the harmful marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children

- Provide funding for agricultural education, especially sustainable and traditional methods that support, rather than negatively impact the environment.

- Stop state-level tax breaks and other policy and regulatory giveaways for factory farms and big agricultural corporations.

- Increase available resources and funding to address food insecurity, which includes a prioritization on increasing the capacity of food programs, particularly at the community level.

- Increase direct cash assistance to low-income households through mechanisms like guaranteed basic income, earned income tax credits and increased SNAP (food stamp) payments, as a short-term solution until the root causes of poverty and high prices are solved. Finance these expenditures by taxing the exorbitant profits of the large agricultural corporations.

- Form and empower state and national councils to oversee and enforce elimination of needless food waste. The councils will consist of stakeholders that ensure decisions are made by a consensus of low-income workers, consumer groups, small farmers, restaurant owners and health care professionals.

- Sponsor local and regional efforts to conduct community-level education of residents in how and why to prepare healthy foods, with an emphasis on plant-based recipes; how to read food product labels to avoid high fructose corn syrup, trans fats, high salt or low fiber/high carbohydrate content; and to promote the benefits of exercise.

- Maintain high standards for physical activity in schools; and integrate nutrition education and obesity prevention and management services into primary health care.
Goal 13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts*

* Acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change.

The U.S. committed to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 26-28% by 2025, and more recently to reduce its emissions 50% by 2030. The U.S. did so as a party to the 2015 Paris Climate Accord, established under the auspices of UNFCCC, and its subsequent pledges made in COP26, COP27 and COP28.

Targets:
13.1 Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries
13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning
13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning
13.4 Implement the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly $100 billion annually by 2020 from all sources to address the needs of developing countries in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation and fully operationalize the Green Climate Fund through its capitalization as soon as possible
13.5 Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities

Problems

With fewer than 5% of the world’s population, the U.S. consumes 16% of its energy – mostly from fossil fuels: oil, gas and coal – and has generated 20.3% of worldwide emissions since 1850. High-income nations use per capita six times more materials and engender ten times greater climate impacts than low-income countries. The wealthiest 1% of the U.S. population owns the majority of the country’s wealth.

The U.S. and governments of other advanced industrialized economies are the primary perpetrators of global warming through overconsumption, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and own the greatest responsibility to pay for timely, scientific solutions. But the U.S. Department of Energy issued an estimate that fully 66% of U.S. energy will still be produced from fossil fuels in 2050. This directly contradicts the 2030 SDGs and breaches the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change carbon reduction goals. Allowing this to become our reality would have disastrous results.

In March 2024, the UN International Resource Panel warned that relentless use of natural resources more than tripled in the past 50 years, pushing humanity into multiple planetary crises – climate change, biodiversity loss, and more extreme inequality. We consume resources as though we had three or more Planet Earths! If we do not qualitatively and rapidly change course we jeopardize environmental sustainability and human life itself. Those who are driving Earth in the wrong direction do so at the expense of us all.

13.1 Resilience and adaptive capacity:
An estimated 64 million people in the U.S. live in communities with economies historically reliant on oil, gas or coal industries. Some 40% of people in the U.S. live where coal mines are closing. 46% live in other fossil fuel energy production areas. The majority are low income, suffering from high levels of pollution and chronic health problems.

A transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy requires a top-down, comprehensive plan equipped with a budget to foster new industries, business startups and trades with corresponding job retraining to ensure a resilient and viable economic future. No U.S.
government programs or projections reflect a realistic path to transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. Such plans could be the basis of new jobs, economic growth and elimination of poverty. Environmental remediation of abandoned fossil fuel sites can and should also be funded to create living wage jobs while improving health and living conditions.

Most cities and rural counties in the U.S. do not have adequate tax bases to finance the infrastructure needed to adapt to intense heat levels, onslaughts of “atmospheric rivers” and heightened storm intensity. Emergency services departments do not have the requisite funds for adequate equipment and staff that also need training in how to respond to the unprecedented severity of climate forces. Municipalities do not possess sufficient emergency housing or resources to quickly build shelters when major disasters strike.

Private insurance companies are canceling their contracts in states prone to damaging storms or wildfires, leaving homeowners with no insurance coverage.

**13.2 Integrate climate change measures into national policies and planning:**

**Emissions** – The U.S. has never instituted mandatory emissions-phase-out targets for transportation, commerce, residential and industrial sectors. Neither Congress nor the White House has allocated sufficient funding for timely and effective compliance with emissions reduction consistent with the SDGs. The U.S. is not ensuring the support, technical assistance, financial incentives and investment needed to end fossil fuel emissions.

The U.S., instead, still gives tax breaks to the fossil fuel industry and promotes the U.S. military-industrial complex – the greatest polluter in world history. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Fossil Fuel Subsidy Tracker in 2022 calculated nearly $14 billion in legislated tax breaks for U.S. domestic fossil fuel production and write-offs tied to foreign production outlets of U.S.-based oil and gas companies.

The Revenue Act of 1913 allows corporations to write off up to 80% of their costs for drilling, employee wages and survey work in the first year of operation. The oil and gas industry is expected to reap $1.7 billion in 2025 from the “intangible drilling costs” tax break and $9.7 billion over the next 10 years; plus $880 million from the “depletion allowance” tax break in 2025 and $15.6 billion by 2034.

There is no government justification for this giveaway of public funds to private corporations and investors reaping billions in profits while they continue destroying the Earth’s environment.

**Public land use** – About one-quarter of the country’s planet-warming carbon emissions come from coal, oil and gas extracted on federal lands. The recent climate legislation aimed at increasing investments in renewable energy did not end existing drilling leases, which means oil and gas extraction will continue on public lands for decades, unless stopped, once and for all.

60% of forests in the U.S. are privately owned; they can be cut down for development, industry or agriculture. Every year, the United States loses 2.2 million acres of forest to development. Our forests provide some of the most effective carbon sinks. We can no longer afford to lose our old growth forests; forests need to be protected.

When large forest areas, wetlands, subtropical swamp and forest zones are converted to croplands or removed for real estate development, not only are whole ecosystems destroyed, but powerful carbon sinks are eliminated. They are replaced with carbon-emitting industrial agriculture or housing built on landfill and concrete. The Center for American Progress and Conservation Science Partners has documented the U.S. is losing one football field of natural carbon sequestering area every 30 seconds.

Wildfires are burning with more severity across larger areas than at any time in modern history. This adds carbon to the atmosphere and further decreases the sequestration potential of forests and other terrain.

There are hundreds of volunteer-driven nongovernmental organizations across the country trying to accomplish as much restoration and staving off of destruction as they can. Examples include Appalachian Voices in Virginia, Common Ground Relief in New Orleans and Atchafalaya Basinkeeper in Plaquemine, Louisiana, Great Old Broads for Wilderness in Colorado with chapters across the country, Michael Fields Agricultural Institute in East Troy, Wisconsin, and
The World Resources Institute pointed out that, in 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama pledged $3 billion, out of which $2 billion has been delivered in the last ten years. Germany, France and the United Kingdom have contributed relative to the size of their economies. In September 2021, the U.S. pledged $11.4 billion a year by 2024 in public finance to developing countries to support climate action. In the 2023 COP28 Climate Summit, parties agreed to establish a Loss and Damage Fund to be functioning by 2024. Some countries have announced funding pledges toward it, including UAE, Germany, the EU, UK, U.S., Japan, Denmark, France, Canada, the Netherlands, and Italy, with an overall total as of spring 2024 of a little over $400 million. The United States pledge of $17.5 million — which still requires approval from Congress – is a drop in the bucket given the scale of loss and damage now experienced by the least developed and developing countries of the Global South. The funding pledged at COP28 will cover less than 0.2% of the developing countries’ annual needs for loss and damage due to climate change. The people of the United States know little about the necessity to invest in these programs as mainstream media doesn’t explain and elected officials don’t speak of this publicly.

Solutions

- Enforce the U.S. federal government clean up the thousands of Superfund and other hazardous waste sites throughout the country forthwith to stop the spread of cancer-causing chemicals in the soil, water and air that for decades have been killing and maiming local workers and residents.

- Obligate that the U.S. federal government put an end to greenhouse gas emissions; fund and enforce the restoration of our forests and sustainable programs for continuous forest protection and maintenance; adapt proven indigenous methods of protecting the land; restore natural sources of carbon sequestration; and protect ecosystems that help maintain the natural balance of oxygen, carbon dioxide and water in our atmosphere.

- The U.S. government must fulfill its long overdue commitment to capitalizing the Green Climate Fund created to aid developing nations for effective environmental mitigation actions within their own borders.

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13.a The needs of developing countries:

In December 2023, the U.S. government announced a $3 billion pledge to the Green Climate Fund – the largest fund in the world dedicated to supporting sustainable development in poor and vulnerable countries. It helps farmers plant drought-resistant crops, brings solar energy to rural communities and invests in coal-to-renewable energy sources. No country has greater responsibility to contribute to these efforts than the United States.

The expansion of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) industry and construction of LNG ports is being allowed to grow and reap the benefits of tax breaks and subsidies at the expense of the health and future of the people and planet. Local residents in the Rio Grande Valley on the U.S.-Mexico border have been fighting to stop the construction of more LNG ports along the Gulf of Mexico coast.

The Sierra Club estimates LNG terminals in Texas will create as many greenhouse gas emissions as 46 million cars a year. The ports also perpetuate the destructive “fracking” (hydraulic fracturing) process of extracting natural gas imbedded in deep rock. This technique permanently pollutes groundwater and leaks large quantities of toxic methane into the atmosphere.

Single federal agencies cannot stand up to the powerful pushback from corporate interests. The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) in March 2024, for example, issued an order requiring large public companies to report their greenhouse gas emissions, climate-related risks to their businesses, and the financial harm caused by extreme weather events in their registration statements and annual reports. Not a month later, SEC suspended the order when their authority was challenged in court by affected corporations. This begs the question: who is really governing the country and who is able to protect the people? This is a problem that SDG Goal 16 addresses.
• Secure the funds for climate action from the profits of carbon-emitting monopoly corporations and ultra-wealthy purveyors of the military-industrial complex.

• Create living wage jobs in programs protecting nature’s ability to lock up carbon and boost environmental resilience to the benefit of people, wildlife and plant life – forestalling species extinction caused by uncontrolled global warming.

• Involve educators and scientists in public education campaigns to teach communities how to be better stewards of undisturbed wild lands and all ecosystems.

• The developed nations of the Global North must provide financial compensation and restitution to developing nations of the Global South.

• Protect the peoples and sovereign governments of island nations being inundated by and forced to evacuate from rising ocean waters.

• Empower and fund local, regional and national bodies formed to teach and involve the public in monitoring and reporting sources of carbon emissions and other toxic pollution in their locales and engage them in demanding enforcement of emission mitigation, toxic cleanups and curtailment of species die-offs.

• Promote affordable, safe and efficient public mass transit systems run on renewable energy in all cities for the more than 80% of the U.S. population living in urban areas.
Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Targets:
16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere
16.2 End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children
16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
16.5 Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms
16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels
16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Problems

Goal 16 is often called up by the U.S. as context for lodging criticisms of other countries, without addressing honestly the distance between this Goal and the realities of U.S. society at this time.

16.1 Reduce all forms of violence:
Law enforcement officers killed at least 1,232 people in 2023 – the deadliest year for homicides by law enforcement in over a decade in the U.S. Gun violence among the population is also staggering. As of April 2024, there had already been over 49 mass shootings for the year. The Gun Violence Archive defines a “mass shooting” as an incident in which four or more victims are shot or killed. Mass shootings account for just a fraction of the daily toll of firearm deaths in the U.S.

In the first month and a half of 2024, at least 4,994 people died from gun violence, and another 3,351 people were injured. Of those deaths, 174 were killed in police officer-involved shootings.

The American Academy of Pediatricsians has documented that in 2019, gun injury became the leading cause of death among children aged birth to 19 years in the U.S. In 2020, the United States was the only country among its higher-income peers in which guns were the leading cause of death among children and adolescents. In the 2021-2022 school year, the average number of gunfire incidents on school grounds had virtually quadrupled over the prior year.

Likewise, during that year, there were a total of 93 school shootings with casualties in elementary and secondary schools – more than in any other year since the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began collecting such data. The United States has had 57 times more school shootings than all other major industrialized nations combined. Fear of possible shootings is now part of school life for students in the U.S.

There are over 433,000 cases of sexual assault or rape annually in the U.S. among people ages 12 and older, according to The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). Every 68 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted.

While there is a growing number of community-based social organizations being formed by residents and local leaders to work with youth and families to build hope in their futures and stem the tide of growing violence in homes and on the streets, these local programs alone cannot do the job of creating a peaceful and inclusive society in the U.S., reversing all the social and economic inequalities and eradicating the drivers of escalating violence.

16.2 End exploitation of children:
The U.S. Labor Department reported in October 2023 child labor violations in the United States soared in the 2022-2023 fiscal year, rising to their highest level in nearly two decades. The agency found 5,792 minors working in violation of child labor laws in this two-year period, an 88% increase since 2019.
The maximum civil penalty for employers under current child labor laws is $15,138 per child, and no jail time.

The U.S. Labor Department announced it concluded 955 investigations with child labor violations in fiscal 2023, compared with 835 the year before, and 800 child labor investigations are still underway. A plan of action for preventing children from being exploited in the first place, however, is missing.

16.3 Promote the rule of law: Erosion of the right to peaceful assembly — While the Black Lives Matter protests and marches in 2020 received worldwide headlines, what received little media coverage is the number of bills introduced in state legislative bodies across the country attempting to criminalize peaceful protests.

Since 2017, state legislators have introduced over 238 bills in 45 states that aim to stamp out dissent by increasing the civil and criminal penalties for protest tactics as common as blocking traffic. After the protests at Standing Rock in South Dakota against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016-2017, lawmakers introduced dozens of bills targeting protests led by Indigenous communities by reclassifying pipelines as “critical infrastructure” and dramatically increasing the penalties for protesting near pipelines.

As more people took to the streets in 2020 in defense of Black lives, lawmakers responded with hundreds of new anti-protest bills. In the summer of 2020, demonstrators camped out at Tennessee’s state capitol, demanding a meeting with the governor to discuss plans to address police brutality. Rather than meeting with demonstrators, Tennessee legislators made camping on state grounds a felony punishable by up to six years in prison.

In Arkansas, a demonstrator could also face up to six years in prison for purposefully entering a pipeline construction site under a new law. In Florida, after the historic protests for racial justice, legislators passed one of the harshest anti-protest laws in the country, which also limits the ability of cities to reduce their police budgets. The law is currently being challenged through litigation.

While these bills have been introduced in nearly every state in the country, the vast majority of the bills that have passed so far are in Southern states. In 2022, two anti-protest bills were introduced in Alabama that would have redefined a riot to mean five or more people coming together to engage in any activity that could cause danger to people or property damage. Those two bills were defeated by strong community organizing.

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels: U.S. elections — The 2020 presidential election ranked 31st when compared to voter turnout among the voting-age population with 49 other countries that year. Voter registration and election boards are run by individual state with each having different rules and procedures — no single authority exists that can report how many people are registered to vote in the U.S. The Census Bureau reported that, in 2020, 168.3 million people said they were registered to vote, or about two-thirds of the total voting-age population. The 2024 state primaries saw a surge in voters that selected “none of the above” on their ballots.

While the popular vote elects members of Congress, mayors, governors, state legislators and even some local officials, the November popular election for U.S. president does not determine who will gain that office. When Americans cast their ballots in November, they are actually voting for a slate of electors appointed by their state’s political parties who are pledged to support that party’s candidate when they vote in the electoral college in December. All of a state’s electoral college votes therefore go to the candidate of whichever party gained the most of those votes, even if the popular vote in that state was very close between two candidates or if none of the candidates received a majority of the vote. This means the total of the nation’s popular vote is not the determining factor as to whom becomes president. There have been five U.S. presidents put in office who did not win the majority of the popular electoral vote, but were elected by the electoral college made up of representatives who are not elected by the people, but appointed by the individual parties at state level. The president of the U.S. has been elected to office each year by a vote of less than 50% of the registered voters, who, in turn, often make up less than 50% of the population.

Administrative agencies run the affairs of the country — Beginning with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 1914, Congress has cre-
Eliminate illegal child labor in all 50 states. Strengthen and enforce child labor laws and make them explicitly applicable to undocumented as well as U.S.-born children.

Ensure quality public education for all children nationwide and regardless of their nation of origin. Carry out Goals 1, 2 and 3 to end parents’ poverty and children’s socioeconomic impediments to learning.

Repeal laws and government policies that lead to mass incarceration, overwhelmingly affecting the poor and people of color.

End prison labor – a modern-day form of slavery – throughout the U.S., forever.

Stop the collusion through which both public and private sectors financially gain from operating for-profit prisons and immigration detention centers.

Protect the right of freedom of assembly and the entirety of the Bill of Rights.

Solutions

- Stop the controlling influence of the U.S. military-industrial complex over U.S. foreign policy that has been responsible for 221 U.S. wars of aggression and “proxy wars” since the end of World War II.

- Mandate all members of the U.S. Congress, Cabinet-level federal officials, vice presidents and presidents divest from any financial connections with the arms and other “defense” industries.

- Ban Congress and the executive branch from financing foreign military actions that benefit U.S. corporate and finance capital interests, such as wars over control of oil extraction.

- Ban video games that overtly reward killing, rape and other deadly violent behavior.
Goal 17  Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the
global partnership for sustainable development

This important Goal calls for an increase in international cooperation, solidarity between nations and sharing of resources necessary to make the other 16 Goals possible.

Goal 17 has 19 targets in the categories of Finance of official development assistance commitments; Technology; Capacity-building; Trade; and Systemic issues such as “Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries;” and “Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.”

The Solutions are right there

In this interdependent and now multi-polar world, improved U.S. cooperation with other nations on global agreements related to climate change and sustainable development is imperative for the achievement of sustainable development and peace in the world and in the U.S.

Women Against Military Madness (WAMM) is a non-profit based in Minneapolis, Minnesota established in the early 1980s to build awareness and opposition at that time to U.S. military intervention in Central America. Since its inception, WAMM has been calling for cutting the military budget and applying the money to human needs, including improved healthcare, job creation, fighting climate change, increasing aid to education, and alleviating poverty.

In 1982, the military budget was $180 billion. In December 2023, the U.S. government allocated $841.4 billion to the military budget, increasing it to $953 billion in April 2024. The U.S. military budget is larger than the next ten largest national military budgets combined.

More than half the nation’s federal budget is for the military. Former federal officials published a report detailing that the U.S. Defense Department could, in the next decade alone, cut $1.2 trillion in waste and inefficiency. That money could be used instead to accomplish the Sustainable Development Goals. Powerful financial interests resist this shift in societal priorities. If even half of this figure was spent, instead, on fulfilling our obligations in the Climate Change Paris Accord and in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., we would have a much surer chance in achieving a sustainable world and international peace and cooperation before it is too late.

Commission on Voluntary Service & Action (CVSA) assists nongovernment grassroots organizations across the country to build systemic solutions to the economic, social and environmental problems faced in their communities. CVSA takes action to advance Goal 17 by building alliances and partnerships with educational institutions, faith-based groups, other nongovernmental organizations and business associations, domestically and internationally. By joining forces, we must voice our demands to all levels of U.S. government to devise and implement the ways and means to achieve all 17 Goals and, so doing, regain integrity in the eyes of the Global South.

International respect for the U.S. will also greatly increase when it ends the illegal (by international law) unilateral trade and financial blockade on Cuba, and economic sanctions on numerous other developing countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa. For over 22 years the U.S. has refused to abide by the annual near-unanimous UN General Assembly vote to end the inhumane and illegal blockade it has held on Cuba since 1960. While Cuba is respected worldwide for its international humanitarian aid to countries throughout Latin America, Africa, Asia and even Europe during the COVID19 pandemic, the U.S. is isolated in its refusal to build normal relations with the island country.
Establishing respectful relations with all nations as equals would greatly enhance the world’s ability to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and improve life in the United States.

The approach of Commission on Voluntary Service & Action to Goal 17 is through the framework of building alliances and partnerships with other nongovernmental organizations, educational institutions, faith-based groups and business and professional associations in order to mobilize people into action for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in the U.S., in solidarity with the people of all nations.
Organizations whose work inspired this report and contributed data to its content:

Appalachian Voices, Boon, North Carolina  
www.appvoices.org  
Brings people together to protect the land, air and water of Central and Southern Appalachia and advance a just transition to an equitable clean energy economy.

Atchafalaya Basinkeeper, Inc., Plaquemine, Louisiana  
www.basinkeeper.org  
Works to protect and restore the swamps, lakes, rivers, steams and bayous of the Atchafalaya Basin.

Camphill Communities of North America  
www.camphill.org  
A worldwide social initiative that creates communities designed to include people with and without intellectual disabilities. They strive to empower people to grow, learn, and achieve together.

Capital Area Food Bank, Washington, DC  
www.capitalareafoodbank.org  
The largest non-profit food distribution center in the Washington DC area.

Common Ground Relief, New Orleans, Louisiana  
www.commongroundrelief.org  
Involves volunteers in works to restore and preserve Louisiana's disappearing coastal wetlands.

First Friends of New Jersey and New York, Kearny, New Jersey  
www.firstfriendsnjny.org  
Connects immigrants who are impacted by the immigration enforcement system with volunteers dedicated to helping them survive detention, gain freedom and rebuild their lives.

Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Durango, Colorado  
www.greatoldbroads.org  
A women-led national grassroots organization that engages and inspires activism to preserve and protect wilderness and wild lands.

Grid Alternatives, Oakland, California  
www.gridalternatives.org  
A non-profit dedicated to building community-powered solutions to transition to an equitable clean energy economy.

Photo courtesy of Part of the Solution

Photo courtesy of First Friends of New Jersey and New York
Inclusiv (formerly the National Federation of Community Development Credit Unions), New York, New York
www.inclusiv.org
Helps low- and moderate-income people and communities achieve financial independence through credit unions.

Kansas Rural Center, Topeka, Kansas
www.kansasruralcenter.org
Advocates for an economically viable, ecologically sound and socially just food and farming system.

Mahwah Environmental Volunteers Organization, Mahwah, New Jersey www.mevo.org
Coordinates model projects to combat environmental apathy by increasing our community’s connection to the environment.

National Family Farm Coalition, Washington, DC
www.nffc.org
Represents family farmers, ranchers, fishers and advocacy organizations throughout the United States.

New York Fair Trade Coalition
www.nyctfc.com
Runs the Sustainable Fashion Community Center in New York and advocates for sustainable production and consumption of clothing.

Part of the Solution (POTS), Bronx, New York
www.potsbronx.org
Provides a mosaic of services to the low-income community including daily meals, advocacy, and a legal clinic and more.

Silver Valley Community Resource Center, Kellogg, Idaho
www.silvervalleyaction.org
Organizes the community in their demand for EPA to clean up the nation’s largest Superfund site in the country.

Union Station Homelessness Services, Pasadena, California
www.unionstationhs.org
In pursuit of the goal of ending homelessness, provides services of shelter, meals, career support and advocacy.

Women Against Military Madness, Minneapolis, Minnesota
www.womenagainstmilitarymadness.org
An action-oriented peace and justice organization that works in solidarity with others to create a system of social equity, justice and empowerment of women.
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