

Agenda 2030 Compass: Insights built on the SDGs



Around the world, businesses, governments and citizens increasingly want to make sustainable choices. Yet in practice, the challenges can be daunting: Options that seem sustainable may have unintended consequences, and it is easy to miss synergies that could increase societal benefits.

One way to evaluate the merits of a given investment option, research strategy or policy is to consider how it might affect progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda 2030 Compass provides a practical, structured way to do that.

The 2030 Compass starts from a recognition that the SDGs are complex, and the extent to which an action advances progress on a goal, as well as the potential for synergies or conflicts, will depend on the specific context. It has two key components:

- **The Context Mapper** identifies the potential for positive or negative interactions among SDGs in a particular context (such as a country), based on factors such as socio-economic conditions, the energy mix and the physical environment.
- **The Strategy Analyser** provides a simple, robust workshop-based process and toolbox to analyse the sustainability implications of a planned intervention within that context.

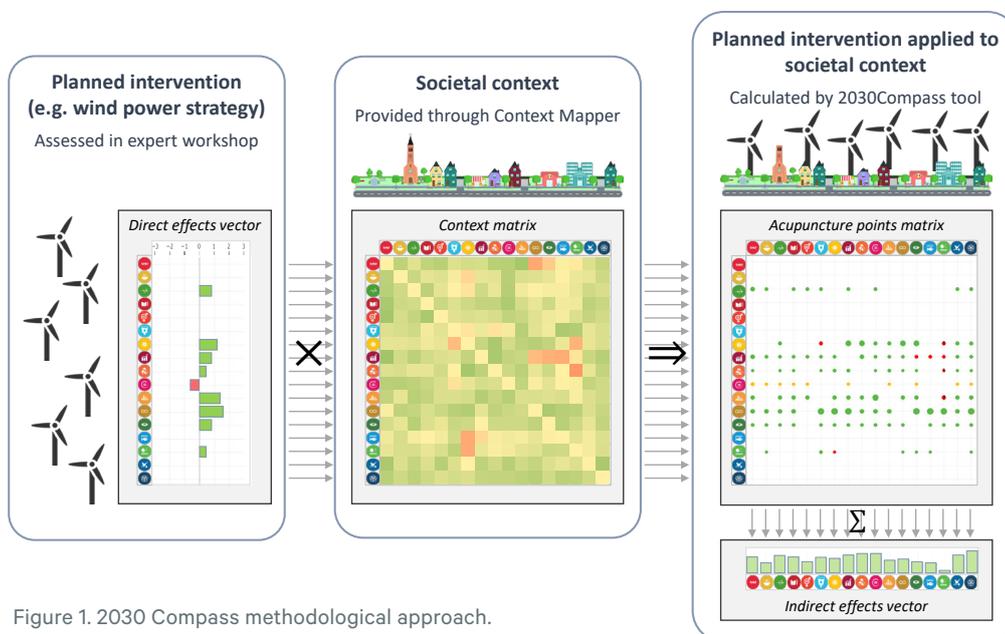


Figure 1. 2030 Compass methodological approach.

The 2030 Compass can be used in a wide range of settings and has been successfully tested, in case studies involving product design, housing development, and local and regional strategies. The tool continues to be refined and improved, and the project partners welcome inquiries about applying it to sustainability challenges all around the world. This brief provides an overview of the tool for prospective users and an entry point to learn more about the Agenda 2030 Compass project.

OCTOBER 2022

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Creating the 2030 Compass

The 2030 Compass grew out of a long-standing collaboration between the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) and Jernkontoret, the Swedish Iron and Steel Producers' Association. In the process, the industry has pioneered CO₂ free steelmaking, while SEI continues to help high-emitting industry sectors identify transformative options. SEI is also a global leader in SDG interaction research. The two were joined by the MIT Center for Collective Intelligence and Swedish software developer Swedwise in delivering the 2030 Compass.

The Agenda 2030 Compass project team worked closely with industry, public authorities, researchers and civil society organisations to develop a scientifically robust, but easy-to-use methodology to assess the potential sustainability impacts of different investment options, research strategies and policies in specific geographic, temporal or sectoral contexts.

A key first step was to understand the factors that might affect how actions to advance one SDG would support or hinder progress on another. For example, in a water-stressed region, trying to boost crop productivity through irrigation might conflict with efforts to expand the clean energy supply through hydropower development – and both could conflict with efforts to provide water for human use. In a place with plentiful water, such conflicts would not arise.

Through an SDG expert panel, supplemented by an innovative crowdsourcing process called the 2030 Compass CoLab, the team gathered insights on potential SDG interactions from researchers, government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and private companies. Drawing on that collective knowledge, the team built a suite of software tools called the Context Mapper that makes it possible to map SDG interactions in specific contexts, based on key factors such as the degree of water scarcity.

To date, the Context Mapper has been used to create a detailed context map for Sweden, basic maps for Poland and India, and test applications for other countries. Going forward, the data inputs and knowledge needed to produce a new map could be gathered by working with country-level experts in as little as two or three days. Alternatively, the CoLab approach could be used to gather a broader range of perspectives.

The 2030 Compass Strategy Analyser

Once a context map is in place, the Strategy Analyser can be used to assess the sustainability of a specific action or strategy. It involves a series of workshops – online or in person – spread out over three half-days, with facilitated homework exercises in-between (Figure 2).

Block A is a partly facilitated process to specify the strategy to be analysed, describe the context for the case and select the workshop participants. In the four pilot cases this was done over two meetings, with regular follow-ups, using a virtual board made on the app MURAL. The **strategy** may be anything from a policy, to a product, process, investment or other type of intervention. It is important to understand its key objectives and characteristics. The **context** is based on the location(s) where the strategy will be implemented, and may include the sector(s) involved, local conditions, known socio-economic or environmental concerns, etc. The **participants** should be at least 3–4 people, and no more than 10 (for a web-based process), and be diverse enough to bring the experience and knowledge needed to cover the main aspects of the case and the context.

Block B is the first workshop session. After **agreeing on the relevant SDGs**, participants use the 2030 Compass tool app to **score SDG impacts** (Figure 3). Working individually, the participants rate the strategy's expected impact on each SDG on a scale from +3 (strongly promoting) to –3 (strongly restricting). They then discuss their initial assessments, and adjust their scores as desired before the final scores are tallied.

3 Practical insights built on the SDGs

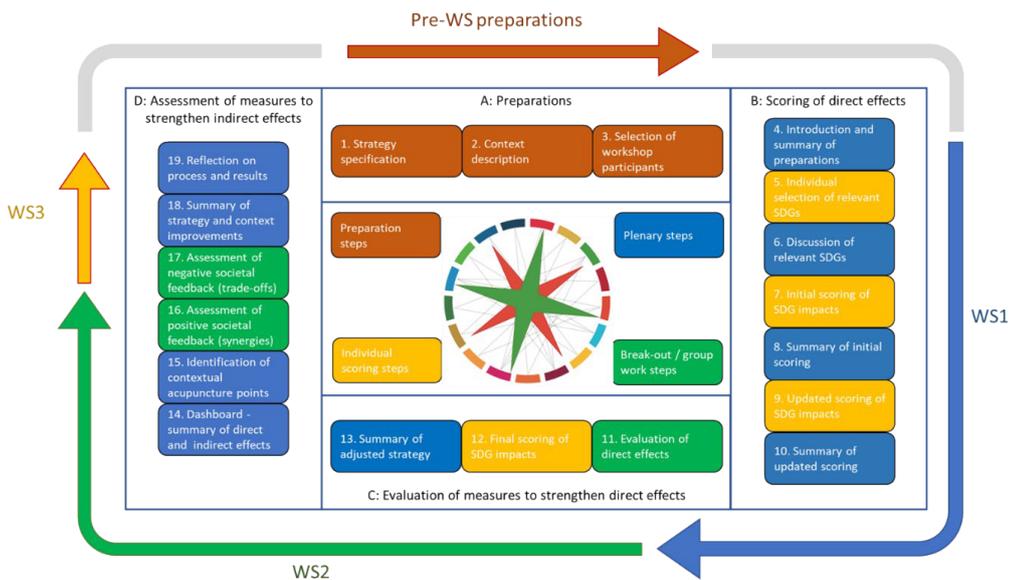


Figure 2. The 2030 Compass workshop process.

Block C is a team exercise to harness the expertise of participants in the room to identify the strategy’s expected impacts on SDG progress more in depth and suggest ways to improve it to strengthen its direct positive effects and minimise its negative impacts. The group work uses a technique known as “**think-write-share**”: Participants first reflect individually for a few minutes on the strategy’s positive and negative direct effects on each SDG. Using sticky notes, they then share their reflections with the group and **consider ways to improve the strategy**. This process is repeated to cover all relevant SDGs.

Block D uses the 2030 Compass tool to identify the strategy’s potential indirect effects on SDG progress – through synergies and/or trade-offs with other SDGs. For this, the group uses the tool’s Acupuncture view, which highlights the strength and direction of all indirect interactions, i.e. showing the synergies and trade-offs with different strengths. Participants work together analysing the SDG-interactions which the tool has identified as **the strongest synergies and trade-offs**. With this analysis in mind, they use the **think-write-share** approach to come up with **potential improvements to the strategy**. The process concludes with **synthesis and reflection** to distil the key takeaways of the analysis.

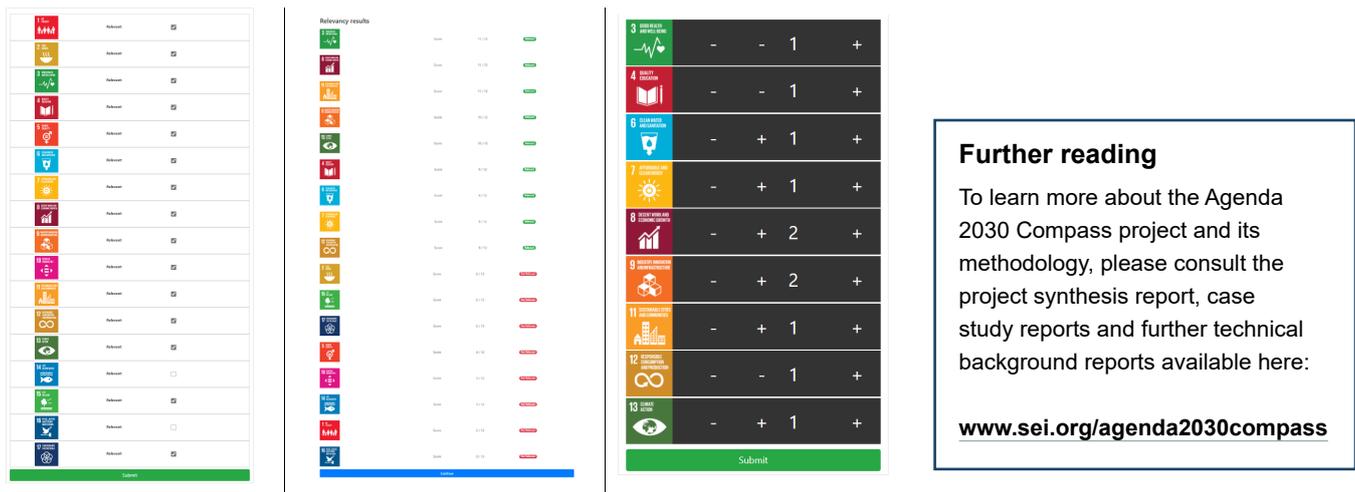
Organisation	Strategy tested
Stilride – Small start-up company making lightweight steel electric scooters	Stilride’s business idea is to produce scooters in a different way compared with mainstream scooter production methods, with a view to enhancing synergies and mitigating trade-offs to increase societal benefit
Ascend – Management consultancy specialising in sustainable business transformations	Smart energy housing solution developed for a residential area by Örebrobostäder (municipal housing company) with the aim to achieve greater local self-sufficiency and progress towards the SDGs compared with a traditional energy system
Kalmar municipal administration	A new mobility strategy with the aim to shift from a current 60% share of private car based mobility to a 60% share of walking, cycling and public transport, taking into account broader urban development objectives
Ramboll – large management and engineering consultancy in collaboration with Skåne Regional Council	Innovation strategy for the Skåne region in light of the 2030 Agenda

Table 1. Case studies and strategies tested

Applying the 2030 Compass Strategy Analyser

The process described above was pilot-tested in four case studies in Sweden, summarised in Table 1. In all four cases, the analysis focused on a single strategy in a single context. The Stilride and Kalmar case studies focused on strategies that were under development, while the Örebro and Skåne studies reviewed existing strategies. The focus was on understanding the societal impacts of the strategy in that context, and refining it to maximise synergies and minimise trade-offs.

However, this is just one of three ways in which the tool can be applied. Two other options are to analyse several alternative strategies in a single context, or to analyse a single strategy across several contexts – for instance, for international projects, or when multiple locations are being considered. In the Stilride study, participants reflected on, but did not fully analyse, how the strategy could also provide societal benefit in other contexts, such as in developing countries.



Further reading

To learn more about the Agenda 2030 Compass project and its methodology, please consult the project synthesis report, case study reports and further technical background reports available here:

www.sei.org/agenda2030compass

Figure 3. Interface for individual selection of relevant SDGs (left); presentation of results from joint selection of relevant SDGs (middle), and scoring tool used for the initial individual scoring exercises, the updated scoring and final scoring

Ways forward

The Agenda 2030 Compass has established a new co-creation-based process and tool to support decision-makers to assess the societal benefit of a planned intervention by analysing its potential impacts in specific societal context, based on how it might affect the attainment of the SDGs, both directly and indirectly.

The approach was successfully tested in four case studies, demonstrating its usefulness across multiple settings. Although the case studies were all set in Sweden, contexts maps can be developed quickly to support applications in any country. Should participants want more detailed maps, the project has also demonstrated how both an expert panel and a crowdsourcing platform can be used to generate more insights about SDG interactions in a specific context.

The 2030 Compass shows significant promise as a decision-making tool to ensure stronger benefits across society. In May 2022, a new phase of the Agenda 2030 Compass was launched under the leadership of Jernkontoret, with project partners SEI and Swedwise. Organisations interested in finding out how the Agenda 2030 Compass can assist in testing the contribution to societal benefits of new product ideas, investments, strategies and reform proposals are welcome to contact **Jernkontoret's Technical Area 86**, available here: <https://www.jernkontoret.se/en/research-education/jernkontorets-technical-areas/to-86-agenda2030compass/>.

As momentum builds around the world to tackle climate change and build a truly sustainable and inclusive future, the 2030 Compass can help stakeholders make more informed decisions.



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