The United Nations (UN) adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a call to action (see figure below) and identified 169 specific targets to help guide these actions. The goals aim to protect people and the planet and promote peace and prosperity to transform global socio-economic ecosystems by 2030.

We are five years into the effort and, so far, results are mixed. While some large multinational companies regularly publish annual sustainability reports and aggressively measure SDG-target progress, many have not yet adopted sustainable development objectives as a measure of corporate performance or as a tool to improve the bottom line.

Some organizations have developed guidance documents that build on the SDG goals and targets. KPMG published their SDG Industry Matrix series in 2017, which offers segment-specific activities that help each industry achieve targets. The publications feature best practices and existing collaborative efforts that can enable companies to achieve SDGs. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development published a Chemical Sector SDG Roadmap in 2018 that highlights the SDGs relevant to segments of the process industries. The roadmap also identifies product and process innovations that can be used to achieve SDG targets.

The RAPID Manufacturing Institute promotes technology development in the areas of process intensification (PI) and modular processing. Our success metrics have focused on improving process yields, reducing manufacturing footprints, and lowering energy use. However, our perspective is evolving, and we are starting to consider the impact PI and modular technologies can have on achieving the SDGs.

It is easy to see how RAPID technologies might help members meet SDG targets. For example, RAPID is already funding several projects that focus on the intersection of water and energy (Goal 6 and Goal 7). A novel membrane technology is being developed to concentrate wastewater and energy (Goal 6 and Goal 7). A novel membrane development in the areas of process intensification (PI) and modular processing. Our success metrics have focused on improving process yields, reducing manufacturing footprints, and lowering energy use. However, our perspective is evolving, and we are starting to consider the impact PI and modular technologies can have on achieving the SDGs.

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