

Climate change poses greater risk to global development than climate action does

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Climate action without careful planning and reform can be costly—but a new study shows that the benefits of global action on climate largely outweigh the hazards.

Researchers found that there are approximately four times fewer trade-offs than synergies between [climate](#) action and the targets of the UN's global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Published today in *Nature Sustainability*, an analysis of the UN Sustainable Development Goals shows how policymakers can manage the positive and negative knock-on effects of taking climate action.

Climate change threatens to undermine about 40 percent of the targets across 16 SDGs, according to the research.

"The climate crisis can affect virtually all areas of sustainable development worldwide," says Francesco Fuso Nerini, assistant professor at KTH Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm. "No matter where you live or what you work with, [climate change](#) will directly—or indirectly—impact your life," he says.

However, the analysis recommends that action is coupled with integrated planning and resource management.

There are trade-offs involved, but not taking action on climate will inflict damage on a much wider scale, Fuso Nerini says. "There are in fact beneficial synergies with the vast majority of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals."

The study was led by Fuso Nerini, an assistant professor in KTH's Unit of Energy Systems Analysis (dESA), who collaborated with co-authors from University College London, University of Sussex, University of British Columbia, Politecnico di Milano and the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The analysis identifies evidence of synergies between climate action and 134 targets enumerated in the SDGs, which the UN describes as a

"blueprint for peace and prosperity". These include targets such as reduced poverty, resilient infrastructure, more innovation and availability of water and sanitation.

Professor Benjamin K. Sovacool from the University of Sussex, second author of the study, argues that the study has some sobering implications. "The SDGs will not be obtainable without serious, coordinated and global action to keep climate change below 1.5C before the end of the century. Ineffective climate action risks slowing progress on the SDGs, which is why we need accelerated action on climate, not just development."

But if the balance between climate action and the wider development agenda is not managed carefully, measures to curb greenhouse gases emissions could backfire, according to the study.

For example, in macro-economic terms climate mitigation policies can be costly in the short term, especially for carbon intensive and energy exporting regions.

Climate action could also adversely affect communities relying on the fossil fuel industries, if there is no "just transition" plan in place. If not properly designed, climate policies could make inequality and poverty worse.

Certain climate policies can impact land and food prices, increasing the risk of leaving behind small agricultural holders. Some national climate adaptation programs have even resulted in violence and conflict, such as the forced displacement of poor communities in Bangladesh.

Nevertheless, there are approximately four times fewer trade-offs than synergies between climate action and achieving the SDGs, the study shows. These trade-offs however have the potential to block [climate](#)

[action](#)—or conversely other development gains.

The impact of trade-offs can be deflected through better coordination within governments, with the "dismantling of policy silos" and "enhancing policy and institutional coherence," the research shows. The paper highlights some promising policy examples, such as Colombia's creation of a cross-department commission for implementation of the country's development agenda and Canada's Federal Sustainable Development Strategy.

"Climate action can enable and reinforce building prosperous, equal and peaceful societies. It provides a foundation for building strong, functioning and capable institutions, and has synergies with SDG targets concerning poverty reduction, welfare and jobs," Fuso Nerini says.

More information: Francesco Fuso Nerini et al. Connecting climate action with other Sustainable Development Goals, *Nature Sustainability* (2019). [DOI: 10.1038/s41893-019-0334-y](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0334-y)

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