

Rob van Tulder and Eveline van Mil



# Principles of Sustainable Business

Frameworks for Corporate Action on the SDGs



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT **GOALS**

**PRME**  
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The basic function of companies is to add value to society. Profits are a means to an end, not an end in itself. The ability of companies to innovate, scale and invest provides them with a powerful base for positive change. But companies are also criticized for not contributing sufficiently to society's grand challenges. An increasingly **VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) world** creates serious governance gaps that not only require new ways of regulation, but also new ways of doing business. Can companies effectively contribute to sustainable development and confront society's systemic challenges?

Arguably the most important frame to drive this ambition was introduced and unanimously adopted in 2015: the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**. The SDG-agenda not only defines a holistic set of global goals and targets, but also foundational principles to guide meaningful action to their achievement by 2030. Multinational companies have signed up to the SDGs as the world's long-term business plan. Realizing the SDGs provides a yearly US\$12 trillion investment and growth opportunity, while creating hundreds of millions of jobs in the process. But **progress is too slow** – witnessing society's inability to deal with pressing human, ecological, economic and health crises – whilst the vast potential for societal value creation remains underutilized. This book provides a timely account of the systemic, strategic and operational challenges that need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of corporate involvement in society, by using the SDGs as leading principles-based framework for actionable, powerful and transformative change.

*Principles of Sustainable Business* is written for graduate and post-master (executive) students, policymakers and business professionals who want to understand the complex challenges of global sustainability. It shows how companies can design and implement SDG-relevant strategies at three levels: the macro level, to assess whether the SDGs present **wicked problems** or **opportunities**; the micro level, to develop and operationalize innovative **business models**, design new **business cases** and navigate organizational **transition trajectories**; the meso level, to develop fit-for-purpose **cross-sector partnering strategies**. *Principles of Sustainable Business* presents innovative tools embedded in a coherent sequence of analytical frameworks that can be applied in courses for students, be put into practice by business professionals and used by action researchers to help companies contribute to the **Decade of Action**.

**Rob van Tulder** is full professor of International Business at RSM Erasmus University, co-founder of the department of Business-Society Management (one of the world's leading capacity groups on teaching and research in sustainable business). He is academic director of the Partnerships Resource Centre, acclaimed author of more than 20 books on Sustainable Development and Multinational Enterprises, and advisor to many companies, governments, international organizations and NGOs.

**Eveline van Mil** is strategic advisor to (semi-)public, private and non-profit organizations on societal interface management challenges. Her practical experience and applied research projects stretch from 'wicked problems', societal governance, transition theory and issue- and stakeholder management, to the 'resource curse', sustainable production and consumption, and behaviouristic regulation of controversial sectors.

More information: [www.principlesofsustainablebusiness.nl](http://www.principlesofsustainablebusiness.nl)

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**Ban Ki-moon**

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