



Puerto Rico's painful awakening to the Sustainable Development Goals

By Ricardo Arzuaga Chaves, Executive Director, PR Chapter of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA)

The loss of life and widespread destruction caused by hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017 resulted in a painful awakening for Puerto Rico to its vulnerabilities about all of the seventeen SDGs. In an island already coping with a 70 billion+ debt crisis—almost 3,000 people lost their lives as 100% of the power grid, 95% of cellular sites and 43% of wastewater treatment plants were inoperable. More than 95% of Puerto Ricans lacked drinking water. With over 40,000 landslides, 97% of roads were impassable and 80% of agricultural infrastructure and production were lost.

The Government of Puerto Rico has taken promising steps to address some of these vulnerabilities. The Puerto Rico Energy Public Policy Act signed into law in May 2019 establishes that the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (PREPA) has to obtain 40% of its electricity from renewable resources by 2025, 60% by 2040, and 100% by 2050. PREPA is also mandated to phase out coal-fired generation by 2028.

The Committee of Experts and Advisors on Climate Change was created

under Law 33-2019 to outline a Mitigation, Adaptation, and Resilience Plan. In February 2021, the Committee for the Prevention, Support, Rescue, and Education of Gender Violence (PARE) was established by Executive Order 2021 -13 to develop and execute a comprehensive and measurable plan to advance gender equality.

Cognizant of the need for global and regional cooperation to advance the 17 SDGs, on April 13, 2021, the Government of Puerto Rico became a member of the Local2030 Islands Network. The Network brings together emerging island economies – nations, states, and communities – from all regions of the globe. The following week Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry announced the United States’ support for the Local2030 Islands Network and its commitment to partnering with small islands in their efforts to combat the climate crisis and development challenges by building resilience in the face of a changing climate.

In its official membership letter, Puerto Rico committed to supporting the Four Principles of the Local2030 Islands Network:

- Identify local goals to advance the SDGs and strengthen long-term political leadership on climate resilience and net-zero emissions pathways.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships that support diverse stakeholders in integrating sustainability priorities into policy and planning.
- Measure SDG progress through tracking and reporting on locally and culturally informed indicators.
- Implement concrete initiatives that build island resilience and a circular economy through locally appropriate solutions, particularly at the water-energy-food nexus.

To stay the course with these promising steps and principles more than 80 stakeholders representing government, academia, private sector, and civil society are actively engaged on the Puerto Rico SDG Working Group (SDGWG). The SDGWG is a collaborative ecosystem focusing on promoting, integrating, advancing, measuring, and financing the SDGs on the Island; in partnership with other like-minded networks and action groups.

Much remains to be accomplished, but one thing is certain—Puerto Rico has been awakened to the SDGs and wants to be part of the solutions to achieving them by 2030.

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