

## SDC 2019 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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### **Title: The Nexus between Economic Activities, Corporate Strategies, and Sustainable Development Goals**

Economic activities have profound impacts on societies and the environment, and therefore on the SDGs. The ways in which companies organize resources and production processes to make goods and services can positively contribute to SDGs. But economic activities can also limit the ability to achieve SDGs, thereby forming negative interactions. Whether economic activities positively or negatively affect the SDGs is contingent upon the type of economic activity that is engaged in. For instance, agriculture may help end hunger (SDG2) but afflict land-based ecosystems (SDG15) and deplete water resources (SDG6). Similarly, pharmaceutical firms help provide access to medicines (SDG3) yet create chemical waste (SDG12). Understanding what the positive and negative interactions are between detailed and specific economic activities and the SDGs is critical for planning for sustainable development and may enable companies to develop more sophisticated SDG value propositions (Van Zanten & Van Tulder, 2018; Van Tulder, 2018). This ambition is theoretically relevant and practically urgent since progress on the SDGs is too slow, as recently reiterated by many (e.g. the UN Secretary General).

We study how the nearly 1,000 economic activities in the ISIC Rev. 4 classification are expected to interact with the SDGs. We adopt a binary approach that flags a positive or a negative relation between an economic activity and an SDG target using three complementary methods. First, we assessed the wording of the SDGs' targets to assess which targets call for involvement of specific economic sectors. Second, we reviewed +-700 academic and grey articles that discuss interactions between economic activities and sustainable development themes. Finally, we interviewed sustainable development experts to validate the linkages that we identified.

Our findings offer a comprehensive overview on the expected positive and negative linkages between economic activities and SDGs. We thereby contribute to the emerging nexus approach to sustainable development, which recognizes that because the SDGs are interconnected, coherent and integrated – as opposed to silo-ed – policies are required (Liu et al., 2018; Weitz et al. 2014). Additionally, we contribute to discussions on the role of companies – the main agents undertaking economic activities - in achieving the SDGs.