

WHAT THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS MEAN FOR THE UNITED STATES

In 2015, the U.N. General Assembly, with the support of the U.S., adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for all countries that generally are to be achieved by 2030. This panel will explore what the SDGs mean or should mean for the United States, and will show, among other things, how the SDGs are intended to move law and policy toward the equitable achievement of sustainability goals. It will also explore how the SDGs can change, and are changing, the conversation about sustainable development. The proposed panel is based largely on a forthcoming book, *Making America a Better Place for All: Accelerating the Transition to Sustainability* (ELI Press 2022). The book is edited by two of the panelists (Dernbach and Schang); the other two panelists (Kronk Warner and Adler) contributed chapters to the book. This book, which contains detailed recommendations for all levels of government as well as the private sector, will be the first detailed examination of what the SDGs mean for the U.S.

Professor John Dernbach will moderate the panel. He will also explain the SDGs and their implications for sustainable development. The SDGs provide a clearer and more focused understanding of sustainable development—and its environmental, social, and economic dimensions—than simple definitions. For example, the SDGs make clear that it is not just improvement in environmental quality that matters, but access to and distribution of improved environmental quality. In addition, he will summarize ways that the SDGs are being employed in the U.S. and elsewhere, and briefly explain the book project.

Dean Elizabeth Kronk Warner will explore Sustainable Development Goal 7, which focuses on clean and reliable energy sources. She will begin with an overview of Goal 7, and an update on how implementation of Goal 7 is going globally. Following this overview, she will explore implementation in the United States and innovative steps being taken by states and tribes. She will conclude with a discussion of what the Biden Administration has done in compliance with SDG 7.

Professor Scott Schang will discuss Goal 15 (life on land). A forthcoming Food and Agriculture Organization legislative study on sustainable land management (of which he is a co-author) seeks to explicate this rapidly developing area of law. He will offer a working definition of sustainable land management and then focus on two key problems at the intersection of sustainability and land: 1) the central, but poorly understood, role that land tenure plays in the US and abroad to ensure sustainable land management; 2) the problematic aspects of the US legal system that leave historically disadvantaged US populations at higher risk for losing their

land and suffering the effects of climate change. He will then offer suggested legal solutions to strengthen land tenure to help meet social, environmental, and economic goals.

Professor Robert Adler will discuss the importance of Goal 6 (water and sanitation) and its importance to human life and dignity. Relative to some other portions of the world, the United States performs well in providing its overall population with access to clean and safe water and sanitation, especially from a human health perspective. There are notable gaps in that coverage, particularly for lower income communities and often communities of color. Similarly, in part due to the intensity of economic growth and land development, the United States has not performed as well in preserving and restoring the integrity of aquatic ecosystems. Water justice and ecosystem restoration and protection, therefore, are key remaining challenges for the United States in accelerating progress toward full attainment of Goal 6.