



How Far Have We Come In Attainment Of The Sustainable Development Goals?

A survey of the Sustainable Development Goals Reports

Dr. Sharmistha Rakshit

Assistant Professor,

Holy Cross College, Agartala, Tripura

Abstract:

The effort of United Nations to set up a target a set of Sustainable goals in 2015 for the member states to achieve by 2030. Since its implementation in 2016 we have come a long way. Hence it becomes necessary to assess how far we have achieved it so far? Or are on the verge of achieving it? The Sustainable Development Goals published by United Nations between 2016 to 2024 have been studied along with the data on Sustainable Development Goals published by the United Nations for conducting the study.

Key words: Sustainable Development goals, Commitment, progress, attainment.

Introduction

Development comes with its own cost. All developments involve utilization of human and natural resources. Developmental ventures across nations and communities have led to severe exploitation of natural resources leading to grave environmental degradation around the world. Its manifestations have been in the form of ozone layer depletion, rise of environmental temperature levels, natural calamities like floods. In order to save the planet there has been rise of concern in the global community for sustainable development which intends to attend to the needs of all human communities as well as protecting the balance of the natural world alongside taking developmental initiatives. The first global summit on human environment was held in Stockholm in Sweden in 1972. This conference marked the beginning of international efforts in restoring and promoting healthy environment around the world. In 2000, the member countries had set a target called as Millenium Development Goals to be achieved by the by 2015 these included eradication of poverty, prevention of environmental degradation, addressing illiteracy, hunger and removal of gender

discrimination. The United Nations Brundtland Report first introduced the concept of Sustainable Development and defined as development that meets the needs of present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (United Nations Brundtland Commission, 1987). Economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection are fundamental to sustainable development. As they are interconnected and crucial for the wellbeing of individuals and societies, it is required to work towards attaining them globally. (United Nations Brundtland Commission, 1987) Keeping this in mind, 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development were adopted by world leaders in September 2015. These goals came into force from 1st January, 2016 and were to be attained by all nations by 2030. (United Nations, 2016) Inspired by the progress made after the adoption of MDGs, in 2015 the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all 193 member countries of UN. They adopted a resolution in the name, “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in which these Goals and 169 related targets were adopted. Since the adoption of SDGs we have come a long period. Almost half the time period marked. It therefore becomes imperative to critically assess how much we have achieved and how far these goals seem to be achievable by 2030.



Objectives of the study:

1. To Understand about Sustainable Development Goals
2. To study how far the SDGs have been achieved globally?
3. To understand the challenges those were faced in attaining the goals.
4. What are the prospects of achieving the goals by 2030?

Research Methodology:

The study is descriptive in nature. It was conducted with the use of secondary data collected through surveying the sustainable development reports. The Sustainable Development Reports from 2017 to 2024 were surveyed for this study.

Performance of SDGs over the years

The effort of United Nations to set up a target a set of Sustainable goals in 2015 for the member states to achieve by 2030. Since its implementation in 2016 we have come a long way. Hence it becomes necessary to assess how far we have achieved it so far? Or are on the verge of achieving it? The following is a discussion on the progress of the countries worldwide by 2024.

SDG 1: No Poverty: 1 out of 8 people around the world suffered from extreme poverty in 2012. 10% of the working class population lived in extreme poverty in 2015 (United Nations, 2016) People living in extreme poverty (living with \$ 1.90 per day) were 8.6% in 2018. In 2020, the number of people living in extreme poverty rose to 724 million. Only 47% of the global population was covered under social protection through cash benefit. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

In 2023 it has been reported that there has been a rise of inflation leading to situation of rise in poverty around the world. This has been due to rising number of conflicts and the devastations and military expenditures associated with it. The continent that has extremely suffered from poverty has been Africa where again the rural areas have suffered more than the urban areas. If the present trend continues, 575 million people will be living under extreme poverty in 2030 (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 2: Zero Hunger: The global population suffering from hunger was 15% in 2002-2002 and it reduced to only 11% between 2014-2016. (United Nations, 2016) While 2.5% of people suffered from severe or moderate food insecurity in 2019. (World Health Organisation, 2023) In 2022, 735 million people were suffering from chronic poverty. In 2023 it has been observed that due to rising inflation, climate change and the Ukraine there has been increase in hunger around the world. The continent which has suffered the most is Africa. Globally certain sections who have been very severely affected are children, women and refugees. In 2024, 1 out of three people in the world suffer from severe food insecurity .30% of the women aged between 15 to 49 years suffer from anemia. 600 million people are likely to suffer from hunger in 2030. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 3: Good Health and Well Being: A huge number of people aged below 70 years died due to heart diseases or cancer in 2012. (United Nations, 2016) 5.9 million children aged below 5 years of age died from preventable diseases, 2.1 million people got infected by HIV and 214 million by malaria in 2015.(ibid) In 2018, 81% of children were delivered under medical supervision. Adolescent pregnancy declined from 56 per 1000 childbirths to 44 per 1000 in 2018. By 2017, although 116.2 million children were immunized, still there were many instances of death of children from diseases like measles and diphtheria. Maternal mortality rate has declined from 227 per 100000 live births in 2015 to 223 in 2020. Child birth under medical supervision has increased from 81% in 2015 to 86% in 2020. By 2021, 133 countries had already met the SDG target of reduction of child mortality rate on under-5years mortality rate of 25 per 1000 live births. The proportion of women of reproductive age (15–49 years) having their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods has increased slightly, from 76.5 to 77.6 per cent between 2015 and 2023. Immunization of children lowered from 86% in 2019 to 81% in 2021. In 2024 it is found that 4.9% of world population has been led to extreme poverty due to expenses made by them in health care services. 15 million people have died due to the pandemic. 52% of deaths caused by AIDS have been reduced through effective treatment. (United Nations, 2025) 146 countries are expected to reach the SDG target of reduction of child mortality rate by 2030. However more needs to be done to ensure universal access to health care services and more vaccination of children against diseases has to be ensured. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 4: Quality Education: in 2013, 59 million children of the primary school level were not going to schools and 757 million people were not literate. (United Nations, 2016) In 2017, only 69% children received education. 262 million children and adolescents were still out of school in 2017. In 2021 rate of school completion around the world was 87%, lower secondary completion was 77% and higher secondary completion was 58%. Proficiency in learning in primary and lower secondary schools were increasing but at a very slow rate. In order to achieve minimal learning proficiency by 2030 it requires an average annual growth of 2.7%. COVID has led to major disruption in education as 4 out of every 5 countries studied by United Nations had to close down their schools during this period. In 2023 still a 1 billion children were in the position to fall out in studies. However a significant positive development that has been noted is that the gender parity in education had almost been achieved with only a 1% gap still remaining to be bridged. It's predicted that in 2030, 300 million children and youth around the world will lack basic numeracy and literacy skills. 84 million children and youth will be out of school. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) Only 1 in every 6 countries will achieve the goal of universal secondary school education. (United Nations, 2025)

SDG 5: Gender Equality: In 2015, 19% women in the world was engaged in labour without pay as against men who were only 8%. Also there were only 23% women in the legislatures around the world. 26% of married women aged below 24 years said that they got married before attaining 18 years of age. (United Nations, 2016) In 2019, 18% women suffered from physical and sexual violence from their partners. Only 24.3% women representatives were found in national parliaments. Women constituted 39% of workforce but only 275 held managerial positions. The pandemic had increased violence against women. In 2021 after the pandemic began, 45% women had reported that they had experienced violence in some form or the other. The work of women at home had increased by atleast 5 hours more during the pandemic. There was a rise in unemployment rate of men by 3% and women by 4.2%. In 2023, women who were members of parliament were only 26.5% in the lower houses and 35.4 % in the local government. It has been observed that there is lack of sufficient legal provisions made by many countries (119 as in 2022) to protect women against violence both sexual and physical. In this scenario it appears impossible to eliminate violence against women around the world. The rate at which women are achieving leading public positions is very slow and at this rate it will require 140 years or more to achieve gender parity for women. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) There seems to be a slow growth in terms of gender equality in education. (United Nations, 2025) By 2030, achieving gender equality remains a far cry. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation: In 2016, a global population of 663 million people did not have access to clean drinking water and only 68% of people around the world had proper sanitation facility. In 2017, 71% people had access to safe drinking water. However 785 million people still did not have access to safe drinking water. (World Health Organisation, 2019) 45% of the global population had access to safe sanitation services. In comparison to what it was in 2000, by 2020 there has been a good progress in availability of clean drinking water. There has been an increase from 62% to 74% people in the world

having access to clean drinking water availability. However, 2.2 billion people still lacked access to safe drinking water in 2022. 703 million people had no access to basic water service and 1.5 billion people did not have basic sanitation services. In 2023 report, it has been predicted that by 2030, water cannot be provided to residents of 107 countries of the world. If universal access to safe drinking water and sanitation has to be ensured by 2030, the pace of extending these services should be increased to three or four times the present effort. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy: In 2014, 3 million people (40%) of the world were not using clean fuel for cooking. In 2015, 89% of the population had access to electricity. In 2017, this percentage remained same and there was no improvement in this subgoal. 61% people had access to clean and safe cooking fuel. Electrification is intrinsically connected to education facilities, working conditions, irrigation, healthcare services and so on. However there has been only 2% rise in global electrification. Whereas in 2017 it was at 89%, in 2021 it rose to only 91%. This indicates that in 2021, 675 million people in the world still did not have access to electricity services which continues to be the same even in 2024. It has been observed that in 2021, 29% of the global population still did not have access to clean , safe and pollution free cooking facilities. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth: In 2014, only 58% women and 65% men in the world only had bank accounts. (World Bank, 2015) In 2015, 6.7 % women and 5.8% men were unemployed. (United Nations, 2016) In 2017, There were also wide gender disparities in labour productivity across regions of the world. It increased the most in Central and Southern Asia (by 4.8 %) and the least in Caribbean (by 0.5%). In 2011, while 50% of the global population had bank accounts in 2021 the number grew to only 76% of the global population had access to the same. (World Bank, 2021) The unemployment rate among youth was 12% in 2018. The global GDP rate was 6% in 2021, 3.2 % in 2022 , 2.7% in 2023. This indicates a massive slowdown of GDP growth rate over the years. This is due heightening of inflation around the world leading to tough economic conditions for people all over. Economic growth has been very much disrupted due to conflicts around the world. The most noteworthy among them during this period has been the Ukraine War in 2021. If decent work and economic growth will need doubling the effort that is being made at present and also making the efforts more inclusive of all regions to eradicate regional divide in terms of economic growth. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) In 2024, the global economic growth is slow, 2 billion informal workers work without social security, one in four people in the world are not in education, training or employment. (United Nations, 2025)

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure: According to the Global Innovation Index 2014, Globally, there were clear differences in industry and innovation, with middle-income countries like China, Brazil, and India catching up but still trailing behind high-income nations like the US, Japan, Germany, and Switzerland in terms of innovation quality. (Soumitra Dutta, 2014)

By 2019, there remained a huge disparity in industry and innovation across regions around the world. Not all regions have access to facilities like loan and aid for growth of industry and innovation in all regions. Innovation, health industry and essential goods industries had bloomed during the pandemic. High tech

industries soon got back to track and has shown impressive growth after the lockdown. However many labour intensive industries were finding it difficult to make progress. These include clothing, leather and furniture industries. There has been a rise in the governmental investments on research and innovation and increase in the use of internet around the world. But older people and people with disabilities find it difficult to adjust themselves to the new means of accessing the important services. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

There also remained a wide gender disparity in the number of researchers in the world as by 2020 only 31.2 % of the researchers around the world were found to be women. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023) In 2024, although 95% of mobile and broadband is available to the people, there remain regional disparities. Only 68% access of broadband in Oceania, there remains 82% coverage in sub Saharan region. (United Nations, 2025) While there has been significant progress in the field of innovation, technology and increase in mobile network coverage, there a lot needs to be done regarding sustainable and inclusive .

SDG 10: *Reduced Inequalities*: There was found a mixed progress in prosperity in countries. Both rich and poor countries had high and low levels of economic inequality. The economic inequality among countries had increased due to the Pandemic. The inequality has increased to 4.4 % between 2019 to 2020. Economic inequalities is going to increase in the future due to market economy and rise of inflation. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 11: *Sustainable Cities and Communities*: In 2014, 880 million people dwelling in urban areas of the world lived in slums. 2.5 million people in the urban area was exposed to air pollution. (United Nations, 2016). The population living in slums or informal settlements as in 2018 is over 1 billion. 80% of them are found in Asia and Africa. From 2010 to 2018, it was found that 2 billion people had no service for waste collection and 3 billion people did not have controlled waste disposal facilities. In 2022, 55% of the world population lived in cities and towns. 1.1 billion people from the urban areas lived in slums or similar situation in 2022. The number of world population was predicted to increase to 70% of the population by 2050. By 2050, 2 billion people are predicted to live in slums. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 12: *Responsible Production and Consumption*: In 2015, the global material footprint—which measures the quantity of primary materials required to meet consumption—amounted to about 12 tons of resources extracted per person (United Nations, 2016). the global material footprint was 92 billion in 2017. It was an increase in 70% of the same since 2000. 31% food of the world is wasted during production (14%) and in retail and household (17%). The amount of plastic pollution in the world is 400 million tons per year. Plastic pollution will rise to around 800 million tons per year by 2050. preventing food loss and ensuring responsible production and consumption is an urgent need to prevent climate change, loss of bio diversity and environmental degradation. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 13: *Climate Action*: In 2017, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations reached 405.5 parts per million . According to the report given by Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United nations, the world has witnessed a 1.5°C of temperature level rise by 2021. There is a trend towards increase in global temperature level by 1.5°C by 2030. The target of reduction in greenhouse gases emission shows no progress. On the contrary the data reveals that the situation is deteriorating. 220 coastal regions improved their coastal water quality from 2012-2018. .(United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 14: *Life Below water*: As of December 2018, 17 per cent of waters under national jurisdiction were covered by protected areas. This is a significant increase from 12 per cent in 2015. It is also more than double the coverage level in 2010. 17 million metric ton of plastic were found polluting the ocean in 2021. Another matter of concern has been the more and more acidification of sea and rise in pH level. in 2023, the pH level of sea water on an average around the world was 8.1 which indicates acidification level is 30% more than what it was in the pre-industrial world. Illegal and unregulated fishing should also be prevented. In this direction, the Agreement on Port State Measures was introduced from June 2016. By May 2023, 75 parties became part of the agreement. This has definitely advanced the caused the prevention of IUU around the world. From 2021 to 2040, the amount of plastic liter in oceans is predicted to increase the amount to around double or triple of what it was in 2021 (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 15: *Life on land*: According to the Red List Index, which tracks data on more than 20,000 species of mammals, birds, amphibians, corals and cycads, the risk of species extinction has worsened by about 10 per cent over the last 25 years. The Index declined from 0.82 in 1993 to 0.74 in 2018. According to the red list around 1 million species around the world is under the threat of extinction which includes 21 percent of the reptile species in the world. Only 32% of the countries are taking proper steps to maintain the biodiversity of their countries. It is estimated that by 2030, the Red list index of species will fall down to 0.70 or even lower. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 16: *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*: The global homicide rate was 6 per 100,000 people over the 2007–2017 decade. The average number of detected trafficking victims per country was 254 in 2016. In 141 countries of the world there were 1, 97,915 cases identified of trafficking between 2017 to 2020.

In 2021, there were around 4,58,000 intentional homicides around the world. This was the largest in the last two decades. There are other major areas of concern like large number of pretrial (3.4 million in 2021) and sentenced detainees in prisons. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

Between 2021 to 2022, around 16,988 civilians around the world were killed during conflicts in the world. The Ukraine War was one of the grave conflicts that occurred during this period. According to the Global Sustainable Development Report 2023 published by United Nations, there has been little or no progress in reduction of homicides around the world. There has been aggravation in terms of both numbers and living conditions of unsentenced prisoners around the world. Although there has been increase in the number of national human rights institutions, there has been increase in the number of un sentenced detainees. Also no progress has taken place in the attempt to reduce number of homicide cases around the world. Looking at

the present scenario there seems to be not much hope in attainment of this goal by 2030 unless some acceleration of initiatives and strengthening of capacities of countries around the world. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

SDG 17 *Partnerships for the Goals*: Although the global partnerships to attain SDGs is growing but hurdles still remains mainly due to the digital divide that still exists between rich developed and developing countries. According to the Global Sustainable Development Report of 2023, there has been fair progress in the implementation of developmental assistance commitments. There has been great progress in the use of internet and its availability around the world. However there has been only limited progress in the increase of statistical capacities. (United Nations Development Programme, 2023)

Key Findings

1. Out of 193 UN member countries, data of only 167 countries have been produced in the SDG Reports. This might be due to the data not being produced by some countries. This depicts United Nations lack of proper enforcement mechanism for compliance of promises made.
 2. Only a handful of sub goals seem to be attainable by 2030. Those are Mobile network access (under SDG 9), access to electricity (under SDG 7), increase in internet usage (under SDG 17), under five mortality rate (under SDG 3) (United Nations, 2024)
 3. The goals of no poverty(SDG 1), zero hunger (SDG 2), quality education (SDG 4), clean water and sanitation(SDG 6), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate action(SDG 13), life below water (SDG 14), life on land (SDG 15), peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16), partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) have shown a stagnation in progress by 2024. (United Nations, 2024)
 4. Instead of progress in achievement, some goals are found rather to be in deterioration . Those are inclusive and quality education (SDG 4), affordable and clean energy (SDG 5), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 7) and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8) (United Nations, 2024)
- 3.Among the 10 territorial regions of the world demarcated in the 2024 report, the BRICS, BRICS+ and the East and South Asian countries are performing considerably well in comparison to the other regions. They have depicted a steep improvement in parameters of poverty elimination and innovation while a steady progress in promotion of good health gender equality, clean water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy. There is no deterioration in performance in any of the goals in these regions although there is stagnation in areas like zero hunger, reduction of inequalities, building up of sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, marine and animal life, building up of peace, justice and strong institutions and partnerships for attainment of the goals.

4. Finland(SDG score 86.4) is the first, Sweden second, Denmark third, Germany fourth and France fifth in terms of attainment of SDGs (United Nations, 2024)while some economically powerful countries USA, Russia, China, India, UK are far away in position.

5. The performance of countries in achieving the goals is declining. While Finland the top most country in this field scored 94 in 2023, its score has reduced to 86.4 in 2024. (sdgtransformationcenter.org, 2024)

6. In general it can be said that the SDGs have failed to prevent the rising amount of air pollution, ozone layer depletion, global warming, gender disparity and the like.

Challenges in achieving SDGs:

1. It is a challenge to create and maintain public awareness, mobilization, advocacy,
2. There are too many goals to be attained. 17 goals and 169 targets enshrined in SDGs as compared to only 8 goals and 18 targets of MDGs.
3. Several targets are aspirational and unachievable
4. Another challenge is that too many of the goals and targets are vague and immeasurable
5. Lack of stringent mechanism adopted by United Nations in ensuring compliance with the goals by member countries.
6. Lack of enough data being provided by the member countries on the attainment of SDGs in their country.

Policy recommendations:

1. There should be more inclusivity in the membership of the United Nations. The Developing countries should be given a involvement and say in the decision making process in the UN so that the interests and concerns of the Third world countries can truly be represented and there is prevention of unilateral perspective on global concerns.
2. The countries leading the path should act according to their commitments. While Finland a small country situated at the northern part of the world could acquire the position of the World's happiest country and the first in position in regard to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, USA the most developed country in the world could only acquire the 46th position in this list.
3. The United Nations should develop stringent mechanisms for compliance of countries in commitment towards attainment of the SDG goals.
4. There should be more awareness programs conducted on the importance of SDGs and ways to achieve them both at the international and national levels.

Conclusion

Although the initiative of developing Sustainable Development Goals by the United Nations was a great step taken in order to promote and protect the health and environment of the world but how much they can be achieved seems to be too big a dream in 2025 just five years away from 2030. Overall it can be said that progress in this area also has not been as it was desired it is due to lack of adequate resources to take new initiatives. Global conflicts have had an adverse effect. Moreover although there has been immense progress in the spread and use of internet facility, the digital divide persists among global population. There needs to be more intense and working partnerships made between Governments, Private organizations, and Civil society to achieve the SDGs and their desired outcomes.

References:

- 2014 *The Global Innovation Index 2014 The Human Factor in Innovation* INSEAD
sdgtransformationcenter.org2024reports
- UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs2022 *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals The Gender Snapshot 2022* New YorkUN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
- United Nations Brundtland Commission1987 *Our Common Future; Brundtland Report 1987* United Nations
- United Nations2016 *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016* United Nations
- United Nations2021 *Goals*
- United Nations2024 *Sustainable Development Goals*
- United Nations Development Programme2023 *Sustainable Development Goals*
- World Bank *News*
- World Bank2021 *publication*
- World Health Organisation *Health Topics*
- World Health Organisation *Health Topics*

Hence according to the United Nations reports it has been found that the progress in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals around the globe has been relatively slow due to factors like global conflicts, climate change, slow and less effective partnerships, global economic and digital divide and the Pandemic. All of these fall outs can be overcome only by a global effort with an attitude of collaboration. The SDG Summit held on 18-19 September 2023 at its Headquarters in New York has also reported the same.

