

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

CONCEPTS, DEBATES AND CONCERNS:

An Overview in the Context of
South Asia



Salahuddin M Aminuzzaman

Sustainable Development Goals– Concepts, Debates and Concerns: An Overview in the Context of South Asia

Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman, Adviser, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG)

Published in June 2020

Cover design - Sarah Zaman

Published by South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG)

Room No. - NAC 1074, Phone: +88-02-55668200 Ext. 2163/2164

www.sipg.northsouth.edu, sipg@northsouth.edu

Contents

Introduction	01
Development Paradigms	02
Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)	06
A Snapshot Overview of MDGs	09
SAARC Development Goals -Regional Approach of Development	10
SAARC Development Goals	11
A Snapshot Overview of SAARC Development Goals	12
Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)	17
Components of the SDGs.....	18
Conceptual premises of the SDGs	19
Core Features of the SDGs	21
Complexity of SDG Monitoring	22
Synergies and Trade-Offs of SDGs	25
Patterns of SDG Interactions	30
Key building blocks of SDG Implementation	32
Institutional Arrangements for Implementation of SDGs in South Asia ...	36
Conclusions: Key building blocks of SDG Implementation	45
Policy Options and Interventions	48

Sustainable Development Goals– Concepts, Debates and Concerns: An Overview in the Context of South Asia

Salahuddin M. Aminuzzaman*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a global approach to reduce poverty, promote sustainable development and ensure the peace and prosperity of people across the world. The SDGs are based on the conceptual premise that proper integration and synergy of policy interventions in different areas can make a substantive difference in achieving the desired goals. As an integrated model, SDGs therefore offer a unique mechanism towards having a balanced approach of development, not only within the national boundary but also on the regional and global scale. SDGs strongly emphasize the need for the interconnectedness of policies to enable action from national leadership structures, policy makers and planning professionals at all levels. As a development model, it recognizes the need for addressing the complex development issues with balanced social, economic, and environmental considerations. Bringing together such dimensions of development into one framework is perhaps the uniqueness of the SDG model.

The SDG model and its approaches are, therefore, especially important in the stages of policy design, when specific interventions are designed for various sectors. In fact, the design model of SDGs is based on the fullest put forward to assess their combined effect. As a design model, SDGs also expect the fullest synergies of the comprehensive interventions to achieve their combined effect.

*Adviser, South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG), North South University

The SDG targets and indicators, therefore, demand a complex, ambitious and holistic approach – capturing the local, regional and global framework for sustainable development. Many of the SDGs are integrated with issues that cover economic vitality, gender equality, human rights, disability, climate change and disaster risk reduction. As an approach it cuts across and is supplementary to each other in terms of sustainability, economic vitality, gender equality, human rights, disability, climate change and disaster risk reduction. In fact, SDGs as a set of ambitious goals have set huge developmental options, opportunities and challenges with a high potential of capturing the citizens across their social, political and economic status and identities. Achieving the SDGs, therefore, requires an integrated, holistic and broad system based approach with a wide policy range and robust political framework where the philosophy of “leave no one behind” is duly recognized and respected.

The 2030 Agenda encompasses the three core dimensions of economic, social and environmental development and offers South Asian countries a unique pathway to eradicate poverty and hunger. It enables them to provide a life of dignity for all while paying attention to environmental sustainability. Against that backdrop, this working paper explores the opportunities that the SDGs represent for their sustainable transformation, and the implementation challenges for achieving the SDGs.

Development Paradigms

The Charter of the United Nations expresses the determination of the people of the world to “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” and to “employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples”¹. Article 55 of the Charter further expands on these purposes more elaborately: “With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and wellbeing which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: a. higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and

¹Jackson, Peter (2007), A Prehistory of the Millennium Development Goals: Four Decades of Struggle for Development in the United Nations, UN Chronicle, Vol. XLIV, No 4. 2007

social progress and development; b. solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and c. universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all”².

In the early Post-War Consensus era, a number of theories have evolved which largely focus on the extensions of classical dualism theory and policy, concentrating on creating the preconditions for development and severing colonial ties and getting tied with global market system. This approach has been followed by the approach of the developmentalist state. During this period, international financial institutions have emphasized the importance and increased reliance on structural adjustment and reform at both macro and micro levels of policy, embodied in line with the Washington Consensus and its extensions. The new era emerged more prominently in the early eighties, emphasizing that the development model for the developing world should emphasize on the fundamental objective of human development fueled by equitable growth.³

The SDGs, as a development approach, have emerged through an evolutionary process. They are essentially a continuity of the development paradigms of the UN System over the four decades. The UN has played a significant role in the process of development of different models and approaches of development practice. Such models cover a range of areas – economic development management and planning, design of institutional and structural adjustment processes, promotion of human rights, access and participation of community members in decision making, promotion of gender equality, environmental concerns, social justice and sustainability.

In 1961, the UN floated the *First Development Decade Plan* as the blue print for the global socio-economic development policy framework. The overarching principles and values of the First Development Decade plan emphasized the need and importance of the promotion of civil, political,

²The United Nations Development Agenda: Development for All Goals, commitments and strategies agreed at the United Nations world conferences and summits since 1990, United Nations, New York, 2007.

³Ranis, Gustav (2004) The Evolution of Development Thinking: Theory and Policy, World Bank, <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/pdf/10.1596/0-8213-6021-3#page=127>.

social and economic rights.⁴ The first UN Development Decade called on all member states to intensify their efforts to mobilize support to accelerate the progress towards developing a self-sustaining economic growth and social advancement, particularly in developing countries. The Plan emphasized the need for a developing country to set its own targets, with a minimum annual growth rate of 5% in aggregate national income by the end of the decade. However, despite the formulation of various plans and efforts, the First Development Decade could only make limited progress, where the ultimate goals and targets remained still a far distant.

Based on the institutional learning of **the *First UN Development Decade***, in 1970, the General Assembly adopted an international development paradigm for the Second UN Development Decade. The main objectives of the plan were to promote sustained economic growth - particularly in the developing countries, ensure a higher standard of living, and facilitate the process of development. Most importantly, the ***Second UN Development Decade*** recognized the need to facilitate the process to reduce the gap between developed and developing countries. The General Assembly also noted that while the developing countries bore primary responsibility for their development, their efforts would be insufficient without increased financial assistance from and more favorable economic and commercial policies on the part of the developed countries.

The goals and objectives of the second decade set the average annual rate of growth in the gross product of the developing countries at 6% or above, average annual expansion in agricultural output at 4%, and expansion in manufacturing output at 8%. Unfortunately, during the decade, the gap between the developed and the developing countries increased alarmingly. Regardless, some of the aggregate targets set in the strategy for the decade had been met or exceeded, “owing mainly to the developing countries’ own efforts and, to a certain extent, to external factors”. A major area of shortfall was in agriculture, where less than half of the target rate of 4% annual growth was realized by the developing countries as a whole.

⁴Ghai, Dharam (2008), UN Contributions to Development Thinking and Practice, Development in Practice, Vol. 18, No. 6 (Nov., 2008), pp. 767-773

Based on the institutional and structural learning from the last two model UN Decades, the *Third UN Development Decade* pledged that the governments of developing countries initiate themselves, individually and collectively, to fulfill their commitments towards establishing a new international economic order based on justice and equity. They agreed to subscribe to the goals and objectives of the strategy and to translate them into reality by adopting a coherent set of “interrelated, concrete, and effective policy measures” in all sectors of development.

The strategy set forth ambitious goals and objectives - 7% average annual rate of GDP; 7.5% expansion of exports; increase in gross domestic savings to 24% of GDP, 4% average expansion of agricultural production; and a 9% annual rate of expansion of manufacturing output, and 100% universal primary school enrollment. The result of the Third UN Development Decade was disastrous and the overall growth, along with per capita growth, in these nations shrank, compared to averages in the 1970s.

Thus, the UN Development Decades could, unfortunately, not make any difference to the development disparity of developing nations or create any impactful change in their growth and development circumstances. This dismal result is illustrated by the fact that the number of countries designated by the General Assembly as “least developed” had grown from 24 in 1972 to 47 in 1991.

The UN, however, recognized the limitations of the UN Development paradigm. With a view to the creation of conditions of stability and wellbeing which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations as well as the promotion of principle of equal rights, standards of living, employment, social progress and development, health, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The UN system realized that the expected outcomes of the Development Decades do not seem to have worked due to the absence of any legal binding on or commitment from the member countries. The UN also acknowledged that due to weak planning and inadequate development management skills, developing countries simply adopted the goals without being able to integrate them with the mainstream development

planning process. The UN also recognized that most of the developing countries adopted the conventions and treaties without having appropriate legal and institutional frameworks.⁵

The Charter of the United Nations set the premise for a global development paradigm for the creation of conditions of stability and wellbeing of the nations. The UN recognized the need and importance of promoting civil, political, social and economic rights. Thus, they subsequently advocated the new approaches of the developmentalist state. Thereafter, all three of the UN Development decades emphasized the need for economic development management, promotion of civil, political, social and economic rights, and establishment of a new international economic order based on justice and equity. However, three UN Development Decades could not make any noticeable dent in addressing the developmental disparity; the number of “least developed” countries had rather almost doubled between 1972 and 1991.⁶

With such a background, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) emerged as the newest global promise and agreement to reduce poverty and human deprivation through collaborative action. The MDGs differ from all other global promises for poverty reduction in their comprehensive nature, with a plan to systematically manage the generation of resources while providing a comprehensive design, implementation and monitoring system. In fact, the MDGs started with a warm aura as against “a cloud of soft words, good intentions and moral comfort”⁷.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

In continuation of the UN Development Decades, at the beginning of the new millennium, the United Nations tabled a broad vision to fight

⁵The United Nations Development Agenda: Development for All Goals, commitments and strategies agreed at the United Nations world conferences and summits since 1990, United Nations, New York, 2007, p 79.

⁶Tolba, Mostafa & El-Kholy, O edited (1992) *The World Environment 1972–1992: Two decades of challenge*, Springer

⁷Saith, Ashwani, (2006) *From Universal Values to Millennium Development Goals: Lost in Translation*, *Development and Change*, 37(6): 1167–1199.

poverty in its many dimensions. In September 2000, leaders of 189 countries gathered at the United Nations headquarters and signed the historic Millennium Development Goals. The World leaders committed to combat poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation, and discrimination against women.⁸ The member countries, under the guidance of the UN, committed to a set of eight measurable goals that include addressing extreme poverty and hunger, promoting gender equality and reducing child mortality by the target date of 2015. In line with the 8 goals, the MDGs identified 60 specific indicators to assess the performance of the mega development interventions. Listed below is a brief aggregation of the achievements of MDGs.⁹

MDG 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger: The number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day has been reduced from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015, although the target of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger was narrowly missed.

MDG 2: Achieve universal primary education: Primary school enrolment figures have shown an impressive rise, but the goal of achieving universal primary education has just been missed, with the net enrolment rate increasing from 83% in 2000 to 91% this year.

MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women: About two thirds of developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary education.

MDG 4: Reduce child mortality: The child mortality rate has reduced by more than half over the past 25 years – falling from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births – but it has failed to meet the MDG target of a drop of two-thirds.

MDG 5: Improve maternal health: The global maternal mortality ratio has fallen by nearly half – short of the two-thirds reduction the MDGs aimed for.

⁸In fact, the MDGs were conceptually and technically aligned to other different set of development goals especially of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) widely known as International Development Goals (IDGs).

⁹<https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/background.html>

MDG 6: Combating HIV/AIDs, malaria, and other diseases: The target of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids by 2015 has not been met, although the number of new HIV infections fell by around 40% between 2000 and 2013.

MDG 7: Ensure environmental sustainability: Some 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water since 1990, so the target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of water was achieved in 2010 – five years ahead of schedule. However, 663 million people across the world still do not have access to improved drinking water.

MDG 8: Develop a global partnership for development: Between 2000 and 2014, overseas development assistance from rich nations to developing countries increased by 66% in real terms.

Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the UN, made succinct observations in regards to the achievements and shortcoming of the MDGs. He noted that the MDGs have been able “to lift more than one billion people out of extreme poverty, to make inroads against hunger, to enable more girls to attend school than ever before and to protect our planet”. The MDGs have also “created a condition to reshape the decision-making in developed and developing countries alike”. Unfortunately, however, “inequalities still persist and that progress has been uneven... experiences and evidence from the efforts to achieve the MDGs demonstrate that we know what to do. But further progress will require an unswerving political will, and collective, long-term effort”. He further acknowledged that “We need to tackle root causes and do more to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions”¹⁰.

The critics, however, observed that the approach and methodology of the MDGs are “all too technocratic and non-transparent” and have developed in a “political vacuum”, with little citizens’ involvement.¹¹ MDGs have been created by only a few stakeholders without adequate engagement of developing countries. They have broadly overlooked. The development objectives and priorities on the ground. Others noted

¹⁰Foreword Note, The Millennium Development Goals Report.

¹¹<https://www.thebrokeronline.eu/lessons-learned-from-the-mdgs-d38/>

that MDGs are simplistic and unadapted to national needs; they do not offer a credible accountability structure and have grossly ignored the system of vertical integration¹².

A Snapshot Overview of MDGs

MDG No.	Goal	Progress
1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger	The number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day has been reduced from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015. This is remarkable progress in one dimension of the goal, despite not fully meeting the target of halving the proportion of people suffering from hunger.
2	Achieve universal primary education	Primary school enrolment figures have shown an impressive rise, but the goal of achieving universal primary education has just been missed, with the net enrolment rate increasing from 83% in 2000 to 91% this year.
3	Promote gender equality and empower women	About two thirds of developing countries have achieved gender parity in primary education, which is remarkable progress in this regard.
4	Reduce child mortality	The child mortality rate has reduced by more than half over the past 25 years – falling from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births. Despite this astute progress, it has failed to meet the MDG target of a drop of two-thirds.
5	Improve maternal health	The global maternal mortality ratio has fallen by nearly half – short of the two-thirds reduction the MDGs aimed for.

¹²Fehling, Maya Fehling, Brett D. Nelson, and Sridhar Venkatapuram (2013), Limitations of the Millennium Development Goals: a literature review, *Global Public Health*. 2013 Dec; 8(10): 1109–1122, doi: 10.1080/17441692.2013.845676

MDG No.	Goal	Progress
6	Combating HIV/ AIDs, malaria, and other diseases	The target of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids by 2015 has not been met, although the number of new HIV infections has fallen by around 40% between 2000 and 2013.
7	Ensure environmental sustainability	Some 2.6 billion people have gained access to improved drinking water since 1990, so the target of halving the proportion of people without access to improved sources of water was achieved in 2010 – five years ahead of schedule. However, 663 million people across the world still do not have access to improved drinking water.
8	Develop a global partnership for development	Between 2000 and 2014, overseas development assistance from rich nations to developing countries increased by 66% in real terms.

SAARC Development Goals - Regional Approach of Development

In 2005, the countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)¹³ innovated their own version of development goals – officially known as South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation Development Goals (SAARC Development Goals). The SAARC Development Goals, to a great extent, are a tailor-made version of the MDGs for the region. The twenty-sixth session of the Council of Ministers of SAARC in November 2005 formally endorsed the SAARC Development Goals. The SAARC Development Goals broadly covered four thematic areas: Livelihood Goals (with 8 specific goals), Health Goals (with 4 goals), Education Goals (with 4 goals), and

¹³Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal and Pakistan

Environment Goals (with 6 goals). Overall, there were 22 goals with 75 indicators. SAARC member countries also agreed that all of the national governments would monitor their progress and publish reports based on these 75 indicators to the SAARC Secretariat, which will compile and analyze these reports and submit its findings at the annual meetings of the SAARC Poverty Alleviation Ministers.

Later, during the 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2014, the SAARC leaders recognized the post-2015 Development Agenda, and agreed to appropriately contextualize the Sustainable Development Goals, at the regional level. Subsequently, the fourth meetings of the SAARC Ministers on Poverty Alleviation in Bhutan in July 2015 decided to revise the SAARC Development Goals to align them with the UN sponsored SDGs.

SAARC Development Goals

Components of SAARC Development Goals	
Livelihood	
Goal 1	Eradication of Hunger Poverty
Goal 2	Halve proportion of people in Poverty by 2010
Goal 3	Ensure adequate nutrition and dietary improvement for the poor
Goal 4	Ensure a robust pro-poor growth process
Goal 5	Strengthen connectivity of poorer regions and of poor as social groups
Goal 6	Reduce social and institutional vulnerabilities of the poor, women, and children
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable justice
Goal 8	Ensure effective participation of poor and of women in anti-poverty policies and programmes
Health	
Goal 9	Maternal health
Goal 10	Childhealth
Goal 11	Affordable health-care
Goal 12	Improved hygiene and Public health

Education	
Goal 13	Access to primary/communal school for all children, boys and girls
Goal 14	Completion of primary education cycle
Goal 15	Universal functional literacy
Goal 16	Quality education at primary, secondary and vocational levels
Environment	
Goal 17	Acceptable level of forest cover
Goal 18	Acceptable level of water and soil quality
Goal 19	Acceptable level of air quality
Goal 20	Conservation of bio-diversity
Goal 21	Wet land conservation
Goal 22	Ban on dumping of hazardous waste, including radio-active waste

The SAARC Development Goals faced a number of challenges. Some of the critical challenges are: incorporation of the goals into the National Development Plans, including poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), and prioritization of such goals in the light of the respective national concerns; inadequate allocation of resources, targets and indicators for each of the goals; lack of resource allocation and mobilization, and developing stakeholder partnerships. It also suffered from inadequacy of data and information towards developing an effective implementation plan.

A Snapshot Overview of SAARC Development Goals

As discussed previously, data collection in regard to the progress of the SAARC development goals was not consistently maintained across the sub-region from its inception until the point where SDGs were incorporated into the SAARC development framework. While some countries maintained comparatively better databases, difficulty remained in aggregating data for the sub-region collectively across the 22 goals. Thus, the table below has inconsistent data timelines, and proxies have

been used to varying degrees of accuracy as a measure of each respective goal. Some goals could not even be quantified through aggregated indicators.

Goal No.	Goal	Progress
Livelihood		
1	Eradication of Hunger and Poverty	The food production index (base year of 2004) increased from 100.38 to 140.39 in between 2005 and 2015, a 40% improvement in total food production, compared to a 14.4% increase in population for the same period. This must have significantly reduced the hunger of people within this sub-region. Poverty was not eradicated, but rather mitigated, as shown in the next goal.
2	Halve proportion of people in Poverty by 2010	The number of people living under the poverty line \$1.9 a day (2011 PPP) had been reduced 38.5% of the sub-region's population in 2002 to 24.6% of the sub-region's population in 2010, which falls short of the target.
3	Ensure adequate nutrition and dietary improvement for the poor	The percentage of undernourished individuals fell from 21.83% to 16.2% in between 2005 and 2015, a significant improvement but not eradication.
4	Ensure a robust pro-poor growth process	Income growth for the bottom 40% as a ratio of the top 10% has been -0.19 in Bangladesh (2010-2016), -0.05 in Bhutan (2012-2017), -0.49 in India (2004-2011), 3.58 in Nepal (2003 to 2010), -1.53 in Pakistan (2010-2015) and -0.48 in Sri Lanka (2012 to 2016). Data was unavailable for Afghanistan and Maldives. Overall, it can be seen that income inequality has gotten significantly worse in South Asia.

5	Strengthen connectivity of poorer regions and of poor as social groups	The percentage of population living in slums in the sub region fell from 39.8% in 2005 to 34.8% in 2009. The urban population has also increased from 29% to 32.7% from 2005 to 2015, indicating greater involvement of social groups in areas of economic power. The quality of trade and transport related infrastructure, as measured by the World Bank – with 1 being low and 5 being high – increased from 2.073 to 2.449 in between 2007 and 2016.
6	Reduce social and institutional vulnerabilities of the poor, women, and children	Vulnerable employment for women as a percentage of total women employed reduced from 86.0% to 78.6% in between 2005 and 2015. Children out of primary school as a percentage of the total children of primary school age has fallen from 11.41% to 7.79% in between 2005 and 2015. Both indicators indicate reducing social vulnerabilities for women and children.
7	Ensure access to affordable justice	No quantitative indicators were aggregated for this goal.
8	Ensure effective participation of poor and of women in anti-poverty policies and programmes	The percentage of seats in parliament for women increased between 13.3% in 2005 to 15.7% in 2015. This indicates a marginal improvement in their role in shaping policies and programs.

Health

9	Maternal health	The number of maternal deaths had decreased from 116,000 in 2005 to 63,000 in 2015 for South Asia. While this is an absolute number and the maternal mortality ratio for this period would be a better indicator, it has not been aggregated for South Asia. The lifetime risk of maternal death had also decreased from 1.05% in 2005 to 0.48% in 2015.
---	-----------------	--

10	Child health	The mortality rate of under 5 years (per 1000 live births) decreased from 76.7 to 48.8 between 2005 and 2010, a significant improvement to children’s health.
11	Affordable health-care	No direct indicators of affordability could be determined. However, as a proxy for access, number of beds per 1000 of the population fell from 0.813 in 2005 to 0.674 in 2015, indicating the proportionate increase in population has not been matched by health facilities.
12	Improved hygiene and Public health	The percentages of deaths caused by communicable diseases, and maternal, prenatal and nutrition conditions as a percentage of the population fell from 44.8% in 2000 to 27.95% in 2015.

Education

13	Access to primary/ communal school for all children, boys and girls	Gross enrolment ratio is the ratio of total enrolment, regardless of age, to the population of the age group that corresponds to the level of education shown. The gross enrolment ratio in primary education for South Asia increased from 102.7% to 106.5% from 2005 to 2015.
14	Completion of primary education cycle	The completion rate of primary education increased from 80.5% to 92.5% from 2005 to 2015 for the sub-region, which is a drastic rise.
15	Universal functional literacy	The adult literacy rate increased from 60.64% to 69.65% from 2005 to 2015. While this is significant improvement, there is a lot more room to further develop in this area to create a stronger human resource pool and utilize the demographic dividend of the sub-region.

16	Quality education at primary, secondary and vocational level	The pupil to teacher ratio for primary education reduced from 40.78 to 32.72 between 2005 and 2015. The same ratio, however, increased for secondary education from 29.4 to 30.5 in between 2005 and 2015, indicating the growth in access to education has not been proportionately supported by an increase in the number of teachers. Thus, the education quality can be said to have fallen.
Environment		
17	Acceptable level of forest cover	Percentage of land area covered by forests increased from 16.94% to 17.48% between 2005 and 2015 - a decent increase in the level of forest cover.
18	Acceptable level of water and soil quality	Fertilizer consumption (kilograms per hectare of arable land) increased from 124.28 to 160.28 between 2005 and 2015. It is a significant increase and has possibly worsened soil quality. Investment in water and sanitation (both public and private) increased from \$142 million in 2004 to \$910 million in 2017.
19	Acceptable level of air quality	Carbon dioxide emissions in metric tonnes per capita increased from 0.932 to 1.512 in between 2005 and 2015, a significant damage to the level of air quality. Total greenhouse gas emissions, in kt equivalent of carbon dioxide, also increased from 2.64 million in 2005 to 3.64 million in 2015.
20	Conservation of biodiversity	Total terrestrial and marine protected areas have remained a constant between 2014 and 2018 of 4.78% of the total area of the sub-region. Data was not aggregated for earlier time periods.
21	Wet land conservation	No aggregated data could be found for this goal.

22	Ban on dumping of hazardous waste, including radio-active waste	Combustible renewables and waste as a percentage of total energy has fallen from 31.7% in 2005 to 23.7% in 2015, a significant improvement in the handling of toxic waste.
----	---	--

Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the latest development fad. The SDGs have been conceptualized by the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012. The Conference proceedings identified and acknowledged the need for a set of universal goals that would address the critical and urgent environmental, political and economic challenges being faced by the world. Consequently, the SDGs emerged as the new global development regiment to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which started in 2000 to tackle the indignity of poverty and hunger, prevent the spread of deadly diseases, and expand primary education to all children, among other development priorities.

The SDGs can be broadly classified into three categories: Firstly, SDGs are some form extension of the MDGs that covers about the first seven SDGs; secondly, they strongly emphasize the need and importance of inclusiveness, covered broadly by goals 8, 9, and 10; and finally, they address sustainability and urbanization with seven goals: sustainable cities and communities, life below water, consumption and production, climate action, resources and environment, peace and justice, and the means of implementation and global partnership for them. Thus, compared to the MDGs, the SDGs are more inclusive, transformative, integrated and universal. The goals and targets are inter-related and cannot be implemented in isolation. The thematic and methodical difference of SDGs and MDGs are¹⁴:

- The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets are broader in scope and go further than the MDGs by addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works

¹⁴<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

for all people. The goals cover the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

- The SDGs emphasize more on addressing concerns in inequality, economic growth, employment, human settlements, industrialization, oceans and ecosystems, climate, sustainable consumption and production, peace and justice.
- The SDGs are universal and applicable to all countries; the MDGs, on the contrary, were intended for the developing countries only.
- The SDGs noticeably focus on and recognize the importance of the means of implementation of policies, mobilization of resources, capacity and institution building, and the generation of data.
- Most importantly, the SDGs strongly recognize the need and importance of tackling climate change.

However, it is to be acknowledged that the SDGs are essentially built on the objective assessment of the inadequacies of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address more critical areas of various development interventions across the globe. Therefore, the SDGs should be recognized as the realistic and evidence-based continuation of the development paradigm.

Components of the SDGs

The Sustainable Development Goals are comprised of 17 Goals with as many as 232 indicators. The number of goals and variety of indicators broadly demonstrate the coverage, complexities and the nature of diversity of the model.¹⁵

Components of SDGs	
Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

The SDGs, as such, cover all development fronts, having direct and tertiary implications on society, economy and the environment.

Conceptual premises of the SDGs

The genesis of the SDGs lies on the achievements and shortcomings of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs, in effect, further extend the scope and coverage of the MDGs and propose a new development paradigm, adding more dimensions of development in a

much more comprehensive and holistic scale. SDGs are, therefore, broader in coverage and more ambitious than the MDGs were.

The SDGs are based on a universal framework and designed to be interlocked and unified by a philosophical pledge that “no one will be left behind” in the process of development. The SDGs, in simple terms, aim to transform the world by addressing various concerns and challenges in the process of ensuring well-being and economic prosperity, and preventing environmental hazards and other concerns related to dignity of life. The SDGs significantly differ from previous global level development agenda or models, which tend to focus on a few select set of dimensions and indicators. One of the most important and striking features of the SDGs is that it is essentially a comprehensive, indicator-based development intervention and implementation package, and it also covers both developed and developing countries, under the global ownership of the United Nations. Therefore, the SDGs are viewed as having a “holistic and multidimensional view on development”¹⁶.

Illustrating the features, coverage and concerns of the SDGs, Halen Clark, the then UNDP Administrator, identified some of the core prerequisites of the SDGs.¹⁷ These include strong national ownership and leadership. National ownership is a prerequisite for achieving the SDGs by 2030. Each of the governments across the continent have committed to setting their own national targets, guided by the agenda’s global level of ambition while reflecting their particular contexts and priorities. Therefore, parliaments need to ensure that appropriate legislative frameworks are enacted, funds are made available, and, most importantly, continuous and critical scrutiny of government actions are maintained. It must, however, be noted that through the process, there is a pressing need to develop an oversight mechanism to monitor the implementation of the SDGs, not only by central governments but also by local governments, civil society, and the private sector.

¹⁶Prajal Pradhan et,al (2017), A Systematic Study of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Interactions, <https://doi.org/10.1002/2017EF000632>

¹⁷Halen Clark, What Will it Take to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals? *Journal of International Affairs, The Next World Order, Special; 70th Anniversary Issues 2017*, pp. 53-59

Core Features of the SDGs

Addressing Inequalities and Exclusion: One of the prime purposes of the SDGs is to address a wide range of exclusion, ranging from gender inequality to inequalities in income and employment opportunities – critical components in the ambit of inclusive development. The SDGs recognize that investing in women and girls is not only a moral necessity, but is also a strategically utile choice. SDGs strongly emphasize the need for mainstreaming different forms of exclusions to address their concerns. These groups include the youth, people with disabilities, individuals from indigenous backgrounds and members of minority classes and groups.

Tackling Climate Change: All scientific modeling and predictions indicate that climate change will result in more frequent and extreme weather events, causing human casualties and putting millions of people at risk of hunger, disease, and water shortages. The SDGs assert the need to build stronger resilience in order to combat the dynamic array of climate-related challenges.

Working Across Sectors: As stressed previously, the SDGs work through a comprehensive approach. The SDG targets, therefore, cannot be addressed in silos but should rather be based on “whole of society” approaches. The success of one SDG depends on the success of other SDGs. Thus, a concerted, integrated and complementary approach is essential for SDG implementation.

Prioritization: Given the interconnections of the SDGs, policies must be designed to adequately identify the “accelerators” that can drive the progress across multiple objectives for SDG achievement. Extensive research and documentation is needed to identify such SDG “accelerators” at the early stage and develop relevant national strategies and sectoral plans.

Building Broad Coalitions around the SDGs: The 2030 agenda recognizes that while each country has primary responsibility for its own development, their efforts need to be assisted by enabling international economic environments across trade, monetary, and financial systems,

and global economic governance. In short, successfully implementing the SDGs is not somebody else's challenge – it is a shared challenge that must be tackled together.

Mobilizing Finance: Delivering on the 2030 agenda requires the mobilization of unprecedented levels of finance. The SDGs need funds from all sources – both public and private, and domestic and international. Official Development Assistance (ODA) will, therefore, be crucially important. However, ODA alone will come nowhere near providing the huge investment needed for the implementation of SDGs. There is an urgent need for domestic resource mobilization. This will demand administrative initiatives reforms alongside tackling problems such as tax evasion and illicit financial flows. Such an initiative would also require enhanced global cooperation.

Complexity of SDG Monitoring

A number of experts and scholars have observed that the SDGs are overtly interdependent and are potentially conflicting, which may result in distorting or diverging results. Thus, there are strong arguments that suggest that in order to make SDGs functional and effective, the dependency dynamics among the goals need to be evaluated and understood.

SDGs, comprising of 17 broad goals with 169 targets, aim to address multiple competing and complex goals as well as their implementation challenges for the governments across the continents. In fact, the uniqueness and strength of the SDG framework lies in the complementarities and the inter-linkages between the goals. However, it must be noted that such interconnections in some cases cause trade-offs (trade-offs where progress in one Goal hinders progress in another) and thereby affect results in either of the goals within systems. This tends to challenge the holistic approach of the SDGs.

On the other hand, it is also true that the SDGs have mutual interactions. Such interactions can be classified as synergies, where progress in one goal favors progress in another. It is also empirically established that there is significant correlation of synergies and tradeoffs in a number of SDG indicators. Such cases of synergies and trade-offs are observed

within and across the SDGs - both at country level and global scales.¹⁸

To analyze the SDGs extent of interactions, Pradhan and associated researchers¹⁹ systematize the extent of synergies and trade-offs covering SDG indicator data for 227 countries and observed a significant positive correlation between a pair of SDG indicators classified as having “synergy” while also observed a significant negative correlation and classified those as “trade-off”. The correlation of the SDGs observed that positive correlations between indicator pairs were found to have outweighed the negative ones in most countries, e.g. SDG 1 (No poverty) has synergetic relationship with most of the other goals, whereas SDG 12 (Responsible consumption and production) is the goal most commonly associated with trade-offs.

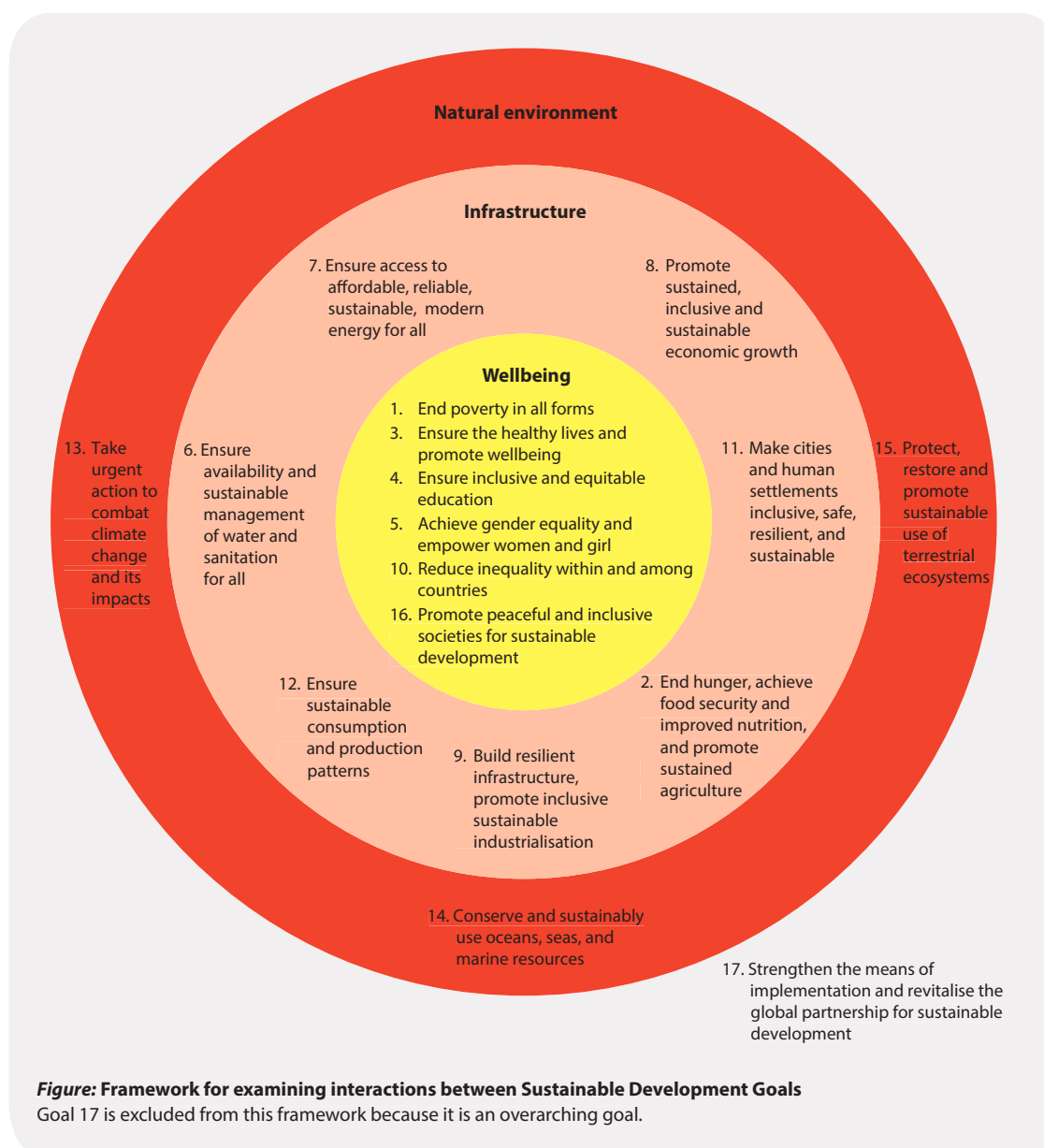
In particular, for the SDGs 1 (No poverty), 3 (Good health and wellbeing), 4 (Quality education), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and 13 (Climate action) tend to show higher level of synergistic correlations with p-values greater than 0.6 for up to 80%-90% of the data being paired. This indicates a higher level of compatibility of the indicators, which means that if there is progress in one indicator that is associated with the fulfillment of another one in the same goal, there is progress in the secondary indicator too.

Analysis show that around 25%–40% of the data being paired for SDGs 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), and 15 (Life on land) has presence of negative correlations within the same goal.

SDG framework implies that a large number of potential interactions across the 169 targets have to be considered by policy makers. The following circular diagram shows the three tiers of SDGs addressing - natural environment, infrastructure, and well being:

¹⁸Måns Nilsson et,al (2018)Mapping interactions between the sustainable development goals: lessons learned and ways forward, *Sustainability Science* volume 13, pages1489–1503(2018).

¹⁹Pradhan Prajal, LuísCosta, Diego Rybski, Wolfgang Luchtand Jürgen P. Kropp,(2018) , *A Systematic Study of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Interactions*, *Earth Future*, Volume 7, Issue 11, November 2019



The inner level of the SDGs contains the components that cover the “well-being” components of citizens. These components could broadly be labeled as ‘people-centered’ goals, aimed at delivering individual and collective outcomes covering health, education, and nutrition, which directly contribute to the welfare and well-being, equitable justice and distribution of resources within and between individuals and countries. This level of the SDGs represents the conventional territory of the role and scope of government. It also provides the key components of social and political accountability, and the enablement of strategic and thematic state policy interventions.

The middle-level of the SDGs address the concerns labelled as “infrastructure”; these goals cover various kinds of networks and

mechanisms for the production, distribution, and delivery of goods and services, including food, energy, clean water, and waste and sanitation services in cities and human settlements. Moreover, the set of goals transcend individuals, households, and communities, and addresses many of the perceived essential functions of modern society within – and sometimes beyond – nation states. The goals are assumed to contribute to growth in well-being while simultaneously reducing the intensity of resource use, pollution, and negative impacts on the environment.

The outer level of the SDGs – labelled “natural environment” – addresses environmental issues. Collectively, this level represents goals that relate primarily to the management of global resources and global public goods, such as land, oceans, air, natural resources, biodiversity, and the management of climate change. The level also covers the biophysical systems that underpin sustainable development. These systems are strongly influenced by men. These goals typically require international and transnational cooperation for their realization. At the outer level, the SDG 17, attempts to “strengthen the means of implementation and reactivate the global partnership for sustainable development”. The goal is an umbrella coverage and goes beyond three levels as a cross-cutting thematic goal relating to goals in all three levels.

In summary, SDGs interventions demonstrate the synergies and also trade-offs and vice versa. Thus, observers strongly argue for an extensive study to assess and examine “the holistic nature of the SDG framework” and identify the direct and potential implications of such mutual complementarities of the interactions across all 169 targets.²⁰

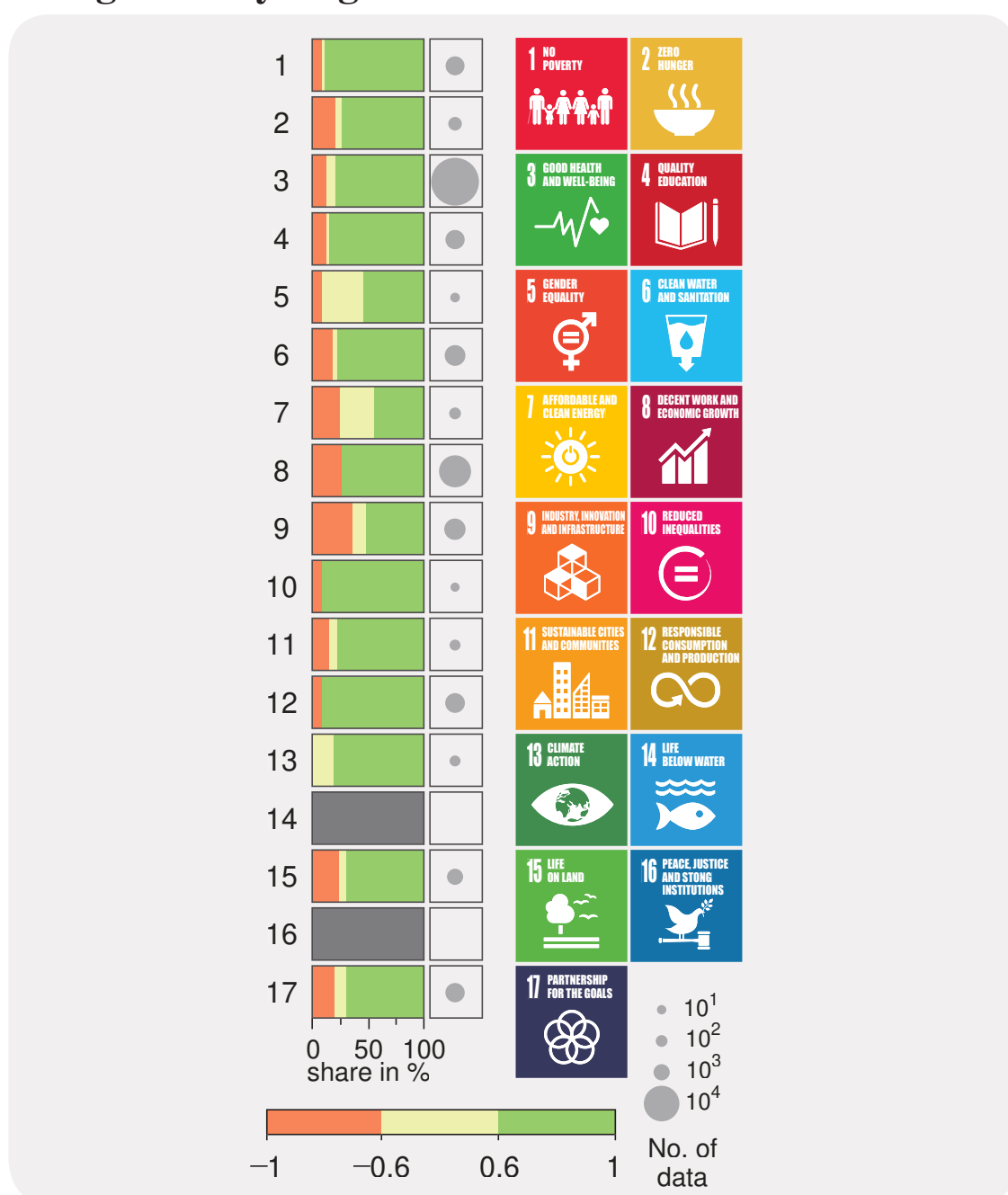
Synergies and Trade-Offs of SDGs

The figure below presents the synergies and trade-offs within an SDG. The color bars represent the shares of synergies (green), non-classifieds (yellow), and trade-offs (orange) observed within a goal for the entire dataset. The grey bar depicts insufficient data for the analysis. The area of the circle in the boxes indicates the number of data pairs (see the legend for comparison). The SDGs are represented with the numbers in the left

²⁰Rickels, Wilfried (et,al) Indicators for monitoring sustainable development goals: An application to oceanic development in the European Union,2016 <https://doi.org/10.1002/2016EF000353>

and the icons in the right. Within each goal, the positive correlations largely outweigh the negative ones. However, negative correlations and non-classifieds are also observed within all SDGs. Given the nature of an indicator, an increase or a decrease of its value in time carries different meanings for attaining the SDGs. For example, SDG 3 needs to be achieved by declining “maternal mortality ratio” and by increasing “portion of births attended by skilled health personnel.”

Figure 1: Synergies and Trade-Offs within an SDG



Source: Jeff Waage (et,al, 2015)

Synergies and Trade-Offs within an SDG considering all countries, available analysis indicates that within each SDG synergies largely outweigh trade-offs. Particularly, SDGs 1 (No poverty), 3 (Good health and wellbeing), 4 (Quality education), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and 13 (Climate action) show synergetic relations with p values greater than 0.6 for 80%–90% of the data pairs. This indicates a broad compatibility of indicators, where progress in one indicator is associated with the fulfilment of another one in the same goal

Recent studies show that a rise in the “proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel” and decline in the “number of new HIV infections” can contribute to a reduced “maternal mortality ratio,” indicators for the SDG 3. Additionally, pairs of disaggregated data for the SDGs mostly depict a positive correlation for all countries and enhance the percentage of synergies. For example, the large fraction of synergies within SDG 1 is partially due to synergies observed between disaggregated indicators such as “proportion of population below the international poverty line, by sex, age, employment status, and geographical location”. Analyses also highlights the existence of negative correlations within the same goal. These are mostly observed within SDGs 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), and 15 (Life on land) for 25%–40% of the data pairs. Furthermore, “proportion of population with access to electricity”, an SDG 7 indicator, has increased in some countries by expansion of nonrenewable energy sources. This may not support an increase in “renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption,” another SDG 7 indicator. We can observe such significant negative correlation between these two indicators with a p-value of -0.67 when all countries are considered²¹.

A similar logic is valid regarding the historical association of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita and material footprint of a country.²²

²¹PRickels, Wilfried (et,al) Indicators for monitoring sustainable development goals: An application to oceanic development in the European Union,2016 <https://doi.org/10.1002/2016EF000353> alth services, The Lancet Global Health, December 2016, pp.w3027-3035. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X\(17\)30472-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(17)30472-2)

²²Vanham, D., Leip, A., Galli, A., Kastner, T., Bruckner, M., Uwizeye, A., ... Hoekstra, A. Y. (2019). Environmental footprint family to address local to planetary sustainability and deliver on the SDGs. *Science of The Total Environment*, 133642. doi:10.1016/j.scitotenv.2019.133642

SDG 8 calls for sustaining economic growth while improving resource use efficiency by reducing material footprints. The opposite took place during the time-frame investigated with trade-offs observed between indicators “annual growth rate of real GDP per capita” and “material footprint, material footprint per capita, and material footprint per GDP” for 77% of the countries. The two examples make clear the existence of intrinsic challenges in achieving the SDGs due to the tight coupling (correlation) of some indicators.

Between and among the SDGs, both positive and negative interactions can be observed (Figure 1). A noticeable example is SDG 1 (No poverty) that is associated with synergies across most SDGs and ranks five times in the global top-10 synergy pair list (Figure 2, left). Reducing poverty is statistically linked with progress in SDGs 3 (Good health and wellbeing), 4 (Quality education), 5 (Gender equality), 6 (Clean water and sanitation), or 10 (Reduced inequalities) for 75%–80% of the data pairs. For SDG 3, a large fraction of synergies with various SDGs are also observed and summarized by four appearances of the goal in the global top 10 synergy pair list.

The observed positive correlations between the SDGs have mainly two explanations. First, indicators of the SDGs depicting higher synergies consist of development indicators that are part of the MDGs and components of several development indices.²³ Second, the observed higher synergies among some SDGs are an effect of having the same indicator for multiple SDGs. Analyses further reveals that the SDGs 8 (Decent work and economic growth), 9 (Industry, innovation, and infrastructure), 12 (Responsible consumption and production), and 15 (Life on land) are to be associated with a high fraction of trade-offs across SDGs. These goals are currently in conflict with most other SDGs, antagonizing sustainable development.²⁴

²³Alkire, S., Jahan, S., & Kivilo, M. (2018). The new global MPI 2018: aligning with the sustainable development goals. OPHI.

²⁴Similarly, SDGs 12 (Responsible consumption and production) and 15 (Life on land) frequently appear, seven and three times respectively, in the global top 10 trade-off pairs (Figure 3, right). SDG 12 has negative correlations with 10 goals (SDGs 1–7, 9, 10, 17) and SDG 15 with 12 goals (SDGs 1–6, 7–11, 17), respectively for 50%–90% and 40%–70% of the data pairs

Figure 2: Top ten Synergy and Tradeoffs of SDG

Top ten Synergy pairs of SDG		Top ten tradeoffs pairs of SDG	
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Goal 13: Climate Action	Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 4: Quality Education	Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 5: Gender Equality	Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Goal 4: Quality Education	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 4: Quality Education	Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Goal 15: Life on Land
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Goal 5: Gender Equality	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Goal 1: No Poverty	Goal 15: Life on Land
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Goal 5: Gender Equality	Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production
Goal 3: Good Health and Well-being	Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Goal 4: Quality Education	Goal 15: Life on Land

Patterns of SDG Interactions

At the country level, available analyses indicate that positive correlations among the SDGs largely outweigh the negative ones for most countries. The observed share of synergies is larger than 40% for all the countries and more than 60% for around 70 countries. Similarly, the fraction of trade-offs is less than 50% for almost all the countries and the tradeoff fraction is less than 40% for around 140 countries. This implies that countries have a positive starting point to implement the SDG agenda due to a relatively larger share of synergies than trade-offs among the SDGs.²⁵

SDG 3 (Good health and well-being) was found to have a higher share of synergies with other SDGs in most of the countries and the world population. SDG 3 also has substantial synergies with SDG 6 (Clean water and sanitation). Additionally, progress in both of these goals will positively contribute to fulfilling other SDGs.

On the trade-off side, SDGs 3 and 12 are identified as a top trade-off pair in 121 countries, making it the most widespread trade-off across countries. This is mainly driven by better health care being found in countries with larger material footprints.

Apart from such patterns, the nature of the other trade-offs is rather heterogeneous. The larger trade-offs between SDGs 6–12, 3–8, and 6–15, have been identified for a few selected countries. However, considering populations which are in between 200 and 600 million people, trade-offs are significant. This pattern implies that policy priorities for achieving the SDGs need different approaches among the countries based on the observed extent of SDG synergies and trade-offs of the respective countries.

Addressing strategies for trade off: For achieving the SDGs, these tradeoffs need to be further examined. Assessing cross-sectoral and cross-goal synergies can play a crucial role in localization and effective implementation of the SDG agenda. For achieving the SDGs, these

²⁵De Neve, J., Sachs, J.D. The SDGs and human well-being: a global analysis of synergies, trade-offs, and regional differences. *Sci Rep* 10, 15113 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-71916-9>

tradeoffs need to be negotiated and made structurally non-obstructive. In some cases, a deeper structural change may also be needed. Therefore, country specific studies needed to be carried out to develop a model for balancing and optimizing the synergies in co-ordinated balance with the trade-offs.

Data Gaps on SDGs: A recent UNESCAP report²⁶ identifies that there are large number of data gaps in critical areas like poverty, climate change, environment, gender, inequality and governance. UNESCAP also observed that over half of the 230 indicators of the SDGs lack agreed-upon measurement criteria or sufficient coverage for regular monitoring, reporting or both. SDG researchers also raised concerns regarding certain goals and noted that some indicators, rather, “dilute the aims of the targets” especially those related to goal 10 on inequality.

UN Women Report (2018) points out that less than a third of the data needed for monitoring the gender specific indicators are currently available. Furthermore, the report raises concerns that many of the gender specific indicators rely on data collection mechanisms that are ad-hoc exercises and are not integrated into national statistical plans and strategies. Global Policy Watch (GPW), in its report in April 2018, even observed that “a large number of SDG indicators lack agreed-upon methodology for measurement”. Concerns have been raised in regards to “a disconnect between the review process of the United Nations High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and the monitoring-by-indicators process”²⁷.

Localizing the SDGs: SDG localization has been described as “the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national, and subnational sustainable development goals”.²⁸ It also includes “the process of taking into account subnational contexts in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, from the

²⁶<https://unstat.un.org/unsd/statcom/49th-session/document/#documentonar>, seven and three times respectively, in the global top 10 trade-off pairs (Figure 3, right). SDG 12 has negative correlations with 70% of the data pairs.

²⁷Global Policy Watch, Report No. 22, 30 April 2018

²⁸UN Development Group. 2014. *Localizing the Post-2015 Agenda: Dialogues on Implementation*. New York. p. 6.

setting of goals and targets, to determining the means of implementation and using indicators that measure and monitor progress”.²⁹

It is now empirically validated that there is a need for strong commitment to SDG localization by national governments. It also demands the designing of new legal frameworks alongside buildings institutional and financial capacity.³⁰

Key building blocks of SDG Implementation

Though some critics question the content and the process of the SDGs³¹, the content of the SDGs geared towards the success of SDG implementation demands clear mandates of institutions and installation of cross-sector collaboration at various levels – from national to local governments. The OECD³² identified eight key building blocks for the policy coherence as well implementation of the SDGs. These include: (i) policy commitment and leadership, (ii) integrated approaches to implementation, (iii) intergenerational time frame, (iv) analyses and assessments of potential policy effects, (v) policy and institutional coordination, (vi) local and regional involvement, (vii) stakeholder participation, and (viii) monitoring and reporting.

Key Policy priorities for Achieving SDGs in South Asia: South Asia as region has all potential to take the leverage of the synergies and externalities between economic, social and environmental development. However, UNESCAP observes that the region suffers from the inability to exploit these externalities alongside significant structural imbalances. South Asia lagged behind other sub-regions in several indicators of development with considerable gaps in physical and social infrastructure and evidence of social and economic deprivation, widening inequality,

²⁹Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, UNDP, UN-Habitat. 2016. Roadmap for Localizing the SDGs: Implementation and Monitoring at Subnational Level. Barcelona, UN. 2008, p.6.

³⁰Asian Development Bank (2018) “Localizing the SDGs to Accelerate Implementation of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, The Governance Brief, Issue 33, 2018

³¹Gaspar, Des, The Road to the Sustainable Development Goals: Building Global Alliances and Norms, Journal of Global Ethics, Vol. 15, No.2, pp.118-137, 2019.

³²OECD (2018), Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2018: Towards Sustainable and Resilient Societies, Paris

perpetually rising unemployment levels - especially among the youth, and widespread hunger. The region is highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change in various forms, e.g. extreme weather, droughts and floods. Considering its unique demographic features, the state of development, institutional preparedness and overall development dynamics, international development partners suggest seven key policy priority areas of intervention for the SDGs in South Asia:³³

i. Creation of jobs through balanced economic transformation and sustainable industrialization:

Industrialization (SDG 9) is a booster for economic growth and also creates opportunities for productive jobs (SDG 8) that ultimately act as critical enablers of poverty alleviation (SDG 1) alongside other SDGs. Empirical evidence suggests that South Asia has emerged as one of the fastest growing sub-regions in the world. Ironically, such growth has not been creating adequate employment for its youth population, without about 80% of the workforce remaining in the informal sector. UN ESCAP data suggest that an industry oriented structural transformation in South Asia could generate more than 56 million additional jobs and lift 71 million additional people out of poverty against a business-as-usual strategy. The region, therefore, needs to develop “a coordinated sustainable industrialization strategy that could leverage the spillovers of manufacturing across borders, creating productive capacities across South Asia through regional value chains”.

ii. Provide essential basic services to all and accelerate sustainable infrastructure development:

South Asian countries are characterized by wide gaps in terms of transport infrastructure (SDG 9), basic infrastructure for drinking water and sanitation (SDG 6), electricity (SDG 7), and ICT (information and communications technology). All such gaps ultimately cost about 3% to 4% of the GDP of the region and adversely affect the achievement of related SDGs. The estimates suggest that per capita income of South Asia would increase by roughly 1% for each percentage point increase in the availability of the right infrastructure. The South Asian countries

³³UNESCAP (2018), Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in South Asia- Key Policy Priorities and Implementation Challenges, Bangkok, UNESCAP.

would, therefore, need to have policies with a “right mix of infrastructural development schemes in terms of transportation, drinking water and sanitation, electricity and ICT”.

iii. Provide universal access to education and health to harness the youth bulge:

To optimize the demographic dividend of the youth population of South Asia, emphasis should be given for higher investment in health coverage (SDG 3) and quality education with due emphasis on vocational training opportunities (SDG 4). In addition, more investments are needed to address the projected skills deficit of the region. The region also needs to emphasize the importance of the rights-based approach to universal education while ensuring the availability of quality education and training.

iv. Provide universal social protection and financial inclusion:

Addressing food security and hunger are two core concerns and development challenges of the South Asian countries. SDG 2 addresses food security and the eradication of hunger.

Agricultural productivity in South Asia needs to be doubled to ensure food security which subsequently results in an increase of up to 16% in GDP, increase in exports of 14%, and increase in household incomes of 11%. Furthermore, enhancing agricultural productivity could help 16 million people of the region to get out of poverty and create nearly 13 million additional jobs. South Asian countries can further strengthen the collective food security of the region by operationalizing the SAARC Food Bank, liberalizing intra-regional food trade and designing collaborative research and development (R&D) on agricultural productivity.

v. Address food security and hunger with sustainable agricultural productivity improvements:

Addressing food security and hunger are two core concerns and development challenges of the South Asian countries. SDG 2 addresses food security and the eradication of hunger.

Agricultural productivity in South Asia needs to be doubled to ensure food security which subsequently results in an increase of up to 16%

in GDP, increase in exports of 14%, and increase in household incomes of 11%. Furthermore, enhancing agricultural productivity could help 16 million people of the region to get out of poverty and create nearly 13 million additional jobs. South Asian countries can further strengthen the collective food security of the region by operationalizing the SAARC Food Bank, liberalizing intra-regional food trade and designing collaborative research and development (R&D) on agricultural productivity.

vi. Promote gender equality and women’s entrepreneurship:

Gender equality and gender mainstreaming are two of the most critical development challenges of the region. Over the years, some major improvements have been noticed in terms of achieving gender parity in education, but the region still lags behind in terms of economic and political empowerment of women and gender equality (SDG 5). Available estimates predict that gender equality could add up to \$3.4 trillion to the South Asian collective GDP by 2025. New and innovative policy instruments need to be installed to develop women’s entrepreneurship through gender-responsive policies, create gender-based budgets, install one-stop advice centers, incentivize credit schemes, and support innovative use of capacity-building to consolidate the empowerment process of women..

vii. Enhancing environmental sustainability:

South Asia, like many other regions of the world, suffers from environmental sustainability challenges which directly affect growth and widen development gaps. Empirical data reveals the severity and extent of vulnerability of the region in regards to the effects of climate change, extreme weather conditions and natural disasters.

As a policy intervention, the region demands environmental sustainability through the increasing shift towards the use of renewable energy sources and cleaner gas-based fuels, and introduction of new technology to reduce emissions from conventional electricity generation. Industries also need to be encouraged and brought under legal frameworks to mandate the use of pollution free energy, recycling and cogeneration approaches. Wider campaigns need to be initiated to encourage a change in lifestyle towards the principles of “3 Rs” - reduce, reuse and recycle. To cope with the projected rise in urban population within the next three

decades, South Asia needs to opt for smart cities with fortified green and resilient infrastructure and transport systems.

Implementation of comprehensive development programs in developing countries tends to suffer from various institutional factors. The dominant factors include the time frame of the development initiatives, nature of design or program/projects approach, resource mobilization and management, political instability, the election cycle, the incentive systems of the civil service and the complexities of the planning processes. In addition, comprehensive development models, such as the SDGs, also suffer from identity and ownership concerns, and are often too quick in scaling up without an appropriate design for the accountability and monitoring system. Most critically, such mega programs suffer from institutionalizing consensus, coordination and capacity deficits, and providing inadequate attention towards creating a participatory process at the implementation phase³⁴.

At the policy level, South Asian countries need to develop institutional arrangements for policy integration, coordination and stakeholder engagement in SDG implementation. Furthermore, the countries of the region give high priority for strengthening of capacities and systems to provide access to information in regards to SDG processes and resource allocation. Adequate access to data is also needed to enhance the demand side of services as well downward special accountability. The local government institutions at various levels need to be a close partner in the planning and monitoring processes.

Institutional Arrangements for Implementation of SDGs in South Asia

In South Asian Countries, in general, central planning agencies are responsible for national development strategies and plans, and have taken over responsibility for coordinating the SDGs as well, surmised below:

- The National Planning Commission in Nepal is responsible for the coordination function for the SDGs.

³⁴Nagy Hanna, *Implementation Challenges and Promising Approaches for the Comprehensive Development Framework*, OED Working Paper Series No. 13, The World Bank, 2000

- In Bhutan, coordination of the SDGs is performed by the Gross National Happiness Commission.
- In Pakistan, the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms act as the national SDG Monitoring and Coordination Unit
- In Bangladesh, the Planning Commission has the coordinating responsibility of the SDGs. The Prime Minister’s Office of Bangladesh has also set up a unit to monitor the implementation of the SDGs and mobilize stakeholders under an appointed Chief Coordinator of SDG Affairs.
- The National Institution for Transforming India (NITI Aayog) is entrusted with coordinating the achievement of the SDGs through specific ministries and key government programmes, although primary responsibility for implementation rests with the state or provincial governments. The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) coordinates with ministries to guide monitoring, data collection and the development of national indicators.
- Sri Lanka has established the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, which launched the National SDG Platform for coordinating SDG implementation.
- The Maldives has established a National Committee with representatives from the President’s office, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Finance, Health, Environment, and of Planning and National Development.
- In Afghanistan, a secretariat was established within the Office of the President to draft the country’s national development strategy. However, the Office of Administration and cabinet is accountable for carrying out the strategy, while budgetary monitoring is done by the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Economy monitors progress against the specified goals.

Need to focus on outcome-based approaches

One of the general weaknesses of the MDGs was that its implementation was primarily undertaken at ministry or department level of the respective sector, which encouraged a silo-approach rather than the effective multi-

sectoral and crosscutting approach that was needed, e.g. child nutrition improvements required action on many fronts, including nutrition, water, health and sanitation, as well as the education of mothers. However, because it was primarily addressed through nodal ministries acting alone, and cross-sectoral synergies were not adequately captured, the effectiveness of the interventions was limited. Delivering on the SDGs requires an approach focused on outcome-based delivery, reducing such trade-offs and exploiting synergies. To achieve this, ministries may need to be restructured to be based on outcomes unless mechanisms are developed to allow for multi-sectoral approaches.

Strengthen decentralization and partnership with Local Government institutions

Local administrations must function effectively in order to deliver on the SDGs, and may require the investment of considerable authority, capacity and resources. This needs urgent action as many countries in the sub-region do not yet have local administrations capable of tackling SDG implementation effectively. Achieving this requires developing strong vertical coordination between local authorities and national governments, while also developing horizontal coordination at the local level among the various local agencies tasked with carrying out plans for achieving the SDGs. Institutional changes to mobilize effective stakeholder participation at the local level is also needed.

Implement institutional and policy reforms for sustainable development

SDG 16 emphasizes the importance of effective, accountable and inclusive institutions, alongside highlighting the role of peace and justice, as an important prerequisite for sustainable development. This, in turn, requires institutional and policy-level changes to enable faster, inclusive and sustainable growth, alongside development and environmental sustainability.

Economic reforms are needed for development in many South Asian countries. Rapid progress in social development also requires changes in a wide range of areas, including social practices, gender equality, social protection, laws and regulations relating to health and education, private and non-state player participation. These include incentives and regulations to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns.

India, for instance, has set up the National Green Tribunal, which has introduced some difficult and sometimes unpopular measures necessary for the country's sustainable development.

Enhance stakeholder participation in implementation and monitoring

Stakeholder participation at national, sub-national and local levels will be critical for the effective implementation of the SDGs. The participatory process initiated during the design stage of the SDGs needs to be continued during the implementation and monitoring phases to ensure that benefits are optimized and groups that are most underserved, such as the poor and those facing discrimination, have access to such services. Non-state participation also serves to enhance effective monitoring by enabling better provision of public services. All relevant stakeholders in the country need to be involved, including beneficiaries, civil society, the private sector and external development partners. However, the capacities of local agencies and stakeholders are often weak in South Asian countries and will need strengthening. To achieve this, adequate attention and resources will be needed, in addition to an enabling legal, political and cultural environment.

Sub-regional and regional cooperation

South Asian countries can benefit from sub-regional cooperation on SDG implementation, given their shared challenges, cultural and administrative frameworks and similar initial conditions. Regional cooperation and integration could supplement national strategies in the case of a number of SDGs. SAARC-led cooperation could, for instance, strengthen the provision of regional public goods, such as regional transportation, ICT and energy infrastructure, and help support food security. It could also facilitate regional value chains, support better management of shared water resources, and address shared vulnerabilities through disaster risk reduction and management in complement to climate change mitigation and adaptation. To this end, SAARC leaders have recognized the importance of coordination at the sub-regional level.

In particular, SAARC could coordinate follow ups and reviews at the subregional level, as provided for in the 2030 Agenda. This would then feed into the regional Asia-Pacific follow-up and review mechanism being

evolved through the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) under the auspices of UNESCAP.

Institutional improvements for delivery of the SDGs

Coordinating agencies at national level will be critical for the effective implementation of the SDGs, given the wide range of objectives across sectors. Effective SDG implementation will further require: outcome based approaches to multi-dimensional sustainable development challenges; decentralization to empower local administrations; and institutional reforms to incentivize changes in regulations, institutional culture, markets and mindsets. It is equally important to ensure stakeholder participation in the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs at all levels. The importance of strong institutions at all levels along with peace and justice has been emphasized under the SDG framework. SAARC has a leaders' mandate for coordination and cooperation to implement the 2030 Agenda in the sub-region. The countries could evolve a follow-up and review mechanism at SAARC level, feeding into the regional follow-up and review that is being developed at UNESCAP within the framework of the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development (APFSD).

SDG success will depend on addressing the capacity gaps and means of implementation. To undertake the ambitious 2030 Agenda, countries in South Asia will also need the appropriate means of implementation, including – but not limited to – finance, technology, capacity-building, trade, policy coherence, data generation and monitoring, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

1. Finance:

Implementing the SDGs in South Asia will require substantial financial resources, including social investments of up to 20% of GDP and around \$5 trillion to close infrastructure gaps by 2030, in addition to the significant investments needed to enhance environmental sustainability. With low tax-to-GDP ratios, South Asian countries have the potential to enhance domestic resources through expanding their tax base, undertaking tax reforms, strengthening tax administrative systems and enabling innovative tax policies. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) can

also supplement public investments in sustainable infrastructure projects. Some countries, such as India, are also harnessing the potential of corporate social responsibility to supplement public resources. Regional cooperation in cross-border listings and development of regional bond markets can help to diversify risk and increase access to cheaper capital for companies from least developed countries. The SAARC Development Fund could support the financing of regional public goods for sustainable development, such as regional or cross-border infrastructure. Cooperation on funding for climate change adaptation and international taxation of financial transactions may also be options to help implement the 2030 Agenda. While conventional flows of overseas development assistance (ODA) from western economies remains critical for the sub-region's individual economies, especially the least developed countries, South-South cooperation is beginning to supplement development resources with India emerging as a key contributor in South Asia.

2. Domestic resource mobilization:

Tax-to-GDP ratios in South Asian countries range between 10% to 15% of GDP, which is considerably low when compared to those of more developed countries in the region. For instance, in China and Thailand, the ratios are closer to 20%. There is scope for increasing domestic resources by enhancing the tax base and strengthening tax administration and tax compliance. This could be done by plugging tax loopholes, including thorough regional tax cooperation and innovative tax policies. In Bangladesh and Pakistan, less than 1% of the population pays income tax. In India the figure is less than 3%. The collection efficiency of the sub-region is also low, with figures in between 29% and 40%. UNESCAP has estimated that the potential tax gap (the gap between actual and potential revenue) varies between 17% and 72% across countries in the sub-region. Examples of innovative tax policies aligned with SDG priorities in the sub-region include green tourist taxes imposed in Bhutan and Maldives and a number of cess (tax on taxes) imposed in India, such as an education cess imposed on income taxes funding the universal education campaign, a tax on fuels that supporting the development of a national highway programme and a cess imposed on service tax financing sanitation campaigns.

3. Data, monitoring and accountability:

Systems to accurately track SDG progress are beyond the capacity of many countries in South Asia, which face gaps even in as simple processes as registration of births. Countries in the sub-region are likely to face significant challenges in providing regular, timely and representative quality disaggregated data for different SDGs. Strengthening regional cooperation for monitoring and evaluation, especially concerning statistical capacity, is an agenda point that UNESCAP and SAARC are well placed to carry out as a means of regional cooperation. A regional approach would also help develop common standards and perspectives for methodological processes, and for the reporting of progress at the broader regional and global levels.

4. Technology facilitation for pursuing low-carbon pathways:

Science, technology and innovation agendas in the sub-region must be aligned with the new sustainable development paradigm. Countries must strengthen their capabilities and capacities in the sector. This requires conducive policies and legal and regulatory frameworks, supported regionally and globally by favorable technology transfer provisions, a global technology facilitation mechanism, and a technology bank for least developed countries. Regional and sub-regional cooperation would play a critical role.

A global technology facilitation mechanism and a technology bank for least developed countries, as provided for under SDG 17, are critical for South Asian countries. South Asia spends only 0.7% of its GDP on Research and Development (R&D) compared with the world average of 2.1%, and 2.6% in East Asia. The sub-region lags behind in all other aspects of Science, Technology and Innovation (STI), which determine a country's ability to absorb, assimilate and benefit from technology. Pooling resources to develop sustainable solutions jointly could be fruitful, e.g. harnessing the frugal engineering capabilities of South Asian countries to develop low-carbon growth paths. At the same time, those countries should prioritize investing in education, training and R&D aimed at industry-oriented sustainable structural transformation.

5. Addressing the Capacity Gaps and Means of Implementation

The sub-region's success in implementing the SDGs hinges on addressing current capacity gaps and strengthening the means of implementation. Mobilizing diverse sources of finance is imperative to the sub-region in this respect. This includes, but is not limited to, domestic resource mobilization, official development assistance, private sector investments and public-private partnerships for sustainable development.

South Asian countries will need support with the means of implementation if they are to achieve the 2030 Agenda. The means of implementation are included under select SDGs, as well as under SDG 17, and covered in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) on Financing for Development. These include finance, technology, capacity-building, trade, policy coherence, data and monitoring and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The key priorities for countries in South Asia in this respect are described below.

5.1 Harnessing private investments and public-private partnerships for sustainable development

Public Private Partnership (PPP) can play a critical role in supplementing public investments in sustainable infrastructure projects. For example, India is expecting 48% of the projected infrastructure investment of \$1 trillion under the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-2017) to come from PPPs. Recognizing their importance, other South Asian countries have started to implement policies to encourage the development of PPPs. Examples of such policies include the 2010 Pakistan Policy on PPPs, the 2010 Policy and Strategy for PPPs in Bangladesh, and the PPP policy in Nepal currently being finalized. PPPs are most successful in addressing specific urban infrastructure needs where public goods can be arranged in managed market structures, such as telecommunications, energy or transport infrastructure. Some countries are also encouraging the private sector to enhance their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to supplement public resources. In India, an amendment to the Companies Act of 2013 requires at least 2% of company profits to be directed towards CSR, which is likely to release several billion dollars for SDG priorities. Initial results have

shown that companies have responded by focusing on education, poverty and hunger eradication.³⁵

5.2. Regional and international cooperation for sustainable financing

There is considerable potential for regional cooperation to assist South Asia in meeting its development financing and resource management needs. In particular, regional cooperation can be leveraged to support capital market development and foster collaboration on tax related matters. Regarding the former, cross-border listings and the development of regional bond markets could help enable enterprises from countries with less developed capital markets to raise capital in more developed markets.³⁶ With regards to tax cooperation, UNESCAP has been supporting regional discussions on tax-related matters in the Asia-Pacific region to foster cooperation on tax matters, including on base erosion, profit shifting, transfer pricing and information sharing at annual Asia-Pacific dialogues on financing for development.³⁷

There is also scope for the SAARC Development Fund³⁸, which has \$420 million at its disposal, to expand and to provide a new framework for regional cooperation in financing sustainable development priorities through its infrastructure and social windows. It could be transformed into a South Asian Development Bank to enable it to raise capital from the market and catalyze regional and cross-border infrastructure investment, working with other multilateral financial institutions,

³⁵See www.livemint.com/Companies/ltYrOray6AN4InutGaMQ0M/Education-povertyeradication-draw-most-firmsCSR-funds.html.

³⁶UNESCAP SSWA (2017). <https://mailchi.mp/6667e61f329a/unescap-sswa-sdgs-update-may-june-2017?e=71b2e9bfa3#1st>.

³⁷UNESCAP resolution 71/5.

³⁸SDF which was established by the heads of the eight SAARC Member States in April 2010 with the aim to: promote the welfare of the people of SAARC region; improve their quality of life, and Accelerate economic growth, social progress and poverty alleviation in the region.

including the New Development Bank established by the BRICS and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.³⁹

In addition to regional cooperation, international development cooperation also has a role to play in helping South Asian countries meet their development financing needs. Under the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, developed countries are to provide official development assistance (ODA) equivalent to 0.7% of their gross national income, including 0.2% allocated to the support of least developed countries (LDCs). The COP21 reiterated the commitment of developed countries in mobilizing an additional \$100 billion per year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries through the Green Climate Fund. Keeping in mind the staggering needs of the sub-region, the Green Climate Fund should also prioritize the financing of sustainable development in South Asia.

Conclusions: Key building blocks of SDG Implementation

With nearly a quarter of the world's population and 36% of the world's poor, South Asia holds the key for the global achievement of the SDGs. Given its large population base and huge burden of implementation, the pursuit of the economic and social goals must go hand-in-hand with ecological sustainability considerations to avoid an increase in carbon emissions and a depletion of natural resources. The 2030 Agenda, therefore, presents a unique opportunity for South Asia to eradicate poverty and other deprivations and provide a life of dignity to all its people in a more sustainable, integrated and balanced manner.

Evidence suggests that the SDGs are to carry forward the unfinished MDG agenda, and have outlined seven policy priorities that will help

³⁹The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a multilateral development bank with a mission to improve social and economic outcomes in Asia. Headquartered in Beijing, the Bank started its operations in January 2016. One of the prime aims of the Bank is to invest in sustainable infrastructure and other productive sectors to better connect people and provide services.

the sub-region accelerate progress on SDGs. These priorities include: job creation through sustainable industrialization; closing the gaps in basic infrastructure; providing universal access to education and health; universal social protection and financial inclusion; addressing food security and hunger with sustainable agriculture; promoting gender equality and women's entrepreneurship; and enhancing environmental sustainability through low-carbon, climate-resilient pathways to development.

It is also observed that various changes to institutional arrangements at the local, national, sub-regional and regional levels are needed to implement these policy priorities and achieve the 2030 Agenda. In particular, at the national level, coordination of agencies is important in ensuring the adoption of an integrated outcome-based approach. The empowerment of local governments, stakeholder participation, and peace and security are imperative to effectively delivering the targets of the SDGs.

South Asian countries share many challenges including cultural and administrative frameworks. In light of this, coordination with SAARC for contextualizing the 2030 Agenda could be beneficial - by sharing good practices and developing regional public goods and infrastructure.

South Asian countries also need to formulate a proper means of implementation and close a number of capacity gaps in finance, technology, trade, data, monitoring and accountability. Additional financial resources will have to be mobilized through expanding tax bases, tax reforms, and innovative taxes, harnessing public-private-partnerships (PPP), and creating regional cooperation complemented by ODA flows and South-South cooperation. Along with this cooperation, technology facilitation mechanisms will be critical in enabling South Asian countries to develop sustainable solutions that jointly harness their frugal engineering capabilities. Regional cooperation could help in closing the gaps in statistical capacity as well.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides South Asian countries with an opportunity to achieve sustainable prosperity for all of their 1.7 billion people – including over 300 million who continue to live in abject poverty – and invest in them to harness their latent potential as a precursor to building the next locomotive of

the global economy. UNESCAP stands ready to assist the South Asian countries in this sustainable transformation.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a comprehensive framework for a global socio-economic transformation and it cannot be addressed by the isolated initiative of the government alone. It needs broader coalition of engagement between and among government agencies, the private sector, CSOs, local governments and the international development partners.

Most of the developing countries have opted for a strategic partnerships with the private sector, including the option of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) programmes, in addressing the substantial financing requirement for the SDGs. South Asia, collectively, is still far behind in developing a visible and effective process of such partnership.

As a package of policy intervention, South Asia need to acknowledge that there are five core areas of concerns for SDG implementation: i. identification of generation of resources; ii. appropriate areas of investment and synchronization of financial resources; iii. developing a pragmatic and strategic plan for investment harmony between Public, Private sector, Local Government and the CSOs.

South Asia needs to take advantage of the youth population dividend. SDGs in Bangladesh attempt to generate 380 million jobs by 2030. Such an ambitious target of the SDG policy demands a coherent strategic plan and orchestration of various structural processes and designing means of institutional synchronization.

There is hardly any clear and formal statement in most developing countries in regards to the space and nature of engagement of the private sector in SDG implementation, with limited progress in carving out an optimized space for the sector. There is also a need to critically explore the character of the policy regime in order to make it private sector inclusive for the attainment of the SDGs. In addition, there is a pressing need to design different modes and forms of collaboration among the government, banking sector and private entrepreneurs within a broad policy framework. SDGs cannot work without a well-functioning and inclusive financial market in order to ensure economic justice inclusive economic growth.

Policy Options and interventions

Institutional arrangements for policy integration and coordination

South Asian countries face some common challenges in transforming institutional structures from the silo approach towards an integrated approach for the design, formulation and implementation of policies under the SDG framework. This transition requires an effective coordination and oversight body for SDG implementation and monitoring in order to make the process effective, inclusive and accountable. It is also equally important to strengthen the capacity of public servants in order to implement the SDGs through the development of new skills, attitudes and abilities to collaborate across organizational boundaries.

Enhancing policy coherence through integrated assessments and institutional strengthening

The governments in the region need to confront the challenge of designing coherent policies that can simultaneously accelerate growth, reduce poverty and inequality, preserve and improve the environment, and help adapt to and mitigate climate change. To successfully achieve these objectives, countries need to: i) design sound institutional arrangements for policy integration; and ii) enhance the capacities of assessing policy options, both using quantitative and qualitative approaches. The sectoral macro policies also need to foster a cohesive policy formulation process that incorporates development objectives across the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Most importantly, there is a need to assess the policy coherence through stronger inter-agency collaboration and coordination, while building integrated assessment methodologies and capacities to address the inter-linkages and trade-offs among policies, and the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Strengthening of capacities to provide information through introducing open government data management systems

Government of the region must recognize the importance of high quality Governments of the region must recognize the importance of

high-quality statistics and their effective usage in promoting evidence-based socioeconomic policies to achieve the agreed-upon goals and strengthen national statistical systems. This will not only ensure better monitoring, but will also promote transparency and accountability in regards to the goals, purpose and budgetary allocation of the SDGs. The countries of the region should develop a comprehensive strategy for open data, particularly in thematic areas such as government expenditure, environmental indicators, procurement, demographic and socio-economic indicators, healthcare, geographical coverage etc.

In summary, with the review of the country experiences of the region, we may identify some common issues and challenges that South Asian countries need to recognize and address to achieve the SDGs within the stipulated time period. These include:

- Appropriately integrating the SDGs into long term plans, sector strategies and Annual Programs
- Keeping in view the national priority and the depth of the problems, and subsequently sequencing the SDG targets and their indicators
- Decentralizing SDGs to the regional and local levels.
- Preparing realistic plans to address the needs of the hard-to-reach people and appropriately designing the intervention strategies
- Mobilizing internal resources and developing smart and strategic approaches in order to address the financing gap
- Creating appropriate capacity, both at the national and local government levels
- Strengthening the quality of governance and service delivery, from national to local government levels
- Strengthening the process of collection of relevant quality data to support realistic monitoring and evaluation systems, from national to local government levels.



SIPG

South Asian Institute of Policy and Governance (SIPG)

North South University, Basundhara, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Room No. : NAC 1074

Phone : +880-2-55668200 Ext. 2163/2164

E-mail : sipg@northsouth.edu

Website : www.sipg.northsouth.edu, www.northsouth.edu