

While the reasonableness of some of these criticisms may be questioned, it is suggested that MDGs do have some inherent limitations.¹⁵

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

Over few past years, endeavour of economics has changed from achieving higher rates of economic growth or economic development to the attaining growth with sustainability. Sustainable development relates to economic development without depletion of natural resources. Development in an economy is considered as sustainable only if it meets the needs of present generation without adversely impacting the capabilities of resources of nation to meet the needs of future generation. Sustainable development aims at conservation of resources for future generation and its overall objective is accomplishment of long term economic stability along with environmental conversation.

The Stockholm Conference held in 1972, was the first to put environmental concerns on the global agenda. Afterwards, the World Commission on Environment and Development, Brutland, suggested in its report 'Our Common Future (1987)' that sustainable development is an approach of finding better ways of accomplishing tasks without adversely affecting the well beings of individuals, societies and planets, for the present as well as the future generations. Thus, sustainable development concentrates on the redistribution of resources to ensure the quality life for each and everyone in present as well as future time.

The United Nations (UN) adopted 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) in 2015. All members of

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15. A strategy for achieving the MDGs is laid out in a report by the UN Millennium Project, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the UN Millennium Development Goals* (New York : United Nations Development Programme, 2005).

The UN, including India, are committed to these global goals. The SDGs 'are inextricably intertwined for the holistic development of communities and nations and aim to achieve prosperous and peaceful living for human beings, ensuring food, nutrition, and health security for all. Concerted efforts are, however, required to secure future human, economic and natural capital to achieve these goals.

The 17 sustainable development goals adopted by United Nations are integrated to each other as the action in one area will affect the outcome in other areas. These goals aims at maintaining balance between social, economic and environmental sustainability. The 17 sustainable development goals are described as below :

1. No Poverty : This goal aims at eradicating poverty in all its forms. In 2015, nearly 736 million people were living their life with income less than US \$ 1.90 a day. Many of people were not getting food, clean drinking water and sanitation. Though, efforts have been taken to end poverty. With rapid growth in developing nations, some people have been lifted out of poverty, but still poverty rate is quite high in some regions. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa has 80 percent of extreme poor people. Thus, first sustainable development goal aims at ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions by 2030 by targeting the most vulnerable sections and increasing basic resources and services to provide adequate means to developing nations.

2. Zero Hunger : This goal targets at ending all forms of malnutrition, including the malnutrition of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women, children and older persons by 2030. In 2017, 821 million people were undernourished. So, this goal aims at ending hunger through ensuring sustainable food production, maintaining the sound management and optimum utilisation of genetic agricultural resources, increasing investment in agriculture research, rural infrastructure etc.

3. Good Health & Well Being : Health facilities are still not appropriate all over world. According to UNDP report, atleast 400 million people world wide have no basic healthcare facilities and around 40 percent persons lack social protection. Therefore, third sustainable development goal aims at reducing maternal mortality rate to less than 70 per one lakh live births till 2030. This goal also aims at ending the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases, water borne diseases and other communicable diseases by 2030. The main target of this sustainable development goal is to achieve universal health coverage and provide access to safe and affordable medicines and vaccines for all. Investment in health system should be increased to help countries to achieve this goal and build resilience against future health threats.

4. Quality Education : Fourth sustainable development goal aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and at promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. According to United Nation, 84 million children and young people stay out of schools and approximately 300 million students will lack basic numeracy and literary skills if additional efforts will not be taken. Therefore, this goal aims at providing equal access to quality higher education and vocational training for all at affordable prices besides free primary and secondary schooling for all by 2030. This demands huge investments in education sector so that efficient human capital can be built up which will help in enhancing economic growth and reducing poverty and inequalities.

5. Gender Equality : Fifth sustainable goal targets to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Women have still not equal positions of power and leadership in the workplace, moreover, they are still earning 23% less then men worldwide in labour market and women spend on an average three times as many as hours in domestic care work as men. Moreover, significant number of cases of sexual harassment, child marriage still exist. Since women represents half of the world's population and hence half of world's potential, therefore comprehensive policy reforms are needed to achieve this objective.

6. Clean Water and Sanitation : Sixth sustainable development goal aims at ensuring availability and

sustainable management of water facilities and sanitation for all. Due to global warming and changing climate conditions, there is threat of water scarcity. In 2020, 2.4 billion people lived in water stressed countries. In 2022, 2.2 billion people still lacked safe drinking water facility including 703 million without basic water facilities, 3.5 billion people lacked safe sanitation facilities including 1.5 billion lacked basic sanitation facilities. Though, proportion of population having access to safe drinking water facilities has increased from 69 percent to 73 percent, yet sector wise investment strategies capacity building and innovative programmes should be adopted to achieve this target.

7. Affordable and Clean Energy : Seventh sustainable development goal aims at ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all. The proportion of global population having access to electricity has increased from 87 percent in 2015 to 91 percent in 2021. In 2021, there were still 675 million people worldwide having no access to electricity. Since day to day life activities require reliable and affordable energy, therefore, this goal aims at ensuring access to energy for all by 2030. For this purpose, investment in solar and thermal energy sources, infrastructure and technology should be promoted in worldwide as particularly in all developing countries to achieve this goal.

8. Decent Work and Economic Growth : Eighth sustainable development goal aims at promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Decent work opportunities are persistently limited and insufficient to absorb the labour force. The creation of quality jobs still remains a major challenge for almost all economies with passage of time. More workers are shifting towards informal sector. Therefore reforms are required to promote decent work and pay for young people.

9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure : Ninth sustainable goal aims at building resilient infrastructure, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and faster innovation growth of manufacturing sector worldwide decreased from 7.4 percent in 2021 to 3.3 percent in 2022 worldwide. The share of manufacturing sector in least developed countries is still low which is a serious challenge in attaining the target of doubling industrial share in GDP by 2030. Thus to achieve the goal, investment in infrastructure, transport, irrigation, energy and technology, particularly in information and communication technology are pivotal to attain this sustainable development goal and empower communities.

10. Reduced Inequalities : Tenth sustainable goal aims at reducing inequalities within and among countries. The income and regional inequalities worldwide have increased particularly in aftermaths of pandemic Covid-19. Therefore, resources should be equitably distributed, simultaneously investment in education and skill development should be done to reduce inequalities worldwide.

11. Sustainable Cities and Communities : Eleventh sustainable development goal targets to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The rapid migration of people from rural to urban areas and rapid urbanisation requires increase in housing and infrastructural facilities. However, inadequacy of housing and infrastructural facilities lead to rise in slums or slum like conditions. In 2020, approximately 1.1 billion urban residents lived in slums or slum-like conditions. Therefore urban areas should be transformed by ensuring access to safe and affordable housing facilities, investing in public transport and improving urban planning and management, which is essentially required to attain sustainable development.

12. Responsible Consumption and Production : This goal aims at ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns. Global pandemic had triggered a resurgence in fossil fuel subsidy nearly doubling from 2020 to 2021. In 2021, nearly \$ 732 billion had been spent on coal, oil and gas subsidy. So, adequate support should be provided to developing countries to move towards more sustainable consumption patterns by 2030.

13. Climate Action : One of the target of sustainable development goals is to combat climate change

is impact. The impacts of climate change include rising levels of sea and extreme weather conditions. Natural calamities like floods, droughts and storms, highly vulnerable regions experienced 1.5 times higher mortality rate than very low vulnerable regions. Climate change is a global challenge; worldwide coordination is required to combat it.

14. Life Below Water : Fourteenth sustainable development goal aims at conservations of marine resources for sustainable development. A significant number of natural resources are contained by oceans. However, marine pollution is increasing day by day and reached the alarming situation – over 17 million tons clogging the oceans in 2021. This requires careful management, increase in funding for ocean conservation to attain sustainable development.

15. Life on Land : This goal aims at protecting, restoring and promoting sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably managing forests, reversing land degradation handling biodiversity loss. It is estimated by United Nations that global forest coverage has decreased from 31.9 percent in 2020 (4.2 billion hectares) to 31.2 percent (4.1 billion hectares) in 2020. There was threat to 21 percent of reptile species in 2022. Land degradation is also a challenge worldwide; atleast 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land was degraded every year from 2015 to 2019 which impacted lives of 1.3 billion people. Therefore efforts should be done to stop deforestation and restore the use of terrestrial ecosystem to save life on land.

16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions : The goal aims at attaining peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development providing access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. There was more than 50 percent increased conflict related civilian deaths in the year 2022. Moreover, high levels of armed violence and insecurity have destructive impact on development of countries. In 2021, there were approximately 4,58,000 intentional homicides – the highest in past two decades. Thus Government, Civil societies and communities should work in coordination to find solutions to maintain peace and harmony to attain sustainability.

17. Partnerships for Goals : This sustainable development goal aims at strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the global partnership for sustainable development. Sustainable development by 2030 is universal agenda and requires action by all the countries leaving no one behind. This demands partnership between governments, private sector and civil societies. The total external debt of low and middle income countries reached \$ 9 billion in 2021, showing 5.6 percent increase from 2020. In 2022, global exports increased by 12.3 percent and global trade reached to \$ 32 trillion. In 2022, net official development assistance flows by member countries of the development. Assistance Committee reached \$ 206 billion. Thus mobilisation of existing and additional resources by every one and fulfillment of official development assistance commitments by developed countries will certainly help in attaining sustainable development.

With the promulgation of the SDGs, the sustainability debate became more prominent in matters concerning governance and public policy but the achievements reflecting sustainable development through private and public sector projects and schemes are too meagre. Sustainability dimensions are neither understood nor codified as per the governance requirements and aspirations. Governments have not formulated sustainability codes, and short-term political priorities and bureaucratic expediency overshadow the pillars of sustainability.

Often ignored, sustainability is defined and attempted differently in varying contexts. It primarily means meeting our needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It implies equity in social and economic development without adversely impacting the rights and entitlements of the next generations. We have no right to grow or develop, mortgaging the future of our next generations. The Academic Committee for the office of sustainability at the University of Alberta, USA, has defined sustainability as a process of living within limits of available physical, natural and social resources in ways that enable the living systems in which humans thrive in perpetuity.

Three Sustainability Pillars¹⁶

The World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), known as the Brundtland Commission, observed that the world needed to find a way to harmonise ecology with prosperity. It defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The commission combined environmentalism with socio-economic concerns on development.

Sustainability is, in fact, an approach that considers ecological, social and economic dimensions of development to find durable and long term prosperity.

Three sustainability pillars are environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and social sustainability.

Environmental sustainability means that natural resources within the earth's environmental systems should be kept in balance, maintaining its ecological integrity. These should be consumed by humans at a rate whereby they can replenish themselves. Economic sustainability implies that human communities across the globe should maintain their independence and have access to the resources, financial and others, required by them to meet their needs. Social sustainability emphasises that universal human rights and necessities should be attainable by all people who have access to enough resources to keep their families and communities healthy and secure.