

Attaining SDGs 2030: Realistic Prospect or Idealistic Assumption?

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Abstract:

The sustainable development goals replaced the millennium development goals in 2015 providing a more comprehensive and detailed approach to make the world more sustainable for coming generations. Today the world is a global village with several problems that are universally prevalent like global warming, income and gender inequalities, toxic working environment and pollution to name a few. The United Nations was the authority that formulated the SDG's to address and resolve such conflicts and make the world a better place for living beings. This research paper attempts to evaluate if attaining the SDG's by 2030 as envisaged originally is a realistic possibility or an idealistic assumption, unattainable under present global conditions. This is a secondary data based paper that analyses research papers, news reports, white papers and other contemporary literature to arrive at realistic conclusions with respect to the topic under study. The study aims to identify the limitations, geopolitical scenarios, and other challenges that restrict progress, while attempting to highlight the opportunities that can help in achieving the SDG targets.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, United Nations, Realistic Possibility, Idealistic Assumption

Introduction:

The United Nations in 2000 adopted the eight MDGs i.e. Millennium Development Goals, to target the prevailing issues of poverty and inequality worldwide. However, global developments in due course caused the UN to replace these eight goals with 17 more comprehensive sustainable development goals to be achieved by 2030, called the Sustainable Development Goals 2030. These SDG's provide for a multidimensional framework that aims at holistic development, removal of poverty and environmental protection ensuring prosperity for all by 2030. However, as we come to an end of 2025 and have around four years remaining to 2030, most of the targets appear significantly off the track. Scholars and concerned authorities world-wide continue to argue whether it is possible to attain the SDG's by 2030 that on date appears to be far from reality. While, many may argue for Covid-19 to be reason for the delay; another point of view pronounces that even otherwise attaining the SDG goals by 2030 would not have been possible. This research seeks to examine the level to which the goals remain achievable, scrutinizing the progress done and the hurdles being faced.

Literature Review:

A lot of literature is available with respect to sustainable development and SDG's providing a wide data base for secondary study. The United Nations publishes annual reports with respect to the global progress achieved and actionable areas that provide authentic and detailed data with respect to the SDGs.

The latest Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 shows mixed results: while substantial advances have been made in achieving a few targets, others appear to be completely off track. The window for attaining the goals by 2030 is closing fast and quick decisions with respect to future course of action need to be taken (The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025).

Other literature studied by the researcher has highlighted the unequal progress across geographical areas and income units. Underdeveloped countries with low income and extremely dry countries are commonly seen to suffer from uneven attainment of SDG's. On the other hand countries with high per capita income face hostility between climate protection and other goals. This unevenness on a global level further impedes the progress towards complete attainment of sustainable goals (Yali Liu, 2024).

In a recent article published in April 2025, the United Nations warned of a global financial deficit estimated at around 4 trillion dollars threatening the achievement of SDG's by 2030. The UN officials urged for an immediate action to revive financial international cooperation that has taken a back seat due to rising trade wars and differences among nations (Mishra, 2025). The current trade wars and conflicts among nations lead to diversion of funds from development to protection and economic stabilization pushing the SDGs achievement down the priority list.

Research with respect to the government's role in effectively achieving the targeted goals of sustainable development reveals that weak institutional capacity and policy formulation hinder SDG attainment. Studies by (Velez, 2025) reveal that local government units (LGUs) can play a very prominent role in achieving the SDGs by incorporating and synergizing them with the local sustainable goals. This study indicated that incorporating local and global SDGs requires systematic efforts including prioritizing the goals. Stakeholder involvement in this process can greatly help in enhancing the planning and implementing policies targeted at achieving the SDGs.

Digital transformations in the recent years have completely altered the way we live our lives. Right from academics to entertainment, to banking and shopping, all aspects of our life today are affected by technology. While the digital transformations offer new ways to attain our goals, unequal access to technology can further aggravate disparities. Study by Hariyani and Mishra (Dharmendra Hariyani, July 2025) makes a systematic review of various contemporary digital technologies prevalent today and their role in addressing SDGs. They reviewed more than 450 peer reviewed articles in their study highlighting the transformation brought about by the DTs in supporting the SDGs as well the challenges posed.

Based on the literature review the current scenario can be summed up to state that, only a few SDGs are on track, while many of the goals are delayed. Effective policy making at global level requires data that is reliable, and timely available to formulate and implement most workable strategies.

Future Scenario: Attainment by 2030

Although, complete attainment of the SDGs by 2030 looks highly unlikely it is not fully impossible. Many goals require exponential rather than linear efforts to be achievable by 2030. Even in case of developed countries financial constraints arise due to multiplicity of requirements, natural disasters, and other situations that require immediate financial allocations. The pandemic times posed financial allocation problems requiring funds to be diverted from areas like infrastructure and education to providing medical aid, administering vaccines, setting up quarantine facilities etc. These expenses were unexpected and no country was equipped with surplus funds to provide for the same.

For the developing and under developed countries the financial challenges are multifold. Lockdowns caused mass scale job losses and governments were forced to provide for the basic amenities requiring

diversion of funds. Large scale or global level financial concessions and fund mobilization are needed to solve the money related matters. Initiatives need to be taken by global organizations like IMF, World Bank and WTO in prioritizing funding the SDGs.

Studies highlight certain specific areas where it has been predominantly difficult to achieve the targets like, access to safe sanitation, secondary school completion, and malnourished children. These areas need to be addressed more rigorously and focused strategies designed to achieve them. Certain countries have also been identified as most vulnerable that need special international aid and assistance to achieve the SDGs (Jonathan Moyer, March,2020). Such identified and non- identified countries or areas or regions must be given special attention ensuring parity in achievement of SDGs.

Prioritizing the SDGs:

One major thought to be kept in mind is that SDGs do not operate in isolation but are rather interlinked. SDG achievement should be prioritized based on the impact of the goal on other goals. Certain goals if achieved can actually help in speeding up the process of achieving the other SDGs creating a cascading effect. These are the high impact areas that include women empowerment, basic health and education facilities, and renewable energy transitions to name a few. For e.g. women empowerment can facilitate the attainment of certain SDGs namely 08(Decent work and economic growth), 10 (reduced inequalities) along with achievement of SDG 05 i.e. Gender equality. Similarly access to basic health and education facilities will enable the common man to achieve the goals of No poverty, Zero hunger, Good health, and well-being.

Social protection measures like subsidies and concessions can help in reducing extreme poverty, if designed and implemented properly. UN reports confirm that social protection plans where implemented, aided in poverty reduction and rebound, i.e. helped in breaking the vicious circle of poor people remaining poor.

Aggressive inroads towards education especially girl child education, reduction in gender parity and legal reforms provide multiple gains by way of increase in productivity, reduced fertility rates and better environment for children to flourish. Focus on gender equality at workplace can provide a better economic growth rate to the nation.

Climate changes have proven to be detrimental to the mental and physical health of humans. Funding climate action plans can not only help in mitigating climate degradation but achieving other SDGs at the same time like good health and well-being, clean water and sanitation, life below water, life on land etc. Thus, the crux of discussion here is that the SDGs cannot be achieved in isolation and are interconnected. The policy makers need to identify and prioritize the SDGs that have the maximum impact on the other goals and can work as a catalyst in achieving the same. This will ensure maximum impact with minimum inputs and aid in achieving multiple SDGs.

Practical strategies to fast-track SDGs progress:

Numerous studies and researches have been conducted to study and devise practical strategies for rapidly attaining the SDGs. Some of the suggestions as put forth by various researchers and other authorities are discussed below-

1. Prioritizing or targeting maximum impact SDGs: As discussed in the above paragraph prioritizing of SDGs can greatly accelerate the process of sustainable goal achievement. Governments, world over

- need to identify and prioritize a category of SDG targets that provide highest returns and hasten the achievement of other goals. For e.g. women empowerment, basic health care facilities etc.
2. Blended finance models: Public – private partnerships can be greatly instrumental in financing infrastructure, renewable energy generation and such other social initiatives. Governments may not have the necessary resources or willingness to singularly fund the targeted SDG achievement. Private capital will ensure a wider participation ensuring more far reaching results and create accountability including all stakeholders.
 3. Relief measures for developing countries: Lower income countries can be offered conditional debt relief or financial aid linked to SDG achievements. For e.g. providing assistance with respect to ICT infrastructure setting in an under developed country can improve digitalization and contribute to economic growth for the nation. Providing interest free or subsidized loans for infrastructure setting or sustainable development can help in building sustainable cities and communities as envisaged in SDG 11.
 4. Collaborative efforts by stakeholders: Combined efforts from stakeholders are required in scaling up the SDG target achievements globally. These stakeholders include the national and local government bodies, the United Nations, the corporate or business houses, NGOs, youth and educational institutions (Mjimba, 15th January, 2020). Such multi scale collaborations will ensure participation from grass root levels and ensure a holistic understanding and adoption of practices suited for SDGs achievement.
 5. Strengthening human capabilities: Strengthening the core human capabilities enabling them to make correct life choices depends on their level of education, health and a decent standard of living. In certain areas like the Asia- Pacific regions there are around 400 million people who live in conditions of extreme poverty and another one and a half billion who live very close to the poverty line. These people are extremely susceptible to uncertainties like pandemics or geopolitical conflicts or natural disasters. Strengthening the core human capabilities through basic education and health would greatly contribute in fast tracking SDG attainment.

Conclusion:

The study on “Attaining SDG 2030: Realistic Prospect or Idealistic Assumption?” suggests that complete attainment of all 17 SDGs by 2030 appears improbable under current global scenarios. Reports by United Nations and other private agencies show that many targets are not moving at the speed required and various financial and other factors are delaying the progress. However, considering the SDGs as merely idealistic assumptions is not entirely justified as the entire process has not been completely futile. Considerable progress has been recorded on many SDGs and some are within reach within the remaining years. Even if complete attainment of SDGs cannot be achieved by 2030, considerable progress can still be made if the policy makers adopt certain strategies like prioritizing SDGs, stakeholders’ involvement and public private partnership.

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