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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A Comprehensive Review of Progress, Implementation, and the Path Forward

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Abstract

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, represent an unprecedented global commitment to ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for all. This review paper provides a comprehensive assessment of the SDGs, their scope, implementation across sectors, and global status as of 2025—the tenth anniversary of their adoption. Drawing on the latest available data from the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025 and other authoritative sources, the paper finds that only 35 per cent of SDG targets are on track or making moderate progress, while nearly half are progressing too slowly and 18 per cent have regressed since the 2015 baseline. Notable achievements include declining HIV infections, expanded social protection coverage, increased school enrolment, and growing access to electricity and the internet. However, more than 800 million people still live in extreme poverty, climate change continues to accelerate, conflicts displace millions, and the annual SDG financing gap has exceeded US\$4 trillion. The paper examines implementation across government, business, and civil society sectors, identifies persistent gaps in data, financing, and political will, and explores emerging discussions on the post-2030 agenda. It concludes that while the SDGs have improved millions of lives, accelerated action, systemic reforms, and renewed multilateral cooperation are urgently needed in the final five years to 2030 and beyond.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); 2030 Agenda; Global implementation; Financing gap; Progress assessment; Post-2030 Agenda

BACKGROUND OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Sustainable Development Goals represent a landmark achievement in international cooperation. Adopted in September 2015 by all 193 United Nations Member States, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which had guided global development efforts from 2000 to 2015. Unlike the MDGs, which primarily focused on developing countries and addressed a narrower set of issues, the SDGs are universal in scope—applicable to all countries regardless of their level of development (European Commission, 2025; UN Office at Geneva, 2025). They address the interconnected challenges of poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

The 2030 Agenda is built on five core principles often summarised as the "five Ps": People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. It recognises that sustainable development cannot be achieved through isolated actions but requires integrated approaches that balance economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The framework comprises 17 Goals, 169 targets, and 248 indicators that allow for systematic monitoring of progress (UN DESA, 2025a).

The decade since adoption has witnessed both remarkable achievements and profound challenges. The COVID-19 pandemic, escalating conflicts, climate chaos, rising inequalities, and mounting debt burdens have significantly hindered progress. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated in July 2025, the world faces a "*development emergency*" (UN, 2025a). Yet the same report emphasises that the SDGs remain within reach—but only with urgent, united, and unwavering action (Focus 2030, 2025; SDSN,

2025). The tenth annual stocktaking confirms that while global commitment remains strong, the pace of change is far too slow (UN DESA Voice, 2025).

THE 17 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: SCOPE, AIMS, AND TARGETS

Each of the 17 SDGs addresses a distinct but interconnected dimension of sustainable development. The symbols or icons of each SDG were designed according to the following three criteria:

1. *Universality*: Symbols are understandable to diverse audience and different cultures.
2. *Simplicity*: Basic and clear forms that avoid complex details and facilitate recognition.
3. *Chromatic Association*: Each colour reinforce the meaning and identity of the goal.

The icons were conceived as schematic representations, capable of conveying both general ideas and concrete actions in a unified visual language (MunImpact, 2019; UN, 2018).

The following sections outline each goal, its core aim, key targets, and implementation requirements, based on the official frameworks outlined by the UN (UN DESA, 2025a).

Goal 1: No Poverty



Icon: Represents a family, evoking social protection and the need to guarantee minimum conditions for a dignified life for all people. An intense red colour is associated with urgency and the need for action.

Aim: End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

Key Targets: Eradicate extreme poverty (people living on less than USD 2.15 per day) by 2030; reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women, and children living in poverty; implement nationally appropriate social protection systems; ensure equal rights to economic resources.

Requirements: Progressive taxation, social protection floors, investment in basic services, and targeted interventions for vulnerable populations.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger



Icon: A bowl with steam and ears of grain, symbolizing food security and nutrition. Identified with a mustard yellow, a color that evokes cereals and abundance.

Aim: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

Key Targets: End hunger and ensure access to safe, nutritious food; end all forms of malnutrition; double agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers; ensure sustainable food production systems.

Requirements: Agricultural investment, climate-resilient farming practices, reduced food waste, strengthened food supply chains.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being



Icon: Represents an electrocardiogram line combines with a heart, evoking the continuous tracking of health and physical well-being. Bright green colour – a symbol of life, vitality, and hope.

Aim: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Key Targets: Reduce global maternal mortality; end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five; end epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, and neglected tropical diseases; reduce non-communicable diseases; ensure universal health coverage.

Requirements: Health system strengthening, disease prevention, universal health coverage, access to essential medicines, and health workforce development.

Goal 4: Quality Education



Icon: An open book with a pencil, symbolizing literacy, access to knowledge, and education as an essential tool for development and equity. A burgundy red – a tone associated with seriousness and transformation.

Aim: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Key Targets: Ensure all girls and boys complete free, equitable, and quality primary and secondary education; ensure equal access to affordable vocational training; eliminate gender disparities in education; increase youth and adult literacy.

Requirements: Teacher training, educational infrastructure, inclusive curricula, and targeted support for marginalised groups.

Goal 5: Gender Equality



Icon: The icon thoughtfully combines the female and male signs with an equality symbol at its core, reflecting the overarching goal of eliminating discrimination and actively promoting full equality between women and men in all aspects of life. A strong, vibrant orange colour serves as the backdrop, powerfully representing dynamic energy, collective social change, and the urgent, unwavering push toward a more just and inclusive society.

Aim: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Key Targets: End all forms of discrimination and violence against women; eliminate harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation; ensure women's full participation in leadership; ensure universal access to reproductive health.

Requirements: Legal reforms, institutional capacity, cultural change, and targeted investment in women's empowerment (UN Women and UN DESA, 2025; UN, 2025b).

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Icon: A glass with water and a drop, evoking access to drinking water as a basic condition for health and life. Light blue colour is associated with water and purity.

Aim: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Key Targets: Achieve universal and equitable access to safe drinking water; achieve access to adequate sanitation and hygiene; improve water quality; increase water-use efficiency; implement integrated water resources management.

Requirements: Water infrastructure investment, pollution control, efficient irrigation, and transboundary water cooperation.

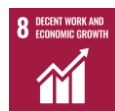
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Icon: A stylized sun whose rays evoke the diffusion and availability of renewable energy for all. Bright yellow that evokes sunlight as a source of clean energy.

Aim: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all.

Key Targets: Ensure universal access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy services; increase substantially the share of renewable energy; double the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency.

Requirements: Renewable energy investment, energy infrastructure, efficiency standards, and just transition policies.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Icon: An ascending arrow over growth bars, representing economic progress and sustainable prosperity. A dark red colour that conveys strength and dynamism.

Aim: Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all.

Key Targets: Sustain per capita economic growth; achieve higher levels of productivity; promote development-oriented policies; achieve full and productive employment; protect labour rights; promote safe and secure working environments.

Requirements: Economic diversification, job creation, labour rights enforcement, and skills development.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

Icon: Three connected cubes representing infrastructure, industry, and innovation, key elements for sustainable economic development. Usage of intense orange – a colour associated with modernity and creativity.

Aim: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and foster innovation.

Key Targets: Develop quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure; promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation; increase access to financial services; enhance scientific research and technological capabilities.

Requirements: Infrastructure investment, industrial policy, research and development, technology transfer, and digital connectivity (UNIDO, 2025a; UNIDO, 2025b).

Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities

Icon: A set of arrows pointing in opposite directions, representing existing disparities and inequalities, while the equality symbol in the center reflects the goal of achieving equality and equity for all. Presented with fuchsia pink – a colour that symbolizes inclusion and diversity.

A circle with the number 10.

Aim: Reduce inequality within and among countries.

Key Targets: Progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent; promote social, economic, and political inclusion; ensure equal opportunity; adopt fiscal, wage, and social protection policies; enhance representation of developing countries in global institutions.

Requirements: Progressive taxation, social protection, anti-discrimination laws, and international cooperation.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Icon: Three structures that reflect architectural diversity: a tall building with rectangular windows representing dense urban areas, a house with a gabled roof symbolizing residential communities, and an intermediate building suggesting public or institutional infrastructure. Together, they symbolize the diversity of human settlements and the need to make them more sustainable. Ochre yellow that conveys urban energy.

Aim: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Key Targets: Ensure access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services; provide access to safe, affordable, and sustainable transport systems; enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation; reduce the number of deaths from disasters.

Requirements: Urban planning, affordable housing, public transport, disaster risk reduction, and green infrastructure.

Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production

Icon: An infinity symbol formed by arrows, referring to the principles of the circular economy: reduce, reuse, and recycle. A sandy gold color that evokes the cycles of nature.

Aim: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.

Key Targets: Implement the 10-Year Framework of Programmes on Sustainable Consumption and Production; achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural

resources; halve global food waste; achieve environmentally sound management of chemicals and waste.

Requirements: Circular economy approaches, waste management, sustainable procurement, and consumer awareness (CH, 2024).

Goal 13: Climate Action



Icon: Planet Earth with an eye, evoking the need for vigilance and action against climate change. Dark green colour linked to nature and environmental responsibility.

Aim: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Key Targets: Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity; integrate climate change measures into policies; improve education and institutional capacity; implement the commitment to mobilise US\$100 billion annually for climate action.

Requirements: Emissions reduction, climate adaptation, renewable energy transition, and international climate finance (UN, 2025c; UN DESA, 2025b).

Goal 14: Life Below Water



Icon: A fish among stylized waves, representing marine biodiversity and the need to protect aquatic ecosystems. Navy blue colour reflects the oceans and their depth.

Aim: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development.

Key Targets: Prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution; sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems; minimise ocean acidification; regulate fishing and end overfishing; conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas.

Requirements: Marine protected areas, sustainable fisheries management, pollution control, and ocean governance.

Goal 15: Life on Land



Icon: A tree accompanied by natural elements, represents forest life and the ecosystems that sustain biodiversity. Light green – a refreshing and soothing color that is universally associated with nature and the thriving abundance of biological diversity.

Aim: Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt biodiversity loss.

Key Targets: Ensure conservation and sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems; promote sustainable forest management; combat desertification; ensure conservation of mountain ecosystems; take urgent action to end poaching and trafficking of protected species.

Requirements: Protected area expansion, sustainable land management, reforestation, and biodiversity conservation.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions



Icon: The icon combines a dove with an olive branch and a judge's gavel, representing peace, justice, and the strengthening of transparent and inclusive institutions. Represented by cobalt blue – a color that conveys trust and stability.

Aim: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Key Targets: Significantly reduce all forms of violence; end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and violence against children; promote the rule of law; ensure equal access to justice; develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions.

Requirements: Judicial reform, anti-corruption measures, conflict resolution, and institutional capacity building.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals



Icon: A circle of interlocking rings, a symbol of the global collaboration needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda goals. Sky blue, symbolizing openness and cooperation.

Aim: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development.

Key Targets: Strengthen domestic resource mobilisation; fully implement official development assistance commitments; address debt sustainability; enhance North-South and South-South cooperation; promote technology transfer and capacity building; improve data, monitoring, and accountability.

Requirements: International cooperation, financing, technology transfer, capacity building, and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

SECTORS AND ORGANISATIONS IMPLEMENTING THE SDGS

The SDGs are not the sole responsibility of governments. Their achievement requires engagement across all sectors of society.

Government and Public Sector

Governments bear primary responsibility for SDG implementation. National governments translate the global goals into national development plans, establish institutional frameworks, allocate budgets, and monitor progress. As of 2025, 190 out of 193 UN member states have presented national action plans through the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. Most have presented two or more VNRs, with 39 countries volunteering to present one in 2025. Subnational governments are increasingly active, with 249 Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) listed as of March 2025 (IISD SDG Knowledge Hub, 2025).

Business and Private Sector

The private sector plays a crucial role through responsible business practices, sustainable supply chains, green investment, and innovation. Companies align their strategies

with the SDGs, report on their contributions, and develop products and services that address sustainable development challenges. The SDG Global Business Forum, convened annually by UN DESA, brings together business leaders to showcase private sector contributions. Corporate initiatives increasingly integrate SDG-aligned Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) frameworks (Deswal and Deswal, 2025; UNDP, 2025a; UNECA, 2025a).

Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organisations

Civil society organisations (CSOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play essential roles in service delivery, advocacy, accountability, and community mobilisation. They provide services to vulnerable populations, hold governments accountable, and amplify the voices of marginalised communities. The whole-of-society approach, increasingly adopted by countries, recognises that SDG implementation requires engagement from all stakeholders.

International Organisations and Multilateral Institutions

UN agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), and others, provide technical assistance, data, financing, and coordination (UNIDO, 2025b). Regional organisations and development banks also contribute to SDG implementation.

Academic and Research Institutions

Universities and research institutions contribute through evidence generation, innovation, capacity building, and SDG monitoring. They develop new technologies, conduct policy-relevant research, and train the next generation of sustainable development practitioners (Elsevier, 2025).

Local Communities and Individuals

Ultimately, SDG success depends on action at the community and individual level. Local communities implement projects, adopt sustainable practices, and participate in decision-making. Individual behaviour change—in consumption, energy use, and civic participation—is essential for achieving many SDGs.

STATUS APPRAISAL UP TO 2025

Overall Progress

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2025, the tenth annual stocktaking of global progress, presents a sobering assessment. Among the 139 targets with available trend data, only 35 per cent are on track or making moderate progress. Nearly half (47 per cent) are progressing too slowly, and 18 per cent have regressed since the 2015 baseline (UN DESA, 2025a; Focus 2030, 2025). At the global level, none of the 17 goals are currently on course to be achieved by 2030.

The Sustainable Development Report 2025, produced by the SDG Transformation Center, finds that only 17 per cent of SDG targets are on track to be achieved worldwide (SDSN, 2025). This discrepancy reflects the difference between "on

track or making moderate progress" and "*on track to be achieved by 2030*"—the latter being a more stringent measure.

Regional Performance

East and South Asia has outperformed all other regions in SDG progress since 2015, driven notably by rapid progress on socioeconomic targets (ESCAP, 2025). European countries continue to top the SDG Index, with Finland ranking first and 19 of the top 20 countries located in Europe (UNRIC, 2025). In the 2025 SDG Index, China ranked 49th with a score of 74.4, and India ranked 99th with a score of 67.0—both entering the top 50 and top 100 performers respectively for the first time (IE, 2025).

Countries that have progressed more rapidly than their peers include Benin (Sub-Saharan Africa), Nepal (East and South Asia), Peru (Latin America and the Caribbean), the United Arab Emirates (Middle East and North Africa), Uzbekistan (Eastern Europe and Central Asia), Costa Rica (OECD), and Saudi Arabia (G20) (SDSN, 2025).

Goal-by-Goal Progress Assessment

SDG 1 (No Poverty)

Despite progress, more than 800 million people still live in extreme poverty. Progress has been uneven, with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent crises reversing gains in many regions (UN, 2025d).

SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)

Food security indicators are deteriorating at an alarming pace in several regions across the globe. Persistent conflict, increasingly severe climate shocks, and persistently rising food prices continue to drive widespread hunger and acute malnutrition, particularly among vulnerable populations.

SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)

Notable progress has been made. New HIV infections have declined by nearly 40 per cent since 2010. Malaria prevention has averted 2.2 billion cases and saved 12.7 million lives since 2000. However, health systems remain fragile, and universal health coverage is far from achieved (UN, 2025a).

SDG 4 (Quality Education)

Since the year 2015, an additional 110 million children and young people have gained access to and entered school. Yet, despite this notable progress, tens of millions still remain excluded from education, and learning outcomes remain worryingly inadequate across numerous national and regional contexts.

SDG 5 (Gender Equality)

Child marriage is declining, with more girls staying in school and women gaining ground in parliaments. However, progress on Goal 5 remains insufficient. No indicator or sub-indicator for SDG 5 has reached "target met or almost met". If current trends continue, 351 million women and girls will still be living in extreme poverty in 2030 (UN Women and UN DESA, 2025; UN, 2025b).

SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)

Across vast regions of the world, billions still lack access to safe drinking water, adequate sanitation, and basic hygiene services on a daily basis.

SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)

In 2023, 92 per cent of the world's population had access to electricity. Forty-five countries achieved universal electricity access in the past decade. Renewable energy is now the fastest-rising source of power worldwide.

SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

Decent Work and Economic Growth decreased from 6.6 per cent in 2024 to 4.9 per cent in 2025. The global economic outlook remains uncertain.

SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)

Manufacturing Value Added (MVA) per capita reached a record high of US\$1,936 (at constant 2015 prices). Global manufacturing value added per capita grew 17.3 per cent from 2015 to 2024. However, SDG 9 falls below the 50 per cent performance mark (UNIDO, 2025a; UNIDO, 2025b).

SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

Inequalities remain stubbornly high. Many people struggle to earn adequate incomes in precarious jobs.

SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)

Data coverage for Goal 11 remains below 30 per cent. Urban-rural disparities in reporting mask sub-national differences (OECD, 2025).

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)

Progress has been slow. Unsustainable production patterns continue to compound environmental challenges (CH, 2024).

SDG 13 (Climate Action)

Climate change pushed 2024 to be the hottest year on record, with temperatures 1.55°C above pre-industrial levels. SDG 13 is one of the most affected goals, with climate action witnessing "alarming regression" in some regions. By 2025, 141 countries reported the adoption of national disaster risk reduction strategies, up from 56 in 2015 (UN, 2025c; UN DESA, 2025b).

SDG 14 (Life Below Water)

Critical data gaps still persist today, making it considerably more difficult to track ongoing progress on ocean ecosystem health.

SDG 15 (Life on Land)

Conservation efforts have doubled protection of key ecosystems. However, biodiversity loss continues at alarming rates. Data for biodiversity indicators remain insufficient.

SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

Conflicts caused nearly 50,000 deaths in 2024; by the end of that year, over 120 million people were forcibly displaced. The rule of law remains weak in many contexts (UN, 2025a).

SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

Global commitment to the SDGs remains strong, with 190 countries presenting national action plans. However, Official Development Assistance (ODA) fell by a record 23 per cent in 2025. The SDG financing gap now exceeds US\$4 trillion annually (AllianzGI, 2025; UNECA, 2025b).

OUTCOMES AND SUCCESSES

Despite the sobering overall assessment, the SDGs have delivered tangible improvements in millions of lives over the past decade.

Health Achievements

New HIV infections have declined by nearly 40 per cent since 2010. Malaria prevention has averted 2.2 billion cases and saved 12.7 million lives since 2000. Fifty-four countries had eliminated at least one neglected tropical disease by the end of 2024 (UN, 2025a). These achievements demonstrate that targeted health interventions, sustained investment, and global cooperation can deliver measurable results.

Social Protection Expansion

Social protection now reaches over half the world's population, up significantly from a decade ago. This expansion has provided a crucial safety net for vulnerable populations, though coverage remains far from universal (UN DESA, 2025a).

Education Gains

Since 2015, 110 million more children and youth have entered school. Gender gaps in education continue to narrow, with more girls completing school.

Energy Access

In 2023, 92 per cent of the world's population had access to electricity. Forty-five countries achieved universal electricity access in the past decade. Renewable energy is now the fastest-rising source of power worldwide.

Digital Connectivity

Internet use has surged from 40 per cent in 2015 to 68 per cent in 2024, unlocking access to education, jobs, and civic participation. This digital transformation has opened new opportunities for development, though the digital divide persists.

Biodiversity Conservation

Conservation efforts have doubled protection of key ecosystems, contributing to global biodiversity resilience. Protected area coverage has expanded significantly, though biodiversity loss continues.

National Success Stories

Global averages mask meaningful advances in many countries. National and local successes, driven by sound policies, strong institutions, and inclusive partnerships, prove that accelerated progress is not only possible but already happening (SDSN, 2025). These success stories demonstrate that the SDGs are achievable with the right combination of political will, investment, and collaboration.

WHAT MORE IS REQUIRED

Accelerated Action in Priority Areas

The 2025 SDG Report calls for intensified action across six priority areas where transformative impact can be generated (UN DESA, 2025a):

- *Food Systems*: Transform agricultural practices to ensure food security, reduce waste, and build climate resilience.
- *Energy Access*: Accelerate the transition to renewable energy and ensure universal access to affordable, clean energy.
- *Digital Transformation*: Bridge the digital divide and leverage technology for inclusive development.
- *Education Reform*: Improve access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.
- *Jobs and Social Protection*: Create decent work opportunities and expand social protection coverage.
- *Climate and Biodiversity Action*: Urgently reduce emissions, build climate resilience, and halt biodiversity loss.

Closing the Financing Gap

The SDG financing gap has exceeded US\$4 trillion annually. Annual investment of US\$5-7 trillion is needed globally to achieve the SDGs, but current investment levels are far below this (AllianzGI, 2025). Closing this gap requires:

- *Domestic Resource Mobilisation*: Countries need to strengthen tax systems and achieve the 15 per cent tax-to-GDP threshold identified in the Sevilla Commitment (UNDP, 2025b).
- *International Financing*: ODA must be restored and increased, reversing the record 23 per cent decline in 2025 (UNECA, 2025b).
- *Innovative Financing*: Blended finance, green bonds, public-private partnerships, and other innovative mechanisms are needed (UN, 2025e; UNDP, 2025a).
- *Debt Restructuring*: Low- and middle-income countries face record-high debt servicing costs of US\$1.4 trillion (2023), constraining their ability to invest in sustainable development (UNECA, 2025a).

Strengthening Data Systems

The Medellín Framework for Action, adopted at the 2024 UN World Data Forum, provides a roadmap to strengthen data systems essential for responsive policymaking (PARIS21, 2024). Key priorities include:

- *Timeliness*: Over 40 per cent of SDG indicators in OECD countries rely on outdated data, hampering real-time responses in climate action, social equity, and biodiversity (OECD, 2025).
- *Data disaggregation*: Insufficient disaggregation by gender, income, age, and location limits the ability to track disparities.

- *Coverage gaps*: Trend data coverage for Goals 5, 11, and 13 is still below 30 per cent (OECD, 2025).
- *Sectoral gaps*: Over 30 per cent of targets in the Planet dimension lack sufficient data for trend analysis.

The suspension of US funding and the closure of USAID in February 2025 have disrupted the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which contribute to monitoring 39 SDG indicators. This disruption particularly affects sub-Saharan Africa and the least developed countries (PARIS21, 2024).

Systemic Transitions

The final five years require a shift from incremental adjustments to systemic transitions. This means addressing structural barriers, reforming international financial architecture, and building institutions that are inclusive, accountable, and trusted (UNDP, 2025b). Multilateral cooperation is not a luxury—it is a practical necessity.

Political Will and Leadership

Progress happens where there is strong leadership, smart and sustained investment, and genuine inclusion. Governments must demonstrate political will, businesses must commit to responsible practices, civil society must hold power to account, and individuals must embrace sustainable lifestyles.

WHAT NEXT AFTER THE SDGS?

As the 2030 deadline approaches, discussions about the post-2030 agenda are gaining momentum. The Pact for the Future, adopted by UN member states, mandated the SDG Summit in 2027 to kick off official discussions on the post-2030 agenda. This will be the last SDG Summit before 2030 (UN, 2025d).

Emerging Principles for the Post-2030 Framework

Debates on "*Beyond SDGs*" increasingly point toward the need for refined design principles (NS, 2025; IDOS, 2025):

- *Governance Across Scales*: Strengthening coordination between global, regional, national, and local levels.
- *Well-Being Beyond GDP*: Moving beyond economic growth as the primary measure of progress.
- *Digital and AI Governance*: Addressing the opportunities and risks of emerging technologies (UNU, 2025).
- *Verification and Accountability*: Strengthening mechanisms to ensure commitments are met.
- *Recalibration of Roles*: Clarifying the responsibilities of different actors.

Maintaining Ambition While Acknowledging Realities

Many stakeholders emphasise the need to maintain the current framework rather than rewrite it, instead focusing on "*by and beyond 2030*". The post-2030 process must not become a vehicle for lowering ambition, weakening rights or shrinking accountability. Instead, it should correct the implementation, financing, and participation gaps that have limited the SDGs, while defending their universal and transformative promise.

Thematic Priorities

Discussions highlight several thematic priorities for the post-2030 agenda:

- *Climate and Biodiversity*: The existential challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss must remain central.
- *Inequality*: Addressing widening inequalities within and among countries.
- *Digital Transformation*: Leveraging technology for inclusive development while managing risks.
- *Peace and Security*: Addressing conflicts and displacement.
- *Financing*: Reforming the international financial architecture to enable sustainable development.

Strengthening Local Ownership

There is growing recognition of the need for stronger local ownership and grounded data systems (IISD SDG Knowledge Hub, 2025). The voices of youth, civil society, and Global South actors must be amplified in shaping the post-2030 agenda. The shift should be from abstract visions to more grounded and context-specific futures.

A Long-Term Vision to Mid-Century

The post-2030 agenda is increasingly being framed as extending to mid-century (2050) rather than ending in 2030 (Elsevier, 2025). This longer time horizon allows for more realistic goal-setting and acknowledges that sustainable development is a continuous process rather than a finite project.

CONCLUSION

Ten years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs have improved millions of lives through gains in health, education, energy access, and digital connectivity. However, the pace of change remains insufficient. Only 35 per cent of targets are on track or making moderate progress, 18 per cent have regressed, and none of the 17 goals are currently on course to be achieved by 2030 (UN DESA, 2025a; SDSN, 2025).

The challenges are formidable: more than 800 million people still live in extreme poverty; climate change continues to accelerate; conflicts displace over 120 million people; and the annual SDG financing gap exceeds USD 4 trillion (UN, 2025a; AllianzGI, 2025). Yet the evidence also shows that success is possible. National and local achievements—45 countries achieving universal electricity access, 54 countries eliminating neglected tropical diseases—prove that accelerated progress is achievable with sound policies, strong institutions, and inclusive partnerships.

The final five years to 2030 require a fundamental shift from incremental adjustments to systemic transitions. This means closing the financing gap, strengthening data systems, building political will, and embracing multilateral cooperation (UNDP, 2025b; UNECA, 2025b). As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated, *"This report shows that the Sustainable Development Goals are still*

within reach. But only if we act—with urgency, unity, and unwavering resolve" (UN, 2025a).

Beyond 2030, discussions on the post-2030 agenda are already underway. The SDG Summit in 2027 will kick off official deliberations (UN, 2025d). The emerging framework must maintain ambition, correct the implementation gaps that have limited the SDGs, and adapt to new global realities (NS, 2025; IDOS, 2025). The journey toward sustainable development does not end in 2030—it is a continuous process that extends to mid-century and beyond (Elsevier, 2025).

The 2030 Agenda is not aspirational; it is non-negotiable. The choice before the world is clear: retreat into fragmentation or advance with solidarity and cooperation. The SDGs have provided an unprecedented shared global vision. Now is the time to turn that vision into reality.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript. In addition, the ethical issues, including plagiarism, informed consent, misconduct, data fabrication and/ or falsification, double publication and/ or submission, and redundancy, have been completely observed by the authors.

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