

IFMSA Policy Proposal Sustainable Development Goals

Proposed by Team of Officials

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Policy Statement

Introduction:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted in 2015, with 17 goals forming a comprehensive plan for global development, prosperity and sustainability for the entire planet. Given the nature of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their imminent deadline, it is now more imperative than ever for all relevant parties, including youth, to work and assume responsibility. In addition, it's crucial to champion collective action, robust and innovative planning, and timely and effective monitoring and reporting on the SDGs.

IFMSA position:

The International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) supports the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and believes in its vision of creating a more sustainable future for all. In addition, the IFMSA recognises the imperative role of and calls for meaningful youth engagement across all planning, implementation, and evaluation efforts on sustainable development. As such, the IFMSA champions and spearheads the involvement and engagement of medical students around the world with several items on the 2030 agenda through an array of activities such as policy development, campaigning and advocacy, capacity-building initiatives, thematic meetings, exchange programs, and external collaborations on local, national, regional and international levels. Consequently, the IFMSA reaffirms that all relevant stakeholders' actions are needed to achieve the SDGs.

Call to Action:

Therefore, the IFMSA calls upon the following:

Governments and Policymakers:

- Create policies and frameworks on sustainable development prioritising cross-sectoral collaborations and champion stakeholders' participation, including youth.
- Integrate the SDGs into existing national policies, legislative frameworks, development plans, and budgets, ensuring adequate resource allocation for health, education, and environmental protection.
- Address national and regional disparities in health, education, and resource access, particularly for under-resourced populations.
- Invest in national statistical systems to improve data collection, analysis, and dissemination on health, education, and environmental indicators that are related to sustainable development.
- Actively and consistently report on the SDGs and the progress made by countries on the indicators.
- Invest in primary healthcare, strengthen disease surveillance and response systems, and ensure equitable access to quality healthcare.
- Implement national action plans to combat Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). These plans should include promoting responsible antibiotic use, investing in research and development of new antimicrobials, and strengthening infection prevention and control measures.
- Implement national climate action plans by investing in renewable energy sources, promoting sustainable transportation, and implementing measures to reduce air and water pollution.

The United Nations System, International Agencies and Civil Society:

- Enhance global platforms to unite stakeholders from different backgrounds to ensure coordinated actions towards the SDGs.
- Strengthen political will and hold governments accountable to their commitment to the SDGs by engaging in advocacy, awareness campaigns and public reporting.
- Implement grassroots initiatives and provide technical and financial assistance to developing countries to support the implementation of the SDGs, including addressing health threats, mitigating climate change, and reducing inequalities.
- Enhance coordination and collaboration among UN agencies and other international organisations to address global health challenges, including pandemic preparedness and response.

- Facilitate international cooperation on research and development, technology transfer, and knowledge sharing to address global health threats and environmental challenges.
- Advocate for policies that promote health equity and environmental sustainability and address the root causes of inequalities at the local, national, and international levels.
- Support the development and implementation of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress on the SDGs and identify areas for improvement.

Educational Institutions:

- Provide students with the tools to recognise the SDGs as a fundamental axis of the sustainability of nations. They also give them a sense of duty and their consequent roles as future professionals by integrating SDGs into academic agendas and encouraging students to collaborate on solutions for SDGs implementation.
- Conduct research on infectious diseases, AMR, the health impacts of climate change, and other issues within the development agenda and work on effective interventions to address these challenges.
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration across all relevant disciplines to address the complex nature of global health and development threats.

Private Sector:

- Creating business strategies that encourage innovation and incorporate the achievement of the SDG targets.
- Invest in sustainable practices and technologies for renewable energy, waste management, and circular economies aligned with the SDGs and 2030 Agenda.
- Invest in research and development of new diagnostics, treatments, and vaccines for infectious diseases and AMR.
- Support public health initiatives and programs through partnerships and funding.

Youth and Student Organizations (including National Member Organizations and Medical Students):

- Target advocacy towards decision-makers on sustainable development and highlight the need for active involvement of the young population when it comes to the implementation of the SDGs,
- Elaborate and promote the drafting and implementing of national policies that align with the SDGs agenda, incorporating it in all activities and initiatives.
- Increase peer-to-peer education within the NMOs, education in advocacy matters, and further collaboration with relevant stakeholders to align with the agenda of SDGs.
- Create academic and professional incentives for members to engage in the SDGs agenda, promote international congresses and forums, and build their capacity to further engage and advocate on the topics of the 2030 agenda.
- Actively seek and organise spaces for public discourse and raising awareness, promoting evidence-based information that educates, empowers and recognises the relevance of the SDGs in a globalised context of youth.

Financial Institutions:

- Invest in research and innovation initiatives that promote sustainable development and provide consistent funding mechanisms for sustainable projects and actions.
- Prioritise funding and investment in goals and indicators that report stagnation or regression on the agenda.
- Bridge the investment gap in developing and Low—and Middle-Income Countries through innovative financing, debt relief initiatives and sustainable development funds.
- Invest in sustainable development projects and programs that address global health threats and promote health equity.

Position Paper

Background Information:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, aims to achieve global peace and prosperity for both people and the planet. The agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an urgent call to action for countries, organisations, and individuals worldwide. The 2030 Agenda led to the developing of a set of 231 monitoring indicators known as the SDGs Indicators.

Historically, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were first introduced in September 2000, setting targets to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. In 2012, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) led to the adoption of "The Future We Want," which proposed the development of the SDGs to expand the MDGs globally. This initiative emphasised intersectionality and established the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (1).

The 17 SDGs and their 169 targets aim to advance a bold, universal agenda that builds on the MDGs. They seek to achieve a balanced integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions to ensure sustainable development for all.

The interconnectedness of the SDGs is a critical factor in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Research has highlighted the complex web of relationships between the 17 SDGs, revealing that progress in one area can significantly influence outcomes in others. For example, poverty reduction and economic growth improvements often drive advancements in education and health, while unsustainable industry practices can impede environmental goals. (2)

The evaluation of the SDGs' interconnectedness through causal analysis of sustainability indicators underscores the need for an integrated approach to policy-making. It emphasises that addressing one goal in isolation may not be effective, as the ripple effects on other goals can either amplify or diminish overall progress. This interconnectedness calls for holistic strategies that consider the multifaceted nature of sustainable development, ensuring that policies are designed to maximise positive synergies while mitigating negative impacts.

Some advanced analytical techniques, such as those used in particle physics, offer insights into the dynamics of the complex interconnectedness of the SDGs. This knowledge is crucial for developing effective interventions and strategies for the intricate linkages between economic, social, and environmental dimensions. (3)

A comprehensive bibliometric analysis of global research on the SDGs further highlights the importance of intersectionality in sustainable development. Key research hotspots, such as climate change, poverty alleviation, global health, and governance, demonstrate the interconnected challenges that must be addressed. The analysis calls for greater cross-disciplinary collaboration and sharing of best practices to tackle these challenges holistically. It also stresses the need for inclusivity in research and policy-making to ensure that progress is equitable and leaves no one behind. (4)

Discussion:

1. Key Focus Areas of IFMSA's Engagement

Public Health

The Standing Committee on Public Health (SCOPH) promotes collaboration, capacity building, and innovation, empowering students in public health advocacy, education, and action. It works closely with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to enhance its global impact. Through its five programs: Communicable Diseases, Environment and Health, Healthy Lifestyles & Non-Communicable Diseases, Mental Health, and Health Systems, SCOPH advances its mission, aligning with the SDGs to create a healthier, more equitable world.(5)

Communicable Diseases and Antimicrobial Resistance:

In tackling communicable diseases, IFMSA contributes to SDG Target 3.3 by raising awareness and building capacity to combat these illnesses. Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is an escalating threat, with approximately 1.27 million deaths globally in 2019 directly attributable to AMR, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated action.(6) Between 2021 and 2024, IFMSA actively engaged in various initiatives, including participation in WHO #EndTB webinars and workshops, contributing interventions on social determinants of tuberculosis (TB), and hosting World TB Day campaigns to address diagnostic and treatment gaps. The federation collaborated on AMR efforts, co-hosting AMR Youth Summits with global partners and contributing to the WHO Civil Society Consultation on AMR. Additionally, IFMSA supported efforts to combat Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) through capacity-building workshops and WHO-led discussions. Over three years, more than 60 activities under the Communicable Diseases program focused on education, prevention, and equipping youth with tools to combat these diseases. These efforts underline IFMSA's role in advancing SDG 3.3 by increasing public awareness, advocating for policy changes, and ensuring equitable access to prevention and treatment resources. (7)

Environment and Health, including Climate Change:

Recognising the intricate link between planetary health and human health, IFMSA emphasises environmental health and climate change's impact on public health, aligning with SDG Targets 3.9 and 13.3. Climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050 from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhoea, and heat stress alone. (8) The IFMSA Program on Environment and Health (EH) made significant progress during the 2023-2024 term, with a notable rise in activities and an 84.6% reporting rate. Since its inception, the program has enrolled 131 activities by NMOs, reflecting ongoing efforts to address critical environmental health issues. Climate change remained the top focus area, with only 28 reported activities in 2023-2024. Notable achievements included the launch of the EARTH Workshop (Environment, Action, and Resilience Training for Healthcare) and the Climate Alarm Newsletter, which showcased NMO efforts in environmental health. Externally, IFMSA bolstered its advocacy by participating in COP28 and the Bonn Climate Change Conference, reinforcing its dedication to planetary health. These initiatives emphasise the critical connection between environmental sustainability and public health, underlining IFMSA's role in addressing these global challenges.(7)

Non-Communicable Diseases:

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are responsible for the majority of global deaths, posing a significant barrier to sustainable development. NCDs, including cardiovascular diseases, cancers, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes, account for 74% of all deaths globally, with 41 million people dying each year from these conditions. Notably, 85% of premature deaths from NCDs occur in low- and middle-income countries. (9) Between 2021 and 2024, IFMSA implemented over 70 initiatives targeting NCDs, emphasising youth leadership and community engagement. The federation collaborated with partners like NCD Alliance and WHO to organise capacity-building workshops, policy discussions, and global campaigns, including participation in the WHO Global Meeting on NCD Targets. Advocacy efforts addressed the link between NCDs and environmental determinants, notably air pollution, and raised awareness about the intersection of NCDs and mental health during World Health Assembly side events. These efforts align with SDG Targets 3.4 and 3. a, underscoring the program's commitment to reducing the global impact of NCDs and promoting healthier lifestyles. (7)

Mental Health:

Mental health remains a pressing global health priority, with its significance emphasised under SDG 3.4. In 2019, nearly a billion people – including 14% of the world's adolescents – were living with a mental disorder. Suicide accounted for more than 1 in 100 deaths, and 58% of suicides occurred before age 50. (10) From 2021 to 2024, IFMSA implemented over 90 mental health-related initiatives. (7) An example is the capacity-building workshop *Mental Health Essentials*. Furthermore, IFMSA's contribution to discussions at international platforms such as the World Health Assembly and the Global Mental Health Summit further strengthened advocacy for integrating mental health into primary care and addressing barriers to access. Aligned with SDG Targets 3.4 and 16.1, the Mental Health Program exemplifies IFMSA's commitment to fostering awareness, reducing stigma, and empowering communities to prioritise mental well-being globally. (11)

Global Health Workforce

The global health workforce plays an integral role in helping to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is essential for achieving all health-related SDGs, and UHC relies on a well-trained and equipped health workforce to achieve many of its goals, such as SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Timely and equitable access to quality health and care services depends on having a fit-for-purpose workforce as well as one that is equipped to deal with changing health needs resulting from ageing populations, rising levels of chronic disease, changing expectations, new technologies, and increasing health threats associated with climate change and health emergencies. (12)

Furthermore, SDG Target 3.c focuses on the importance of the health workforce. (13) It states that there must be a substantial increase in health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in the least developed countries and small island developing states. Furthermore, the WHO projects a shortfall of 10 million health workers by 2030, mostly in low—and lower-middle-income countries. (14)

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed many challenges, amplifying and exacerbating workforce issues, such as uneven distribution, suboptimal skill mix, and shortages of health and care workers. It also made emerging challenges more acute, for example:

- Increasing difficulties with retention of health and care workers due to pressures from substantial service backlogs, burnout, stress, and concerns about workplace safety and violence.
- The importance of protecting mental and physical health and well-being and strengthening gender equality within the health and care workforce
- , and the need to attract young people into the health and care professions, given the workforce itself is rapidly ageing. (15)

IFMSA has been actively addressing health workforce issues through campaigns such as the IFMSA #HealthWorkforce2030 Campaign and developing several policies on this topic, advocating for a stronger, more sustainable health workforce.

Moreover, IFMSA is a key member of the Global Health Workforce Network Youth Hub, hosted by the WHO. This hub ensures that youth-related issues—such as employment, practice, and work environment—are systematically integrated, aiming to create a resilient health and care workforce that can effectively deliver Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). (16)

Additionally, IFMSA is conducting ongoing research to identify and map medical students' specific workforce challenges during their clinical training and transition to residency programs. This research also explores the impact of these challenges on medical students' mental health and well-being, how they affect clinical competencies and their broader implications for training and professional development.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR)

In the Standing Committee on Sexual & Reproductive Health & Rights, including HIV & AIDS (SCORA), the following Focus Areas have been identified as priority work areas:

- Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) directly contributes to all SRHR-related targets (3.3, 3.7, 5.6), as IFMSA focuses on empowerment through education and capacity building.
- Sexuality and Gender Diversity. This area, linked to targets 3.7 and 5.6, emphasises the inclusion of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities as a fundamental aspect of sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). Contributing to target 3.3.
- Maternal Health and Access to Safe Abortion (MHASA). Addressing targets 3.1 and 3.2,
- Gender-Based Violence (GBV). Closely aligned with SDG 5 (17)

Annually, IFMSA, through SCORA, develops various campaigns aimed at raising awareness, building capacity, and empowering medical students worldwide. These include initiatives such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, World AIDS Day, International Day of Safe Abortion, International Women's Day, and World Contraception Day. (18)

IFMSA develops the following workshops, which equip future healthcare professionals with the knowledge and skills to address areas closely related to specific SDG targets:

- HEAT (HIV Education and Advocacy Training) Aligns with target 3.3. This workshop focuses on enhancing knowledge and advocacy skills to combat HIV and AIDS, aiming to reduce their prevalence and eliminate related stigma and discrimination.
- V2V (Violence to Victory) – Aligns with SDG 5: This workshop addresses gender-based violence by building the capacity to recognise, prevent, and respond to violence, empowering participants to advocate for gender equality and the elimination of harmful practices.
- TSRHRT (Training SRHR Trainers) aligns with targets 3.7 and 5.6. This training develops facilitators who promote comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights education, advocate for universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services and promote decision-making autonomy. (18)

In addition to the abovementioned events, some online training and discussion sessions are organised, such as the SRHR Fest and the MHASA Camp.

IFMSA, thanks to its ECOSOC Consultative Status, can attend events such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the Commission on Population and Development (CPD). Through its participation in these events, IFMSA contributes to the global dialogue on achieving gender equality, particularly about the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Additionally, it addresses issues related to the access and advocacy of sexual and reproductive health and rights within the framework of the Programme of Action developed during the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD).

To amplify the voices of medical students and youth worldwide, IFMSA has developed several policy documents that align with the targets outlined in the 2030 Agenda.(19) These documents serve as advocacy tools to address key issues and propose actionable solutions, focusing on the following themes:

- Gender Equity, Harmful Traditional Practices, Eliminating Gender-Based Violence. (SDG 5; Targets 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5, and 5.6) (19)
- Comprehensive Sexuality Education, Pregnancy and Infant Health, Ensuring Access to Safe Abortion, Sexually Transmitted Infections, Access to Family Planning, HIV and AIDS Response, and Sexuality, Sexual Health and Rights (SDG 3; Targets 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, and 3.7 and SDG 5, target 5.6) (19)

Programs:

- Realising Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights targets 3.7 and 5.6 (20)
- Maternal Health and Access to Safe Abortion, target 3.1 and 3.2 (21)
- HIV, AIDS and other STIs, target 3.3. (22)
- Gender-Based Violence, SDG 5. (23)

External Relations (including UN relations):

United Nations: UN Women, UNAIDS and UNFPA.

WHO: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Research Department; Global HIV, Hepatitis and STIs Programmes; Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing; Partnership for Maternal Newborn and Child Health (being part of the Youth HealthCare Professionals Constituency); Gender, Rights and Equity - Diversity and Inclusion.

NGOs: IFMSA maintains relationships with a wide range of NGOs to join efforts and increase impact to achieve and contribute to the goals set out in the Agenda 2030. These collaborations include organisations working on maternal and newborn health, HIV and AIDS, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), gender equality, and the elimination of harmful practices.

Human Rights and Peace

Human rights are central to the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is directly grounded in human rights standards and promotes dignity, justice, and freedom. Over 90% of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) overlap with human rights obligations, emphasising their interconnectedness. The agenda's vision of universal respect for human rights and principles like equality and non-discrimination underscores its commitment to "leaving no one behind." (24)

The "Human Rights-Based Approach" strengthens the SDGs by embedding human rights principles—universality, equality, participation, and accountability—into their implementation. This approach amplifies accountability and sustainability, addressing the root causes of global challenges and ensuring alignment with legally binding human rights instruments. Thus, human rights and the SDGs are mutually reinforcing, advancing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) while driving impactful, sustainable progress toward the 17 goals.

Within IFMSA, the Standing Committee On Human Rights & Peace (SCORP) supports the 2030 Agenda through advocacy, capacity building, and awareness. Its programs directly align with SDGs:

1. Ethics and Human Rights in Health (EHRH) Advocates for eliminating barriers to health rights, addressing poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), education (SDG 4), equitable working conditions (SDG 8), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), and promoting sustainable communities (SDG 11). It also promotes justice (SDG 16) and partnerships (SDG 17).
2. Emergencies, Disaster Risk, and Humanitarian Action (EDHA): Enhances resilience in vulnerable communities, addressing poverty (SDG 1), sustainable cities (SDG 11), climate action (SDG 13), and peacebuilding (SDG 16). Promoting disaster risk reduction and international humanitarian law contributes meaningfully to the 2030 Agenda.
3. Gender-Based Violence (jointly with SCORA): This initiative addresses inequalities and promotes safe, inclusive environments, supporting gender equality and human rights.

SCORP's External Affairs strengthen SDG advancement through partnerships, advocacy, and knowledge-sharing. Collaborations with WHO, the Lancet O'Neill Commission, and the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) amplify health equity, migration, and disaster preparedness work, aligning with SDGs 10, 13, and 16. Initiatives like the SCORP Digest enhance awareness (SDG 4), while SCORP policies and external participation reinforce partnerships (SDG 17).

Medical Education

Medical education is not only the gateway to healing and the beacon of hope for working towards healthier communities but undeniably the decisive driver of sustainable development, equity, and resilience in global healthcare systems. (25)

Within IFMSA, the Standing Committee on Medical Education (SCOME) plays an unparalleled role in actively advancing the quality, accessibility, and equity of medical education globally through impactful student involvement in medical education systems, peer learning initiatives, workshops, and crafting activities aligned with the IFMSA Medical Education-related Programs, which include the Medical Education Systems Program and the Teaching Medical Skills Program. By aligning its initiatives with the SDGs, SCOME empowers and enables the realisation of the following SDGs:

- SDG 4 (Quality Education) ensures competency-based learning through formal and informal education and promotes lifelong learning for healthcare professionals. Through capacity-building initiatives, the IFMSA prepares students to drive meaningful change and collaborate on diverse aspects of medical education systems. It actively aims to improve medical skills training through Informal education and advocates for better Medical Skills training that is adaptable and engages the needs of students and their respective communities.
- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) empowers medical students to take up decision-making roles within their medical schools to develop and promote their lived medical education experiences. By refining medical education, medical students also work on advancing the healthcare systems and the communities their medical schools serve.

One of the essential SCOME focus areas includes Social Accountability, where IFMSA has had toolkits, countless campaigns, workshops, and publication material for years. Social accountability calls on medical schools to adopt a socially accountable approach to their curricula and medical education systems by addressing healthcare disparities and aligning education with community health needs. This contributes to SDGs, such as:

- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) empowers students to serve underserved populations, particularly in low-resource settings.
- SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) through promoting human rights and equity in health education.

Moreover, all Focus Areas champion aligning medical education with global healthcare needs. These focus areas contribute to other SDGs, including:

- SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) integrates cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, telemedicine, and simulation tools into medical education to enhance innovation and adaptability.
- SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) aims to empower medical students with relevant and adaptable competencies. This will enable a more seamless integration of graduating students into the workforce, as they will gain hands-on skills before graduating, preparing a well-trained and motivated healthcare workforce.
- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) enables collaborations among medical students, non-governmental organisations, medical schools, healthcare providers, policymakers, communities, and all other relevant stakeholders to ensure a consistent global movement toward sustainable healthcare systems through aligning medical education with global health needs.

Medical students, especially IFMSA members, are integral to achieving the SDGs. They serve as advocates and change-makers within their educational institutions, communities, and beyond. SCOME initiatives engage students in decision-making by capacitating and involving them in curriculum development, policy discussions, and medical education activities. Additionally, initiatives promote advocacy training and outreach to build capacity for students to advocate for sustainable and equitable medical education systems.

Medical Sciences and Professional Exchange

The Standing Committee on Professional Exchange (SCOPE) is an essential component of IFMSA's efforts to bring the community worldwide closer to reality with SDGs met, mainly working on Global Health through the IFMSA exchanges program. Over more than 70 years, SCOPE has coordinated and managed several clinical rotations, with more than 13.000 students annually having the chance to experience the reality of a different health system and cultural background. (26)

SCOPE has adopted a Global Health Framework with the pillars of Global Health Education, Universal Health Coverage and Health System, and Environmental Sustainability in Exchanges, focusing on achieving SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, while each exchange student experience all major health priorities in the hosting country: communicable and non-communicable diseases; universal health coverage; and access for all to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines and vaccines and maternal and newborn health. Improving their ability to deal with complex cultural aspects of health and preparing them to deal with other challenges is an essential part of the healthcare system, such as language barriers and providing culturally inclusive treatment choices. And thus, those electives contribute to preparing more globally-minded future doctors to meet the needs of the increasingly interconnected health systems.

However, it is not only about the exchange itself since each student going on an exchange receives mandatory pre-departure training and upon-arrival training. According to internal reports and statistics from the National Exchange Officers, most training is focused on Global Health, Ethics in Exchanges, Universal Health Coverage and National Health Care System. Students are equipped with Student Handbooks, which must be filled out during the clerkship and include learning objectives, global health outcomes, and skills. Those handbooks include mid-exchange and final evaluation assessment tools to ensure the quality assessment process of the student's performance and improvement throughout the exchange period; those handbooks are endorsed by worldwide medical education organisations such as the World Federation of Medical Education (WFME), the International Paediatrics Association (IPA), the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA), among others.

Ensuring this high academic quality for every exchange student only promotes and reinforces ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all, as SDG 4 stands for.

On the other hand, SCOPE promotes the understanding and implementation of SDG 17, which focuses on partnerships to achieve the SDGs. Our global network facilitates collaboration between health and education institutions, creating a space where exchange experiences benefit students and strengthen host countries' health systems. Some of our initiatives are:

- Presenting different health systems
- Exchanges focused on the Public Health sector
- Open Space Discussions among National Exchange Officers

These opportunities allow us to establish lasting connections with health professionals in diverse cultural contexts. These connections are essential to foster international cooperation and the exchange of best practices in health care.

Research and Research Exchange

The Standing Committee on Research Exchange (SCORE) fosters research education, promotes global access to research, and equips medical students with essential skills for addressing global health challenges. Through its structured programs and activities, SCORE focuses on developing future healthcare professionals who are aligned with achieving the SDGs. (27)

SCORE has identified the following priority areas, linking them to specific SDG targets:

- Research Education; SDG 4 (Quality Education): Through its Research Exchange Program, mobilising over 3,000 students annually, and initiatives like the Research Camp, SCORE provides high-quality education in research methodology, critical appraisal, and study design.

- These activities enhance global access to research and develop innovative and creative solutions (aligned with SDG 4.7).
- Open Science and responsible research; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): SCORE addresses barriers to research access, ensuring that students from all backgrounds, regardless of location or resources, can participate in research exchanges.
- Youth Empowerment in Research; SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): SCORE collaborates with academic institutions, research organisations, and global stakeholders to foster youth engagement and leadership in research and advance partnerships for sustainable development.

To build capacity in research education, SCORE organises:

- Research Camp: A five-day international workshop for research enthusiasts focused on practical skills like research methodology and study design.
- Workshops and Training: Covering basic research principles, critical thinking, and innovative solutions to global challenges.
- Student logbooks: Providing learning objectives, global health outcomes, and skill assessments during research exchanges, endorsed by leading medical organisations.

These activities promote cultural exchange, inclusivity, and the ability to work in diverse healthcare and research environments.

SCORE ensures that its activities contribute to several SDGs:

- SDG 4 (Quality Education): Build capacity in research education and promote lifelong learning.
- SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): By providing equitable opportunities for all students to engage in research.
- SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): By fostering multi-sectoral collaborations to advance sustainable development.

Through its comprehensive approach, SCORE empowers medical students to drive innovation, advance global health research, and contribute meaningfully to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. Youth and SDGs

There are 1.8 billion people between the ages of 10 and 24, the largest generation of youth in history in the globe. Close to 90 percent of them live in developing countries, where they make up a large proportion of the population. Their numbers are expected to grow—between 2015 and 2030 alone, about 1.9 billion young people are projected to turn 15 years old. Data shows that this increasing population must have a voice, as they will represent the future of societies and the sustainability of their nations. (28)

However, 70% of young people feel they do not have enough space to express themselves in public debates, nor can they voice their concerns and ideas.(29) This is an imminent symptom of societal problems within their democracies and even their credibility. Decision-makers of today must acknowledge that youth participation is a rights-based condition. Young people are entire rights-bearing citizens and have the right to participate in decision-making that affects them for the future. (30)

It is assumed that young people will actively participate in decision-making only if the civil society institution carries out all these roles, tasks and responsibilities (X). Through youth activities led and organised by civil society institutions, young people should have the opportunity to participate in various youth platforms to discuss youth policy matters and propose changes and improvements to community authorities at local, national and international levels. Relevant civil institutions give the youth a platform to raise difficulties, but they are still challenging to tackle. (31)

Youth Empowerment and Leadership

Age is often stated as a hierarchy detrimental to taking stances in workplaces, forums, and the political spectrum. However, we must not forget the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which Article 2 states that Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms outlined in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made based on the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. (32)

Role of Youth in SDG-related Decision Making and Advocacy

As a practical approach, researchers have found that the justification for youth participation has been described through an 'efficiency argument', which implies that youth participation produces more informed policy and/or practice. (30) According to the UN Sustainable Development Goals Youth Office, this leads us to the following roles that they are taking on:

1. Critical thinkers: Youth can identify and challenge existing power structures and barriers to change and expose contradictions and biases
2. Change-makers: Youth activism is on the rise worldwide, bolstered by broader connectivity and access to social media.
3. Innovators: In addition to bringing fresh perspectives, young people often have direct knowledge and insights into issues that are inaccessible to adults.
4. Communicators: Young people can be partners in communicating the development agenda to their peers and communities at the local level and across countries and regions.
5. Leaders: When young people are empowered with knowledge of their rights and equipped with leadership skills, they can drive change in their communities and countries. Youth-led organisations and networks, in particular, should be supported and strengthened because they contribute to developing civic leadership skills among young people, especially marginalised youth. (28)

It's paramount to establish the notion of available platforms that connect the youth with global health leaders and determine if their implementation is impactful enough. A data report from The Youth Progress Index 2021 comprehensively ranks 150 and 18 additional countries partially. It comprises 58 social and environmental indicators. It covers a 10-year time series with data from 2011 to 2020. Our analysis finds that 65 countries have improved their Youth Progress performance significantly over the past 10 years, with another 65 countries having seen some improvement. Ten countries have stalled, and 6 countries have declined. (33)

Importance of Youth-Specific Indicators in SDGs

Regarding youth-specific indicators in SDGs, young people are differently affected by sustainable development challenges. Hence, it is essential to undertake such a youth-disaggregated analysis on more indicators and all countries. (34) Our data analysis found that the following challenges disproportionately impacted young people:

- Poverty
- Psychological distress
- Suicide mortality rate
- Unemployment
- Rent overburden
- Homelessness (34)

Measuring this and other indicators reflects an integral part of the population and provides a panoramic view of the future. According to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY), of the 232 indicators of the Global Sustainable Development Framework, 68 provide information directly or relevant

to youth development. In contrast, 18 provide information that may be highly relevant to youth. Education, Employment, Hunger and poverty, health and environment are just a few. (35)

Barriers to meaningful youth participation (in decision-making, policy-making processes, implementation efforts, etc.).

Youth civil societies have been particularly affected by the shrinking civic space. Yet, they have been delivering support in times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and to refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine. Discrimination, along with general othering and infantilisation of youth, continues to add barriers to youth engagement with democratic processes and institutions, creating an atmosphere of mistrust and disenfranchisement. (31)

On the other hand, historically, we have also had institutional limitations, such as bad management, a lack of skills and training, time and money constraints, staff burnouts and weak adult training. (31)

We must consider what The United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY) tells us. These (are the) most pertinent, recurring and systemic problems faced by young people and youth-led entities during their engagement and/or intended meaningful engagement.

1. Individualisation: There is a growing trend of proactively enabling and promoting the participation of individual young people picked by the engaging UN entity or otherwise in various avenues while displacing and eroding resources away from thematic engagement, constituency (formal and/or informal)- based mechanisms and rights-based practices. (36)
2. No resources: Currently, the UN has no dedicated resources to facilitate youth engagement, either for core funding or on an ad hoc basis. An ironic example is that even the lowest salary in the UN is higher than its youth engagement budget. (36)
3. Regressive Normative Framing: The narrative on youth as a demographic is increasingly moving away from realising the human rights of young people and obligations of duty bearers (states, and towards young people primarily being a sound economic investment and inputs to an extractive economic system (36)
4. Changing Engagement Landscape for Non-State Actors: There is a push in many avenues in the UN system (mainly by the UN) to reduce the avenues of engagement to only 'business, civil society and academia'. This pushes youth into general civil society, takes away constituency status and eliminates designated rights-based space. (36)

3. Progress Towards the 2030 Agenda

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been a focus of all United Nations (UN) Member States for the last 10 years. What has been achieved at this time, and where does our progress stand, measured against the 2030 Agenda, and what is the end goal of the adopted SDGs?

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs aim to guide global efforts towards eradicating poverty and hostilities and paving the way towards planetary health. Tracking the progress of such efforts became a mission of the United Nations Statistical Commission, which developed in 2017 the Global Indicator Framework for SDGs. (37) A comprehensive list of 231 unique indicators has allowed for the monitoring of how far we have come while also providing a well-defined statistical foundation for developing follow-up and review mechanisms that guide the discussion on the accountability of stakeholders. This list is complemented by additional indicators that Member States have developed for National and Regional progress monitoring. (38)

These indicators are assessed based on a growing number of both international and national datasets. A vast network of UN Agencies and partners such as the WHO, ILO, UNECLAC, UNICEF, and UNDESA come together with Voluntary National Reviews to provide a large pool of data on which statistical results can be drawn to evaluate these indicators. (39) Having credible and sufficient data is of utmost importance in a conclusion. Only through tracking and monitoring progress can the Member States adjust their efforts, amend their policies and march towards the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

However, for many of the Member States of the United Nations, that does not apply. According to the Committee for Development Policy (CDP), the data drawn from National Voluntary Reviews (NVRs, hardly represent the on-ground progress for the SDGs. According to the CDP in 2016, the first year after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, only 22 Member States submitted an NVR, 43 NVRs presented in 2017(40), 46 NVRs in 2018, 47 NVRs in 2019, 45 NVRs in 2020, and 41 NVRs in 2021. Through the course of the quinquennium, 244 reviews have been submitted by 187 countries, with a large majority of the reports being one-time submissions by Member States, resulting in the inability to perform any type of analytical and statistical comparison, complicating tracking progress, making the monitoring of the SDGs on national levels essentially impossible. For a large part of the 2030 Agenda Timeline, the NVRs have been ineffective in providing substantive content. On the contrary, NVRs are descriptive and lack analytical depth, and the policy focus outline does not reflect efforts that match the agenda's ambition or integrated concept. (41)

The restrictive pool of data from NVRs provided by Member States has resulted in the Inter-Agency and Experts Group (IAEG) on SDGs of the UN Statistical Commission, primarily focusing and relying on data disaggregation for the monitoring of the progress on SDGs and the tracking of SDG Indicator Framework. The IAEG has also focused on the capacity development of data disaggregation by providing tools and resources for Member and Non-Member States. (42)

Despite the hurdles described above, the Statistical Commission has been committed to upholding the quality of the data. It has made efforts to develop capacity at the national level towards establishing and implementing Quality Assurance Frameworks. Through these National Quality Assurance Frameworks (NQAfS), the Commission aims for each state to create a holistic system for statistical quality management that assures trust and quality of official statistics across the national statistical systems. Multiple Resources have been issued to assist these efforts, including the UN NQAfS Manual for Official Statistics, E-learning courses, etc. (43)

All collected data are compiled into what later become the Annual Reports of Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and shared with the UN General Assembly. Returning to the initial question, what has been achieved after 10 years of focus on the SDGs and with only 5 years remaining until the conclusion of the 2030 Agenda?

According to the 2024 Annual Report, progress is generally minimal. With the current trends in progress, out of 135 targets across all SDGs, only 23 targets will be met—merely 17% of the targets. Assessing the overall progress of the targets, it becomes clear that 18% of targets have shown moderate progress and 30% marginal progress, while 18% of targets have shown stagnation and 17% have even shown regression. (44)

Admittedly, the years following adopting the 2030 Agenda have not been easy. Since 2019, humanity has faced severe obstacles to transformative change. The COVID-19 pandemic, increasing conflicts, growing tensions in geopolitics and trade, and the continuously worsening effects of climate change have combined to leave the SDGs at stake. As history has it, some people feel these obstacles more than others. Under the presence of economic and financial shortcomings, historical injustices, and the fall of global solidarity, developing countries and those in need have faced the largest reciprocations in SDG progress. (44,45)

The aftermath of the state of the world can be seen in the progress of some SDGs more than in others.

Goal 1 aimed to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Not only has the progress made up until 2019 been reversed but as of 2022, 23 million more people live in conditions of extreme poverty. (44,45)

Goal 2 aimed to eradicate hunger and achieve food security. According to the 2019 data, an additional 123 million people will suffer from hunger in 2022.(44,45)

Goal 3 aimed to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being. While some indicators are on track to be fulfilled and others note moderate progress, SDG3 and its targets no longer seem feasible with the current trends in progress. (44,45)

Goal 4 aims to Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education. SDG4 is a foundational goal upon which multiple other SDGs have relied for their completion and realisation. Although progress has been slow, progress has been made towards completing the targets. However, until 2019, data shows that only 58% of students had reached the minimum proficiency in reading after primary schooling. More recent data reveal that since 2019, a large percentage of countries have indicated regression in skills such as reading and maths, revealing the underlying impact of the pandemic. (44,45)

Goal 5 aimed to achieve gender equality, empowering women and girls alike. However, with the current trends, gender parity will not be achieved in 2030 but rather in 2200. According to the monitoring of SDG5, up until 2022, 55% of countries lacked regulations to prevent gender-based discrimination. In 2023, 640 million girls entered into marriage under 18. (44,45)

Goal 6 aims to achieve water availability and ensure sustainable management. However, all targets under SDG6 are severely off track. As of 2022, 2.2 billion people lacked access to safely managed drinking water, and 3.5 billion lacked access to safely managed sanitation. (44,45)

Goal 7 ensures access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy. According to the 2024 Annual Progress Report, SDG7 is the only Goal for which all targets note moderate /marginal progress or are on track to be met. However, data shows that the Goal is not predicted to be fulfilled; by 2030, 660 million people will still lack electricity and clean cooking. (44,45)

Goal 8 aimed to promote sustained, inclusive, sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, global economic growth has been met with several growing setbacks ranging from geopolitical instabilities to conflicts and rising debts of developing countries—all of which have weighed on the Goal's progress. Nonetheless, key targets have covered significant ground, with unemployment rates hitting an all-time low in 2023. (44,45)

Goal 9 aimed to build resilient infrastructure while promoting sustainable industrialisation. However, as described, the progress of SDG9 has been halted by the events and state of the world for 2019-2024. Instead of increasing, the manufacturing sector's growth has plateaued since 2022. Stagnation has also been noted in the Technology sector since 2021. (44,45)

Goal 10 aimed to reduce inequality within and among countries. While income has grown for the poorest 40% of the population, the per capita income growth gap between the richest and poorest countries has widened even more. Not only has inequality not been reduced, but as of 2024, 1 in 6 people are affected by age, gender, religion, race or beliefs-based discrimination. In 2023, the number of refugees reached an all-time high, a staggering 35.8 million people, with the year being the most deadly for refugees, as more people died in migration routes in 2023 than any other year. (44,45)

Goal 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. With over 50% of the world's population living in cities, the rate of urban sprawl is significantly faster than the densification rate, resulting in negative impacts on sustainability and environmental health. (44,45)

Goal 12 aimed to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. Significant strides have been made for SDG12. One-third of UN Member States have reported the employment of policy instruments related to the scope of the goal. Combined, 516 policy instruments have been reported. Nonetheless, patterns of unsustainable consumption and production persist globally. (44,45)

Goal 13 aimed to combat climate change and its impacts. However, all targets under SDG13 are severely off track. 2023 was a record-breaking year, with all-climate records reaching new all-time highs. (44,45)

Goal 14 aimed to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. Oceans are the basis of the livelihoods of around 3 billion people. Yet, efforts to achieve the targets outlined under SDG14 remain uneven across regional and Member States, hindering the feasibility of completion by 2030. (44,45)

Goal 15 aimed to protect, restore and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. However, restoration targets are projected not to be met by 2030, and forest areas worldwide continue to decline regardless of sustainable forest management efforts. (44,45)

Goal 16 aimed to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. SDG16 is another foundational Goal upon which the completion of other SDGs relies. Nonetheless, the completion of SDG16 by 2030 is out of reach. In the first 5 months of 2024, displaced people reached 120 million. In 2023, civilian casualties in conflicts increased by 72%. (44,45)

Goal 17 aimed to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development. Some targets within SDG17 are on track to be met, while others note stagnation or marginal progress. Discrepancies are also present in the monitored progress between different Member States, with developing countries showing a substantial \$4 trillion annual investment gap towards realising the Goals. (44,45)

In 2015, the UNGA Resolution 70/1 adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the SDGs were adopted by consensus. All 193 UN Member States agreed to adopt the resolution without objection—a powerful message for a brighter future. However, significant regression in the political commitments of Member States to the Agenda has been noted for the years that followed. Member States have repeatedly failed to meet the threshold of political changes and policy focus that was needed to drive the Goals towards completion. The aftermath of the inability to commit is present in the progress of the Goals. No goal is projected to be completed, and out of the 135 targets outlined in the adopted resolution, only 23 are projected to be met. (46)

4. Challenges in Achieving the SDGs

Global Health Threats to the SDGs

The pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) faces significant challenges from global health threats, particularly infectious diseases and the impacts of environmental degradation.

Infectious Diseases and Antimicrobial Resistance:

Infectious diseases remain a leading cause of mortality, particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Eastern Mediterranean region (47). In 2015, an estimated 1.2 million deaths were attributed to AIDS, 1.1 million to tuberculosis, and 438,000 to malaria. Notably, over two-thirds of malaria deaths occur among children under five (47). The challenge in combating HIV/AIDS is especially pronounced in sub-Saharan Africa, which is home to approximately 70 per cent of the world's adults living with HIV (48). Tuberculosis and malaria also persist as major global health concerns, with nearly 10 million new cases of tuberculosis detected in 2014 and 214 million new malaria cases worldwide in 2015 (47).

Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of antimicrobial resistance (AMR) poses a serious global health security risk (49). For instance, *Streptococcus pneumoniae* shows reduced susceptibility to penicillin, leading to invasive diseases such as pneumonia and meningitis, particularly impacting children and the elderly. This growing resistance hinders the effective prevention and treatment of many infections caused by bacteria, parasites, and viruses.

Global trends such as population growth, increased international movement of people and goods, climate change, urbanisation and poverty will likely continue to affect the spread of infectious diseases.

Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:

Climate change and environmental degradation present substantial risks to human health and hinder progress towards the SDGs. Ecological degradation is driven by population growth, polluting technologies, and the overexploitation of ecosystems, with unsustainable consumption and production patterns (50). Climate change, in turn, can further exacerbate this damage.

Industrial activities and growing urbanisation have contributed to the deterioration of air quality globally. Ninety-two per cent of the global population lives in places where air pollution exceeds WHO limits.

This negatively affects ecosystems and causes multiple illnesses in humans, including heart disease, respiratory infections, and lung cancer. Air pollution contributes to 6.5 million premature deaths annually worldwide, with more than half occurring in China and India (51).

Increasing pollution, overpopulation, human activity and climate-related changes contribute to the deterioration and depletion of available water sources, which, together with poor water resource management, cause water scarcity. In particular, global groundwater withdrawals have tripled over the past 50 years (50). As a result, a severe shortage of clean drinking water persists, with 663 million people lacking access to an improved source and over 1.8 billion people drinking contaminated water (52). Contaminated water can transmit diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, and polio, with diarrhoea causing 502,000 deaths each year globally, a leading cause of death among children under five.

Land degradation, another primary source of environmental stress, affects 1.5 billion people globally and has implications for anger. Unsustainable land use and extreme weather events increase desertification, threatening the livelihoods of 2 billion people living in dryland areas (mostly in developing countries). Deforestation also contributes to land degradation and climate change. Africa and South America experienced the highest annual loss of forests in the past five years, with 2.8 and 2 million hectares, respectively (53).

These environmental changes and biodiversity loss pose serious health risks and undermine SDG progress.

National Disparities and Inequities

While the world has witnessed significant economic and human development advancements, progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been uneven across regions, within countries, and between different communities (54;55). This unevenness is particularly apparent when examining national disparities in key areas such as health, education, and resource access.

Disparities in Health Outcomes:

Substantial differences persist in health outcomes, with stark contrasts observed between regions. For example, child mortality rates in 2015 were significantly higher in sub-Saharan Africa (86 deaths per 1,000 live births) compared to Eastern Asia (11 deaths per 1,000 live births) (54). Maternal mortality rates also paint a similar picture, with sub-Saharan Africa experiencing the highest rates (546 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2015) (56), while developed countries have significantly lower rates (12 deaths per 100,000 live births) (57). Achieving SDG target 3.1, which aims for a global maternal mortality ratio below 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030, requires a significant acceleration in the reduction rate, particularly in regions with persistently high rates (57). Crucially, most maternal and child deaths occur in low-resource contexts and are preventable with improved nutrition, quality healthcare, and access to vaccination.

Additionally, countries with weak health systems, poor infrastructure, and limited resources are more prone to diverse health risks and are often incapable of responding to health emergencies. This vulnerability was particularly evident during the 2016 outbreak of the Ebola virus disease in post-conflict countries in West Africa, which resulted in approximately 28,600 cases and 11,300 deaths (58).

Inequities in Education Access and Quality:

Significant efforts have been made to expand access to education; however, this expansion has sometimes occurred at the expense of quality (59). Numerous challenges, particularly in developing countries, including inadequate teacher training, a lack of resources such as textbooks, and large class sizes, continue to affect the quality of education (59). More than 780 million adults worldwide were unable to read or write in 2015, highlighting a significant global literacy crisis, particularly among women, who make up two-thirds of the affected population, and young people, who make up 103 million of the affected population (60;61).

Furthermore, while the global number of out-of-school children has decreased since 1990, approximately 57 million children of primary school age are still not enrolled in school, with 33 million in sub-Saharan Africa (54). Notably, girls constitute 53 per cent of the global population of out-of-school children and face significant barriers in regions such as Northern and sub-Saharan Africa and Western and Southern Asia (62). Children from marginalised backgrounds, including those from rural areas, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities, those with disabilities, migrant children, and those impacted by armed conflict experience more incredible difficulty accessing education (54). Unless these inequities are addressed, it is estimated that 43 per cent of out-of-school children globally may never attend school (54).

Uneven Access to Essential Resources:

Disparities also exist in access to crucial resources like water and sanitation. A significant proportion of the rural population, 16%, lacks access to improved drinking water sources compared to only 4% of the urban population (54). Similarly, 49% of those living in rural areas lack improved sanitation facilities, compared to 18% of the urban regions (54). Addressing these disparities, particularly for those living in rural areas, is crucial to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Multidimensional Poverty and its Distribution:

The Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) highlights the complex nature of poverty, measuring deprivations in health, education, and living standards. In 2016, 1.6 billion people lived in multidimensional poverty, with 53% in South Asia and 32% in sub-Saharan Africa (63). This demonstrates the significance of inequality and how multidimensional poverty can be even more impactful than income poverty alone.

Income Inequality: A Persistent Challenge:

While income inequality has decreased in some regions, notably in Africa (by 7%) and Latin America (by 5%) (64; 65), developing countries continue to experience persistently higher levels of income inequality than their developed counterparts (66, 55). Even though some gains have been made in certain regions, Latin America remains the most unequal region globally, with 10 of the 15 most unequal countries in the world being in this region (67). These high levels of inequality are often associated with new disparities (66), which can undermine efforts to achieve sustainable development.

Climate Change: An Inequality Multiplier:

Climate change and environmental degradation also exacerbate inequalities (67). Those least responsible for climate change, particularly vulnerable countries and communities, cannot often adapt to its effects (68). Regions at the highest risk from climate change are concentrated mainly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where many people already live in poverty (69). Climate change is projected to push another 122 million people into extreme poverty by 2030 (70), mainly due to negative impacts on agricultural incomes (71), contributing to food insecurity and other health problems. Climate change could also increase the risks of malnutrition and infectious diseases, notably malaria and diarrhoea (70).

Other Issues:

Systemic issues, including global economic challenges, further aggravate the disparities above. The global economic outlook, characterised by increasing policy uncertainty in major economies, financial market disruptions, and heightened geopolitical tensions, creates instability, hinders investment, and reduces economic growth. This ultimately exacerbates disparities and limits the capacity of certain nations to achieve the SDGs.

Gaps in Monitoring Mechanisms

A crucial lesson from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is the indispensable role of a systematic follow-up and review process in driving progress. A robust, inclusive, and country-led review mechanism is paramount to effectively address the complexity and breadth of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda recognises this need and establishes a comprehensive, integrated framework for reviews at the national, regional, and global levels.

Data Gaps and Monitoring Challenges:

A significant challenge hindering the achievement of the SDGs is the persistent lack of reliable, comparable, and timely data. Data reporting has declined despite countries' commitment in 2015 to track their progress on research intensity (SDG 9.5.1) and researcher density (SDG 9.5.2). As of 2018, only 69 countries reported data on domestic research investment, down from 99 in 2015. Similarly, the number of countries reporting on the number of researchers decreased from 90 to 59. Moreover, data on female researchers is available for only 107 countries, with major economies like India, China, and the US lacking internationally comparable figures.

The situation is equally concerning for environmental indicators. According to the UN Environment Programme, data for 68% of ecological SDG indicators is unavailable, making it difficult to assess progress. (72)

Policy Implications of Data Gaps:

These data gaps pose significant challenges to evidence-based policymaking. Without reliable data, it is impossible to accurately monitor progress, identify emerging trends, and inform policy decisions. Furthermore, omitting lessons learned from past strategies in many policy frameworks hinders the development of effective and targeted interventions.

It is imperative to strengthen data collection, analysis, and dissemination capacities to address these challenges. This includes investing in national statistical systems, promoting data sharing and collaboration, and developing innovative data collection methods. Additionally, policymakers must prioritise evidence-based approaches and learn from past experiences to ensure that future policies are effective and sustainable.

5. Opportunities and Strategic Actions

Multisectoral Collaboration

The goal of the last SDG (SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals) sums up the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration in achieving the SDGs. This goal focuses on revitalising global partnerships for sustainable development. SDG 2030 aims for universality and ensures no one is left behind, whether in developed or developing countries; therefore, partnerships are needed to mobilise all resources, share knowledge, and foster innovations to accelerate progress in achieving the goals. (73)

The environment would encourage a party to compete rather than collaborate in the traditional principles and setting, as there is a scarcity mindset. However, shifting the perspective into sufficiency is crucial, where all the resources are already available to achieve the SDGs – they just have to be connected.

Some parties have made several initiatives to encourage more partnerships. Those initiatives are and are not limited to:

2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator:

The 2030 Agenda Partnership Accelerator is a collaboration initiative by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) to enhance multi-stakeholder partnerships and achieve the SDGs. This is achieved through capacity building, which equips stakeholders with skills and improves trust in collaborating with different sectors. (74)

UNDP Partnership with Global Funds, government and civil society in Geneva:

This partnership aims to combat tuberculosis, HIV, and malaria by strengthening national capacities to deliver key health services. The initiative has proven fruitful: Since 2003, it has prevented 7.3 million deaths, performed over 63 million HIV tests, cared for and supported 920,000 individuals living with HIV, and treated 1.1 million TB patients and 107 million cases of malaria. (75)

HERProject (now RISE: Reimagining Industry to Support Equality):

RISE is a project that promotes gender equality in corporate operations, especially in the garments, footwear, and home textile industries. In 2024, RISE operated in 9 countries, reaching up to 433 workplaces and 399,618 workers participation. They empower female workers to advance their skills and actively speak up about their needs in the workplace. (76)

UN Global Compact:

The UN Global Compact engages businesses and creates partnerships among civil society and UN agencies to align their operations with the SDGs through initiatives such as SDG Compass and SDG Ambition Accelerator. Now, 25,493 participants from 167 countries engage in initiatives toward sustainable development goals. (77)

Innovation and Research

UNDP Innovation Facility:

The UNDP Innovation Facility is a global initiative launched in 2014. It is devoted to developing innovative solutions to tackle development challenges through innovation labs, the promotion of new technologies, and funding mechanisms. The initiatives mainly target five areas: eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, preventing violent conflict, managing disaster risk, and advancing gender equality. By 2018, this facility had supported over 170 experiments in 87 countries. (78)

Global Strategic Institute for Sustainable Development (GSISD):

Global Strategic Institute for Sustainable Development (GSISD) is a non-profit organisation that aims to provide evidence-based solutions to global challenges. It focuses on research and development initiatives that align with the SDGs. (79)

Joint SDG Research Initiative by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO):

The Joint SDG Research Initiative aims to promote innovative research that advances the SDGs. This is achieved by emphasising multidisciplinary approaches, capacity building, and tangible research outputs that address global challenges. This initiative has introduced the SDG Scaling grants, which offer up to €115,000 to support projects that enhance innovations from previous research. (80)

TWI2050:

Launched in 2018, "The World in 2050" aims to create evidence-based methods for achieving the SDGs with support in the policy process. It addresses the broad spectrum of transformational challenges tied to achieving the 17 SDGs holistically and maximises potential synergies. (81)

6. Finances for Sustainable Development

Financing is one of the biggest hurdles toward realising the 2030 Agenda and the road towards sustainable development. Achieving the development outlined in the UN Resolution 70/1 requires an unprecedented resource shift. Developing countries alone are noting a resource gap that reaches \$2.5 trillion. Even though crucial, the methods deployed by some Member States, such as public resources, tax code modification, Official Development Assistance (ODA) and loans, remain insufficient to cover the cost of sustainable development. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) have been extremely important in achieving progress in key areas such as infrastructure, energy and telecommunications. Deploying the private sector in collaboration with public efforts has proved to be a strategic move towards reducing the financial gap.

However, PPPs are not feasible in developing countries to the extent that they are deployed in other parts of the world. The underdeveloped capital markets and limited investable projects hinder private sector participation, underscoring the need for financial innovation and an enabling environment. (82)

With the current trends in progress and for the completion of the 2030 Agenda to be feasible by 2030, Member States must carve a large percentage of their GDP and dedicate their efforts towards meeting the targets outlined in each Goal. The burden is significantly more enormous in low- and middle-income countries, where projections place the percentage of GDP that needs to be allocated at 4.5%—a staggering \$1.5 trillion annually just for infrastructure targets alone. Additional substantial outlays are required to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to the changing environment. Energy infrastructure alone demands up to \$950 billion annually. Despite these costs, significant discrepancies in spending are recorded consistently, with up to 38% of global infrastructure investment wasted due to bottlenecks and ineffective governance. Improving public investment management, mobilising cross-border financial flows, and integrating PPPs could help close the gap. However, the financing scale required calls for coordinated efforts to mobilise domestic revenues, leverage private sector funds, and ensure that investments align with sustainable development priorities. (83)

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