

Sustainability and Environmental Management - Progress, Challenges, and the Path Forward

Mrs. Shradha Goel¹ and Dr. Vivek S Kanade²

Assistant Professor, Dr. Moonje Institute of Management & Computer Studies, Nashik, India¹

Associate Professor, Dr. Moonje Institute of Management & Computer Studies, Nashik, India²

shradhagoel20@gmail.com and kanade.vivek23@gmail.com

Abstract: *The world's economies have come together to pursue the objectives of sustainable development. Environmental sustainability is recognized as crucial for preserving natural resources, safeguarding ecosystems, addressing climate change, enhancing human health and well-being, and fostering long-term social and economic progress. Developing nations particularly grapple with environmental degradation. It's understood that environmental sustainability is central to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reflecting the interconnectedness of environmental issues with social and economic advancement. This underscores the importance of adopting a holistic approach to ensure a sustainable future for present and future generations.*

Keywords: Mitigating Climate Change, Environmental deterioration, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Environmental sustainability, Interconnectedness

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprise 17 objectives set forth by 193 United Nations member states during a significant summit in New York on September 25, 2015. Officially enacted on January 1, 2016, these goals are designed to guide developmental efforts in vital areas, including eradicating poverty and hunger, ensuring health and quality education for all, achieving gender equality, advancing sustainable economic growth, and lessening inequalities, with a target completion year of 2030. Known collectively as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SDGs seek to revolutionize the well-being and economic prospects of people worldwide. The global achievement of the 2030 Agenda is particularly contingent upon India's progress due to its vast population and robust economy. Moreover, India has taken a leading role in global climate change initiatives. Four years post the adoption of this comprehensive agenda, it's timely to review India's advancements on specific SDGs.

Progress Profile of India:

The SDG India Index: Baseline Report 2018, utilizing 62 priority indicators selected by NITI Aayog and from 306 national indicators by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, illustrates India's advancements across various goals. This assessment, focusing on the impacts of government schemes and interventions, covers 13 of the 17 SDGs, excluding Goals 12, 13, 14, and 17 due to data limitations at the state level and the international focus of SDG 17, respectively.

Regarding SDG-8, which aims to foster inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all, the global economy faces numerous threats. Despite a projected slowdown in global real GDP per capita growth in 2023 and an increase in informal employment amid challenging economic conditions, there have been improvements in labour productivity and a decrease in the unemployment rate. Still, efforts must intensify to enhance job opportunities, particularly for the youth, minimize informal employment and labour market disparities, ensure safer working conditions, and provide better access to financial services for sustained, inclusive economic growth.

In 2022, the global unemployment rate showed a significant reduction, dropping to 5.4% from a high of 6.6% in 2020, as the world began to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic impacts, even reaching below the pre-pandemic level of 5.5% in 2019.

Based on the SDG India Index, with a goal score of 100, the all-India national score stands at 57. State performances vary from 42 to 69, while Union Territories range between 57 and 68 in their scores. Kerala and Himachal Pradesh lead among the states with scores of 69, and Chandigarh tops the Union Territories with a score of 68. These scores categorize states and UTs into performers, front runners, and aspirants, providing a detailed analysis of progress, particularly in relation to SDG-8, alongside national scores and targets.

State /UT	Performance Score SDGs-8
Andhra Pradesh	81
Arunachal Pradesh	72
Assam	61
Bihar	58
Chhattisgarh	56
Goa	90
Gujarat	80
Haryana	72
Himachal Pradesh	71
Jharkhand	52
Karnataka	72
Kerala	61
Madhya Pradesh	57
Maharashtra	74
Manipur	33
Meghalaya	62
Mizoram	65
Nagaland	40
Odisha	53
Punjab	57
Rajasthan	57
Sikkim	57
Tamil Nadu	71
Telangana	75
Tripura	52
Uttar Pradesh	55
Uttarakhand	67
West Bengal	63
Daman & Diu	91
Andaman and Nicobar Islands	60
Chandigarh	82
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	84
Delhi	86
Jammu and Kashmir	43
Lakshadweep	60
Puducherry	85

Performance on Goal 8:

India's efforts to advance Decent Work and Economic Growth, as outlined under Goal 8 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are gauged through four principal national metrics: (1) the yearly GDP growth rate, (2) unemployment rates, (3) accessibility to banking services, and (4) availability of ATMs. The composite SDG Index Score for Goal 8 in India is marked at 65, with state scores spanning from 33 to 90, and Union Territories (UTs) scoring between 60 and 91. Goa leads among the states, while Daman and Diu are the frontrunner among UTs. By 2030, India aspires for all citizens, irrespective of gender or disability, to engage in decent work that contributes to the nation's GDP. To this end, initiatives such as the Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), Start-up India, and the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana aim to boost employment, skill development, and economic growth.

History of Sustained economic growth and productivity:

The global economic landscape has shown a consistent rise in real GDP per capita since 2010, with an average growth rate of around 2% projected to continue until 2020. Low-income countries, however, lag, with their growth rates not meeting the 7% target set by the 2030 Agenda. The trend of increasing labour productivity worldwide since 2010 indicates no direct correlation between GDP growth and employment or sustained human development. Despite a global reduction in extreme poverty, the pace is slowing, suggesting that achieving the target of a 3% poverty rate by 2030 might be challenging, especially in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa where a significant portion of the workforce remains in poverty.

Full and productive employment and decent work:

The global unemployment rate has rebounded to pre-economic crisis levels, standing at 5.0% in 2018. However, informal employment remains widespread, affecting earnings, safety, and working conditions. This sector, often lacking in social security and labour rights, includes a significant portion of the global workforce. Furthermore, challenges such as child labour, forced labour, and discrimination hinder progress towards achieving full and productive employment and decent work for all. The youth unemployment rate, notably higher than that of adults, along with a significant gender pay gap in wages, underscores the need for targeted interventions.

Social protection remains inaccessible to a large segment of the global population, with substantial disparities across regions. The lack of comprehensive social protection exacerbates vulnerabilities and inequalities, highlighting the necessity for inclusive policies that ensure safety nets for all. The high incidence of work-related diseases and accidents further emphasizes the need for improved occupational safety standards globally. Economic growth in regions like Africa has not translated into sufficient job creation, underscoring the critical need for sustainable development strategies that prioritize decent work and economic inclusivity.

Challenges and what works

SDG 8 emphasizes the importance of fostering sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth alongside ensuring full, productive employment and decent work for everyone. This goal underscores the vital link between economic policies and social outcomes, highlighting the need for a strategic approach to manage the transformative impact of technological advancements on work and economic expansion. Addressing the persistent issue of inequality is crucial for making headway towards achieving SDG 8. The success of other SDGs is closely tied to advancements in this area, necessitating a comprehensive mobilization of policies, partnerships, and resources aimed at eradicating poverty and narrowing the gap of inequality to leave no one behind. Sustainable progress under SDG 8 also hinges on preventing environmental harm and avoiding social marginalization.

For meaningful economic growth, there is no alternative to boosting productivity, which is essential for generating employment opportunities. The protection of employment rights and the formulation of clear job-creating policies must progress hand in hand. The SDG 8 targets aim to:

Ensure per capita economic growth aligns with national needs, aiming for a minimum of 7% GDP growth annually in the least developed countries.

Enhance economic productivity through diversification, technological innovation, and a shift towards high-value and labour-intensive sectors.

Foster policies that support productive activities, job creation, entrepreneurship, and innovation, promoting the formalization and expansion of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises via improved access to financial services.

Work towards global resource efficiency in consumption and production by 2030, striving to decouple economic growth from environmental damage, with developed countries leading the way.

Guarantee full and productive employment and decent work for all, including young people and those with disabilities, ensuring equal pay for equal work.

Significantly reduce the proportion of youth not engaged in employment, education, or training by 2020.

Take immediate action to eliminate forced labour, modern slavery, human trafficking, and the worst forms of child labour, including the use of child soldiers, aiming to abolish child labour entirely by 2025.

Safeguard labour rights and create safe working conditions for all employees, including migrants and those in precarious jobs.

By 2030, create and implement policies that encourage sustainable tourism, which fosters job creation and celebrates local culture and products.

Enhance the capacity of domestic financial institutions to promote broader access to banking, insurance, and financial services for all.

Boost Aid for Trade support for developing and least developed countries, including through specialized assistance programs.

Develop and put into action a global strategy for youth employment by 2020, in line with the International Labour Organization's Global Jobs Pact.

This approach to SDG 8 reflects a comprehensive strategy to achieve economic growth that benefits all sectors of society while protecting the environment and ensuring equitable opportunities.

II. CONCLUSION

In the four years following the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015, India has showcased a strong allegiance to these global objectives, recognizing that its successful implementation is crucial for global success. The nation has embarked on several initiatives, such as electrifying rural areas, promoting girls' education, enhancing sanitation and housing access, skill development among the youth for global competitiveness, and broadening financial inclusivity. India's progressive use of data analytics for policy formulation and tracking the progress of initiatives further underscores its dedication to the SDGs, particularly Goal 8, which focuses on promoting economic growth and employment. These efforts not only contribute significantly to the SDGs but also serve as inspirational models for other developing nations facing analogous challenges.

The emphasis on adapting the SDGs to local contexts highlights the pivotal role played by Indian states and union territories in driving the national development agenda. Meanwhile, the emerging economies, identified as the E7 countries (Brazil, Russia, China, India, Mexico, Indonesia, and Turkey), despite their growth, confront challenges that stem from social disparities, unemployment, educational gaps, environmental degradation, and climate change. These issues pose threats to their sustainable development trajectory, prompting a search for viable solutions.

The exploration into sharing economy models reveals promising avenues for addressing some of these challenges. Through the sharing economy, access to shared goods, services, and sustainable production methods can significantly contribute to environmental sustainability goals. Furthermore, integrating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) within such an economy can play a vital role in mitigating inequalities and enhancing social welfare, including education, justice, and health. These strategies align with the broader objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adopting community-based management (CGM) practices within the sharing economy framework can also lead to a reduction in the environmental footprint of businesses, furthering the achievement of the SDGs. This comprehensive approach, which encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions, suggests that innovative economic models like the sharing economy could be instrumental in overcoming the complex developmental challenges faced by India and similar nations, paving the way for a more sustainable future.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations that future research should address to enhance understanding and applicability. The focus here is primarily on the sharing economy and its environmentally friendly practices as they relate to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, other important elements like green financing, sustainable human resources management, and corporate governance, which could significantly impact SDG accomplishments, were not explored due to their lesser relevance to the economies in question. Future studies should consider incorporating these aspects for a more comprehensive analysis.

Additionally, this investigation predominantly centers on the environmental benefits derived from a sharing economy, somewhat overlooking its potential social and economic contributions. This narrows the study's breadth, suggesting a need for subsequent research to explore a sharing economy from environmental, social, and economic viewpoints to fully understand its impact on SDGs.

The methodology employed here, primarily based on surveys, may limit the depth and reliability of the gathered data and the study's conclusions. Future research should employ a variety of data collection methods to ensure a richer, more reliable data set for analysing the relationship between sharing economy practices and SDG achievements.

Furthermore, this research focuses on the effects of sharing economy practices on SDG targets within developing nations only. Given that developing countries have unique geographic, social, and economic attributes, the findings here might not be directly transferable to developed countries. Future investigations should therefore examine these dynamics in developed economies to validate the findings across different global contexts.

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