

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN ASSESSMENT OF POLICIES AND GOALSDaniel Udouo Akpan¹ & Onda Mark Ukpe²^{1,2} Federal College of Education, Ididep, Ibiono Ibom L. G. A., Akwa Ibom State, NigeriaEmail: danielchrist81@gmail.com¹, Ondamark8@gmail.com²*Received: 04.02.2026 | Accepted: 03.03.2026 | Published: 28.03.2026***ABSTRACT****RESEARCH ARTICLE**

This paper assesses Sustainable Development Policies and goals. The information on Sustainable Development policies and goals were obtained from secondary sources, mostly from United Nation Development programme reports. The paper revealed that conflict, climate disruption, economic instability and rising geopolitical tension characterized many countries, thereby invalidating investment in SDGs by countries over the years. Equally, that over 800 million people still live in extreme poverty and hunger. Also, that debt service for low and middle-income countries hit 1.4 trillion dollars, draining resources for critical development. Moreover, that only 35 percent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets are on track or making modest progress while 18 percent are actually regressing. In view of these findings, the study recommends that countries should shift from fossil fuel to renewable energy to combat climate change and improve health outcome of citizens. As well, government should adopt sustained Macroeconomic policies for economic well-being of citizens and prioritize gender sensitive budgeting to accelerate development as women are critical to achieving micro income, food security, health and education. Furthermore, that investment in national statistical system for high quality and timely data gathering to monitor progress and identify gaps should be prioritized.

KEYWORDS: Sustainable, Development, Assessment, Policies and Goals.**INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable development policies are broader strategies targeting at achieving a detailed economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection to meet the current needs without compromising the future generation (United Nation Development Programme report, 2015). Moreover, the policies are driven by Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) initiated by United Nations, in 2015 to replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

Interestingly, the Sustainable Development, which is characterized by 17 goals to be achieved by countries by 2030, appear comprehensive, universal and ambitious, covering the 5P's of People, Planet, Partnership, Peace and Prosperity (wealth).

However, the United Nations has raised fresh concerns over rising global poverty and hunger, warning that the world is off track to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. The report indicates that 800million people or one in 10 people worldwide were living in extreme poverty in

2025. Accordingly, the figure represents an upward revision from earlier estimates following an update to the international poverty line, defining surviving on less than US dollar 3.00 person per day at 2021 purchasing power parity. This indeed contradicted the concern on people and prosperity, being two (2) of the pillars, which summarized the goals.

Furthermore, our environment has been constantly threatened by global warming leading to terrible weather conditions. As well, the issue of factionalization by countries has created conflicting scenario, invalidating the coverage of planet and people respectively summarized by the goals.

Adversely, challenges such as corruption, insufficient funding, weak policies and security have continued to hinder progress, although various developing countries have committed to refocusing its national development plan on achieving the 2030 goals.

In all, progress by countries, especially developing countries on the Sustainable Development Goals has been slow with these countries ranking poorly globally, hence, necessitating the need for creativity, innovation and good governance.

Conceptual Issues

As agreed by about 200 countries, Sustainable Development Goals, the broader strategies for Sustainable Development Policies aimed at facilitating inclusive development in countries by 2030. The goals were occasioned by the failure of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to address major development concern such as employment. The goals were designed by the United Nations to address the following.

Goal 1: End Poverty: To end poverty in all forms.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger: To achieve food security and sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3: Good health and well-being: To ensure healthy living.

Goal 4: Quality Education: To ensure inclusive and equitable education.

Goal 5: Gender Equality: To empower all women and girls

Goal 6: Clean water and Sanitation: To ensure sustainable water management

Goal 7: Affordable and clean Energy: To have access to reliable energy

Goal 8: Decent work and Economic Growth: To promote sustained economic growth.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure: To build resilient infrastructure.

Goal 10: Reduces Inequality: To reduce inequality among countries

Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities: To make cities safe and sustainable.

Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production: To ensure sustainable consumption patterns.

Goal 13: Climate Action: To combat climate change

Goal 14: Life below water: To conserve marine resources

Goal 15: Life on land: To protect ecosystems and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: To promote peaceful societies

Goal 17: Partnership for the goals: To strengthen global cooperation.

Moreover, as a driver of sustainable development, the core mandate is to prioritize the most, the vulnerable; including people with disabilities, women, children and refuse (UN report, 2015). And, implementing the goals require action from governments, businesses and civil society; utilizing technology and financial resources.

In all, the 7 SDGs are integrated, recognizing that action in one area will affect outcomes in others and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Theoretical Literature

Theories of Sustainable development provide frameworks for balancing economic, environmental and social needs to meet present requirements without compromising future generations. The theoretical frameworks are:

Extinction Avoidance Theory

This theory focuses on preventing the irreversible depletion of resources and safeguarding the needs of the future generations. The theory was authored by Dr. Pearson K. Ozili.

Collective Stewardship Theory

This theory emphasizes shared responsibility for managing resources to ensure long-term environmental and social viability. This theory was propounded by Lex Donaldson and James Dones in 1991.

Resource-Resilient World Theory

This theory focuses on building system capable of sustaining themselves against environmental or economic shock. The proponent of this theory is Stevan Hobfoll in 1989.

Modernization Theory

This argues that developing societies must adopt modern, efficient technology and industrialization to achieve sustainability. This theory was developed by Talcott Parsons, a Sociologist.

Providence Theory

This views Sustainable development through a lens of moral or spiritual obligation to protect the earth. Key developers of the theory are Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin.

Rogue Agent Theory

This theory suggests that Sustainable development is hampered by individuals or entities acting against the common good, necessitating better regulation. This theory was developed by James Crossland.

Sustainable Development Policies

Policies enhancing Sustainable development integrate social and environmental issues.

Environmental Protection and Climate Action

This policy targets the climate mitigation, resource management and sustainable infrastructure as follows:

- (i) **Climate Mitigation:** This is concerned with the implementation of carbon taxes, emissions trading systems, and promoting renewable energy, example solar and wind.
- (ii) **Resource Management:** This policy aims at biodiversity conservation, water management and sustainable waste management.
- (iii) **Sustainable infrastructure:** This emphasizes investment in energy-efficient buildings, green spaces and public transportation.

Economic and Social Policies

This envisages poverty reduction and social protection, sustainable Agriculture, Innovation and Education

- (i) **Poverty Reduction and Social Protection:** This is concerned with the elimination of absolute poverty occasioned by lack of basic needs such as housing, nutritional food, lack of access to electricity, water, education etc. Equally, the policy touches on establishing social safety net for the vulnerable in our society.
- (ii) **Sustainable Agriculture:** This is to ensure food security and sufficiency while protecting the ecosystems.

Good Governance

This integrates policy coherence, local engagement and financial incentive

- (i) **Policy Coherence:** This is concerned with integrating policies across different sectors such as energy, trade, Agriculture, etc aligning to avoid conflicting outcomes.
- (ii) **Local Engagement:** This involves empowering local government and communities to implement sustainable practices and fostering partnerships between public and private sectors.
- (iii) **Financial Incentives:** This involves using market-based approaches and removing subsidies on carbon tax that harm the environment.

Regional Development

This analyses development in low-income and high-income countries.

- (i) **Low-income countries:** Emphases focus on poverty eradication, basic infrastructure and training.
- (ii) **High-income countries:** Emphases focus on reducing carbon footprints, advancing technology and social equity.

Core Elements of Sustainable Development Policies

The policies below explain the framework guiding the sustainable development

Long-term Planning:

Sustainable development strives on well coordinated long-term planning by countries. In the absence of an adequate framework to assess or track development plans of countries, sustainable development policies become unattainable.

Cost-benefit Analysis:

For markets to support sustainable outcome, prices should reflect the full cost and benefit to society of the goods and services being produced. This may require the elimination of incentive to over-use natural resources and to degrade the environment or the introduction of new incentives to improve the environment.

Delivery of Public goods:

The delivery of public goods by government, especially in the area of agriculture, health and education are strategic and core element of sustainable development. The effective delivery of these public goods requires overcoming obstacles and embracing coordination through burden-sharing rules that recognize response capacity of individual countries.

Environmental effectiveness:

Policies should secure:

- (i) **Regeneration:** In this case, renewable resources should be used efficiently and their use should not be permitted to exceed their long-term rates of natural regeneration.
- (ii) **Substitutability:** Here, non renewable resources should be used efficiently and their use should be limited to levels that can be offset by renewable resources or other forms of capital.
- (iii) **Assimilation:** In this case, the release of hazardous substances to the environment should not exceed its assimilative capacity and concentrations should be kept below established critical levels necessary for the protection of human health and the environment.
- (iv) **Avoiding irreversibility:** Here, irreversible adverse effects of human activities on ecosystem and in bio-geochemical and hydrological cycles should be avoided. The natural processes capacity of restoring the integrity of the ecosystem should be safeguard from adverse impacts of human activities.

International Cooperation:

With deepening international interdependency, spillovers become more pervasive. A narrow focus on national self-interests is often not realistic when countries are confronted with a range of environmental and social threats that have global implication.

Transparency and Accountability:

A participatory approach is important to successfully meeting the challenges of sustainable development. This requires that the processes through which decisions are reached and taken devoid of corruption and selfishness.

Policy Integration

Unsustainable practices may result from incoherent policies in different domains. Sectorial policies in particular are often introduced without due regards for the externalities being targeted by environmental policies, leading to inconsistencies and spill-over effects. Improving policy coherence requires better integration of economic, environmental and social goals in different policies.

Literature Review

Riding on the mantra of leaving no one behind, the Sustainable Development Goals were birth.

The sustainable Development Goals emerged from the need to create universal and more inclusive goals that cover all aspect of development, a paradigm shift from the less consultative Millennium Development Goals, which were largely imposed by on “the Global South by Northern elites to a more participatory and robust frame of 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets.

From 2015, when the UN Global Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals at its headquarters in New York, USA, the effects of this adoption and implementation like those of the MDGs have been felt even in remote villages across the world. Spanning diverse cultures, continents and regions, the impacts have been evident in health accessibility, quality education, poverty reduction and global partnership for development.

Before 2019, when COVID-19 shook the world unprepared and unguarded, significant progress had been made. The UN MDGs report,2010 highlighted notable achievements: The global extreme poverty rate dropped from 47 percent in 1990 to 14 percent in 2015, translating to a reduction from 1.93 billion to 836 million people. The primary school enrollment ratio (boys to girls) improved from 74:100 to 103:100 while global under-five mortality fell from 12.7 million to 6 million over two and a half decades.

Amid the loft success of the MDGs, upon which the Sustainable Development Goals are building, many have argued that both framework failed to meet all targets and were more quantitative than qualitative.

Interestingly, goals such as Goal 1 (No poverty), Goal 13 (Climate Action), Goal 14 (Life below water), Goal 15 (life on land) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and strong Institution) are intricately connected to pressing issues like biodiversity, climate change and food security (Daniel Hammett, 2024).

Happily, Sustainable Development Goals have tangibly reduced child mortality and expanded educational access, giving hope to children in Burundi.

Clearly, Sustainable Development Goals are not legally binding on countries rather countries are expected to take ownership and establish a national framework for achieving the goals. Implementation and successes rely on countries own Sustainable development policies, planning and programmes.

Moreover, countries have the primary responsibility of following-up and reviewing at the regional and global levels with regards to the progress made in achieving the goals and targets by 2030. Moreso, action at the national level requires quality, accessible and timely data collection and regional follow-up and review (THESDGREPORT 2025).

Apparently, according to the report of UN, 2023 reveal that over 110 million more children are in school since 2015 and 92 percent of world has electricity access in 2023. As well, that malaria prevention has 12.7 million lives since 2000. On clean water/sanitation, 2.2 billion lacked safely managed drinking water in 2022 and over 120.

Findings

The study has revealed a number of gap that required speedy and intervention for the attainment of the goals in 2030, which with holistic policies there are achievable.

Firstly, conflict, climate disruption, economic instability and rising geopolitical tensions characterized many countries.

Secondly, over 800 million people still live in extreme poverty and hunger, hence one in eleven (11) people still face hunger. As well, billions live without safe drinking water and sanitation.

Thirdly, over 120 million people are displaced more than double the number in 2015.

Fourthly, debt service costs for low and middle-income countries hit 1.4 trillion dollars, draining resources for critical development.

In all, only 35 percent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets are in track or making modest progress. Nearly half are progressing too slowly and 18 percent are actually regressing.

Recommendations

Though sustainable development policies have aided modest achievements of some goals, concerted efforts still need to be carried out to address the perceived findings.

Firstly, Countries should shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources to combat climate change and improve health outcomes. As well, industrial sector should be sensitized and policy enacted for them to adopt sustainable practices that align with environmental, social and Governance (ESG) framework.

Secondly, Countries should adopt sustained Macroeconomic policies to enhance economic well-being of it's citizens and ensure gender-sensitive budgeting and policies across all Sustainable Development Goals to accelerate development, as women are critical to achieving micro income, food security, health and education.

Thirdly, Countries should share responsibility for Sustainable Development Goals to tiers of government as many, such as SDG 11 (Sustainable cities), are best implemented at the local level. This would check rising conflicts at the regional level.

Fourthly, Countries should invest in national statistical systems to produce high-quality and timely data transfer to monitor progress and implement ICT-based platforms for tracking Sustainable Development Goal progress. This would enhance transparent in government, such as the high impact initiative on the power of data.

Conclusion

As countries, especially underdeveloped country face the intersecting challenges of economic growth, social responsibility and environmental preservation, which hinders Sustainable Development, bold approach and a set of decisive action is needed to chart a sustainable future.

Though modest progress has been recorded in areas such as poverty reduction and child mortality, according to UN report, 2025, the world is not moving fast enough into significant challenges in hunger and inequality.

In all, the creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources remain sufficient policy direction to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in every context.

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