

Business Ethics

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN 2021

Abstract

The World is constantly changing, especially today in the covid pandemic situation. How have the pandemic influenced the Sustainable Development Goals? What are the biggest differences? Are we on the right path to the sustainable future?

Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development was adopted by all UN members in 2015. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are considered as an urgent call for action.¹

The 17 goals are: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all; Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; Reduce inequality within and among countries; Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss; Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Chapter 2 – before the pandemic

According to the WHO, the pandemic started on March 11, 2020.² Therefore, the main material for comparing the state before the pandemic will be The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019³.

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

² <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/08/09/health/covid-19-pandemic-timeline-fast-facts/index.html>

³ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf>

The extreme poverty decline continues, but is rapidly slowed down. It seems like the main goal (ending the poverty before 2030) is unreal. One of the solutions can be implementing of the Social protection systems in the most relevant areas of the world.

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

There was a huge progress in this matter before 2014, but after 2014 the number of people suffering from hunger is on a rise. In 2018, 7.3% of the global under 5 years old population suffered from undernourishment. Over half of those children are from Southern Asia region. The other extreme is overweight children – 5.9% of the global under 5 years old population are overweight (more than 9% in the North America region).

The recommended solutions are supporting the agriculture sector from domestic and foreign sources; empowering small-scale food producers to participate fully in development.

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

The major progress has been done in this matter. The life expectancy continues to increase globally, there is progress in fighting some infectious diseases and the rates of maternal and child mortality decreased.

However, this point is still bind very closely to the 1st goal: ending poverty. Even when the progress can be considered huge, there are still people (mostly in the poorest areas) who can not be provided even the essential health services.

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Over the past 25 years, there are vast improvements in basic reading and writing skills. Women's literacy is growing faster than men's.

However, in 2016, 750 million adults (two thirds of those are women) still remain illiterate. According to the survey, 49% of those people are from Southern Asia region, 27% form Sub-Saharan African Region, 10% from Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, 9% from Northern Africa and Western Asia and 5% from other areas.

Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

On the one hand, we have to agree that women are in far better environment in today's world than they were in the past. There are women on manager or political sphere and there has been progress in implementing gender budgeting globally. Since 2000's in Southern Asia there has been 40% decrease in forced childhood marriages.

But on the other hand, women and girls are still being subjected to harmful practices. According to the data from 2005-2017, women and girls aged 15 to 49 years subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by a current or former intimate partner in percentage was: 23%

Central and Southern Asia, 22% Sub-Saharan Africa, 12% Latin America and the Caribbean, 6% Europe.

Goal 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all

Between 2000 and 2017, the proportion of the global population using safely managed drinking water increased from 61% to 71%. In Central and Southern Asia and, Latin America and the Caribbean has been the fastest progress.

The proportion of the global population using safely managed sanitation services increased from 28% in 2000 to 45% in 2017. Eastern and South-Eastern Asia making the fastest progress.

Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

More people are using electricity than ever before, with the proportion of the global population having access to this service rising from 83% in 2010 to 87% in 2015, to 89% in 2017. But there are still 840 million people without electricity in 2017, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. In that region, only 44 per cent of the population had access, and an estimated 573 million people still lacked electricity.

Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Real GDP increased globally by 1.9% in 2017 in comparison to 1.3% in 2016. But for a long-term sustainability, policies that promote economic diversification are needed in some countries.

In 2018, labour productivity increased by 2.1% globally. The global unemployment rate is dropping, but still remains high in some regions especially among youth. In 2018, the highest unemployment rates were in: Northern Africa and Western Asia (9.9%), Latin America and the Caribbean (8.0%).

Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

In 2018, 90% of people live within the range of a 3G or higher quality mobile network, but not all can afford to use it.

Global investment in research and development in 2016 is \$2trillion, up from \$739 billion in 2000.

Although the growth slowed down in 2018, the global share of manufacturing value added (MVA) in GDP increased from 15.9% in 2008 to 16.5% in 2018.

On the other hand, industrialization of the Least Developed Countries is far too slow to meet the 2030 Agenda target.

Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

In many countries, an increasing share of income goes to the top 1%. The bottom 40% receive less than 25% of overall income. Most countries have policies to facilitate safe and orderly migration, but more work remains to be done to protect migrants' rights and socioeconomic well-being.

Goal 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

In 2018, 1 out of 4 urban residents live in slum-like conditions and 2 billion people do not have access to waste collection services. In 2019, 150 countries have developed national urban plans, with almost half of them in the implementation phase.

Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Economic and social progress has been accompanied by environmental degradation. The lifestyles of people in the richest nations are heavily dependent on resources extracted from poorer countries. The material footprint per capita has also increased at an alarming rate. In 1990, about 8.1 metric tons of natural resources were used to satisfy an individual's needs. In 2017, that rose to 12.2 metric tons, an increase of almost 50%.

In 2018, 71 countries and the European Union reported on a total of 303 policies for the transition towards sustainable lifestyle.

Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

The climate change is occurring much faster than anticipated, as greenhouse gas levels climb. The global mean temperature for 2018 was approximately 1°C above the pre-industrial baseline, and the last four years have been the warmest on record. Sea levels continue to rise at an accelerating rate.

„In 2017, atmospheric CO₂ concentrations reached 405.5 parts per million (ppm) (up from 400.1 ppm in 2015), representing 146 per cent of pre-industrial levels. To limit global warming to 1.5°C means that emissions will need to peak as soon as possible, followed by rapid reductions. Global carbon emissions need to fall by a staggering 45 per cent by 2030 from 2010 levels and continue at a steep decline to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. As of May 2019, 186 Parties had ratified the Paris Agreement. Parties to the agreement are expected to prepare, communicate and maintain successive NDCs (including targets, policies and actions planned in response to climate change). As of that same date, 183 Parties (182 countries plus the European Union) had communicated their first NDCs to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat, and one Party had communicated its second NDC. Parties have been requested to update their existing NDCs or communicate new ones by 2020. To achieve the 2030 objectives, countries will need to be far more ambitious in preparing their new NDCs for submission.“⁴

Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development

⁴ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf>

Ocean acidity has increased by 26% since pre-industrial times. It is expected to rapidly increase by 100–150% by 2100.

Between 2012 and 2018, 104 out of 220 coastal regions improved their coastal water quality. 87 countries signed the Agreement on Port State Measures, the first binding international agreement on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing.

Goal 15: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

There is a biodiversity loss happening in a rapid pace. Over the last 25 years, the risk of species extinction has worsened by almost 10%.

Between 2000 and 2018, the global mean percentage of each Key Biodiversity Area covered by protected areas increased by: terrestrial areas (39%), freshwater (42%), mountain (36%).

Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

Realizing the goal of peaceful, just and inclusive societies is still a long way off. In recent years, no substantial advances have been made towards ending violence, promoting the rule of law, strengthening institutions at all levels, or increasing access to justice. Millions of people have been deprived of their security, rights and opportunities, while attacks on human rights activists and journalists are holding back development.

Goal 17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The demand for high-quality, timely and accessible data for development planning is increasing. To meet that demand, countries need to establish a strong national statistical plan that has sufficient funding and political backing to improve statistical capacity across the national statistical system. In 2018, 129 countries worldwide had implemented a national statistical plan, up from 102 in 2017. However, many countries lacked the necessary funding to do so. In sub-Saharan Africa, only 23 per cent of plans were fully funded, compared to 94 per cent in Europe and Northern America.

Chapter 3 – The pandemic

As stated above, the pandemic officially started on March 11, 2020. Globally there are 275 162 398 coronavirus cases, 5 373 012 people died and 246 936 074 people recovered.⁵

„Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Most people infected with the virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. However, some will become seriously ill and require medical attention. Older people and those with underlying medical conditions like

⁵ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, or cancer are more likely to develop serious illness. Anyone can get sick with COVID-19 and become seriously ill or die at any age.⁶

Most common symptoms are: fever, cough, tiredness, loss of taste or smell. Less common symptoms are: sore throat, headache, diarrhoea.⁷

As a prevention, there are some precautions we can do: get vaccinated, stay at least 1 metre apart from other people, wear a mask, choose open, well-ventilated spaces, washing hands regularly, self-isolate if feeling any of the symptoms mentioned above.⁸

Chapter 4 – The Impact of the pandemic

Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) recognises that the COVID-19 pandemic is closely related to many environmental issues and cannot be left unaddressed. IGES published 3 types of Measures that should be taken – Short-Term, Medium-Term and Long-Term.

Short-Term ones are addressing urgent concerns, such as Medical Waste, Air Quality, Sustainable Lifestyles. Medium-Term ones include Green New Deal, and Long-Term ones include Integrated, Approaches, Sustainable Cities, Climate Adaptation Planning and Management of Global Risks.⁹

The covid pandemic has vastly influenced the SDGs. It has led to the first rise in extreme poverty in a generation – 119-124 million people were pushed back into extreme poverty in 2020.¹⁰

It has also worsen world hunger – as a result of the pandemic, there are additional 70-161 million people experiencing hunger. In 2020, 2.3 billion people are without food or unable to eat a balanced diet on a regular basis.¹¹

Surely, the biggest impact was on the 3rd goal: shortly said, a decade of progress can be stalled or reversed by covid-19. The pandemic has also shortened life expectancy and most of the countries are still reporting more disruptions to essential health services.¹²

In 2020 9% or additional 101 million children fell below minimum proficiency levels.¹³

Goal 8 was also highly affected: the pandemic has led to the loss equivalent of 255 million full-time jobs, which is 4x more than during the global financial crisis (2007-2009). Economic recovery is under way, but at the same time for many countries, economic growth is expected

⁶ https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1

⁷ https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_3

⁸ https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_2

⁹ Institute for Global Environmental Strategies. *Implications of COVID-19 for the Environment and Sustainability*. Institute for Global Environmental Strategies, 2020, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep24951>.

¹⁰ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>

¹¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal2>

¹² <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>

¹³ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4>

to return to the pre-pandemic levels in 2022 or 2023. In tourism, international tourist arrivals fell from 1.5 billion in 2019 to 381 million in 2020.¹⁴

When it comes to goal 9, there are some good influences pandemic had, for example Manufacture of medium and high-tech products had 4% growth in 2020 compared to 2019; the investment into Research and development also increased. On the other hand, global manufacturing production decreased in 6.8%. For air travel demand, the air passengers dropped from 4.5 billion in 2019 to 1.8 billion in 2020.¹⁵

The pandemic is likely to reverse progress made in reducing income inequality since the financial crisis. Since 2010, the proportion of the global refugees population has more than doubled. In 2020, for every 100 000 people, 311 are refugees.¹⁶

The pandemic has also worsen the plight of people living in slums. The majority of people living in the slums is in Eastern and South-eastern Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Southern Asia.¹⁷

In 2020, there were reported 331 cases of killing human right defenders in 32 countries, which is an 18% increase from 2019. There are also more cases of trafficking and child labour.¹⁸

Conclusion

Even before the pandemic, we had still some problems with implementing some of SDGs, but at some points we were on a good path towards sustainability. However, during the pandemic situation, I dare to say, we took quite a few steps back.

Coronavirus situation had indeed huge impact on most of SDGs, but there is always a hope. Letting the measures mentioned above alone, for example Elon Musk stated that he is willing to donate 6 billion dollars to fight world hunger.¹⁹ Of course, there are some conditions and the process seems to be complicated, but if it was to happen, the impact would be huge.

¹⁴ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>

¹⁵ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal9>

¹⁶ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal10>

¹⁷ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal11>

¹⁸ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16>

¹⁹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/elon-musk-says-willing-spend-6-billion-fight-world-hunger-one-conditio-rcna4301>

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