



A project of the Non-profit International Press Syndicate Group with IDN as the Flagship Agency in partnership with Soka Gakkai International in consultative status with ECOSOC

- HOME GOAL 1 GOAL 2 GOAL 3 GOAL 4 GOAL 5 GOAL 6 GOAL 7
- ABOUT US ▼ CONTACT ARCHIVE SEARCH ▼ LANGUAGES ▼ GOAL 8 GOAL 9
- GOAL 10 GOAL 11 GOAL 12 GOAL 13+14+15 GOAL 16 GOAL 17 Sitemap



Watch out for our new project website <https://sdgs-for-all.net>

Goal 16



Source: the better india

“Communication for All”—An 18th SDG is Needed

share

tweet

pin it

share

share

By Jan Servaes & Muhammad Jameel Yusha'u *

BRUSSELS | CAMBRIDGE, USA, 13 April 2023 (IDN) — The 2030 Agenda for Development or what is known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is perhaps the most ambitious agenda collectively agreed by 193 countries in human history.

Yet, an explicit role for communication as a dedicated goal with clear targets in the SDGs remains conspicuously absent. There are only few passing targets in the SDGs, especially in SDG 16, that address this key function that drives human activity, especially in the 21st century.

Nothing has exposed this oversight more than the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic during which most countries around the world imposed a lockdown in order to suppress the spread of the virus. Vital economic activities were halted.

The airline industry came to an abrupt stop. Universities had to suspend lectures physically and resorted to online teaching. Online shopping skyrocketed. Major meetings by different stakeholders and policymakers, including preparatory meetings by G20 leaders, had to be conducted online. Global conglomerates, corporate organizations, top IT giants all closed their offices.

Just 10-20 years ago, this would have been a global catastrophe. Yet the global community survived mainly on the communication infrastructure available. The world survived on the most important SDG that the framers of the 2030

Agenda for Development had missed.

The SDGs beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine 'war of attrition' and increasing inequality

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown why communication is essential to human survival. A major lesson is the role of communication in providing support for the survival of the global economy and society as a whole.

The global community became more attached to the traditional and social media in order to understand the nature of the virus, how it spreads, and measures needed to curtail the spread of the infection.

The pandemic, which started as a health crisis and later metamorphosed into a full-blown economic crisis, is now having an impact on the possibility of achieving each of the SDGs.

The COVID-19 crisis has made people more aware of the vulnerability of global supply chains. The failure of China's **zero-Covid strategy** indicate that the risk of disruption to global supply chains has still not been eliminated.

If parts from the Far East are missing, assembly lines in Europe come to a standstill. The paradigm shift away from efficiency ('just in time') to greater resilience ('just in case') is accelerating the hidden trend towards de-globalization under way for some time.

The discussion about globalization has emerged again with some arguing that 'nation states' remain important. While globalization facilitates the rapid spread of viruses around the world, concerted national action by governments, the private sector, civil society, and the scientific community has led to different solutions and strategies at national rather than supranational or global levels.

In addition, **Marc Saxer**, head of the Asia Department at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, argues that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has upended the world order — and with it the energy, production, distribution and finance systems. It is "a war of attrition that each side believes it will win, but that both sides will lose", according to **Jeffrey Sachs**, president of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network. It is a serious setback in the realization of SDGs 16 and 17.

The pandemic also exposed major development challenges such as digital inequality (**UN World Social Report 2023**). Suddenly, the issue of inequality, which is the premise of SDG10, became even more apparent. According to the UN, COVID-19 forced the closure of schools in 191 countries affecting 1.5 billion students and 63 million primary and secondary school teachers.

Many developing countries do not have the digital infrastructure to move from teaching physically to online tutoring thereby bringing to the fore the question of the digital divide.

Without communication infrastructure, addressing the digital divide would be a mirage.

The leaders of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the International Association of Universities (IAU), representing more than 2000 universities worldwide, agreed during the United Nations High-Level Political Forum (**HLPF**) in 2022, that international collaboration in higher education is needed to solve the world's pressing challenges and achieve sustainable development.

Optimism gone?

However, while one of the major findings of the **2020 Sustainable Development Report** was that before the COVID-19 outbreak, the world was making progress towards the SDGs, this optimism has since evaporated.

Although no country was on track to achieve the SDGs, more **recent reports** highlight significant disparities in progress across goals and countries.

In an analysis, published in the authoritative *World Development*, **Moyer and Hedden** question how feasible the SDGs are under the current circumstances. They highlight difficulties for some SDG indicators (access to safe sanitation, high school completion, and underweight children) that will not be resolved without a significant shift in domestic and international aid policies and prioritization.

In addition, Moyer and Hedden cite 28 particularly vulnerable countries that are not expected to meet any of the nine human development targets without substantial international aid and financial support.

Three crucial factors

In our view, the realization of the 2030 agenda can only be achieved on the basis of the following three factors.

1- Finance

The critical question that is posed in various forums about the SDGs invariably ends with the question: who is going to fund it? Where will the money come from? How can low- and middle-income countries generate sufficient resources to finance the 2030 development agenda.

Although each country has its own priorities, paying the bills for the SDGs remains a delicate matter. The **Asia-Europe Foundation** calculated in 2020 that “the total investment costs to achieve the SDGs by 2030 are between USD 5 and USD 7 trillion per year at the global level and between a total of USD 3.3 and USD 4.5 trillion per year in developing countries. This implies an average investment need of USD 2.5 trillion per year in developing countries”.

A significant effort must be made through the private sector and philanthropists. While governments and ordinary people have been hit hard by the health and economic impact of COVID-19, in a way it has been good news for billionaires, many of whom have seen their wealth grow astronomically. “Billionaires’ wealth has risen more in the first 24 months of COVID-19 than in 23 years combined.

The total wealth of the world’s billionaires is now equivalent to 13.9 percent of global GDP. This is a three-fold increase (up from 4.4 percent) in 2000”, according to the 2022 Oxfam International report, titled “**Profiting from Pain**”.

The 2023 **Forbes** Billionaires’ List features Bernard Arnault, president of Louis Vuitton, followed by US billionaires like Elon Musk of Tesla, Amazon’s owner Jeff Bezos; Larry Ellison of Oracle, Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft; or Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook. These billionaires, along with the more than 2,000 billionaires from around the world, are wealthy enough to help make substantial progress on some of the SDGs.

2- Political will

The second important factor that can help achieve the SDGs is political will. Many countries have drawn up ambitious national development plans that look great on paper. How many of those plans end up being realized?

When one sees that the fortunes of a country have been successfully changed through the effective implementation of national plans, one cannot separate such achievements from the strong political will of the leaders. The example of China speaks for itself.

The crucial question to be asked is whether that political will is there. UN Secretary-General, [Antonio Guterres](#), responded to a mid-term review of the Sustainable Development Goals: “It is inevitable that one crucial ingredient is still missing. Political will. Without political will, neither the public opinion, nor the stakeholders take sufficient action”.

This is where the challenge to achieve the SDGs lies, i.e. a real political will.

3- Communication for Development

The third factor is the need for robust [communication for development](#) and social change, so that political will can be conveyed to all stakeholders. Leaders who inspire change do so with the communication tools available in their time.

While the digital age disrupts social systems and drives transformation at a scale and pace unparalleled in history, the SDGs remain quite silent on the subject. Indeed, today digital technologies determine what we read and consume, how we vote and how we interact with each other and the world around us.

Many [risks and uncertainties](#) are emerging, including threats to individual rights, social justice and democracy, all amplified by ‘the digital divide’ – the differential speed of internet penetration and access to digital technologies around the world.

Communications for social change must also consider the challenge of misinformation when initiating communication strategies. Therefore, the communication strategies of the World Bank, UNICEF or WHO are not comprehensive enough.

First, they failed to take into account the challenges of infodemics and fake news in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic. The second shortcoming is that the strategies contain little scientific communication to make the public aware of how health professionals make decisions and advise the public about its safety.

Disinformation is a critical factor that exacerbates the challenges that communication for development and social change must address. Technology, social change and human behavior are interconnected; but their impact remains complex.

Another timeframe and main objective needed

For all these reasons, the UN and the rest of the international community need to be realistic and review the 2030 Agenda for Development by shifting the timeline from 2030 to 2050.

Some regional organizations, such as the [African Union](#), go even further. They have postponed the date for achieving their development goals to 2063.

Furthermore, the SDGs should be prioritized with SDG1 on the eradication of extreme poverty as the *main objective* for the next 10 years. Eradicating extreme poverty is likely to have implications for other SDGs also, in particular SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

Efforts to eradicate extreme poverty should not be based on slogans, but should be supported by governments, funding agencies, donors and philanthropists seen as the best chance to save humanity.

Serious thought should be accorded to the post COVID19 world due to the impact of the lockdown on the global economy. Some governments, multinational institutions and private sector are hastening to institutionalize remote

work. As an interim measure, working from home has contributed significantly in reducing the impact of the pandemic, but what is the impact of working from home on the future of work in a post-COVID-19 world?

Will the closure of offices, firms and other businesses for remote work accelerate or reduce the chances of achieving the SDGs? Is there sufficient data to back the policy decisions on a permanent remote work culture? How does this affect the employability of low and unskilled workers?

These are questions that policy makers must think through. The SDGs are meant to promote social inclusion and reduce inequality, not to save money and increase profitability.

Setting the timeline for the achievement of the SDGs to 2050 will allow sufficient time to re-evaluate progress made so far, complete missing objectives, such as SDG 18 on communication for all, and bridge the lost ground of the SDGs.

It will also give the global community ample time to strategize on how to deal with the potential rise of right-wing, populist and nationalist governments, which may impose limits on the SDGs through their disdain for multilateralism. And plans must also be made in advance to mitigate the next disasters that could impair the achievement of the SDGs.

In sum

The current fear of global conflict instead of global cooperation is forcing us to re-think our strategies and approaches. The COVID-19 pandemic drew attention to the fact that, in order to support those who are hit hardest and enhance their resilience for the future, our development interventions should be multidimensional.

An additional goal – SDG18: Communication for All – is necessary if we are to witness a world that is free from poverty, inequality and where issues of climate change and environmental degradation are addressed.

For more information, see:

Jan Servaes & Muhammad Jameel Yusha'u (eds) (2023), SDG18 Communication for All, [Volume 1](#), The Missing Link between SDGs and Global Agendas, Palgrave/Springer

Jan Servaes & Muhammad Jameel Yushau (eds.) (2023), SDG18 Communicaton for All, [Volume 2](#), Regional Perspectives and Special Cases, Palgrave/Springer [IDN-InDepthNews]

* Jan Servaes (PhD) is the former UNESCO Chair in Communication for Sustainable Social Change; and Muhammad Jameel Yusha'u is the Editor-in-Chief of the Africa Policy Journal at Harvard Kennedy School.

Source: the better india
NEWSLETTER

📧 Goal 16

NEXT 

Subscribe

STRIVING



2023 JOINT MEDIA PROJECT REPORT



MAPPING



PARTNERS



UN Climate Change **Newsroom**



Copyright © 2016-2023 International Press Syndicate

