

# Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Developing Countries: Bangladesh in Context

## **Introduction**

According to the United Nations (UN), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are [“the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.”](#) The core guiding principle behind this is the notion of “leave no one behind.” These goals aim to eliminate the global challenges faced by humankind, which can be broadly categorized as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice. The UN also emphasizes the importance of being able to achieve all the sustainable development goals laid out by the Organization by 2030. Achieving these goals will mean that every individual can sustain his/her life without facing any major challenge in fulfilling basic needs. A total of seventeen goals have been outlined to call for action across both developed and developing countries to improve the environmental, economic, and health prosperity.

The research will discuss how developing countries can achieve these SDGs, taking into consideration various barriers these countries will face. With special emphasis on Bangladesh, the study will further identify the various actions and steps required to achieve the SDGs within the country. Some of the national action plans outlined by Bangladesh are aimed towards increasing opportunities for women to broaden skills and advancing gender equality. In addition to this, various other actions from the government are discussed in the research that offers insight into how the country is working towards fulfilling the UN SDGs.

## **The concept of Sustainable Development and how the UN aims to achieve this**

Meeting the needs of the present generation without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs is the essence of sustainable development. Hence, the strategic use of resources that allows resources to replenish is the idea sustainable development aims to achieve.

In order to achieve sustainable development while providing the current world population with access to resources crucial to their survival, the UN has designated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will help the UN achieve peace and prosperity for the people and the planet. The UN concludes that all member nations, developed and developing, recognize the need for sustainable development and are willing to work hand in hand with other countries of the world in a global partnership to eradicate the most pressing challenges for humankind.

All the SDGs listed by the UN are as follows:



**Figure 1: Sustainable Development Goals**

(Source: "[Communications Materials](#)")

Here's a brief look at the seventeen different SDGs defined by the UN:

- **No poverty:** "End poverty in all its forms everywhere" is the essence of the first goal. Poverty is prevalent all across the globe. Countries developed or developing both suffer from this problem. Data suggests 1 in 10 people survive under \$1.90/day, which is the standard accepted poverty line ("Global Poverty Line Update"). However, the UN also recognizes that poverty is more than just the lack of income or resources. Lack of services such as healthcare, education, and security can also be qualified as poverty (Nilsson et al. 320).

- **Zero hunger:** Ending hunger while achieving food security and promoting sustainable ways of agriculture is what the UN aims to achieve with the second goal. It should be noted that agriculture is the single biggest form of employment in the world, i.e., roughly 2 billion people of 26.7% of the world's population derive their income via agriculture or jobs related to it ("World food and agriculture - Statistical pocketbook 2018"). Hence, supporting agriculture can also benefit several other initiatives of the UN.
- **Good health and well-being for people:** The idea with the third goal is to ensure and promote healthy living for everyone at all ages. The UN has already made several strides in this direction. Data suggests that infant and maternal mortality rates are decreasing rapidly. Also, progress has been made in the area of accessibility to clean water and sanitation. Malaria, Tuberculosis, polio, and HIV/AIDS are on the decline, which are all positive trends ("Infectious Diseases").
- **Quality Education:** ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all. This goal ensures that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary schooling by 2030. According to UIS data, about 258 million children and youth are out of school for the school year of 2018. This total includes 59 million children who are of primary school age ("Out-of-School Children and Youth"). Among those 59 million children, 1 in 5 of them had dropped out and recent trends suggest that 2 in 5 of out-of-school children will never set foot in a classroom ("Sustainable Development Goal 4"). UN recognize that this gap must be closed.
- **Gender equality:** The United Nations has recognized gender equality as a fundamental human right, which is necessary for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. Providing women with equal opportunities and access to resources is the fundamental objective of the 5<sup>th</sup> SDG (World Health Organization 171).

- **Clean water and sanitation:** Giving people access to healthy drinking water and hygienic toilets are crucial in ensuring disease-free living. There are several countries that particularly suffer from the problem of unhygienic sanitation due to open defecation, namely Brazil, China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and Pakistan. In order to meet targets by the end of 2030, nearly 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the world needs to accelerate progress towards combating the sanitation crisis (“The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019”).
- **Affordable and clean energy:** ensuring the availability of affordable, clean, reliable, and sustainable energy for everyone is very important for the growth of every individual. To make this happen, the UN plans to provide extensive infrastructure support to least developed countries, small islands, and land-locked countries (“Achieving SDG 7”).
- **Decent work and economic growth:** In order to achieve this, economic growth and development are of paramount importance. The least developed countries’ GDP must grow at a pace of 7% per annum (“State of the Least Developed Countries 2017”).
- **Industry Innovation and Infrastructure:** Manufacturing has been recognized as one of the major contributors to overall GDP growth. The UN must work with the least developed nations to increase the contribution of manufacturing in their respective GDPs (Liu et al. 3035).
- **Reducing inequalities:** The idea of “shared prosperity” means that the bottom 40% of the population should grow faster than the national average (“Shared Prosperity”). Reducing income inequality is at the core of this goal.
- **Sustainable Cities and Communities:** As the movement of masses from rural to urban areas keeps increasing day by day, providing safe and affordable housing to all

is one of the major challenges faced by the world. While development has been shown in this area, the situation is still far from ideal.

- **Responsible consumption and production:** Adapting to eco-friendly production methods and minimizing waste is what the UN is trying to achieve for this goal. Making companies employ sustainable practices is of crucial importance in ensuring sustained survival (Biermann et al. 29).
- **Climate Action:** The drastic outcomes of climate change are now evident everywhere, and governments all around the world have started giving this problem its due consideration. Promoting investment in renewable energy and drastically reducing our carbon footprint is the need of the hour.
- **Life below water:** In order to protect the life that exists beneath the water and to mitigate the exploitation of oceans, seas, and marine resources, several steps have been implemented. Protected marine biodiversity has expanded, and ocean research and science funding have increased (Le Blanc 178).
- **Life on land:** This goal aims towards protecting the numerous diverse ecosystems that exist in forests, deserts, and mountains. Several indexes have been designed to constantly monitor the progress in the preservation of different endangered species, a crucial step considering the increased problem of species extinction.
- **Peace, justice, and strong institutions:** Eradicating violent crime, sex trafficking, forced labor, and child abuse are some of the major objectives under this goal. The UN recognizes the need for strong national institutions that are independent and just in order to achieve peace and justice (“Goal 16”).
- **Partnership for the goals:** The basic idea behind including this goal is to make sure that countries and organizations are willing to cooperate instead of competing.

Sharing knowledge, expertise, and financial support will be crucial for the overall success of the SDGs.

### **Differences between the sustainable development goals in developed and developing countries:**

In the effort to ensure that no one is left behind in realizing the UN articulated SDGs, it is crucial that all parts of the world work towards achieving the goals set out by the UN. However, there are certain differences in the challenges faced by developing countries vs. developed countries.

- **Evaluation and progress measurement:** planning and review mechanisms that exist in most developed nations may not exist or may not be as robust in their counterparts. This may hamper vision for the proper implementation of the SDGs in developing nations (Stafford-Smith et al. 919).
- **Infrastructure scarcity and its implications:** Lack of infrastructure plagues growth in developing countries. This is where developed countries have an edge in terms of attracting investments that lead to further growth. Developed countries should invest in their underdeveloped counterparts and grow symbiotically.
- **The problem of informal economy and improper taxation:** Most developing nations tend to have large informal economies running parallel to the formal ones, making it difficult to track wealth (Sundquist). Also, developing countries rely heavily on sales taxes and don't implement personal taxes properly (Ricciuti et al.). This results in less revenue that translates to scarce public services and resources offered by the government.
- **Fiscal deficit:** Low revenue generation from taxes means the developing nations, specifically countries in the African continent tend to have very low percentages of

their GDP's collected through tax (in most cases about 10%-15% of their respective GDPs), whereas high-income nations tend to have approximately 40% of their GDPs collected as tax. This results in developing nations often having high fiscal deficits (Osborn et al. 118).

### **Sustainable development goals procured by Bangladesh**

The primary SDG goals in the context of Bangladesh include ending poverty (Goal-1) in all its forms. Out of the 17 SDGs, Bangladesh has made considerable progress on reducing poverty (Goal-1). In 2018, the proportion of the population living below the international poverty line (absolute poverty) was 11.3 per cent compared to 19.6 per cent in 2010. On the other hand, the proportion of the population living below the national poverty line was 21.6 per cent in 2018 as opposed to 31.5 per cent in 2010 (Alam). The SDG goals include 17 interconnected goals that include poverty and hunger alleviation, quality education, good health and well-being, and gender equality among others. Another important SDG goal is decent employment and economic growth to reduce inequality. These SDG goals, in particular, are related to the most basic human right of right to life and livelihood. Quality education is a goal that is very important in Bangladesh. Bangladesh, as a country, has already improved a lot in terms of access to quality education.

It can be identified that there is a significant amount of study associated with the sustainability issues in the contemporary scenario. Studies have found that the development of the goals solely depends on the situation within a particular country. As a developing country, Bangladesh requires multiple improvements in different sectors to get closer to achieving the SDGs. The SDGs complement each other to bring about vital improvement and maintenance of both healthy human and environmental resources (Cernev & Fenner, 2020). Various challenges faced by Bangladesh include inequitable distribution of resources thereby leading to higher poverty in rural settings and an increasing income gap.

Importantly, the government of Bangladesh has not been incorporating coastal regions in its national plan. Therefore, key challenges must be taken into account within the national context for the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

### **Analysis of the achievability of the goals**

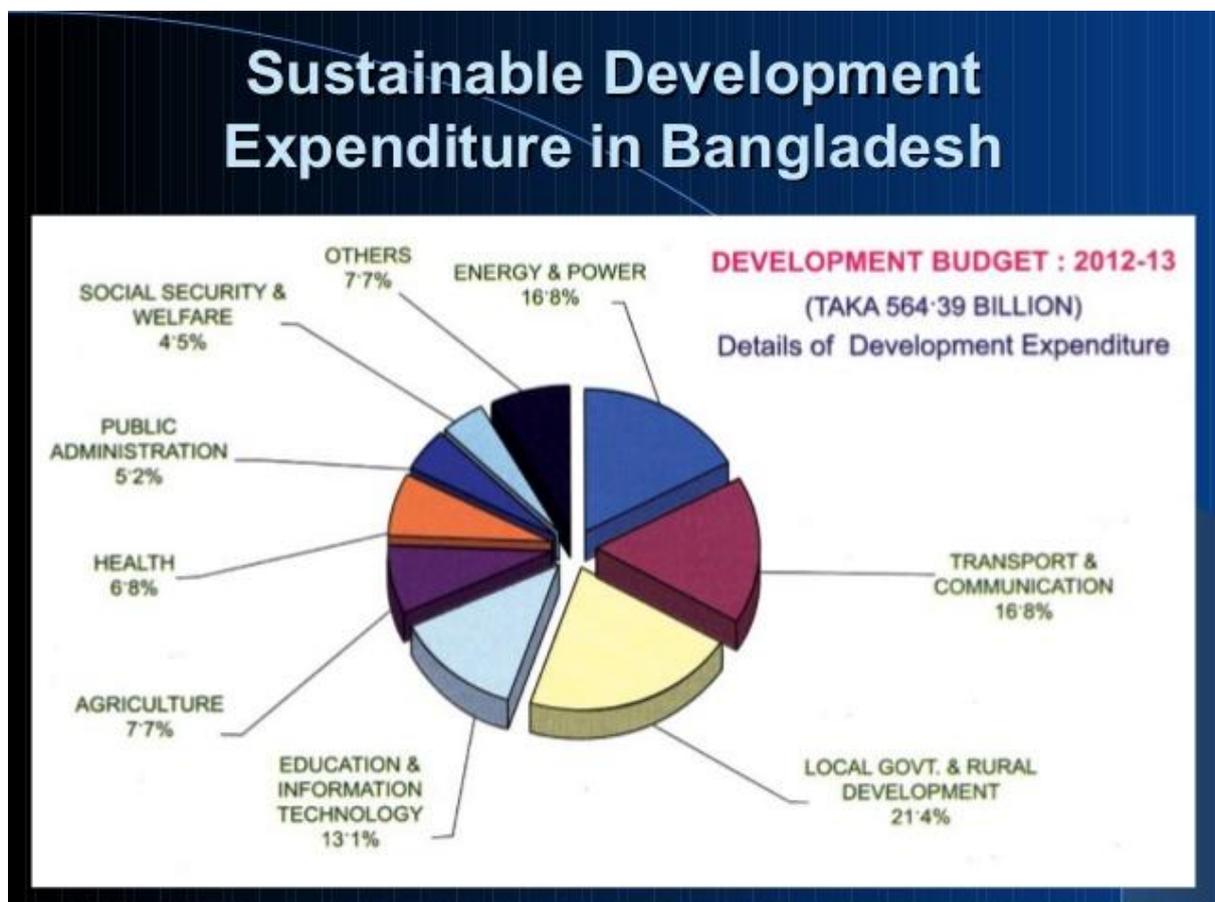
The goals that are set up by the UN are reflective in the contemporary scenario. There are primarily 169 targets associated with these 17 goals, with indicators that help in measuring progress. In this connection, there are almost 232 indicators that are approved by the UN that play an important role in relation to the achievability of the goals. The United Nations Development Programme helps in improving the idea to a significant extent. Consequently, responsible entities must be included in the development of the Organization. A targeted framework to promote integration across the national planning process of the SDG goals is necessary to overcome considerable challenges.

The intention of the UN is quite broad in this scenario. The developed and the developing countries have different characteristics that differentiate each. The implementation of the appropriate strategies is of primary concern in developing countries. Five key challenges have been identified: 1) integration of the SDGs across national, sub-national, and local development plans, 2) laying out an institutional architecture that can support the implementation of the SDGs, 3) procuring adequate resources including financial, 4) monitoring the implementation through data collection, and 5) setting up platforms to engage stakeholders (Bhattacharya et al). The targets can be prioritized thematically such as in areas that governments have already performed well. However, in the best interests of the SDGs, priority may be given in the areas where the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were not achieved. The importance of integrating across the governmental departments is paramount to promote smooth orchestration of the national plans (Bhattacharya et al.). For

example, prior evidence has demonstrated that the implementation of the SDGs had higher chances of success when managed by the national or central planning agency e.g. (Olsen et al.)

Ideologically, SDGs can be achieved through strategic innovation. The implementation and strategic commitment are to be handled by the governing professionals of the country.

Targeted approaches by the governing bodies are to be handled efficiently for improving the discrepancy in the social structure. The development of the national plans needs to be tailored and targeted to overcome the existing barriers and challenges within developing countries such as Bangladesh.



**Figure 2. Sustainable development expenditure in Bangladesh**

(Source: Keesstra et al. 117)

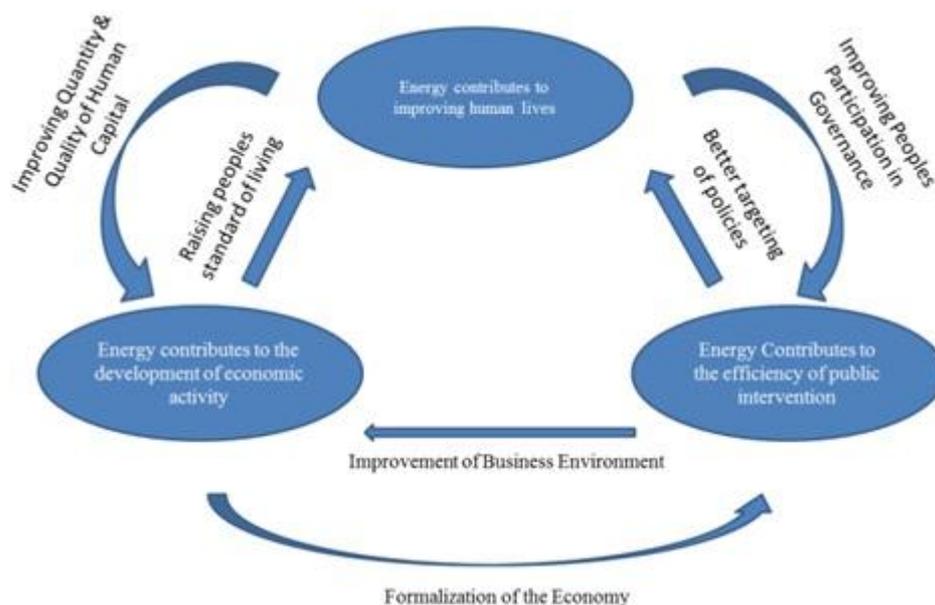
## **Benefits of implementation of sustainable development goals**

The benefits of implementing sustainable development goals are quite extensive and associated with multiple aspects. The SDGs were developed on the MDGs and the enhanced efforts to address these gaps promote comprehensive social, environmental, and economical sustainability for countries. Therefore, it is essential to understand the extent by which developing countries can meet these critical goals. Certain developing countries have already assigned committees to understand the existing gaps to achieve the SDGs within these countries. The priorities and challenges faced by developing countries are not only to lay out national development plans but also to ensure implementation at the state and local level. The implementation of the sustainable development goals may be possible through increased collaboration and prioritization with stakeholders and the government (Lu et al. 432). For instance, the implementation of nationally developed plans will need to be carefully planned due to the financial constraints faced by many developing countries (Sterling 209).

The development of the SDG plans should be potentially measured and planned throughout the feasibility of its implementation within national, regional, and local settings. The SDGs must be implanted in a country for an appropriate outcome and improved social structure. For this reason, the instant approval of the initiation and the credibility of the service must be manipulated through strategic innovations in relation to the effectiveness of organizational stability. Sustainable development is an ambitious developmental objective that has been supported by all the member states in the United Nations. Achieving SDGs is expected to bring forth many economic and environmental opportunities yet there remain great challenges of implementation, particularly in developing countries (Bhattacharya et al.). For instance, while certain developing countries have already started planning for SDGs' implementation, the gaps in the existing national plans need to be addressed as well as

appropriate evaluation of the weak MDG achievement through integration within the countries.

The eminent impact must be associated critically for the attributes and the associative measurement in the internal and external affairs of the respective country. The determination and the potential ability must be included for the development of the study. The influential impact must be percolated by the country according to its economic stability. The internal problems of the country are also linked with its performance on a global scale. Thus, performance initiation must be implemented critically to ensure that the SDGs are achieved.



**Figure 3: Sustainable economic development in Bangladesh**

(Source: Gupta et al. 115)

## Recommendation

Certain recommendations can be identified within this context. The reference and the collection must be managed efficiently for the amendment of the study. The critical

measurement must be imprinted with respect to the evidence and the associative measures of the study. In order to procure appropriate Sustainable Development Goals, the country can implement certain strategic ideas that are crucial in this context. For instance, promoting public procurement strategies in line with the SDGs may promote sustainable development. Additionally, promoting fiscal, and social protection policies to reduce inequality is another strategy to consider achieving sustainable targets (Dahlman and Mealy 40). The association must be integrated with the current situation of a country in accordance with its external factors in the long-term goal (Fukuda-Parr 45).

## **Conclusion**

With the help of this particular study, it can be concluded that there are certain areas that developing countries can take into account and measures to ascertain accountability. The positive measures must be revered for the amendments of the study. Bangladesh, one of the most populous countries with poverty, is working to improve its sustainable national plans. The country is taking certain steps and actions such as commitment and imitation of implementation towards achieving the UN described sustainable development goals. While the poverty rates in Bangladesh remain high, these actions will ensure a significant decrease in people in extreme poverty and improve their quality of lives. Additionally, targeting the gender gap in employment may provide increased opportunities for women such as learning skills required for earning a livelihood.

To conclude, sustainability and performance initiatives must be integrated in a way that sustainable development is fostered within the country. In this manner, the integration ensures that the sustainable goals posited by the UN are able to prevent adverse outcomes for current and future generations. The initiatives taken by the Bangladesh government to improve the lives of the people, and achieve the SDGs by 2030 must be closely overseen by

the government and pertinent stakeholders. The improvements need to be documented properly for future analysis, which will help in making amendments wherever necessary.

***Suraiya Afrina is an international affairs professional finishing her Master's in International Relations from Norwich University. She is passionate about working for human rights as well as driving positive social change.***

#### Works Cited

- United Nations General Assembly. "Sustainable Development goals." *SDGs), Transforming our world: the 2030* (2015).
- Biermann, Frank, Norichika Kanie, and Rakhyun E. Kim. "Global governance by goal-setting: the novel approach of the UN Sustainable Development Goals." *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 26 (2017): 26-31.
- Buse, Kent, and Sarah Hawkes. "Health in the sustainable development goals: ready for a paradigm shift?" *Globalization and health* 11.1 (2015): 13.
- Costanza, Robert, et al. "Modelling and measuring sustainable wellbeing in connection with the UN Sustainable Development Goals." *Ecological Economics* 130 (2016): 350-355.
- Costanza, Robert, Lorenzo Fioramonti, and Ida Kubiszewski. "The UN Sustainable Development Goals and the dynamics of well-being." *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 14.2 (2016): 59-59.
- Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko. "From the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: shifts in purpose, concept, and politics of global goal setting for development." *Gender & Development* 24.1 (2016): 43-52.
- Gupta, Joyeeta, and Courtney Vegelin. "Sustainable development goals and inclusive development." *International environmental agreements: Politics, law and economics* 16.3 (2016): 115-448.

- Hajer, Maarten, et al. "Beyond cockpit-ism: Four insights to enhance the transformative potential of the sustainable development goals." *Sustainability* 7.2 (2015): 1651-1660.
- Kanie, Norichika, and Frank Biermann, eds. *Governing through goals: Sustainable development goals as governance innovation*. mit Press, 2017.
- Keesstra, Saskia D., et al. "The significance of soils and soil science towards realization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals." *Soil* (2016).
- Kumar, Sanjiv, Neeta Kumar, and Saxena Vivekadhish. "Millennium development goals (MDGS) to sustainable development goals (SDGS): Addressing unfinished agenda and strengthening sustainable development and partnership." *Indian journal of community medicine: official publication of Indian Association of Preventive & Social Medicine* 41.1 (2016): 1-65.
- Le Blanc, David. "Towards integration at last? The sustainable development goals as a network of targets." *Sustainable Development* 23.3 (2015): 176-187.
- Liu, Li, et al. "Global, regional, and national causes of under-5 mortality in 2000–15: an updated systematic analysis with implications for the Sustainable Development Goals." *The Lancet* 388.10063 (2016): 3027-3035.
- Lu, Yonglong, et al. "Policy: Five priorities for the UN sustainable development goals." *Nature News* 520.7548 (2015): 432.
- Nilsson, Måns, Dave Griggs, and Martin Visbeck. "Policy: map the interactions between Sustainable Development Goals." *Nature News* 534.7607 (2016): 320.
- Osborn, Derek, Amy Cutter, and Farooq Ullah. "Universal sustainable development goals." *Understanding the Transformational Challenge for Developed Countries* (2015).
- Stafford-Smith, Mark, et al. "Integration: the key to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals." *Sustainability Science* 12.6 (2017): 911-919.

World Health Organization. *World health statistics 2016: monitoring health for the SDGs sustainable development goals*. World Health Organization, 2016.

“Communications Materials - United Nations Sustainable Development.” *United Nations*, United Nations, 2019, [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/).

“FAQs: Global Poverty Line Update.” *World Bank*, Sept. 2015, [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/global-poverty-line-faq](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/global-poverty-line-faq).

*World Food and Agriculture - Statistical Pocketbook 2018*. FAO, 2018, [www.globalagriculture.org/fileadmin/files/weltagrarbericht/Weltagrarbericht/10BäuerlicheIndustrielleLW/Pocketbook2018.pdf](http://www.globalagriculture.org/fileadmin/files/weltagrarbericht/Weltagrarbericht/10BäuerlicheIndustrielleLW/Pocketbook2018.pdf).

“Infectious Diseases and Vaccines.” *World Bank*, 2020, [www.worldbank.org/en/topic/infectiousdiseases](http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/infectiousdiseases).

*The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*. 2019, *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2019*, [unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf).

*ACHIEVING SDG 7 IN LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES*. United Nations, 2019, [unohrrls.org/custom-content/uploads/2019/07/Policy-Brief-LLDC.pdf](http://unohrrls.org/custom-content/uploads/2019/07/Policy-Brief-LLDC.pdf).

*STATE OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES 2017*. United Nations, 2017, pp. 3–3, *STATE OF THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES 2017*, [unohrrls.org/custom-content/uploads/2017/07/State-of-the-LDCs\\_2017.pdf](http://unohrrls.org/custom-content/uploads/2017/07/State-of-the-LDCs_2017.pdf).

“Shared Prosperity: A New Goal for a Changing World.” *World Bank*, The World Bank Group, May 2013, [www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/05/08/shared-prosperity-goal-for-changing-world](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2013/05/08/shared-prosperity-goal-for-changing-world).

“Goal 16: Promote Just, Peaceful and Inclusive Societies.” *United Nations*, United Nations, 2020, [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/).

Sundquist, Bruce. *THE INFORMAL ECONOMY OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD: THE CONTEXT, THE PROGNOSIS, AND A BROADER PERSPECTIVE*. 2nd ed., 2010, *THE INFORMAL ECONOMY OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD: THE CONTEXT, THE PROGNOSIS, AND A BROADER PERSPECTIVE*, [www.civilizationsfuture.com/bsundquist/ie.html](http://www.civilizationsfuture.com/bsundquist/ie.html).

Ricciuti, Roberto, et al. “Low Tax Collection in Developing Economies Has a More Devastating Impact than We Thought.” *Quartz Daily Brief*, Quartz, 15 Mar. 2019, [qz.com/africa/1573957/developing-countries-will-benefit-from-better-tax-collection/](https://qz.com/africa/1573957/developing-countries-will-benefit-from-better-tax-collection/).

*Disclaimer: This essay was written in a personal capacity and opinions expressed within do not reflect the views of the UN.*