



## WHY THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS MATTER IN AFRICA?

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### Cite this article:

Bolaji J., Oluwaseun S.S. (2022), Why the Sustainable Development Goals Matter in Africa?. African Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development 5(3), 73-82. DOI: 10.52589/AJESD-UR23QJUN

### Manuscript History

Received: 30 June 2022

Accepted: 2 Aug 2022

Published: 23 Aug 2022

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**ABSTRACT:** *The singular purpose of this study is directed at answering a fundamental question and its immediate focus would be on Africa. The question is premised on why the Sustainable Development Goals matter as well as revealing its importance to the continent of Africa and Africans. A qualitative research method was adopted during the study. The findings revealed that sustainable development matters, and serve as a necessity in closing certain gaps of the human living index in Africa. Many Africans especially in the rural environment are not aware of the sustainable development goals. Thus, Africa needs more education, information, workshops and seminars to enlighten the people on the importance of the SDGs. This study also showed that the participants interviewed do not know how to drive and achieve the SDGs in the urban area. Finally, unanimously, the respondents agree that poverty, food insecurity, gender and infrastructure development are the major challenges facing the continent. Thus, the Sustainable Development Goals become a matter of necessity for Africans, therefore it matters. The limitation of this study is that it was carried out in just three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the generalized study results about Africa are only limited to a few African nations. It was challenging gathering data as most participants were reluctant about providing information based on trust deficit prevalent in the continent. Some participants altogether felt uncomfortable participating in the research.*

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainable Development Goals, Africa, Poverty, Food insecurity infrastructure, Gender.



## INTRODUCTION

Nature has been relatively supportive and kind to some more than others. Spatial and unequal positioning in the distribution of resources across the globe did necessitate the United Nation to make a clarion call globally for a redress in an attempt to reshape or find a point of possible appropriate balancing to resources usage that affects our contemporary collective life and living in the world. Some countries, nations or economies are more endowed than others; and for some, their economic and industrial growth pursuits have had adverse and detrimental effects on the cooperative existence of humans and every other thing on earth. This drive for economic and industrial empowerment has pushed the less privileged nations, gender, environment and individuals into the list of the endangered in the world (Oteh, 2009; Rees, 2010).

The global space today is in a precarious form that seeks unified help for necessary reform, to a new standard of living for all inhabitants of the earth (man, animal and plants). The need for sustainable development and living becomes paramount as a requisite for redeeming the earth from imploding, due to global industrialization and economic competitiveness of world powers. Poised to provide an answer to the fundamental of the question: why do Sustainable Development Goals matter? The best way in attempting the question is to simplify the answer as the uneven distribution and lopsided nature of resources available to mankind and how man has overstretched the limits of their usage.

With an agenda set to be delivered in or by 2030, the deliberation for the SDGs kicked off in 2012 and was concluded in 2015, adopting 17 goals and 169 targets, with the aim of eliminating hungers in the world, reduction of inequalities and building sustainable communities around the world among others. This deliberation included all 193 member nations of the United Nation. Similarly, the civil society groups also made significant inputs to aid the world in achieving a more sustainable environment, economy and society at large for the benefit of all inhabitants (human, animal and plants) (UN, 2021). The conclusion is an aim to take the battle to see the end of universal poverty as a collective fight, to defend the planet earth by using everything possible to protect its degradation, and that by 2030, the majority of people would be enjoying peace and prosperity.

A vision to free mankind from the claws of poverty, hunger and disease should be an intentional one and to be done in synchronization with all levels of governments not excluding any. Sustainability should not just be a lexicon, but an action to save planet earth, as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals are referred to as global goals and the mission being the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all.

Each of the 17 goals of the SDG had a set target and the targets are 169 in all; each of the targets is assigned an indicator for tracking purposes. The indicators are 232 in unique forms. The conclusion is to track the 169 targets by the indicators (Halligan, 2022). Halligan (2022) further attests to the success of the Millennium Development Goals which is a predecessor for the Sustainable Development Goals. The MDGs are credited as a significant contributor to global gains where the population of people living below poverty line had greater access to better health and good education and a resulting lower number of hunger among dwellers in the developing countries. The formal adoption of the MDGs was in the year 2000, the expectation is that the 17 goals of the SDG and the 169 targets would aid in the delivery of a comprehensive agenda considering the number of pressing issues the human race grapples with



today. Invariably, the SDGs would take a cue from the MDGs and deliver a better standard of living for the world and its inhabitants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Sustainable Development Goals take a cue from its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, with the responsibility of ensuring that the developing countries are not overlooked in the fast changing world. According to the UN (2020), the global community has recorded impressive advancement in supporting its people in the drive to escape poverty. Developing states and small islands, including the Landlocked Developing Countries mostly referred to as the world's most vulnerable nations, are progressing in the quest to reduce poverty. But there remains an imbalance in access to health and educational services, which necessitates the goals, targets and indicators of the SDG.

It is challenging for Africa as the turbulence confronted is inclusive and exhaustive, a continent marginalized from the world economy, characterized by inadequacy of finance for development in healthcare, substandard infrastructure, bad leadership and poor governance (Kyambalesa, 2004). The deficit in leadership competence and quality in tandem with weak and bad governance is common across contemporary Africa. The UNDP (2021) states that global partnership is important for development in an effective manner and crucial for world cooperation. In Africa, of the 17 goals specified by the UN, as reported by IISD (2021), the continent has only recorded progress in just two of the goals, which are: SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and SDG 13 (Climate Action). These are the only goals witnessing some trackable growth as reported in the 2020 edition of the Africa SDG index and dashboard report, a report published by the Sustainable Development Solution Network.

IISD (2021) further reported that Africa as a continent is facing a herculean task in meeting both Goals 3 and 9. SDG 3 specifies good health and well being while SDG 9 focuses on industry, innovation and infrastructure; further, the actualization of SDG 16 seems more like an impossible task for the continent of Africa with the goal of achieving peace, justice and strong institutions as it looks elusive with 2030 in view. A quarter of Africans are at risk of food insecurity as minute progress has been made in meeting the growing food demands in Africa (Fawole, Ibasemis & Ozkan, 2015). Paarlberg (1999) asserts that the circumstances surrounding food insecurity are progressive as it concerns different regions of the world, but the case is different with Africa where it has been progressively worsening. The largest food insecurity problem lies in Africa.

### Poverty and Food Insecurity (Goal 1 and 2)

The only continent that failed to meet the expected threshold of fifty percent poverty reduction set by the Millennium Development Goal for 2015 is Africa (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020). Taking IISD (2020) information into consideration on global population, the global population is estimated to reach 9.9 billion by 2050, the framers of the SDGs have foreseen the immense necessity of sustainable living and development. Thus, the race to feed 9.9 billion people by 2050 requires strategic planning and sustainability (Bene et al., 2015; Searchinger et al., 2014).

The sustainable development goals one and two specify the need to end poverty and hunger (food insecurity) respectively. An astronomical growth in the population of the world needs



requisite efforts and innovation to urgently put in place a sustainable increase in agricultural production, step up supply chain capacity, cut wastage and reduce food loss. This is also to ascertain that the likes of Sub-Saharan Africa is assured that those hungry and malnourished get access to better nutrition. As the world population continues to grow, much more effort and innovation will be urgently needed in order to sustainably increase agricultural production, improve the global supply chain, decrease food losses and waste, and ensure that all who are suffering from hunger and malnutrition have access to nutritious food. It is a common position in the global community that the fight against eradicating hunger within the coming generation can be won and there are collaborative efforts to achieve this (UN, 2020).

The greatest challenge facing humanity globally remains poverty, more reason why it is the first on the list in the sustainable development goals. According to the UN (2020), as at 2015 when the 17 sustainable development goals were agreed upon, an estimate of 736 million of the world population lived on less than 2 US Dollars a day with lack of food, drinking water and hygiene sanitation. As earlier stated Sub-Saharan Africa alongside South Asia form over 80% of the extremely poor people on the earth surface.

The figures to support the need for SDG as it pertains to Africa and poverty generally are not encouraging. One in ten people is extremely poor as half of the population living in poverty are under 18 (Africa UNDP, n.d.). Between 2010 and 2020, Sub-Saharan Africa witnessed an increase in the number of its population living in extreme poverty; 26 countries in the region accounted for this increase with Angola alone accumulating (9.4 million) with both DR Congo and South Sudan accounting for 8.8 million and 7 million respectively (Suckling, Christensen & Walton, 2021).

From the data obtained from Index Mundi, it is stated that in the list of countries across the globe whose population live below the poverty line, African countries occupy 14 slots on the list. Zimbabwe has 72.3 percent of its population below the line and Liberia twentieth on list has over 54.1 percent of the nation's population below the poverty line. Nigeria, the most populous black nation with over 210 million people, has 70 percent of the people living below the line.

The continent of Africa is confronted with numerous challenges that multiplies the preponderance of poverty, food insecurity and hunger among the people of the continent, among which include: terrorism; banditry; kidnapping; bad governance; corruption; social exclusion; and severe pre and postharvest losses (Behera, Rout, Behera & Move, 2019; Otekunrin et al., 2019).

### **Gender (Goal 5)**

Since over seventy years ago as reported in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to the 2000-2015 Millennium Declaration and to the contemporary Sustainable Development Goals, the attention of the entire world is still on promoting human rights and removing discrimination and inequality for girls, women, men and boys (Africa UNDP, 2016). Glazebrook and Opoku (2020) argued that the sustainable development goals as a concept has failed as it is immersed in the world economic system today which considers growth above the stability of the ecosystem while the international institutions do undervalue women's capacity for sustainability. Bradshaw et al. (2017) highlight the essence of women's roles in economic development.



Africa UNDP (2016) posited that the position and level of inequality as it relates to women remains persistent and seemingly unchanged, despite widespread recognition of women's rights and the benefits that accrue to all society from equitable treatment and access to resources and opportunities for women. Within the continent of Africa and in each country, there is growing recognition that as African women attain higher measures of economic and social well-being, benefits accrue to the society; despite this growing understanding, removing inequalities for women has not kept pace. Significant gaps between men and women opportunities remain a major challenge and a severe impediment to structural, economic and social transformation that is still the goal of all African countries (Theresa & Marie-Antoinette, 2008; Africa UNDP, 2016).

Sarkis (2019) noted that female entrepreneurial discrimination is a common practice in many nations globally. The female gender is still referred to as the weaker gender and not approved for some economic roles and activities. The quest for gender equality will bring economic prosperity to African nations. The race to achieve gender equality is as important a goal for the development agenda as it is for every other goal (Koissy-Kpein, 2020). Considering the progress that has been made towards achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there still exists evidence confirming that gender disparities remain persistent in most countries (Moyo & Dhliwayo, 2019).

Developing nations and economies remain in the shadow of other countries in the world on the issue of gender equality. The subject of inequality remains due to a plethora of cultural and structural challenges (Mandy & Jawad, 2018).

### **Infrastructure (Goal 9)**

Africa as a continent is facing a myriad of challenges, which could be the bane why meeting the sustainable development goals might be difficult. The infrastructure gap correlates with innovation (World Bank, 2009). Deficits in infrastructural capacity have an inverse effect on development, as infrastructure is an enhancer for human connectivity and acknowledged as a link that propels and brings the realization of economic opportunities and allows diversity in national development (Popkova et al., 2020).

Lack of infrastructure hinders the growth and development of a nation (Ncube et al., 2017). A community without proper infrastructure will not be seen as a big deal on face value, but becomes noticeable when there are multiple numbers of communities in a nation which then leads to economic advancement as no nation is said to develop without economic growth. As cited by Kodongo and Ojah (2016), the conclusion of a committee deliberation in Sub-Saharan region within the span of twelve years (2000-2011) is that deliberate spending is a must on infrastructure in an effort to witness incremental economic development and growth in the African continent most especially the Sub-Saharan region.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The primary data in this study was gathered through a one-on-one personal interview, where open-ended questions were asked. As a result, the provisional data was used in fulfilling the aim of the study. This study helped us acquire first-hand data on basic understanding of the SDG and the major challenges faced by Africa and Africans meeting these set goals. Due to



this reason, an in-person interview proved to be more efficient as the participants could respond to the interview questions freely without their contributions being limited. The study was conducted within East Africa from participants in Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. The study area harbors many young citizens who are faced with some of the challenges listed within their countries. The study selection criteria involved those who have completed high schools, colleges, and university; and those who dropped out of high school between the ages of 18 to 28 years. A total of 380 participants were interviewed with an average interview length of 3 to 10 minutes. Anonymity and verbal consent were guaranteed to the interviews during the interviews. The interviews were conducted in their workplaces, cafes, and out in parks where they felt most comfortable. All the interview questions used for this study focused on sustainable development goals.

## RESULTS

**Table 1: The participants' awareness of the sustainable development goals.**

<b>Knowledge of Sustainable Development Goals</b>	<b>Total Numbers</b>
Fully aware	110
Not fully aware	130
I have heard of it and know a little about it	65
I have heard of it but do not know it	55
I have never heard of it	20
<b>Total No</b>	<b>380</b>

Table 1 illustrates the number of participants depending on their knowledge of the SDG: 110 out of the 380 participants were fully aware of the existence and had knowledge of the SDGs; 130 participants were not fully aware of the goals; 65 participants had heard about the goals but do not know the purpose and target; 55 participants had heard about the sustainable development goals but knew nothing about them while 20 participants had no idea of the existence of the SDG goals. This implies that the majority of the participants are knowledgeable about the UN SDG 2030.

**Table 2: Participants who understand “why it matters”.**

<b>Understanding “why it matters”</b>	<b>Total Numbers</b>
I do understand	120
I do not understand	150
I am not interested	70
It doesn't make any difference	40
<b>Total No</b>	<b>380</b>

Table 2 depicts the number of respondents who understand why the SDGs matter. Of the 380 participants, 120 agreed to understand the reason for SDG, 150 of the participants do not understand why it matters, 70 participants of the 380 are not interested if it matters or not, while 40 of the participants are of the view that it doesn't make much difference to their existence.



This shows that a good number of the participants are yet to understand the reason behind the sustainable development goal.

**Table 3: Participants who are urban dwellers and rural dwellers.**

Participants' Views	Total Numbers
Urban	210
Rural	170
<b>Total No</b>	<b>380</b>

Table 3 shows the participants' location. 210 of the participants live in the city with access to information more than 170 participants who dwell in the rural areas. This shows that most of the participants are city dwellers.

**Table 4: Participants who agree that poverty, food insecurity, gender and infrastructure development are the major challenges facing the continent and thus see the necessity for the Sustainable Development Goals as it concerns Africans.**

Opinions	Total Number
Poverty is a challenge facing SDG in Africa?	105
Food insecurity is a challenge facing SDG in Africa	100
Is gender a challenge facing SDG in Africa	90
Poor infrastructural services are challenges facing SDG in Africa	85
<b>Total No</b>	<b>380</b>

Table 4 illustrates that 105 of the participants are of the belief that poverty is the biggest challenge confronting Africa; to 100 participants, the challenge is food insecurity, while 90 of the 380 participants are of the view that gender inequality is the most affecting Africa of the SDG goals, and lastly those who say poor infrastructure is Africa's challenge are 85 out of the total participants.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Results from the study show that Africans are aware of the UN Sustainable Development Goals though some are not fully aware but have an idea on what the SDG is all about. According to the study, Africans have at least heard and are aware of the sustainable development goals. Lesser respondents agree and understand why it matters to have a global goal to solve their continent's challenges. Several issues were discovered in the study; first, as much as 30% of participants in the research do not understand why there is a need for SDG as nothing came out from the MDGs (Millennium Development Goal). The result of the MDG was met with mixed feelings from development experts especially regarding its 15-year target for Africa (Durokifa & Ijeoma, 2018).



Also, the challenge of infrastructure (electricity, internet and good roads) between urban and rural dwellers are part of the reasons why most Africans are less aware or concerned about why the SDG matters to them. Africa needs more enlightenment on the importance of the SDG to model and shape our lives and environment towards a better life which is sustainable for us and the coming generation. Most participants identified poverty as the biggest hurdle facing Africa which next to it is the challenge of food insecurity which they believe are challenging situations why Africa is where it is and doubt what the SDG would do to solve these problems.

## LIMITATIONS

The study was limited to three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Therefore, the study results being generalized about Africa are only limited to a few African nations. It was challenging gathering data as most participants were reluctant in providing information on the camera, citing anonymity.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It suffice to say that as some Africans are aware of the Sustainable Development Goals, others are not sure why it matters. Respondents are of the question as why would a global body determine or decide how to solve challenges faced by Africans. Some feel that based on the level of distrust in their government and less knowledge and awareness of the benefits of sustainable development. The task to achieve the SDG in Africa is dependent on regional partnership among continent's stakeholders, which includes civil society, research agencies, governmental and non-governmental organizations, private sectors and the academic sector, in order to educate, inform and promote the benefit and importance of the SDGs for Africa and the next generation of Africans (Lorren et al., 2019).

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