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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

**OUTLOOK
2025**

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CAN THE WORLD ACHIEVE THE UN 2030 AGENDA AND ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT

The adoption of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 represented a landmark global commitment to addressing pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges through the achievement of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As 2030 approaches, progress remains uneven and is increasingly threatened by climate change, widening inequalities, geopolitical tensions, public health crises, and economic instability. This paper examines whether the world can realistically achieve the 2030 Agenda within the remaining timeframe, focusing on the governance, financing, policy coherence, and international cooperation required for effective implementation. It explores the interlinkages and trade-offs among the SDGs, emphasising the need for integrated and systemic approaches rather than fragmented efforts. The paper outlines possible outcomes ranging from accelerated progress driven by transformative policies, technological innovation, and strengthened multilateral partnerships, to partial or uneven achievement characterised by regional disparities and persistent development gaps. It argues that while the full realisation of all SDGs by 2030 appears increasingly unlikely, substantial and meaningful progress remains attainable if urgent, coordinated, and inclusive action is prioritised at all levels.

KEYWORDS: *United Nations; Sustainable Development Goals; 2030 Agenda; Transformative Policies; Technological Innovation; Climate Change; Geopolitical Tensions; Public Health Crisis.*

CITATION: Ahmed, A. (2025): Can the world achieve the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. *World Sustainable Development Outlook 2025*, Vol. 21, pp. 1-7. WASD: London, United Kingdom.

RECEIVED: 30 December 2025 / **REVISED:** 03 January 2026 / **ACCEPTED:** 06 January 2026 / **PUBLISHED:** 07 January 2026



INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent an ambitious and universal framework aimed at addressing the world's most pressing economic, social, and environmental challenges (Wennersten and Qie, 2017). Adopted in 2015 by all UN Member States, the Agenda is centred on 17 SDGs designed to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, protect the planet, and promote peace and prosperity for all countries (Naim et al., 2024). Unlike previous development frameworks, the SDGs apply to all countries and emphasise the interconnected nature of development challenges, requiring collective and coordinated global action (UN-MCPR, 2024).

This chapter explores the central question of whether the world can realistically achieve the 2030 Agenda within the remaining timeframe. It provides an overview of current progress and examines the structural and systemic factors influencing implementation, including governance capacity, financing mechanisms, policy coherence, and international cooperation. These elements are critical to translating global commitments into effective national and local actions, particularly in contexts where institutional capacity and resources remain limited.

The SDGs offer significant potential benefits if effectively implemented (UN-MCPR, 2024). They provide a shared vision for sustainable development (SD), encourage inclusive economic growth, support social justice, and promote environmental sustainability (Arora and Mishra, 2019). By fostering innovation, strengthening partnerships, and aligning public and private investments with long-term development objectives, the agenda has the capacity to drive transformative change and improve quality of life across diverse societies (Adenle et al., 2023).

However, the pursuit of the SDGs faces considerable challenges. Progress has been uneven across regions and goals, with climate change, widening inequalities, geopolitical instability, public health crises, and economic shocks undermining development gains. Additionally, tensions and trade-offs between goals, insufficient financing, data gaps, and fragmented policy approaches continue to hinder effective implementation (UN-ESCAP, 2021). These challenges highlight the need for integrated, evidence-based, and adaptive strategies.

The chapter also considers possible outcomes for the 2030 Agenda. These range from accelerated progress through strengthened political commitment, technological innovation, and enhanced multilateral cooperation, to partial achievement marked by regional disparities and persistent development gaps. While the full realisation of all SDGs by 2030 appears increasingly unlikely, the analysis suggests that meaningful progress remains achievable. The chapter concludes that the ultimate success of the 2030 Agenda will depend on urgent, coordinated, and inclusive action at global, national, and local levels, ensuring that no one is left behind.

FACTORS OF SDG IMPLEMENTATION

Governance Capacity

Effective institutions and leadership are essential to plan, implement, and monitor SDG-related policies. Strong governance ensures accountability, transparency, and the ability to respond to emerging challenges at both national and local levels.

Financing Mechanisms

Adequate and sustainable funding is critical for achieving the SDGs. This includes mobilising domestic resources, accessing international aid, and aligning private sector investment with long-term development priorities.

Policy Coherence and International Cooperation

Coordinated policies across sectors and countries help manage trade-offs and maximise synergies between goals. Collaboration between governments, international organisations, and other stakeholders strengthens capacity, knowledge sharing, and joint action for sustainable development.

CHALLENGES

Achieving the SDGs face multiple and interconnected challenges. Progress remains uneven across regions and sectors, with many low- and middle-income countries constrained by limited institutional capacity, weak governance structures, and insufficient technical expertise. These limitations affect the ability to design, implement, and monitor effective SDG-related policies at national and local levels.

Financing represents a major obstacle to SDG implementation. The scale of investment required far exceeds current levels of public funding, particularly in areas such as climate action, health, education, and infrastructure. Many countries face rising debt burdens, constrained fiscal space, and declining development assistance, while private sector investment is often insufficiently aligned with long-term sustainability objectives.

Global crises further complicate progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Climate change, geopolitical tensions, pandemics, and economic instability have disrupted development trajectories, reversed hard-won gains, and diverted political attention and resources away





from sustainable development priorities. In addition, policy fragmentation and siloed approaches limit the effectiveness of interventions, while data gaps and weak monitoring systems undermine accountability and evidence-based decision-making.

OUTCOMES

Accelerated Progress Outcome

One possible outcome for the 2030 Agenda is accelerated progress driven by renewed political commitment and effective leadership at national and international levels. Stronger governance, clearer accountability mechanisms, and sustained policy coherence can enable countries to scale up successful interventions. Technological innovation, particularly in digitalisation, renewable energy, and data systems, may further enhance efficiency and expand access to essential services, while strengthened multilateral cooperation can support knowledge sharing and resource mobilisation.

Partial and Uneven Achievement Outcome

A second likely outcome is partial achievement of the SDGs, characterised by uneven progress across regions and sectors. Some countries and goals may experience significant advances, particularly where institutional capacity, financing, and political stability are strong. However, others may lag due to conflict, economic vulnerability, climate impacts, or weak governance, leading to persistent regional disparities and development gaps.

Delayed or Stagnated Progress Outcome

In the absence of urgent and coordinated action, progress towards the SDGs may stagnate or be delayed beyond 2030. Continued global crises, insufficient financing, and fragmented policy approaches could undermine development efforts and reverse existing gains. This outcome would widen inequalities both within and between countries and weaken confidence in global development frameworks.

Transformative Legacy Outcome

Despite these risks, the agenda may still deliver a transformative legacy even if all targets are not fully met by 2030. Meaningful progress in poverty reduction, social inclusion,

environmental protection, and institutional strengthening can lay the foundations for long-term sustainable development. The ultimate outcome will depend on inclusive, collaborative, and adaptive action at global, national, and local levels, ensuring that the principle of leaving no one behind remains central to development efforts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address these challenges, stronger and more effective governance is essential at all levels. Governments should prioritise policy coherence and integrated planning to manage trade-offs and maximise synergies among the SDGs. Strengthening institutions, enhancing transparency, and improving data collection and monitoring systems will support better implementation and accountability.

Mobilising adequate and sustainable financing is critical to accelerating progress. This requires scaling up domestic resource mobilisation, improving access to concessional finance, promoting innovative financing mechanisms, and aligning private sector investment with sustainability goals. International cooperation and development finance must be strengthened, particularly to support the most vulnerable countries.

Finally, renewed political commitment and inclusive partnerships are vital to advancing the 2030 Agenda. Greater collaboration among governments, international organisations, the private sector, civil society, and local communities can foster innovation, share knowledge, and ensure that development strategies are inclusive and resilient. Urgent, coordinated, and long-term action remains key to achieving meaningful progress and securing a legacy for the SDGs.

CONCLUSIONS

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development remains a vital global framework for addressing complex and interconnected development challenges, despite growing uncertainties surrounding its full achievement by 2030. While progress towards the SDGs have been uneven and constrained by financial, institutional, and geopolitical challenges, the analysis demonstrates that meaningful advances are still possible through strengthened political commitment, integrated policy approaches, adequate financing, and enhanced international cooperation. Even if all targets are not fully realised within the designated timeframe, sustained and inclusive action can generate lasting development gains and establish a strong foundation for long-term sustainability, reinforcing the agenda's central principle of leaving no one behind.

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12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION



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14 LIFE BELOW WATER



15 LIFE ON LAND



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the fantastic research work contribution by Professor Arshi Naim in the first draft of the chapter and for her valuable reviewing and editorial comments in the chapter.

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