

THE ROLE OF AGRICULTURE IN TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

The United Nations member states, in 25 September 2015, adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals (also known as Global Development Goals) with 169 targets as a part of the resolution ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’ to end poverty, protect the planet and to ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. It is important to follow these 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG’s) in all sectors to have a green and healthy planet.



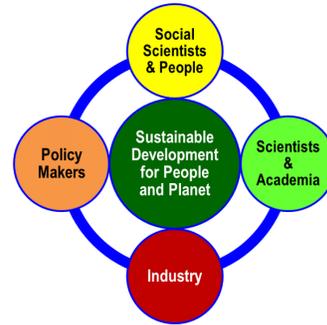
fig.1: United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
(Source: *Sustainable Development Goals* by United Nations Development Goals)

Why is it important to follow these SDGs in Agriculture?

Among all other sectors, Agriculture is the one sector which holds all the 17 SDGs together. Among the 17 SDGs, the goals having direct relevance to agriculture are- Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and Goal 13 (Climate Action), besides the Goal 15 (Life on Land). Hence, it is required to attain these SDGs so that we can fulfil the United Nations agenda to transform our world in a sustainable way by 2030.

How to achieve the SDGs?

To achieve these SDGs, a successful collaboration between the stakeholders is required. The stakeholders are Social Scientists and people, Scientists and Academia, Industry and Policy makers (Bhore, 2016). All the stakeholders should perform their roles sincerely then only it is possible to attain these goals.



Role of social scientists and people: Social Sciences play an important role in community empowerment and socio-economic development of the farming community in India. Any research venture is aimed to serve the society. Social Scientists are therefore very important in attaining these goals. They can contribute remarkably by helping in attaining feedback and impact assessments, in order to carry out research, education and training programmes.

Every individual who is involved in the food system be it farmers, food processors, the distributors, the retailers, and consumers should play a role in ensuring that there exists a sustainable agricultural system. Farmers could adopt sustainable farming techniques like conservation agriculture, organic farming, permaculture, biodynamic farming and agroforestry to ensure that the environment is sustained. On the other hand, consumers and retailers can show their participation by looking for value based foods that are planted using sustainable techniques. This is critical because farmers alone cannot bring agricultural sustainability.

Role of Scientists and Academia: It is the role of the agricultural scientists and research institutes and universities to disseminate scientific understanding about how the existing farming practices are causing environmental degradation and to find innovative agricultural technologies towards sustainable agriculture.

Role of Policy Makers: Social policy consists of guidelines, principles, legislation and activities that affect the living conditions instrumental in human welfare. The social policies influence the SDGs to a large extent since it plays an important role in determining social protection programs, investments, subsidies and enhancing farmers' income. Therefore, the policy makers play a very important role in achieving sustainable development goals.

Challenges faced in achieving the SDGs

Indian agriculture is facing the critical challenge of feeding an escalating human population under increasingly declining soil quality and changing climatic conditions. The escalating population also puts a limit to the available natural resources. Moreover, most of the farmers in India are more inclined towards following traditional and conventional agricultural practices as they are more adapted with their old ways and are reluctant in adopting new technologies. These practices cause misuse of natural resources, reducing soil fertility causing soil erosion and contributing to global climatic change. The farmers in India are mostly uneducated and they are unaware about the sustainable development practices.

It is also very difficult to establish a promising collaboration between the stakeholders, because of lack of inter-department collaboration. It becomes very difficult to realize these goals. There also exist inner problems like corruption, lack of desire of the officials to work, production of false progress reports and numerous others.

Impact of COVID 19 on the SDGS

The COVID 19 is the worst human and economic crisis of our lifetime. It has unleashed an unprecedented crisis, causing further disruption to SDG progress, which affects the poorest and most vulnerable section of the society. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guatterres stressed that, “Although the novel coronavirus affects every person and community, it does not do so equally. Instead it has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and injustice.”

Impact of COVID 19 on the Agricultural Community

The sections of society who were previously secure are now at the risk of poverty and hunger due to lost incomes, limited social protection and rising prices. It has become very difficult for the agricultural labourers to find employment and their life has become similar to a nightmare. They are exposed to problems like lack of adequate housing, proper hygiene and medical facilities. Therefore, they are at a greater risk of being affected by the disease. Women and children are being affected most by the pandemic. Their health and vaccination services have been disrupted and a surge in reports of domestic violence against women and children has risen. The education of the children has also come to a halt and they are at a much greater risk of being involved in child labour, child marriage and child trafficking.

Conclusion

The SDGs in agriculture can be achieved through a very effective collaboration between the four stakeholders (i) The Social Scientists and people (ii) Scientists and Academia (iii) Industry and (iv) Policy makers. But many challenges exist in achieving these SDGs (i) The escalating population (ii) Lack of effective collaboration (iii) Reluctance of the farmers and the people to adopt sustainable practices (iv) Low maintenance of sustainable practices in industries (v) Corruption (vi) Illiteracy.

And now the global pandemic has caused a huge setback in attaining these goals (i) It has led to underemployment and unemployment (ii) disruption of health and vaccination services

(iii) education of the children has come to a halt and they are greater risks of being involved in child labour, child marriage and child trafficking. (iv) the sections of society who were previously secure are now also at risk of poverty and hunger. This crisis has put the Sustainable Development Goals to a standstill and has made it more challenging to fulfil the United Nations Agenda by 2030.

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