Social Impacts and Implications of Coronavirus Pandemic on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda

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Abstract

This paper is a qualitative study with exploring selected documents in sustainability field that focuses on the observed, expected and potential impacts of COVID-19 pandemic to address social challenges of COVID-19 and help to mitigate its long-term impacts. This endeavor may serve as a potential way for moving towards more sustainable world during and after the global crisis by exploring and identifying what is happening during and post coronavirus pandemic.

Keywords

Coronavirus Pandemic, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda, Social Impacts

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began as a health crisis, has swiftly evolved into a multifaceted crisis encompassing the economic and humanitarian spheres (Jan et al., 2021). Its repercussions have been felt by billions of people worldwide (Ashford et al., 2020), amplifying and exacerbating pre-existing inequalities (UN, 2020a) to varying degrees across the globe.

While some studies have noted the positive environmental effects of the pandemic, such as reduced pollution (Srivastava et al., 2020; Fuso Nerini et al., 2020), its impact on social sustainability has been profound. It "has highly affected social sustainability by jeopardizing the life quality, human well-being, healthy and safe lives" (Ranjbari et al., 2021: p. 24).

COVID-19 has been described as a test of our human spirit (UN, 2020a) and

an unprecedented humanitarian crisis (van Barneveld et al., 2020). It poses a significant threat to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) across all five areas of the 2030 Agenda, which encompass goals related to people (goals 1 - 6), prosperity (goals 7 - 11), planet (goals 12 - 15), peace (goal 16), and partnerships (goal 17) (Srivastava et al., 2020).

The pandemic has exacerbated social issues by deepening poverty, increasing inequalities, triggering economic recessions, and straining healthcare systems. The implementation of the UN Agenda lies in safely, well-being and healthy situations. Hence, many goals and their targets are under threat due to the pandemic.

This emergency has necessitated a reevaluation of various policies and activities, from individual to global levels, in diverse areas of human life. The pursuit of the SDGs and the overarching goal of sustainability amid and after the COVID-19 pandemic have become more difficult and markedly challenging. This crisis affects global economic and poses additional burden to vulnerable economics.

Consequently, future efforts must adopt a comprehensive perspective and a deeper understanding of the situation to evaluate effectively. They require a global common commitment and responsibility to advance the pursuit of SDGs and facilitate a robust recovery from COVID-19 to accelerate endeavors to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

In summary, the emergence of COVID-19 in December 2019 has revealed a series of new challenges within the economic and social pillars of sustainability. It has introduced new challenge to the implementation of the SDGs Agenda, particularly affecting the socio-economic aspects of SDGs. Therefore, this paper seeks to address the social dimension of the Agenda as a means to mitigate the pandemic's negative effects and move to a more promising future.

2. Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (Agenda 2030)

2.1. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Sustainable development, as defined in the United Nations Conference (Brundtland Report), is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WECD, 1987: p. 1). This concept embraces three interrelated pillars: environmental, economic, and social sustainability.

Social sustainability, as a fundamental dimension of sustainable development, is essential for creating a more equitable future and achieving better lives for present and future generations.

It, also involves identifying, adapting, and solving social challenges to enhance the well-being of all human-beings.

To guide the pursuit of sustainable development, several key international documents, declarations, and conventions have emerged over time. These in-

clude the Stockholm Conference on Environment and Development, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and most prominently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These documents serve as globally accepted guidelines, offering a framework for creating a more sustainable world. Additionally, they provide benchmarks for measuring, evaluating, and assessing progress in the development process.

Nearly 50 years after Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (1972), the last and the main document is The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The UN Agenda 2030 for sustainable development centers its objectives on the well-being of both people and the planet during the period from 2015 to 2030. In essence, this agenda calls for human actions that address and mitigate current challenges, with a focus on achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their 169 associated targets. These goals encompass a broad spectrum, including economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection.

2.2. Questions

- How the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts affect the future of the SDGs Agenda; and the future of the world?
- What are the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for social aspect of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
- How to respond to the pandemic and mitigate the potential risks and negative effects associated with the COVID-19 pandemic; and to amplify the positive impacts and turn this crisis into an opportunity in during and post COVID-19 pandemic?

3. COVID-19 and SDGs Agenda

Based on the main aim of the paper on the social development of 2030 Agenda, the goals are designed in 5 areas.

3.1. The Well-Being of Individuals (SDG1: No Poverty; SDG2: Zero Hunger)

There is no doubt, "Goal 1 is one of the most negatively impacted SDGs by the current pandemic COVID-19" (Alibegovic et al., 2020: p. 5). The pandemic has significantly contributed to the widening of the poverty gap (Fenner & Cernev, 2021) during and the post COVID-19, particularly affecting vulnerable groups and those who were already living in poverty.

According to the World Bank, the ongoing economic crises resulting from the pandemic may force millions of people into poverty (SDG 1) (Gulseven et al., 2020). "Depending on the scale of the economic shock, COVID-19 is likely to push approximately 40 - 60 million people" (Mukarram, 2020: p. 255) and possibly even "100 million people into extreme poverty in 2020" (Fuso Nerini et al., 2020: p. 3).

The pandemic has also exacerbated the challenges related to achieving Goal 2 (SDG 2), which aims to end hunger and all forms of malnutrition; and ensure access to food for all individuals.

According to a report by the UN (2020c) on hunger, the world is not on track to achieve SDG2, especially in ensuring access to food for the poor and those living in vulnerable situations by 2030 (Ranjbari et al., 2021).

With regard to these 2 goals, the COVID-19 crisis has placed more pressure on food production, supply chains, and household incomes, with the most significant impact felt by the poorest individuals (The Lancet, 2020). This has led to an unprecedented increase in the use of food banks in rich countries (Fenner & Cernev, 2021).

"Food security is a major issue in remote communities under lockdown" (van Barneveld et al., 2020: p. 139). Limited food supplies, scarcity of food, increased hunger and malnutrition contribute to a worsen situation towards achieving SDG2 by 2030.

Considering the crucial role of these two goals and their impact on other SDGs, addressing increased poverty effectively, both at the local and global levels, is essential. It is imperative to define pandemic responses and recovery strategies to move beyond the crisis caused by the Coronavirus.

3.2. The Human Rights of All Human-Beings (SDG4: Quality Education; SDG5: Gender Equality)

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the fundamental roles of schools, universities, and educational institutions worldwide in supporting and ensuring the education of students. However, even before the crisis, as highlighted in a report by the UN (2020b), 617 million young people globally lacked basic mathematics and literacy skills, and over 200 million children were out of school (Ranjbari et al., 2021).

The pandemic has exacerbated this issue and identify other challenges. For instance, with the closure of schools in many countries, women have been disproportionately required to combine paid work, unpaid domestic work and home-schooling children (Wenham et al., 2020).

To address the risk posed by the COVID-19 pandemic to the education system, many countries have turned to distance learning or online learning. However, certain conditions have exacerbated the threat of the pandemic, including unequal access to educational resources and limited internet connectivity. "In developing countries, many students do not have access to the internet, or do not possess personal computers or tablets, or a safe and supportive learning environment appropriate for e-learning" (Leal Filho et al., 2020: p. 6). Families without access to resources are facing immense challenges, with migrant parents struggling to navigate online learning. For single parents, in particular, the task is impossible (van Barneveld et al., 2020: p. 141).

In the context of SDG 5 (Gender Equality), it is evident that women and girls constitute one of the most vulnerable populations to the COVID-19 pandemic. Disparities in the impact of the crisis between men and women have been observed (Gulseven et al., 2020). Emerging research and insights from past pandemics indicate that women are disproportionately affected by COVID-19

(Osland et al., 2020). Epidemics tend to exacerbate existing inequalities for women and girls (Fuso Nerini et al., 2020). "Some impacts are expected for SDG5 such as exacerbated burdens of unpaid care work for women and girls, rise of domestic violence due to heightened tensions in the household, decline in women's economic empowerment, exclusion from leadership roles and interrupted access to sexual and reproductive health" (Leal Filho et al., 2020: p. 7).

Notably, the crisis has witnessed a rise in sexual and other forms of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence against women and girls. "During the current lockdown, reports of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence against women and girls, have spiked" (UN, 2020c: p. 2; Osland et al., 2020: p. 2); and additionally, inequality and discrimination against women, girls, individuals with disabilities, and those living in extreme poverty have intensified (Gulseven et al., 2020: p. 9).

3.3. The Well-Being of Societies (SDG3: Good Health and Well-Being; SDG8: Decent Work and Economic Growth; SDG10: Reduced Inequalities)

One of the most significantly affected SDGs by the COVID-19 pandemic is SDG3, which seeks to ensure healthy lives for all and promote well-being. This Goal "is nonetheless the only Goal that the pandemic seems to impact directly" (Alibegovic et al., 2020: p. 11), and "affects the achievement of the majority of the targets within SDG3 on good health and wellbeing, with particularly severe cascading impacts for the poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups of the society" (Fuso Nerini et al., 2020: p. 3). For instance, poorer countries often lack sufficient access to vaccines, placing vulnerable groups at heightened risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic's primary focus is on saving lives against the Coronavirus, underscoring the urgent need for prioritizing public health. COVID-19 represents a public health crisis that imperils all aspects of human life, affecting individuals of all ages, genders, and economic backgrounds. "COVID-19 affects physical health most directly, but the impact on mental health also exists. Factors that affect mental health through COVID-19 include economic instability, domestic violence, substance use, derailment from regular schedule, and even insignificant things, like lack of sunlight" (Hakovirta & Denuwara, 2020: p. 2). Moreover, COVID-19 has placed "immense pressure on healthcare systems, not only to deal with COVID-19 confirmed cases, but also for the provision of medical services and care for patients with other diseases that require hospitalization. In such a situation, healthcare systems need to manage their resources and capacities effectively for increasing the sustainability of medical services and the healthcare system, on the whole, saving human lives" (Ranjbari et al., 2021: p. 30). It has also strained healthcare systems already grappling with other diseases like malaria, AIDS, and tuberculosis (Leal Filho et al., 2020: p. 10).

The response to COVID-19 has included measures such as quarantine, lock-

downs, stay-at-home policies, self-isolation, and social distancing. These public health responses aim to reduce the burden of the pandemic and help to the achievement of the interconnected goals of the 2030 Agenda, both during and after the COVID-19 period.

COVID-19, also impacts on the world economy significantly. "It is estimated that the global economy could contract even worse than all crises seen before" (Gulseven et al., 2020: p. 12); and the pandemic resulted in the loss of 400 million jobs in the second quarter of 2020 and is expected to lead to a decline in GDP per capita by 4.2% in 2020 (UN, 2020c; Ranjbari et al., 2021).

The struggle against the Coronavirus, coupled with economic recessions or collapses, has exacerbated socio-economic issues, particularly in the poorest countries or those with weaker economies affected by the pandemic.

As a global crisis in the field of economy, the impact of COVID-19 is especially harsh on those engaged in the informal economy, day laborers, temporary employees, and individuals lacking social protection coverage, including overrepresented groups such as women and migrant workers (International Labour Organization, 2021). Additionally, economic sanctions and limitations imposed by other countries, combined with economic collapse, have increased the pressure on some countries, like Iran, during the pandemic.

In the context of SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities), COVID-19 has revealed and exacerbated social and economic inequalities (Ashford et al., 2020). It highlights "how a common global challenge can have differential impacts on different countries/regions based on their socio-economic realities" (Mukarram, 2020: p. 257). "Even within wealthy countries, there are huge gaps of inequality and disparities with regards to availability and access to health and educational services and assets" (Gulseven et al., 2020: p. 15).

Developing countries, in particular, are highly vulnerable to the pandemic (Barbier & Burgess, 2020), "besides direct socio-economic impacts of the health crisis, the pandemic will affect developing countries through global supply chain disruptions, tourism industry collapse, commodity price falls, falls in remittances by migrants, capital flights and foreign investment decline" (van Barneveld et al., 2020: p. 144).

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities related to gender, wealth, and race. It has given rise to increased homelessness and hunger, particularly among vulnerable and marginalized groups, creating a double burden for these populations (Seshaiyer & McNeely, 2020). The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on vulnerable and marginalized groups underscores the urgent need for policymakers and governments to implement recovery policies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.4. Strengthening the Peace Process (SDG16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions)

SDG16 stands as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable development. Its main aim is to foster peaceful and inclusive societies that can sustainably thrive

and ensure access to justice for all. As Tanabe (2020) aptly notes, "achieving sustainability requires the promotion of human security that underpins a stable life for all" (p. 85).

The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of "justice for all segments of society" (Gulseven et al., 2020: p. 23), as well as the global value of peace and friendship around the world. It has also highlighted the power and potential of love, empathy, and kindness. However, as mentioned by Fuso Nerini et al. (2020), "all targets across SDG16 on peace, justice and strong institutions are negatively affected by the crisis" (p. 3). Despite expectations of a potential decrease in certain types of crimes due to lockdowns, the pandemic has increased in various forms of violence (Alibegovic et al., 2020). Moreover, "the crisis has enabled many leaders to accumulate or grab power at the cost of democracy and individual rights. In at least 55 countries elections have been postponed" (Fuso Nerini et al., 2020: p. 3).

As Mukarram (2020) asserts, "the world must take lessons from this crisis and envisage building more resilient and stronger societies to absorb such external shocks in future so that there is no further hindrance to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda (SDGs)" (p. 258).

The political tensions exacerbated by COVID-19 have the potential to threaten not only SDG16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) but also SDG17 (Partnerships for Goals) (The Lancet, 2020; Fenner & Cernev, 2021).

These challenging times help the world to be more connected and more commitment to making peace. Consequently, questions naturally arise, including whether the COVID-19 pandemic could lead for more global peace in the post-pandemic era and whether it creates opportunities to resolve durable conflicts?

3.5. Implementation of the Agenda (SDG17: Partnership for the Goals)

Global participation plays a pivotal role in both curbing the spread of the Coronavirus and mitigating the negative consequences of the COVID-19 crisis.

According to Fuso Nerini et al., (2020), the global partnerships outlined in SDG17 are expected to face a setback (p. 4). Consequently, countries are compelled to embrace shared obligations and commitments to devise sustainable and innovative approaches to confront this unprecedented challenge.

"Shared responsibility, global solidarity and acting together should be the basic principles for responding to the socio-economic challenges posed by COVID-19, and the world must learn from this human crisis to 'build back better'" (Mukarram, 2020: p. 258). Paradoxically, the future of the world and countries lies in responding to and coping with pandemic, as a global pandemic crisis; and implementation of Agenda 2030.

4. The Importance of Recovery Plans

In the beginning of the pandemic and in response to COVID-19, the global community expected future of the world is more ethical and equitable. Some be-

lieve that the Coronavirus can create an opportunity to help spread empathy, compassion and love, because of our shared destiny. Consequently, creating a more sustainable and equitable world has emerged as a main priority.

In addition to scenarios envisioning greater peace, there have been various post-COVID-19 scenarios, including those characterized by sustainability, chaos, or increased vulnerability.

"The German Zukunfts Institue (2020) describes four possible scenarios of how the Coronavirus crisis can transform the world. These are based on considering successful relationships versus unsuccessful relationships (optimistic versus pessimistic) and a local versus global future (disconnected versus connected). This gives rise to a number of possibilities. Everyone is against everyone, and global trade collapses. The world enters a permanent crisis mode, where the focus is on national interests and confidence in global co-operation is severely damaged. Society returns to more local structures with sustainability only dealt with locally and not globally. Alternatively, a more positive outlook sees world society learning from the crisis and developing resilient, adaptive systems in a desire to ensure real healthy environments for all peoples" (Fenner & Cernev, 2021: p. 5).

COVID-19 pandemic provides a unique opportunity to highlight the significance of both immediate and long-term recovery efforts and strategies. It calls for a shift/change in sustainable priorities at the national, regional, and international levels to address these emerging sustainability challenges. This shift aims to move towards a just, secure, and sustainable world for all.

For planning the post COVID-19, "a clear roadmap for recovery are needed" (Mukarram 2020: p. 258). It helps to evaluate progress for better implementation on SDGs, find ways to combat the new challenges and improve global collaboration and participation with the SDGs. In fact, It's a good time to refine, rethink and review progress on the SDGs in during and post COVID-19 pandemic; and design a sustainable plan for during and after COVID-19. All are needed for returning to normality lives after COVID-19; and maximizing the positive impacts, and using this as an opportunity to build more sustainable and more equal world through the lens of Sustainable Development Goals. Governments assume essential roles in this endeavor. During the pandemic, sustainable development goes beyond national strategies (Heggen et al., 2020). It is essential to amplify policy efforts and actions for COVID-19 in response to COVID-19, focusing on establishing a few clear priorities (Naidoo & Fisher, 2020). These priorities should emphasize investment in the fundamental human needs and rights, in particular who's already living in poverty and marginalized segments of society.

5. Discussion

COVID-19 and its impacts, both positive and negative, have profoundly affected global society, daily life, and the world economy. The world now faces the challenge of combating the virus while simultaneously striving to maintain essential

aspects of life.

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic have been significantly unequal. This ongoing crisis has exacerbated existing disparities and divisions within societies, resulting in socio-economic challenges and imposing extra burdens on weaker economic systems and vulnerable groups. In other words, "the COVID-19 crisis worsens the already difficult global situation" (Fuso Nerini et al., 2020: p. 2) including international efforts toward achieving SDGs.

The SDGs Agenda, the purpose and aim goal of creating a better world for all through the improvement of socio-economic aspects of human lives, environmental protection, the promotion of peace and justice, and the revitalization of global partnerships for sustainable development by 2030, has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It was predictable that this crisis would postpone the achievement of socio-economic goals of the SDGs Agenda by the 2030 deadline. This delay can be attributed to factors such as economic recession, unprecedented changes in people's lifestyles, work, and social relations, as well as changing in local and global priorities and strategies, particularly in the realm of social sustainability.

6. Conclusion

This study focuses on the people-centered goals of 2030 Agenda as social development of sustainable development. It is a fact that the emergency of the COVID-19 outbreak has compelled individuals and societies to pay more attention to interconnected issues both during and post COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true for vulnerable populations striving to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and move societies toward a more promising future.

It is clear that the current trends need more efforts, both at the grassroots and macro levels to facilitate the transition towards sustainability, thereby mitigating the negative consequences of Coronavirus pandemic on societies. The future of SDGs in a post-pandemic world remains uncertain and complex; with much hinging on the people participation as sustainable global citizens and the role of governments. It becomes evident that a fundamental factor influencing this trajectory lies in changing behavior resulting from the pandemic. The enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitate urgent attention, as they will persist for an extended period. Addressing issues relevant to the pandemic is obligatory to accelerate process towards a more sustainable future.

Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare regarding the publication of this paper.

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