Sustainable Development Goals: A Cross-Country Analysis

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Abstract

Achieving sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is a challenge for both developed and developing countries. Different countries have adopted multifarious policy measures to instate these targets. However, the performance of these countries shows a pattern of development according to their system of governance. The paper magnetizes a cross-country analysis of different nations, segmented on the basis of their system of governance, towards achieving the SDGs. It shows a trend analysis of different SDGs and the extent of challenges in these countries, in the past twenty years (2000-2019). It has been observed that the performance of federal countries is relatively better than the performance of countries with a one-party system and the countries with absolute monarchies. The paper advocates the idea of cooperative federalism and shows how it can play a definitive role in achieving SDGs.

Key Words: *SDGs, Cooperative Federalism, Monarchies, One-Party System.*

Introduction

The SDGs agenda was accredited by all member countries of the United Nations in 2012 at the Rio De Janeiro Council Meet with an objective to ameliorate standard of living, discontinuing environmental degradation and set up a partnership for development at global level[1]. On 15 September 2015, Sustainable Development Goals were implemented after a well-turned fifteen-year plan of development called the Millennium Development Goals[2]. SDGs are more comprehensive, covering 17 goals and 169 targets in juxtaposition to the MDGs which were focusing only on 8 goals and 21 targets[3].

The SDGs are a set of seventeen targets that all the member countries of the UN consentient to work upon for the preferable future. SDGs are a group of 17 goals with 169 targets and 304 indicators, prescribed by the United Nations General Assembly's Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals which is to be achieved by 2030[4]. They tackle social, economic, personal, physical and environmental issues which, again, emphasize the all-encompassing nature of sustainable development.

Source: https://www.insightsonindia.com/2018/12/28/rajya-sabha-tv-in-depth-indias-sustainable-development-goals/

The nations have adopted multifarious policy measures to achieve the SDGs targets by 2030. Throughout the period, the countries have shown significant reclamation in different SDGs indicators. According to the United Nations, Sustainable

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[1] https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/sustainable-development-goals/ (BYJU's, 2020)
[2] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/sustainable-development/SDGs/index_en.htm (Commission, 2019)
[3] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4746946/ (Sanjiv Kumar, 2016)
[4] https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/sustainable-development-goals/ (BYJU's, 2020)

Development Report, no. of deaths below 5 years have reduced from 9.8 million in 2000 to 5.4 million in 2017. The tuberculosis incidence rate declined by 21% between 2000 and 2017; vaccinations resulted in 80% decline in measles deaths between 2000 and 2017. There is an improvement in the energy sector as well. At present, almost 9 out of 10 people worldwide have access to electricity. On average, 2.3% less energy was needed to create $1 of economic output each year "between" 2010-2016. In 2018, labor productivity increased by 2.1%from 2017: the highest annual growth since 2010[5].

However, achieving SDG by 2030 is still a major challenge for all countries, especially for developing and lowers developing countries. According to the United Nations, Sustainable Development Report, the major area of concern is climate change. The UN estimates suggest that, if we do not extenuate record-high greenhouse gas emissions now, global warming is projected to reach 1.5°C in the coming decades, and its compound effects will be catastrophic and irreversible. The change in the ecosystem is going to strike the entire world and especially poor countries. This will sternly affect food production, leading to extensive food shortages and hunger, and potentially displace up to 140 million people by 2050[6]. The increasing inequality among and within countries is another challenge for the contemporary world. Developing and poor countries are still the epicenter of poverty, hunger and disease[7]. According to UN estimates, the world is not on track to end poverty by 2030. In 2015 roughly 734 million people or 10% remained under absolute poverty. And, it is expected to remain around 6% by the end of 2030[8].

The pattern of different SDGs indicator in the past twenty years demonstrate that the performance of different countries in achieving SDGs is correlated with the system of governance in that particular country. In this cross-country analysis, it has been observed that the performance of countries with federal governance system is relatively better than the countries with one-party system and the countries with absolute monarchies. The article advocates the idea of cooperative federalism and shows how it can be useful to tackle the challenges faced while achieving the SDGs.

Growth Performance of Countries with Different system of Governance

Presently, there are around 25 federal countries in the world, which constitutes 40 percent of the world population. They include some of the dominant economies in the world e.g. India, the USA, Brazil, Germany, and Canada[9]. Similarly, there are eight countries where a one-party system[10] prevails for e.g. China, Cuba, etc. and around 8 countries with an absolute monarchy system (the system in which monarch is the controller of executive branch and exercises all powers)[11]. In this article, I have analyzed the growth performance of different countries, segmented on the basis of their system of governance, towards achieving the SDGs, in the last twenty years. For this analysis, I have selected the top five federal countries[12], countries where the one-party system prevails and the countries with the absolute monarchies.

Federal Countries

country	India	United States	Germany	Brazil	Canada
2019 Global Index Score (0-100)	61.1	74.5	81.1	70.6	77.9

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[5] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2019/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2019.pdf (United Nations, 2019)

[6] ibid

[7] ibid

[8] ibid

[9] http://www.forumfed.org/countries/ (Forum of Federations, 2020)

[10] Non-democratic states in which political power is concentrated within a single political party whose operations are largely fused with the government hierarchy.

[11] https://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/wikispeedia/wpcd/wp/l/List_of_countries_by_system_of_government.htm (Wikipedia, 2007)

[12] States in which the federal government shares power with semi-independent regional governments, in many cases, the central government is (in theory) a creation of the regional governments

2019 Global Index Rank	115	35	6	57	20
Goal 1 Dashboard	orange	orange	yellow	orange	Yellow
Goal 1 Trend	⬆	↗	↗	⬇	↗
Goal 2 Dashboard	red	red	orange	orange	Orange
Goal 2 Trend	↗	↗	↗	↗	↗
Goal 3 Dashboard	red	orange	yellow	red	Orange
Goal 3 Trend	↗	↗	↗	↗	⬆
Goal 4 Dashboard	orange	yellow	yellow	orange	Green
Goal 4 Trend	.	⬆	↗	.	⬆
Goal 5 Dashboard	red	red	orange	orange	Orange
Goal 5 Trend	→	↗	→	↗	↗
Goal 6 Dashboard	red	yellow	yellow	orange	Orange
Goal 6 Trend	↗	↗	⬆	⬆	.
Goal 7 Dashboard	red	orange	yellow	green	Green
Goal 7 Trend	↗	↗	⬆	⬆	⬆
Goal 8 Dashboard	yellow	yellow	yellow	red	Yellow
Goal 8 Trend	⬆	⬆	⬆	→	⬆
Goal 9 Dashboard	red	orange	orange	yellow	Orange
Goal 9 Trend	→	⬆	⬆	↗	↗
Goal 10 Dashboard	red	red	yellow	red	Yellow
Goal 10 Trend	.	→	→	.	→
Goal 11 Dashboard	red	orange	yellow	orange	Yellow

Goal 11 Trend	→	↗	↗	↗	.
Goal 12 Dashboard	yellow	red	red	orange	Red
Goal 13 Dashboard	yellow	red	red	orange	Red
Goal 13 Trend	⬆	→	→	→	→
Goal 14 Dashboard	orange	yellow	red	orange	Orange
Goal 14 Trend	→	→	↗	↗	↗
Goal 15 Dashboard	orange	yellow	yellow	orange	Orange
Goal 15 Trend	↓	.	⬆	→	→
Goal 16 Dashboard	red	red	yellow	red	Yellow
Goal 16 Trend	→	↗	↗	→	↗
Goal 17 Dashboard	yellow	red	orange	yellow	Orange
Goal 17 Trend	.	→	⬆	↗	→

Source: Footnote[13]

The above table tracks the performance of the top five federal countries towards achieving sustainable development goals in the past twenty years. The color-coding shows the current status of each country for the respective SDGs and the arrow indicates the trend of this achievement, which is as follows:

green	Goal Achievement		⬆	On track or maintaining achievement
yellow	Challenges remain		↗	Moderately Increasing
orange	Significant challenges		→	Stagnating
red	Major challenges		↓	Decreasing

The data indicates that the overall performance of federal countries is far more efficacious than the performance of one-party states and the absolute monarchies. In federal countries, except India, almost every country has a sustainable Index score above 70; the score of Germany and Canada is above 77 which reflect that collectively, they are performing well. However, it is completely opposite for the countries with an absolute monarchy system, where almost every country has

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[13]Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2019): Sustainable Development Report 2019. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) (Sachs, 2019)

a sustainable index score below 70, which reflect their overall underachievement. The average SDG index of countries with one-party system and the countries with absolute monarchies is around 67 which is less than the average SDG index score of countries with the federal system of governance.

Countries with One-Party System

Country	China	Cuba	Syrian Arab Republic	Turkmenistan	Vietnam
2019 Global Index Score (0-100)	73.2	70.8	58.1	64.3	71.1
2019 Global Index Rank	39	56	123	101	54
Goal 1 Dashboard	yellow	gray	gray	green	Yellow
Goal 1 Trend	↑	.	.	↑	↑
Goal 2 Dashboard	orange	orange	red	orange	Red
Goal 2 Trend	↗	↗	↓	→	↗
Goal 3 Dashboard	orange	orange	red	red	Red
Goal 3 Trend	↗	↗	→	↗	↗
Goal 4 Dashboard	green	yellow	red	gray	Yellow
Goal 4 Trend	.	→	.	.	.
Goal 5 Dashboard	orange	yellow	red	yellow	Orange
Goal 5 Trend	↗	→	→	→	↗
Goal 6 Dashboard	orange	orange	orange	red	Orange
Goal 6 Trend	↗	↗	→	↑	↑
Goal 7 Dashboard	orange	yellow	yellow	yellow	Yellow
Goal 7 Trend	↗	↗	↗	↗	↑
Goal 8 Dashboard	green	green	red	red	Orange
Goal 8 Trend	↑	.	.	↑	↗
Goal 9 Dashboard	orange	red	red	red	Red
Goal 9 Trend	↑	→	→	→	↗
Goal 10 Dashboard	red	gray	orange	gray	Orange
Goal 10 Trend	.	.	.	.	.
Goal 11 Dashboard	orange	orange	red	orange	Orange
Goal 11 Trend	.	.	.	→	↑

Goal 12 Dashboard	orange	yellow	yellow	yellow	Yellow
Goal 13 Dashboard	red	orange	yellow	red	Orange
Goal 13 Trend	→	→	↑	↓	↑
Goal 14 Dashboard	red	red	red	gray	Red
Goal 14 Trend	→	→	→	.	→
Goal 15 Dashboard	orange	orange	red	orange	Red
Goal 15 Trend	→	.	→	→	↗
Goal 16 Dashboard	red	red	red	red	Red
Goal 16 Trend	.	.	.	.	.
Goal 17 Dashboard	orange	gray	orange	yellow	Yellow
Goal 17 Trend	.	.	.	.	.

Source: Footnote[14]

There are 17 sustainable Development Goals for each country, collectively 85, for every set of five countries. Due to the unavailability of data, we cannot directly compare the trends and the challenges faced by these countries in achieving SDGs in absolute numbers. So, as an approximate indicator, we have calculated the proportion of these trends and challenges to overall SDGs.

Analysis reveals that, the proportion of major and significant challenges faced by federal countries in achieving SDGs is 65.8% i.e. federal countries are facing major and significant challenges in completing almost 65% of their overall SDGs. which is considerably less in comparison to the countries with the one-party system (77%) and slightly less in comparison to the absolute monarchies (67.2%).

If we look at the trend towards maintaining achievement and moderate increment of countries' SDGs then the performance of federal countries is relatively better than the performance of non-federal countries. Federal countries are showing positive trend towards 69.4% of their overall SDGs. And it is expected that, in coming future, many of them are going to be achieved. On the other hand, the countries with the one-party system and the countries with absolute monarchies are showing positive trend towards only 61% of their overall SDGs, which is lesser in comparison to the federal countries.

Similarly, around 39% of total SDGs are facing both downward and stagnant trend in countries with one-party system and the countries with absolute monarchies, in the past twenty years. However, this ratio is around 30% in countries with the federal governance system.

Monarchies

country	Bhutan	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	United Arab Emirates
2019 Global Index Score (0-100)	67.6	67.9	66.3	64.8	69.7

[14] Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2019): Sustainable Development Report 2019. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) (Sachs, 2019).

2019 Global Index Rank	84	83	91	98	65
Goal 1 Dashboard	yellow	Gray	Gray	gray	Gray
Goal 1 Trend	↗	.	.	.	.
Goal 2 Dashboard	red	Red	Red	red	Red
Goal 2 Trend	↗	→	→	↗	→
Goal 3 Dashboard	red	Orange	Yellow	orange	Yellow
Goal 3 Trend	↗	↗	↑	↗	↗
Goal 4 Dashboard	orange	Yellow	Yellow	yellow	Yellow
Goal 4 Trend	→	→	→	.	.
Goal 5 Dashboard	red	Red	Orange	red	Orange
Goal 5 Trend	↗	→		→	→
Goal 6 Dashboard	red	Red	Red	red	Red
Goal 6 Trend	↗	↑	↑	↑	↑
Goal 7 Dashboard	yellow	Yellow	Yellow	yellow	Yellow
Goal 7 Trend	.	↗	↗	↗	↗
Goal 8 Dashboard	orange	Orange	Orange	yellow	Orange
Goal 8 Trend	.	.	.	↗	↑
Goal 9 Dashboard	red	Orange	Orange	yellow	Orange
Goal 9 Trend	↗	↗	↗	↑	↑
Goal 10 Dashboard	orange	Gray	Gray	gray	Yellow
Goal 10 Trend	.	.	.	.	.
Goal 11 Dashboard	yellow	Orange	Orange	orange	Orange
Goal 11 Trend	.	.	.	.	.
Goal 12 Dashboard	yellow	Red	Red	red	Red
Goal 13 Dashboard	yellow	Red	Red	red	Red
Goal 13 Trend	↑	→	↓	↓	↓
Goal 14 Dashboard	gray	Orange	Yellow	orange	Yellow
Goal 14 Trend	.	↗	.	↗	→
Goal 15 Dashboard	orange	Orange	Yellow	orange	Orange
Goal 15 Trend	→	.	.	→	.
Goal 16 Dashboard	yellow	Orange	Orange	orange	Orange

Goal 16 Trend	.	.	.	.	.
Goal 17 Dashboard	yellow	Yellow	Yellow	yellow	Green
Goal 17 Trend	↗	.	.	.	.

Source: Footnote[15]

After looking at these indicators, we can say that in past twenty years, the performance of federal countries in achieving SDGs is relatively better than the performance of countries with one-party system and the countries with absolute monarchies.

Cooperative federalism

Cooperative federalism is a mode of governance in which the authorities at each stage work collectively to solve generic problems, rather than formulating policies individually. The Inter- State Council (ISC), five Zonal Councils, the Finance Commission, and the recent GST Council, are the best example of cooperative federalism in India. Thus, rather than the layer-cake structure of dual federalism, cooperative federalism closely resembles a marble cake, where flavours of different layers are intermingled with each other, and each bite reveals a combination of flavours. That is why cooperative federalism is also considered as "marble-cake federalism"[16].

Why is Cooperative Federalism Important for achievement of SDGs

Instating SDGs requires different layers of decentralization. Strengthening decentralization brings about an ecosystem of cooperative & competitive federal governance system. State Governments are the central stakeholders of moving SDGs forward & they play a comprehensive role in accelerating the achievement of SDGs. For example, in India, the formation of NITI Aayog, which took the place of planning commission, gives an opportunity to state governments to propound policy measures to the Central government[17]. Similarly, the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement) & Skill Development used the recommendations of three sub-groups of chief ministers of States. These measures bestead the Government of India to perceive the role of cooperative federalism as a key contributor to implement SDGs effectively.

Challenges in Achieving SDGs and the role of Cooperative federalism

There are existential economic, political and cultural differences across nations that act as an obstruction in achieving SDGs. There are some failures in governance, prevailing in both developed and developing countries. Rising inequalities is also a major challenge globally. Human Development Index (HDI) scores presented by the Human Development Report (2014) demonstrate that inequality is highest in Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia[18], which constitute major monarchies of the world and the countries with one-party system. Given these challenges, we can see that the performance of federal countries is relatively better than the performance of non-federal countries. The non-federal countries can incorporate the policy measures adopted by the federal countries to achieve their SDGs. In this context, cooperative federalism can be used as an enabling tool in several ways:

Mobilizing Resources- In federal system resources are efficiently apportioned according to the exigency of a particular state. For e.g. in India finance commission is assigned the task to allocate the resources (tax proceeds) between centre and the states. Due to regional disparities, if some states are not able to generate revenues to meet its expenditure, then the adequate amount is transferred by the central government to the state governments to meet its requirements. In this way, the states are capacitating to formulate policies to achieve SDGs at the ground level.

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[15] Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2019): Sustainable Development Report 2019. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) (Sachs, 2019).

[16] https://definitions.uslegal.com/m/marble-cake-federalism/ (US Legal, 2019)

[17] https://india-seminar.com/2019/717/717_kk_kailash.htm (KAILASH)

[18] https://www.theigc.org/blog/sustainable-development-the-goals-and-the-challenges-ahead/ (Kattumuri, 2020)

Transformation through technology –The creation of a 'Technology Facilitation Mechanism' to facilitate capacity building and providing technical assistance to developing countries including technology development and transfer also requires cooperative Federalism.

Promoting Traditional practices- Traditional agriculture techniques like the below-sea-level farming practiced in Kuttanad, in Kerala should be promoted at a global scale. An effort to document traditional practices in the form of a traditional knowledge digital library is a step in the right direction and requires cooperative federalism.

Merging SDGs into Policy Formulation and Monitoring- Most of the SDGs are already embedded in national policies but the focus of the governments should be on formulating policies to address the gaps in current policy frameworks. More importantly, they need to be properly monitored and evaluated. Data-driven, evidence-based policy-making can be more auxiliary. A cooperative federal approach is particularly useful in this context.

Improving awareness and participation- Civil society can play a key role in spreading awareness as well as keeping governments at all levels accountable to SDGs. A Cooperative Federal approach is important in promoting SDGs.

Creating mutually beneficial Global Partnerships- A healthy global partnerships as prescribed in Goal 17 is very important for achieving sustainable development goals. By formulating mutually beneficial trade agreements, signing treaties to avoid any geopolitical disturbances can help in establishing global harmony and vitalizing trade. Cooperative federalism is going to be more effective in this context.

Conclusion

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development has introduced the Sustainable Development Goals in 2012 in Rio de Janeiro following the Millennium Development Goals which are due to expire at the end of 2015. They are formulated to establish social harmony by promoting equality, reducing poverty and to protect our ecosystem for all societies and our future generation. The analysis shows that the achievement of sustainable development goals is biased towards the federal countries i.e. the performance of federal countries outperformed the performance of non-federal countries in almost all the SDG indicators in past twenty years. It shows how the cooperative federalism can play a pivotal role in achieving the SDGs. However, it will not be easy for the non-federal countries to change the system of governance; it can idolize these federal countries and use the policy measures adopted by them to achieve SDGs.