

# Overcoming Challenges to Achieve Sustainable Development Goals: Governance, Data, and Policy Perspectives

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable development has become an international priority, responding to a change of perspective from conventional models of economic growth that tended to disregard environmental and social aspects. In contrast to previous strategies focused on national economic advancement in isolation, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a collective international pledge to promoting inclusive, equitable, and eco-friendly development. This essay examines India's multifaceted challenges in the attainment of SDGs beyond simply financial constraints. These are ineffective implementation of policies, data gaps, fragmentation in governance, and the omission of interlink ages between objectives. Even with India's strong policy interventions like Swachh Bharat Mission, Poshan Abhiyaan, and National Solar Mission, there are still large gaps in monitoring, coordination, and implementation at the grassroots level. The paper also highlights the necessity of a robust data system, multi-level governance, and context-specific budgeting to drive change. Finally, implementation of the SDGs in India will involve a systemic, holistic strategy that takes national aspiration and global sustainability needs into harmony.

**Key Words:** *Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).*

## INTRODUCTION

With the current global context, the pursuit of sustainable development has become a shared aspiration that unites world economies in the name of a shared vision for an inclusive, equitable, and environmentally oriented future. This is a fundamental departure from earlier paradigms of development where national economic advancement constituted the prevailing emphasis at the expense of environmental sustainability and social equity. Historically, governments had set more focus on raising industrial output, accelerating infrastructure development,

and raising GDP, sometimes at the cost of long-term effects of natural resource depletion and environmental degradation.

This unrelenting quest for economic dominance and industrial might has led to the creation of immense inequalities among nations, systematic exploitation of natural resources, and mounting pressure on the earth's balance of ecology. The ill effects are now self-evident: heightened global warming, unstable climatic patterns, loss of species diversity, and extensive socio-economic vulnerabilities—particularly on the part of developing nations. Recognizing these interconnected challenges, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015—a set of 17 comprehensive goals that are to guide global development until 2030. The goals are to align economic development with social justice and environmental protection. But it is not a straightforward process, especially for countries like India, where rapid economic growth goes hand in hand with chronic maladies such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. This paper looks at the multifaceted challenges for India in the quest to attain the SDGs through an analysis of the barrierages in policy, governance, resource allocation, and public engagement that impede the pace towards a true sustainable future. Sustainable Development has now become the buzz word of the world. The struggle for growth and superiority has created imbalance in the economic development of the world, drained some of the natural resources and thus has altered the environmental equilibrium. The Sustainable Development Goals set a uniquely ambitious and expansive agenda for global development by 2030. NITI Aayog is the national agency tasked with rolling out the SDGs in the country, guiding the 2030 Agenda through the philosophy of cooperative and competitive federalism.

The structures, organizations, and procedures that are used to plan, coordinate, and carry out measures and initiatives around the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs, at the federal, state, and local levels are referred to as executive administration in the setting of the present investigation. Clear responsibilities, strong interagency coordination, and broad accountable measures are all made possible by efficient administration. The systems, indicators, and instruments used to gather, track, and evaluate data pertaining to the advancement of SDG targets are referred to as data in this study. Measuring whether resources are reaching the intended beneficiaries, identifying gaps, and directing prompt policy adjustments all depend on accurate, real-time, and segmented information. Lastly, policy viewpoints emphasize how industry approaches and growth designs are

created, modified, and combined to meet various local needs while striking a balance.

**Governance** refers to framework of organizations, responsibilities, and decision-making procedures that direct the planning, coordinating, and enacted of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the federal, state, and local levels is referred to as governance.

**Data encompasses** the collection in order to track progress, identify gaps, and support evidence-based decisions for achieving the SDGs, data must be gathered, measured, monitored, and analyzed in a timely, accurate, and comprehensive manner.

**Policy Perspectives** in order to respond to local contexts, control alternatives and goal synergies, and make sure policies are realistic and achievable in the real world; policy perspectives are used in the design, harmony, and carry out of industry plans and development strategies. All of these variables combine to serve as the cornerstone for removing obstacles and converting SDG pledges into quantifiable results.

### **The Sustainable Development Goals**

The theory of sustainable development became globally recognized with the release of the Brundtland Commission report entitled *Our Common Future* in 1987. This groundbreaking United Nations commissioned report came up with a vision-oriented definition that remains influential today: "Sustainable development is development that is capable of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Two basic principles take the center stage with this definition:

**Intra-generational equity** – providing equal development for all the people currently living.

**Inter-generational equity** – keeping what the world and resources are, so that the future generations can live as well.

It monitors national and sub-national progress through numerous tools such as the SDG India Index and Dashboard, Multidimensional Poverty Index: Progress Review 2023, North-Eastern Region Index and Dashboard, etc. Localization of the SDGs is also essential to leave no one behind and is a focus area for the division. These initiatives have made statistical machinery stronger and established a robust monitoring mechanism for all 17 Goals and over 100 indicators at the national level. With this more detailed and richer version, it is

our endeavor to reassert India's leadership in driving the SDG agenda. At this juncture this paper tries to understand the challenges being faced by India in achieving the Sustainable development goals. The article also tries to suggest solutions to surmount the challenges.

India demonstrates its commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through various national missions and policy frameworks; however, the practical execution of many goals encounters numerous challenges. SDG 1 (No Poverty) is particularly concerning in states like Meghalaya, where poverty continues to be an issue despite specific initiatives aimed at alleviation. SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) is tackled through major programs like Poshan Abhiyaan, which seeks to enhance the nutritional health of mothers and children, yet nutritional deficiencies persist in vulnerable groups. SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) is integrated into broader development discussions, revealing ongoing public health risks exacerbated by environmental and social pressures. In education, SDG 4 (Quality Education) remains inadequately addressed in states such as Odisha, where increased funding has not led to significant improvements in educational outcomes. For SDG 5 (Gender Equality), initiatives like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao are aimed at combating gender discrimination and addressing the declining child sex ratio. Significant progress has been made in access to basic infrastructure under SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) through the Swachh Bharat Mission and Jal Jeevan Mission; however, issues related to quality and equal access are still prevalent. India's energy initiatives align with SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) through the National Solar Mission, which advocates for the adoption of renewable energy, but the sector still faces challenges in terms of infrastructure and scalability. Employment and economic inclusion related to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) are being addressed with the Skill India Mission, but its effectiveness must be assessed in relation to SDG 13 (Climate Action), as economic growth can sometimes conflict with environmental sustainability if not managed properly. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) highlights development disparities across states, underscoring the need for customized and inclusive policy approaches. Lastly, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) emphasizes governance, with states like Haryana struggling despite sufficient funds due to administrative and institutional inefficiencies. These interconnected issues highlight the need for a comprehensive, coordinated, and localized strategy to successfully achieve the SDGs in India.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

The global agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has largely been identified as an international template for addressing complicated social, economic, and environmental issues (United Nations, 2015). Numerous studies emphasize the paramount importance of effective policy implementation and well-established monitoring systems to track progress in achieving these goals (Sachs et al., 2019). However, one of the recurring themes in the literature is the gap between policy intentions and ground realities, with sound policy intentions often running into roadblocks in terms of available resources, coordination challenges, and the absence of local acceptance (Kumar & Singh, 2021). For example, research on regional implementation in India highlights how certain SDG indicators are declining with very high budgetary outlays, reflecting the lack of convergence between the financial inputs and actual outcomes (Sharma et al., 2020).

Data limitations are also highlighted as a critical barrier to SDG development. Poor and unsystematic data collection impedes accurate measurement of outcomes, and the decision-making becomes ineffective (Bhattacharya et al., 2020). Scholars claim that real-time, disaggregated data are essential to understand inequality in populations and that no one should be left behind (Müller & Kroll, 2022). Besides, conventional statistical frameworks might lack the granularity to capture the minute alterations in SDG indicators, particularly related to the social and environmental dimensions (Kumar et al., 2021). Inadequate data could lead to inefficient resource allocation and undermine evidence-based decision-making, according to various case studies of developing countries.

Another significant concern discussed in the literature is the lack of treatment for interlink ages, trade-offs, and synergies among the SDGs. The interconnected nature of the goals necessitates integrated approaches to tackle multiple goals concurrently (Nilsson et al., 2018). For instance, economic development (Goal 8) may sometimes be incompatible with action against climate change (Goal 13), and failure to address such incompatibilities can compromise long-term sustainability (Le Blanc, 2015). Scholars advocate cross-sectorial systems and systems thinking approaches that model these interactions to optimize utilization of resources and benefits among goals (Weitz et al., 2017). Such an integrated approach is needed to avoid fragmented interventions that could have negative

unintended results Governance and institutional frameworks are termed huge hindrances to achieving SDGs. Ineffective and unorganized decision-making and lack of coordination among different agencies lead to inefficiencies and policy inconsistency (Hossain & Hossain, 2020). There is a need for proper multi-level government with clear-cut roles and responsibilities at national, regional, and local levels to balance and make the government accountable (UNDP, 2021). Participatory governance mechanisms and transparent budgeting have been seen to increase responsiveness towards the community needs, especially for vulnerable communities (Singh & Jain, 2019). However, institutional capacity gaps, bureaucratic opposition, and political processes generally dampen such changes in governance, calling for ongoing institutional strengthening efforts. Finally, the SDG financing literature emphasizes budgeting for priorities at the local level and innovative funding models (Tara & Lee, 2020). While government expenditures and foreign contributions supply most of the funding, mobilizing private investment and partnerships is gaining momentum to scale up actions (Sachs et al., 2019). Participatory budgeting programs guarantee that funds end up where they will have the greatest local impact, deepening equity and local ownership of development initiatives (Narayan et al., 2021). Pairing financing actions with data-driven monitoring and governance transformation provides an integrated approach for accelerating SDG progress.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine the main challenges of Sustainable Development Goals' implementation at national and sub-national levels, such as governance, data, and policy gaps.
2. To assess the contribution of data systems and monitoring frameworks to measuring SDG progress and areas for improvement.
3. To analyze the interlinkages, trade-offs, and synergies between various SDGs and their implications for integrated policy-making.

## **METHODOLOGY**

SDG India Indexes, NITI Aayog reports, national conduct reports, secondary data, and published research are all qualitatively synthesized in this paper. The execution actualities are demonstrated by case studies such as the National Solar

Mission, Poshan Abhiyaan, or Swachh Bharat Mission. State-level performance on specific SDGs is used to analyze spending and outcome gaps.

The core materials comprise published scholarly papers, government documents, policy reports, working papers, and appropriate grey literature from national bodies like NITI Aayog and global organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and UNCTAD. In particular, India's important national programs like the Swachh Bharat Mission, Poshan Abhiyaan, National Solar Mission, and associated state-level performance data are examined in order to demonstrate India's SDG implementation realities. A thematic analysis framework informs the integration and interpretation of data, with a focus on three related areas: governance structures, data systems, and policy coherence. Critical barriers, overlaps, and interlink ages across these dimensions are identified in the study to tell a coherent story of India's SDG implementation gaps. Conceptual synthesis makes it possible to distill generalized insights and evidence-based recommendations to enhance governance structures, data ecosystems, and policy frameworks, consequently advancing the national SDG agenda.

Sustainable development, as imagined by the vision of the report, means balancing growth, social justice, and protection of the environment—these three aspects of sustainability. It resists economic-growth-driven models of traditional growth at the expense of ecological integrity and social justice. Rather, it promotes a new way in which developments decisions are responsibly taken with consideration to the long-term effects on human beings and the planet. To this appeal for international cooperation, in 2015 the United Nations endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by the establishment of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a global call for action to eradicate poverty, safeguard the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity by the year 2030.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an overarching framework of the United Nations of 2015, designed to tackle universal challenges and ensure prosperity with a healthy planet. The 17 interconnected goals are a road map for a better and sustainable future for everyone by 2030.

In a country as diverse and big as India, attaining the Goals for Sustainable Development will require not just setting high targets; the situation is going to want discuss ingrained issues with governance frameworks, trustworthy data systems, and cogent policy frameworks. Institutional responsibilities that

intersect, a lack of coordination at each level of government, and disjointed adoption frequently result in ineffectiveness the fact that impedes progression. On the other hand, it becomes challenging to precisely track results, spot gaps, and modify interventions where they have the greatest need in the absence of reliable, real-time, and categorized information. Centrally planned policies can have limited effects on communities that ought to gain the most given that they frequently fail to take local circumstances into account. This study emphasizes that only an integrated, well-coordinated, and evidence-based approach can effectively address the governance, data, and policy dimensions.

### **Measures taken for implementing SDGs in India**

NITI Aayog, the think tank of choice for the Government of India, has been assigned the responsibility of facilitating the SDGs. States have also been suggested to carry out the same mapping of their schemes, including centrally sponsored schemes. Issues in the achievement of SDGs in India. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implies overcoming issues of governance, data management, and policymaking.

Effective governance structures are critical to coordinate national and sub-national action, policy coherence, and inclusive participation. Nevertheless, fragmented institutional designs and poor inter-agency coordination are recurring bottlenecks to advancement. Effective data systems are needed to monitor and analyze SDG implementation.

Yet, most nations face problems of poor data gathering systems, lack of uniform indicators, and poor capacity for data analysis. Adaptability and evidence-based policy making must be implemented, synthesizing lessons from various actors in a manner that takes account of the transversely of sustainable development. These issues must be resolved by a common effort that develops institutional strength, enhances data infrastructures, and enables inter-sectorial policy integration. Encouraging collective responses and embracing technological solutions, nations are in a position to better handle the complexities of sustainable development and progress more rapidly in the pursuit of the SDGs. Four areas have been termed as areas of concern for India in Achieving SDGs. They are examined below

### **Defining Indicators**

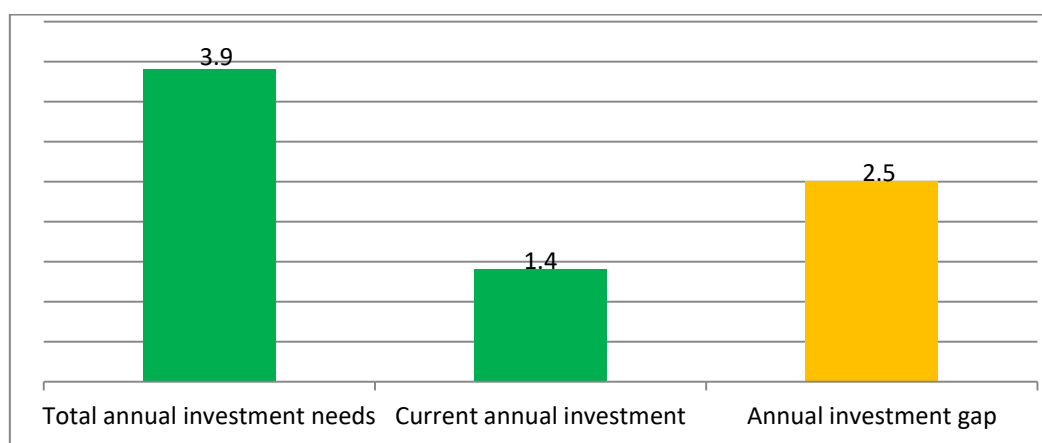
One of the major challenges for India is devising suitable indicators to effectively monitor the progress of SDGs. India's past records reveal that it has not been very successful in setting relevant indicators to measure outcomes. The definition



for “safe” drinking water has been misconstrued with the availability of hand pumps and tube wells and the official data suggested that 86% of Indians had access to safe drinking water and therefore were “on track” for the MDG goal on drinking water. But the number of waterborne diseases and deaths due to diarrhea are quite high in India.

**Monitoring and Ownership:** A third significant challenge in implementing SDGs would be with respect to ownership. Though NITI Aayog is expected to play the lead role in tracking the progress of SDGs, its members have expressed reservations on being able to take on this mammoth task.

Fig 2 Gap in funding SDGs in developing countries



The investment gap figures 2 (roughly USD 3.9 trillion needed, USD 1.4 trillion actual, and ~2.5 trillion gap) are in line with the internationally recognized estimates released by the World Bank, UNCTAD, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).

The bar chart in Figure 2, titled "Gap in Funding SDGs in Developing Countries," clearly depicts the substantial difference between the financial resources needed and those currently available to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in developing countries. The data indicates that around USD 3.9 trillion is required annually to fulfill the SDGs, while only USD 1.4 trillion is currently being invested each year, leading to a funding gap of USD 2.5 trillion. This shortfall highlights a significant obstacle in mobilizing adequate financial resources for essential sustainable development efforts, including poverty reduction, education, healthcare, and climate resilience.

These findings are consistent with well-recognized global assessments from key international organizations like the World Bank, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the United Nations Sustainable

Development Solutions Network (SDSN). These entities have repeatedly emphasized the pressing need to close this funding gap by exploring innovative financing options, encouraging greater private sector involvement, and enhancing international collaboration. The analysis underscores the importance of global financial reforms and specific policy initiatives aimed at accelerating progress toward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The lack of fiscal room to meet the massive financing needs is an important hurdle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). India's right now is still not nearly enough to close the financial gap, yet emerging markets across the globe are thought to want USD 4 trillion annually for achieving the SDG targets. The nation also must deal with conflicting budgetary demands from vital industries like infrastructure, healthcare, and education, which usually limit the total quantity of money available for sustainable development priorities. Budget increases do not always result in tangible gains in outcomes; for example, states such as Odisha continue to make poor progress toward Goal 4 (Quality Education). and Goal 10 (Decreased Inequality) irrespective of increased investment, while Meghalaya experiences difficulties in reducing poverty and enhancing education, and Haryana fights about Goal 16 (Justice, the law, and Durable Organizations). Weak monitoring and evaluation systems contribute to the deficiencies even more. Because there continues to be the absence throughout consistent and trustworthy data collection, advance is frequently monitored unsuccessfully to make space for promptly corrections. The consequence of staying within immediate detail is often not captured by current statistical systems, and assessments frequently ignore the interplay between the various SDGs, producing inconsistent or ineffective results. Besides just funding, there are additional difficulties because of India's decentralized governance, which results in wide variations in the ability of states to carry out and monitor SDG budgets. These interconnected problems collectively show how important it is to have better financial management, reliable data systems, and coordinated.

### **SDGs in India Ineffective Implementation of Policies**

- Policy Design vs. Ground Reality: Good intentioned policies fail due to their weak execution on the ground.
- Example: Haryana: Goal 16 decreases despite budgetary support.
- Coordination Gaps: Harmonization between different departments and agencies collapses, hindering the effective implementation of SDG-related policies.

- Measurement and Data Limitations
- Inconsistent Data Collection: Periodic and original data streams are required to track progress but prove inadequate.
- Not Measuring Progress: Current statistical systems are not able to pick up on small changes or decreases in SDG indicators.
- Misinformation can lead to ineffective resource allocation and hinder evidence-based policy-making.
  - Failing to Account for Trade-offs and Synergies Between Goals
  - Tied Goals Overlooked: SDGs are connected, and interventions are more likely to produce trade-offs or synergies.
- Example: Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) could be in conflict with Goal 13 (Climate Action) if environmental sustainability is ignored.
- Missed Opportunities for Cross-Sector Effects: Failure to model and manage these interactions can lead to ineffective results and wasted efforts.

### **Governance and Institutional Challenges**

Decentralized Decision-making: Various agencies with distinct SDGs also work in silos, limiting coordination. These encompass inefficient implementation of policy, insufficient data, omission of interdependencies between objectives, and scattered governance that adversely impacts the realization of the SDGs. Lack of effective coordination, misleading data, and ignoring trade-offs and synergies undermine the effects of interventions and result in inefficient utilization of resources. It needs to be addressed through better cooperation, robust data systems, and combined planning to deliver sustainable and equitable development results Government initiatives for nurturing SDGs

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM): Targets universal sanitation coverage and free defecation (SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation).
- Poshan Abhiyaan: Aims at enhancing the nutritional status of children, expectant mothers, and lactating mothers (SDG 2 – Zero Hunger).
- Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP): Emphasizes gender equality and reducing child sex ratio (SDG 5 – Gender Equality).
- National Solar Mission: Seeks to popularize the utilization of solar energy to lessen reliance on fossil fuels (SDG 7 – Affordable and Clean Energy).
- Skill India Mission: Seeks to offer vocational training to youngsters to increase employability (SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth).

- Jal Jeevan Mission: Provides safe and proper drinking water through individual household tap connections (SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation).

India's flagship programs such as Swachh Bharat Mission, Poshan Abhiyaan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, National Solar Mission, Skill India, and Jal Jeevan Mission all together deal with the important Sustainable Development Goals by increasing sanitation, nutrition, gender equality, renewable energy, skill development, and access to safe drinking water. These schemes provide a collective effort and multi-dimensional strategy toward sustainable development, ensuring inclusive growth and the living condition of the country as a whole.

### **Way Forward for Achieving SDGs in India**

- Strengthen Data Systems and Monitoring: Establish a robust real-time data framework to track SDG progress effectively.
- Periodic updates and reliable disaggregated data are essential for measuring outcomes and correcting course.
- Enhance Multi-level Governance and Coordination: Improve coordination between Union, State, and District levels to avoid duplication of efforts.
- Develop cross-sectorial frameworks to manage trade-offs and synergies between different SDGs.
- Align Budgeting with Local Priorities: Adopt a bottom-up approach by aligning financial allocations with state and district-specific needs.
- Strengthen participatory budgeting to ensure that marginalized communities' voices are included.

To effectively achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, it is crucial to strengthen data systems for accurate, real-time monitoring, enhance coordination across all levels of governance to streamline efforts, and align budgeting processes with local priorities through inclusive participation. These steps will ensure targeted, efficient, and equitable progress, addressing the diverse needs of communities while fostering collaboration and accountability across sectors.

### **CONCLUSION**

India's pledge to the Sustainable Development Goals is part of its larger mission to create inclusive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable growth. That said, financial investments and policy structures have provided the foundation for advances, but difficulties in implementing the SDGs in India go far beyond a matter of mere funding limits. Systemic challenges like poor policy implementation, coordination failure among institutions, disintegrative

governance, and weak data infrastructure persist to undermine the country's capacity to translate global ambitions into local conditions. What is more, the interlinked nature of the SDGs makes them daunting to implement. The solitary approach to implementation, without regard to the synergies and trade-offs across goals, tends to generate unintended effects and lost leverage for meaningful change. For example, plans for industrialization can subvert environmental objectives if sustainability is not integrated into their planning. Well-capitalized schemes can also fail in case of insufficient grassroots mobilization or inadequate monitoring frameworks. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, India has proved itself capable of transformational programs as in Swachh Bharat Mission, Skill India, and Jal Jeevan Mission. These initiatives, linked to certain SDGs, indicate that concerted action—when supported by political will, community engagement, and adaptive governance—can achieve tangible gains. To actually drive progress to the SDGs, India now needs to concentrate on strengthening institutional coordination, developing a strong data and monitoring ecosystem, and ensuring the development process is inclusive and responsive to local contexts.

Through the adoption of a holistic, systems approach and building sectorial and governance-level collaboration, India can surmount existing impediments and lead the world in sustainable development. Fulfilling the SDGs is not merely a national imperative but an international necessity—and India's success will have a decisive impact on the world's shared advancement toward a sustainable future. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is dependent on surmounting governance, data management, and policy-making problems. Effective governance frameworks are essential to coordinate national and local action, promote policy coherence, and establish inclusive participation. Decentralized institutional frameworks and absence of inter-agency coordination, however, typically hinder progress. Good data systems are essential for monitoring and measuring SDG implementation. Nonetheless, the majority of countries face problems such as weak data collection institutions, non-standardized indicators, and inadequate capacity to analyze data. Policy-making must be evidence-based and responsive, engaging views from diverse stakeholders to combat the multidimensionality of sustainable development. These need to be addressed through concerted efforts in developing institutional capacities, enhancing data infrastructures, and facilitating policy integration across sectors. By promoting cooperative approaches and taking advantage of

technological progress, nations can better meet the demands of sustainable development and accelerate the pace toward accomplishing the SDGs.

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