



Editorial

The Sustainable Development Goals: A Way Forward for Pakistan

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted globally in September 2015 as a set of universal and transformative goals and targets to be implemented by 2030. The 17 development goals include 169 concise, global, and applicable to all countries; developing and developed—the SDGs address three interconnected dimensions: social, economic, and environmental. Health is interconnected with social, economic, and developmental/environmental determinants¹. The SDGs include 244 indicators related to the five Ps: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. The SDGs are more comprehensive and people-centered than the MDGs, with the commitment to "leave no one behind," i.e., reach vulnerable populations. Among the SDGs, Goal 3 directs countries to "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages"; SDG3 includes 13 targets, four of which address implementation². Thirteen SDGs are related to health and well-being and may be informed by less than 169 indicators. SDG 3 addresses chronic diseases, tobacco, alcohol, narcotics use, mental health, road safety, and pollution. However, health is not solely a component of Goal 3. Throughout the majority of the SDGs, some targets have a direct or indirect effect on health gains and thus require special consideration when developing strategies, policies, and plans to achieve the health goal and monitor progress^{2,3}.

SDG 3 has seen unprecedented success, particularly in reducing poverty, providing safe drinking water to the world's most marginalized countries, and combating the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malaria, and tuberculosis⁴. Despite the global results of MDG implementation, progress must be accelerated, particularly in regions with the highest disease burdens, such as Sub-Saharan

Africa⁵. In October 2015, Pakistan committed to achieving the SDGs and initiated processes to adapt and align these global goals with national priorities. Pakistan's Ministry of Planning, Development, and Reform established a federal SDG Support Unit after a year (in 2017)⁶. A data gap analysis has revealed Pakistan's SDG3 indicators are sorely lacking. Improving their health is expected to increase economic growth, as health and economic growth are inextricably linked⁷. The country recognizes that investments in health benefit the economy and society. SDG 3 is vital because many of Pakistan's population live in poverty⁸. Improving their health is expected to increase economic growth, as health is closely linked to economic growth. Despite several health issues, Pakistan has been working hard to improve the health of its growing population⁹.

The data analysis for SDG 3 and selected health-related indicators from various data sources from 2015 to 2020 of Pakistan showed that Pakistan had made significant progress in three areas: Proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel, malaria infection reduction, and total net official development assistance to medical research & basic healthcare. Malaria infection rates have decreased dramatically over the years, owing primarily to prompt campaigns distributing insecticide-treated bed nets and residual insecticide spraying indoors. On the other hand, Dengue fever is increasing in prevalence (viral diseases have risen dramatically). Maternal and neonatal health status improvements result from increased access, provider availability and competency, and stronger infrastructure, systems, and policies in place. In eleven areas, progress has been slow or

stagnant, including maternal mortality, child mortality (under five and neonatal), tuberculosis (TB) infection, hepatitis B infection, non-communicable disease mortality, alcohol consumption per capita, road traffic accidents, Index of Universal Health Coverage (%), deaths caused by hazardous chemicals and pollution and contamination of the air, water, and soil, tobacco control, vaccine coverage and the density and distribution of health workers.

The implementation of SDG 3 on "good health and well-being" takes a comprehensive approach to the biomedical field and health-related research, addressing their subjects and practices and their relationships with civil society. Maternal mortality has decreased due to increased skilled birth attendants in the last two decades but no progress in the last five years. Pakistan needs to improve data collection and to report for SDG 3 indicators. For SDG 3, Pakistan must set explicit policy targets and establish indicators for tracking and assessing progress. The Planning Commission should oversee SDG monitoring to ensure consistency in reporting and implementation of agreed-upon interventions. Achieving the SDG-3 requires inter-Sectoral collaboration and coordination at the national, provincial, and district levels. To achieve the SDG-3 targets on reproductive health, community-based midwives must be trained and deployed. Hepatitis, Tuberculosis (TB), malaria, and HIV/AIDS will continue to be sporadic. Improved Integrated Disease Surveillance Response will help contain infectious and neglected tropical disease epidemics. Infections will be reduced by strengthening the Universal health coverage (UHC). Given the SDG targets, drastic measures, especially primary prevention interventions, are required. Insist on a robust monitoring and evaluation system that identifies and operationalizes SDG-wide indicators.

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