

## The Impact of COVID-19 on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13: A South Asian Perspective

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Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the trend of progression in terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been reversed in many parts of the world. SDG 13 is primarily concerned with taking appropriate measures to combat climate change and its impacts. SDG 13 also deals with a range of other issues: funds required to invest in the climate crisis, compliance of Disaster Risk Reduction Strategies with Sendai Framework, impact of climate change on natural hazards, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions, climate change investment in comparison to fossil fuels investment and other related factors. In simple terms, SDG 13 deals with five core areas: resilience & adaptive capacity, climate change policies, climate change awareness, United Nations Framework for Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) commitments and climate change planning & management. The outbreak of COVID-19 has created a major impact on SDG 13 all across the globe including South Asia.

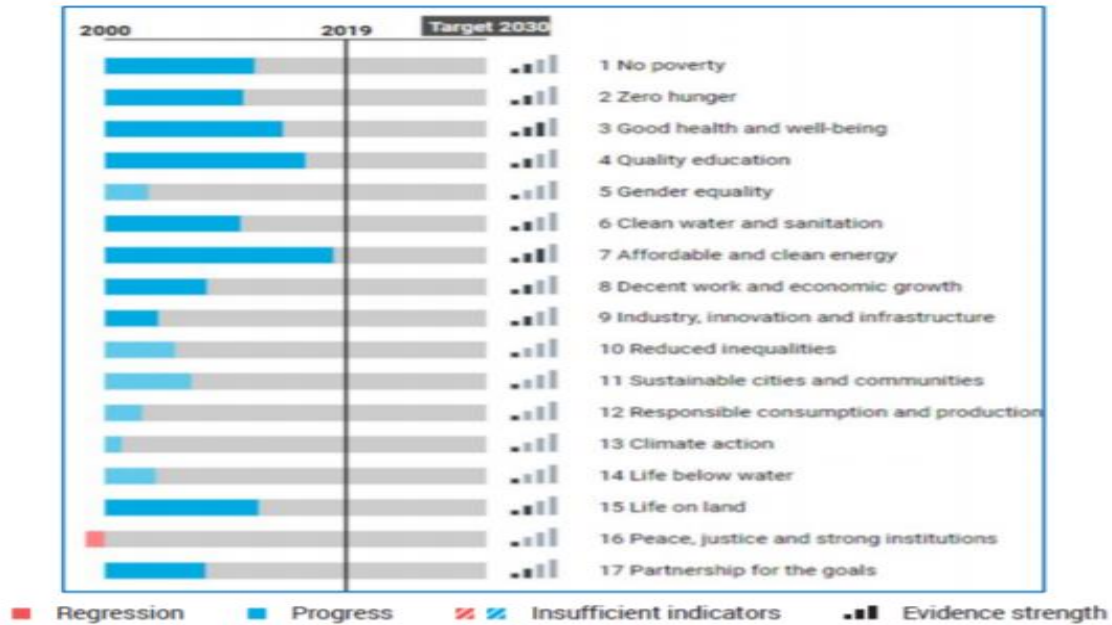


Figure 1: 17 Sustainable Development Goals (Source: United Nations)

## **The Case of South Asia**

The ramifications of the pandemic have driven 44 million people into absolute poverty while the headcount of female poverty is likely to increase by 102 million. Although South Asia is home to the fast-paced economies of the world, there are prospects of economic fallout due to the pandemic. This economic fallout will have a significant impact on the allocation of investments in order to deal with the impacts of climate change. Approximately \$410 billion is a prerequisite investment in terms of achieving renewable energy. The vehicle fleet requires an investment of at least \$670 billion in order to shift towards green fleet. At least \$1.5 trillion is required to ensure the future production is green and resilient. Therefore, managing adequate investment in order to combat the climate-related adversities is a huge challenge for the governments in the region. The situation of COVID-19 and climate change can be associated with the “stag hunt” game where several hunters are required to cooperate with each other in order to hunt a stag rather than hunting a rabbit. It is most important to realise that tackling the adversities imposed by COVID-19 requires an approach based on mutual cooperation. The region requires a concerted approach in order to deal with the “stags” of COVID-19 and climate change to avoid being left with only rabbits.

According to a report of UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific, SDG 13 is one of the key areas of greatest concern. The report stresses on the fact that the current rate of progress is not sufficient in order to achieve the targets associated with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). COVID-19 has led to a reduction in the level of production and transportation which caused a decline in the level of carbon dioxide emissions. One of the most concerning issues is that the ravages of COVID-19 is leading to a huge shift in resources towards the public health sector while there is a reduction in the commitment to climate action. COVID-19 might lead to reevaluation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets and the overarching nature of this pandemic has shifted the spotlight towards changing the nature of work in order to achieve the SDGs. Hyper-localisation may also hamper the process of achieving SDG 13.



**Figure 2: SDG Progress in South Asia, 2019 (Source: UNESCAP)**

The figure above shows the progress of SDGs in South Asia as of 2019. It can be seen that SDG 13 is at the forefront of SDGs where a lot of work needs to be done. As the figure above suggests, South Asia needs to progress at a rapid rate in terms of climate action in order to achieve all its SDG targets. South Asia needs to shift its resources towards climate-resilient infrastructure in order to build a better future for the region. Another key issue of concern for the region is the lack of data. There is a lack of sufficient data on the ground in order to find the true story of progress hence data availability of indicators related to SDGs still remain a prevalent issue. The region must reduce its greenhouse gas emissions on an urgent basis in order to reverse the drawbacks posed by COVID-19 in terms of achieving SDG 13. The process of recovery from the demolishing impacts of COVID-19 may create a scope of opportunity for us to reshape our methods for development pathways which are inclusive, resilient and commits for maintaining planetary boundaries. We need to create a better and greener society in order to accomplish the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **A Glimmer of Hope for South Asia**

Being home to three of the top five most climate vulnerable countries of the world, South Asia has governments and businesses who are constantly working to enhance climate resilience and reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Governments are taking policies to curb the impact of climate change. The private sectors are also stepping up their investment model in the climate-smart sectors, making innovative business models, building more resilient supply chains and growing their operations in a sustainable manner. All the South Asian member states have signed the 2015 Paris Agreement which shows their ambition to deal with climate-related adversities. The installed capacity of renewable energy had increased by approximately 18% in Bangladesh, India

and Nepal collectively when the Paris Climate Agreement came into effect. The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in the region incorporate the significance of private sector's role. According to a survey conducted by International Finance Corporation (IFC), approximately 85% of the participating businesses of South Asia are concerned about the impacts of climate change. Hence, the progressive businesses are taking steps to address climate risks and opportunities.

International Finance Corporation's Excellence in Design for Greater Efficiencies (EDGE) is a worldwide acknowledged certification system for green construction projects and India has performed well in this indicator through implementation of Sustainable Housing Leadership Consortium. Approximately 20,000 housing units and 10 million square feet of commercial space in India received certification from EDGE in 2015. Sri Lanka has also taken up innovative steps through Public Private Partnership (PPP) in order to address the excess demand for growing transport via increased allocation of resources towards the public transport. The major future prospects across the region which may help to achieve SDG 13 are: Climate-smart urban wastewater and agriculture in Bangladesh, Hydropower and electric transport in Bhutan, Renewable energy and electric vehicles in India, Climate-smart infrastructure in the Maldives, Hydropower and climate-smart agriculture in Nepal and Municipal solid waste management and climate-smart urban wastewater in Sri Lanka. In total, South Asia has further investment opportunities equivalent to \$3.4 trillion. India and Bangladesh will also be the leaders in the green infrastructure sector likewise South Asia has the capacity to amount for a total \$1.5 trillion. Hence, the utilisation of future climate-smart opportunities in South Asia will help to achieve SDG 13.

## **Conclusion**

Climate change is going to play a significant role in the sustainable development of South Asia. Therefore, it is crucial to address the concerns regarding climate change in order to create range of opportunities for sustainable growth. All in all, South Asia needs to adapt its policy responses with time in order to achieve SDG 13 and also reverse the negative implications posed by COVID-19.

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