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**Configuring International Norms For Sustainable Development Goals (sdgs)****Dr. Nityash Solanki**Assistant Professor  
Asian Law College (ALC)**ABSTRACT**

This article attempts to recommend strategic approach to eradicate the quintessential goal of eradicating obstacles encountered to achieve SDGs. To address basic concerns such as ‘no hunger’ and ‘zero poverty’ it is essential that Official Development Assistance (ODA) makes necessary amends to abbreviate the annual investment gap amounting to \$4 trillion from developing States to preserve and safeguard the inherent human rights of livelihood and to live with dignity in a civilized society. In this article, the global partnership between United Nations member States that recognized 17 Sustainable Development Goals demanding urgent considerations firstly, to improve health and education; secondly, to eradicate discrimination; and thirdly, to guarantee economic growth would be addressed under the umbrella of socio-economic and political challenges. A report by ILO, titled, “2016 World Employment and Social Outlook – Transforming Jobs to End Poverty” identified various problem areas to be addressed at priority to augment the most prioritized SDGs. The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs incorporated “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” for the member States with an objective to promote harmony amongst people and planet. Deployment of peacekeepers’ to Member States in dispute either to combat illegal encroachments on territory or to safeguard States from terrorist attacks has become a serious concern for UNs. Paradigm shifts from SDGs are legitimately advanced by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) especially to address and combat immediate concerns. UNDP becomes helpless as far as accelerating national

**Keywords**

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Geopolitical Conflicts, Climate Change, Global Solidarity, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

1 General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Report of the Secretary-General: ‘Progress towards the Sustainable development Goals’ (2024 session), Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

2 United Nations: Take Action for the Sustainable Development Goals, Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>.

progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is concerned. In 2024, the United Nations Secretary General annual SDGs Progress Report enlightened the Member States regarding areas such as geopolitical tensions, conflicts and climate change that demands urgent considerations, strategic plans and proactive actions. In the 21st century, international norms for 'Sustainable Development' demands imposing attributes of traditionally recognized behavioral and cultural norms on Member States. Therefore, this article attempts to identify factors that lead to lack of global solidarity, which has already been recognized as serious hindrance to attain the SDGs.

## INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs incorporated "The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" for Member States with an objective to promote harmony amongst people and planet. It is worthy to note that the General Assembly Economic and Social Council published a report<sup>1</sup> titled 'Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals' to comprehend global prospective and progressive steps taken by Member States towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Secretary-General incorporated pious efforts of international and regional organizations to prepare the report, which suggests global indicator framework adopted by experts to attain the targeted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). International norms for 'Sustainable Development' demands imposing attributes of traditionally recognized behavioral and cultural norms on Member States. At the very outset, the report recommends efforts to secure global solidarity since only seventeen (17) percent of SDGs were ascertained to be on track or demonstrated moderate progress. Furthermore, serious concern regarding Member States minimal or regressed position to procure the targeted SDGs was exhibited through the report. It goes without saying that COVID-19 pandemic was one of the

major impediments faced by Member States. COVID-19 pandemic could be held responsible for pushing more than 23 million people to live in extreme poverty and exposed 123 million people to suffer from hunger. The pandemic widened the economic gap amongst poorest and richest Member States.<sup>2</sup> Life threatening struggles faced by States around the globe due to COVID-19 pandemic brought SDGs in direct conflict with economic depression. Problems like macroeconomic pressure, geopolitical tensions made it even harder to stand aligned with trade opportunities. Furthermore, the United Nations Secretary General annual SDGs Progress Report exhibited in the year 2024 enlightened the Member States regarding concerning aspects such as geopolitical tensions, conflicts and climate change that demands urgent considerations, strategic plans and proactive actions.

## CONFLICTS, GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS AND TRADE BARRIERS BETWEEN TWO OR MORE MEMBER STATES

Violent arms conflicts including organized crimes cropping up between Member States observed during the past few years have posed serious concerns regarding global solidarity to achieve SDGs. For instance, paramount security threats arising from Russian invasion of Ukraine, Azerbaijani-Armenian war over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, conflicts in Ethiopia's Tigray region, wars burning in Gaza, Sudan, etc. has exposed Member States around the globe to experience diplomatic failures prompting States to explore military ends. A recent report released by Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) identified evolving trade landscapes and concerns related to war of aggressions between Member States. As far as trade performances for the past four decades are concerned, year 2023 was identified to be the weakest since Member States are still struggling to recover from economic depression experiences

3 International Trade Administration: Russia Sanctions and Export Controls, Retrieved January 1, 2015 from <https://www.trade.gov/russia-sanctions-and-export-controls>.

4 OECD, Building More Resilient Cross-border Regions: Considerations in Governance and Partnerships, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5fd3e59-en>.

due to COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, macroeconomic pressure, economic uncertainties, geopolitical tensions, and other disruptions have made it difficult for realigning trade opportunities for States. These difficult situations would most probably be resolved through in-depth monitoring of evolving trade practices of international business transactions. For instance, goods and services consumed at the market place have relatively improved showing signs of shifting back towards pre-pandemic market structure. Since 2023, the tourism sector too has shown signs of improvement. Most importantly, phasing out of COVID-19 restrictions in China supported global trade and the world economy. In 2023, the Russian Federation's had observed notable decline in goods trade balance due to the base effect of high energy prices subsequent to the act of invasions over Ukraine. Some credit of the situation faced by Russia that is highlighted above could be rendered to economic sanctions that were taken as diplomatic measures. Economic sanctions imposed on Russia took no time to engulf other States for altering global trade patterns. For instance, exports from majority States in Asia that were redirected to them from Russia as a result of trade sanctions increased tremendously. Moreover, importing patterns related to goods and services from European Union to Russia changed drastically in volume and value. In an event, certain products such as cereals, inorganic compounds, fertilizers, and metals mostly remained unaffected because Russia holds important manufacturing units for these products at international market place especially for G7 importer. On the other hand, G7 exporters' contributions to Russian aircraft and vehicle industry declined.<sup>3</sup> Under such circumstances, global peacemaking and solidarity seems like a farfetched goal to effectuate targeted SDGs. Since allowing peacemaker to uphold law and order situation in the territorial jurisdiction of the concerned State experiencing such conflicts must be kept at utmost priority. As a result, the contemporary notion of articulating responsibility by

global bodies such as ILC and ILO Governing Bodies confronts immense difficulties to accomplish the pledged obligation of ensuring that "no one will be left behind". Constant failure of innumerable diplomatic peacemaking initiatives by Member States to reach common consensus over geopolitical tensions has windswept people to experience life threatening instances.<sup>4</sup> It would not be incorrect to state that the ever increasing international conflicts in the past few years have adversely affected more people than ever. Because of these conflicts, people are forced to move out from their dwelling houses,<sup>5</sup> take active participation to protect the sovereignty of the State, provide life-saving aids to fellow citizens, and protect States borders from terrorist attacks. Deployment of peacekeepers' to States in conflict especially under threats of terrorist attacks has resulted into easing compliances expected for achieving the targeted SDGs by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Furthermore, significant development challenges are faced by States depending on their jurisdictional proximity to international borders with number of ports of entry and exist into the sovereign land. Development of cross-border regions has become a concern to resolve issues such as regional economic development, impeding delivery of goods & services, cross-border disaster management, etc. Assessing multi-level governance mechanism becomes necessary to eradicate unnecessary resilience towards cross-border transactions especially to capitalize at the market place. Development of cross-border regions in the European Union is no doubt a tedious task as multi-level governance schemes that results into bolstering trade performances are required to be amended at the earliest. Socio-economic development of cross-border areas demands urgent consideration of sub national, national and international policy makers over regulatory, policy and financial mechanisms to strengthen the economic potential of these cross-border areas.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> More than 110 million people worldwide were forcefully displaced between 2022 and 2023. The number of civil casualties in armed conflicts has raised serious concerns since an overall increased by seventy two (72) percent was recorded.

<sup>6</sup> OECD, Building More Resilient Cross-border Regions: Considerations in Governance and Partnerships, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5fd3e59-en>.

<sup>7</sup> Global Sustainable Development report: 'Times of Crisis, Times of Change Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development', Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Despite conscious efforts of Member States emission of greenhouse gases especially from developing and under developed nations around the globe has surged breaking all the previous records. For instance, evaluation of data collected for the year 2023 suggests emission of harmful gases into environment by States resulting into an overall increase of one hundred and fifty (150) percent. Dependency on non-renewable source of energy such as coal is assessed to be one of the critical hurdles in achieving the projected net-zero emission targets under the 2030 Agenda. Threatening levels of carbon emissions has posed serious concerns as it negatively affects the biodiversity of our planet. Endangered species on the planet are exposed to problems of ocean acidifications, environment contamination and overexploitation of natural resources. Most importantly, vexatious data exhorting twelve (12) percent shrink in endangered species on our planet demands hoisting white flags especially to safeguard sacrosanctity of human existence on the planet.

## CONCLUSION

The shortcomings discussed in the previous paragraphs have rendered Member States to confront brunt faced by marginalized people. For instance, global health index reveals arcane sink since 2015; one of the major pillars, namely, education stratum,<sup>8</sup> on which the foundations of SDGs rests remains unexplored since as low as 58% of pupils worldwide has been identified to be equipped with minimum proficiency in reading and writing. Progress on education portrays grave concern as one in five pupils is neither accommodated in education, employment nor training programs.<sup>9</sup> The dynamic modern market constantly search for young people and adults

equipped with advanced level of skills learned through systematic higher-level vocational training programs and professional courses offered by education institution. For instance, United Kingdom, education regime under Higher Technical Education (HTE) classifies these courses at level 5 under the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). The United Kingdom government revealed that HTE is struggling to address serious concerns regarding the proficiency of academic higher education provided to the masses. Necessary reforms required to bring United Kingdom's HTE system in tune with successful models adopted in States such as, Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, and Sweden are in progress.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, holistic approach to education demands a coherent educational vision incorporated in HTE policies through appropriate governance and engagement from industry experts. Such robust policy framework would foster pupils to be counted under higher education students' population. As far as gender equality is concerned, rise in violence against young girls and women at large perspicuously convey increasing levels of disparity, which characterizes the 2030 Agenda's on gender equality an implausible goal.<sup>11</sup> Rudimentary issues related to gender parity goes unaddressed through appropriate national efforts by Member States, which restricts eligible women to successfully avail the benefits of managerial roles in public life.<sup>12</sup> The global registry, namely, 'SDG Action Platform' introduced by the United Nations constantly motivates governments, partners, and stakeholders to implement or frame their own policies for accelerating the progress of SDGs.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the platform encourages governments around the globe to share detailed

8 OECD, *Higher Technical Education in England, United Kingdom: Insights from Selected International Experience*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/7c00dff7-en>.

9 OECD, *Do Adults Have the Skills They Need to Thrive in a Changing World?: Survey of Adult Skills 2023*, OECD Skills Studies, OECD Publishing, Paris, (2024) <https://doi.org/10.1787/b263dc5d-en>.

10 OECD, *Higher Technical Education in England, United Kingdom: Insights from Selected International Experience*, OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Retrieved January 1, 2015 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/7c00dff7-en>.

11 B. Littig, 'Good Work? Sustainable Work and Sustainable Development: A Critical Gender Perspective from the Global North' (2018), *Globalizations* 565, (2018) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14747731.2018.1454676>.

12 R. Vijayarasa, 'Women, Work and Global Supply Chains: The Gender-Blind Nature of Australia's Modern Slavery Regulatory Regime', *Australian Journal of Human Rights* 84, (2020) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1323238X.2019.1701265>.

13 United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Sustainable Development: SDG Actions Platform*, Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships>.

information regarding policies, budget, resources, deadlines, and other initiatives that would most probably prove beneficial to Member States for accelerating or implementing SDGs.<sup>14</sup> Member States especially the ones who invests huge amount of capital in research and development to innovate 'state of the art' technologies must be mandated to given compulsory licenses to developing and under developed States. Since the state of the art technologies helps industry to increase manufacturing and production capacity without releasing harmful carbon emissions into the environment.<sup>15</sup> The Official Development Assistance (ODA) accorded sustainable development grants to developing States amounting to \$223.7 billion in the year 2023. ODA aimed to aid developing States to overcome various sustainable development challenges including global infanticide, HIV infection, and pure drinking water with sanitation facilities, quality education, digital connectivity, gender equality, etc. In any event, the records collected for the year 2023 reveals annual investment gap amount to \$4 trillion from developing States.<sup>16</sup> Lack of global solidarity amongst the Member States brings the targeted SDGs to a standstill. For instance, as discussed in the preceding paragraphs regarding the challenges in development of cross-border regions that has become a concern to resolve issues such as regional economic development, impeding delivery of goods & services, cross-border disaster management, etc. Consequently, factors that play a key role in abridging cross-border regions involves concrete solutions to language, cultural and traditional differences; legislative, regulatory and territorial obstacles. It goes without saying that tax percentage levied through various regulations at cross-border regions imposes additional trading costs on business enterprises. For instance, comparative analysis of data collected from border regions and cross-border regions suggests that business enterprises are mandated to pay fifty (50) percent higher than usual costs when they engage in trade transactions at cross-border regions.

Thus, unnecessary legal and administrative trade barrier are created for enterprises conducting business transactions at cross-border regions. As a result of imposing legal and administrative trade barriers, European Union gets confronted with issues such as loss in GDP, lack of job opportunities, limited scope of socio-economic growth, deficiency in professional services, and lower quality of life at cross-border regions. To strengthen the governance of cross-border regions it is highly essential to boost solidarity amongst States with the objective to establish legitimate membership base and internal governing structures, which supports cross-border trade developments.<sup>17</sup> Innovations make human life easier on the planet. Government worldwide makes conscious efforts to sponsor and fund projects centered to transform public utilities and related services. Pro-active participation of government establishments would definitely cater to the needs of end users and stakeholders for innovating sustainable public services. In the world of digital communication, it is recommended to strengthen the digital infrastructure through government support and investments. Additionally, users must be served in a personalized manner to meet the expectations of promised accessibility, connectivity and other digital requirements. The basic hurdles that could be created by administrative frictions to optimize public service designs must be addressed at the earliest especially to ensure safeguards from vulnerabilities that a consumer might encounter in the digital sphere. Highly unpredictable and complex digital environment must not restrict citizens to engage in legitimate civic associations. To increase profitability from the digital infrastructure and data sources governments must plan to undertake democratic covenants into consideration and reframe public services norms.<sup>18</sup> Formal correspondences between government and citizens are facilitated through public services; hence, according citizens with opportunities shall ensure them with the right to livelihood.

14 OECD, Risks and Resilience in Global Trade: Key Trends in 2023-2024, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c66c439-en>.

15 OECD, Global Trends in Government Innovation 2024: Fostering Human-Centred Public Services, OECD Public Governance Reviews, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/c1bc19c3-en>.

16 OECD, Global Trends in Government Innovation 2024: Fostering Human-Centred Public Services, OECD Public Governance Reviews, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/c1bc19c3-en>.

17 OECD, Building More Resilient Cross-border Regions: Considerations in Governance and Partnerships, OECD Multi-level Governance Studies, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024) Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5fd3e59-en>.

18 OECD, Global Trends in Government Innovation 2024: Fostering Human-Centred Public Services, OECD Public Governance Reviews, (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024), Retrieved January 1, 2025 from <https://doi.org/10.1787/c1bc19c3-en>.