Urgent action is needed to achieve global goals

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Dr Matiur Rahman- Global progress is alarmingly insufficient, with only six years to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A new UN report reveals that only 17 per cent of the targets are currently on track. The 2024 Sustainable Development Goals Report indicates that nearly half of the 17 targets show minimal or moderate progress, while over a third have stalled or regressed since their adoption by UN Member States in 2015. The SDGs aim to foster peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres highlighted the dire situation at a press conference, stating that the world is receiving a failing grade on its annual SDG report card. He emphasised the critical need for accelerated action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, underscoring that there is no time to lose. Major obstacles hindering progress include the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating conflicts, geopolitical tensions, and worsening climate chaos.

The report underscores the significant setbacks experienced in recent years. An additional 23 million people were pushed into

extreme poverty, and over 100 million more suffered from hunger in 2022 compared to 2019. Civilian deaths in armed conflicts also surged last year. 2023 was the warmest, with global temperatures nearing the critical 1.5°C threshold.

Guterres emphasised the urgency of enhancing international cooperation, reaffirming the 2030 promise to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure no one is left behind. The report outlines key priorities to address the current deficits. First and foremost, there is a critical need for financing development. The SDG investment gap in developing countries stands at $4 trillion per year. Rapidly increasing funding and fiscal space and reforming the global financial system to unlock necessary funds are vital.

Resolving conflicts through dialogue and diplomacy is equally crucial. With nearly 120 million people forcibly displaced by May 2024 and a 72 per cent increase in civilian casualties between 2022 and 2023, the need for peace is more urgent than ever. Additionally, a surge in implementation efforts is desperately needed. Massive investments and effective partnerships are essential to driving transitions in critical areas such as food, energy, social protection, and digital connectivity.

The report’s release precedes the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), held at the UN Headquarters in New York from July 8 to 17. Under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Forum will review global progress towards several goals, including ending poverty, achieving zero hunger, taking climate action, fostering peaceful and inclusive societies, and enhancing means of implementation.

Furthermore, the upcoming Summit of the Future in September will be pivotal in realigning efforts towards achieving these goals. The Summit aims to address the debt crisis affecting many developing countries and the urgent need to reform the international financial architecture.

The SDG Report highlights several key findings that paint a stark picture of the current economic challenges. Per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) growth in half of the world's most vulnerable nations remains slower than in advanced economies. Nearly 60 per cent of countries faced abnormally high food prices in 2022, exacerbating hunger and food insecurity. Gender inequality also remains a significant concern, with 55 per cent of 120 surveyed countries lacking laws prohibiting discrimination against women.

Education is another significant concern, with only 58 per cent of students worldwide achieving minimum proficiency in reading by the end of primary school. Despite global unemployment reaching a historic low of five per cent in 2023, many obstacles to attaining decent work persist across all societies.

However, there are some positive developments. Renewable energy expanded at an annual rate of 8.1 per cent over the past five years. Technological advancements also saw significant strides, with mobile broadband accessibility (3G or higher) increasing to 95 per cent of the world's population from 78 per cent in 2015.

These findings underscore the urgent need for concerted global efforts to overcome the significant challenges hindering progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals. The report serves as a clarion call for world leaders, policymakers, and stakeholders to take immediate and decisive action.

The stakes are high, and the window of opportunity is closing rapidly. Our planet’s future and its inhabitants’ well-being depend on our collective ability to rise to the occasion and make the necessary changes to achieve these critical goals.

The writer is a development worker.