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<b>Article:</b>	<b>How Media Can Accelerate SDGs in Pakistan</b>
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**ABSTRACT**

The Agenda 2030 was adopted in a UN summit in 2015, when all UN member states agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) ‘for peace and prosperity for people and the planet’. SDGs provide a viable course to sustainable development to address climate crisis and well-being of the people. The Agenda 2030 created a global commitment towards achieving the 17 SDGs. It remains the only consensually accepted global development view. Yet as of now when we are half way from 2030, few countries have made significant progress towards achieving these goals. The role of media in all its forms has a crucial role in creating awareness, agenda-setting, policymaking and implementation of policies is well-established and can hardly be overemphasized. And it can do as surely in the case achieving SDGs as it did in many other cases. This paper takes a look at how media can help reach SDGs in a country like Pakistan. A country bearing a burden of immense infrastructure and demographic drawbacks coupled with a huge economic and financial crisis.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development Goals(SDGs), Media, Pakistan

## **Introduction**

In 2015, 193 UN member nations endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), commonly referred to as Agenda 2030 or Global Goals-2030. By 2030, the SDGs aim to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee peace and prosperity for all. A better and more sustainable future for everybody is the goal of our ambitious, revolutionary plan. It focuses not just economic growth, but a safer and more prosperous planet for all people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. At its heart are 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 targets. These objectives serve as a call to action to tackle pressing global issues like poverty, inequality, climate change, and justice. Although the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offer a framework for nations to create a more equitable and sustainable future, achieving lasting wellbeing will require more profound and long-term transformations.

## **Role of Media in Reaching SDGs**

All social changes demand changes in public behavior. This requires involvement of people. Mass mobilization makes it possible to bring widespread changes in a society. The incentive of mass mobilization is to stimulate people to accelerate the social development. Around the world, mass media are used for mass mobilization because of its inherent vast and strong persuasion capacity. In particular, the internet-based media quickly spread information to like-minded individuals and plays a key role in shaping the social psychology for collective action. Mass media raise awareness of social problems, and act as agenda setters (MDI 2022).

In the context of Agenda 2030, media can act as an instrument to increase public awareness on SDGs and provide necessary public support and drive to attain SDGs. Media can also force governments to take necessary measures to implement of national commitments (Arant 2023).

The independent media provide requisite information on current social issues. Thus making it possible for the masses to make informed choices and claim their civil rights. The media thereby has a crucial transformative character in sustainable development. The significance of public access to information can be judged from the fact that ‘public access to information’ in itself is included in the SDG targets (Target 16.10). As a matter of fact, the public access to information is an enabler and catalyst in achieving the other targets laid down in agenda 2030. But SDG 16.10 on public access to information and fundamental freedoms by its very nature can only be achieved through independent media.

A candid and trusted information system is known to contribute enhancing democratic governance, transparency, protecting of human rights, and maintaining a sustainable society. Ironically freedom of media from the control of the governments and the influence of special interest groups in itself is a phantasm (Arant 2023).

Media has a potential role in advocating sustainable development by providing current and reliable information on sustainability issues in real time. Thus drawing prompt attention of people and public offices on issues that require immediate attention or action like deforestation, extensive environmental degradation, and depletion of non-renewable resources. This helps building and *sharing a* clear and compelling vision of sustainability goals. On individual basis, this will motivate people to adopt more environment friendly practices and as an outcome support sustainable development. On a mass scale an effective coverage in the mass media

intensifies the issue's salience and creates public pressure for change. In addition it exerts influence on public and corporate policy makers that is crucial for accelerating efforts to avoid failure in meeting agenda 2030.

Many media houses and fora use media for social advocacy and reaching sustainability. One such example is the 'BBC Media Action' that uses media and communication to achieve SDG like poverty reduction and climate change. The BBC Media Action works in partnership with the 'BBC World Service' and other local media partners in over 35 developing countries (MDIF) for the purpose. Table 1 provides a brief how media can impact the individual SDG.

### **The Agenda in Jeopardy**

As of today, we have already crossed the half-way mark of the 2030 Agenda. Of the 36 SDG targets reviewed in a recent study, only 2 were found on track, namely access to mobile networks and internet, while 8 targets were assessed as still deteriorating: These among others include reduction in emissions and food security (UN 2023). The progress towards these and many other targets has been slow and the current rate of progress can only be described as disheartening.

The progress on the SDGs was severely undermined by the COVID-19 pandemic. The cascading effect of pandemic escalated poverty and inequalities around the globe (OHC 2024). The other key road-blocks that contributed towards slow-pace in reaching these targets include inaction of governments, insufficient financial resources and behavioral inertia. It is feared that with the present pace the world will not be able to achieve most of these SDGs even by 2050 (Sörgel 2021).

The situation demands accelerating transformative actions to meet the agenda 2030. An ambitious policy action needs to be underpinned by collaborative efforts of national and international scientific community enabling necessary conditions by harnessing financial, human, and technical resources (Allen 2024). In the words of António Guterres, Secretary-General, United Nations Said, "Unless we act now, the 2030 Agenda will become an epitaph for a world that might have been" (UN 2023A).

**Table 1:** Role of Media in Achieving Individual Sustainable Development Goal

SDG	Role of Media
SDG 1: No Poverty	By increasing government responsiveness and accountability, we can safeguard vulnerable populations and promote inclusive public discourse on problems that affect the impoverished.
SDG 2: Zero Hunger	To make rational choices about their health, promoting behavioral changes health information and spreading awareness.
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	To make rational choices about their health, promoting behavioral changes health information and spreading awareness.
SDG 4: Quality Education	Educating the public and disseminating information, spreading scientific information to non-experts, can adult literacy rates and school enrolment ratios
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Awareness on LGBTQ, transgender respect, women's empowerment. Promote awareness of gender equality, prevention of violence against women.
SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Advance a social or public policy initiative.
SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Create public awareness on climate emergency and renewable energy alternatives
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Exposing financial scandals, promote accountability, curb corruption, stimulate business regulatory reforms, and improve governance.
SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	Promote awareness of gender equality, prevention of violence against women, LGBT
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Update risk perception on urbanization and mitigation methods.
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Risk perception and support for climate emergency policies are influenced by public understanding of the climate catastrophe.
SDG 13: Climate Action	Provide a platform for dialogue and partake for mitigation and adaptation strategies in face of climate emergency.
SDG 14: Life Below Water	Public awareness on impact of climate change on aquatic life and its consequences.
SDG 15: Life on Land	Educate public on how to protect and rectorate forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	As a prerequisite and a watchdog, the media protects the rule of law and offers a system of checks and balances on authority on behalf of the people.
SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals	Protect human rights and fundamental freedoms: According to reports, countries with a free press have lower corruption and higher accountability.

**Pakistan**

Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world, with a population of over 241.5 million as of 2023 that accounts for ~ 3 % of the global population (PBS 2023). According to a recent World Bank report in FY23 Pakistan's economy shrunk and overall, real gross domestic product (GDP) is declined by 0.6 percent. The economic growth of the country is expected to

remain sluggish. Host of factors contribute towards an increase to worsen the situation of the poor (WB 2023).

As a nation, Pakistan is a traditionalist society, and people resists change more than many other parts of the world. The meagre literacy rate of 58% [WPR 2024] and lack of access to credible sources of information on social issues contributes towards a rigid national behavior. The obstinacy is frequently rooted in the centuries old practices and the distorted religious believes. Unfortunately at times this extends to challenging the well-established scientific principles. For example, arguably, in Pakistani society it might take ages to truly embrace the notion of equality and equity among humans. This makes weighing people's perceptions even more crucial for planning and implementation of changes targeted at meeting the SDGs. According to a BBC report (Zaheer 2013).

“(In Pakistan) .... people often ascribe changes in climate and extreme weather events to the will of God, and 65% don't know what the term climate change means”.

Globally, media shapes perception. In societies like Pakistan, where many of the subjects related to the SDGs fail to find place in curricula at schools, the role of media in educating people and shaping public perception becomes even more crucial. The quick awareness under these conditions is possible only through aggressive mass communication.

Many of the SDG related topics like overpopulation, climate change, responsible production and consumption are not taught in schools in Pakistan. So media remains the sole source of education and information on many contemporary issues. The lack of sufficient information keeps them ignorant about the gravity the significance of particular issues and severity of threat associated with them. Yet another factor that adds to the indifferent attitude of the people towards the SDGs in Pakistan is the very "unexciting" nature of the topics that fail to grasp the attention of the people. Consequently not many people engage themselves with the goals of Agenda 2030. To a certain extent, this is because of the technical jargon. The media can educate people on the SDGs by sharing current information in everyday language to provide better insight on the subject. Otherwise the non-participation and indifferent attitude towards sustainability at a large scale can put the attainment of the SDGs in jeopardy.

Mass communication help people discuss the issues, present solutions, modify it as you obtain more insight and experience This will help managing mental models that people operate under and develop a shared vision about working together towards common social goals. This also enables to build guiding practices that can help for the purpose. This transforms the attitude from a formal compliance to a commitment. Media can go a long way to creates awareness on SDGs that are desperately needed for a country like Pakistan, by motivating people by engaging and pursue governments to take action to improve their lives.

Table 2 provides a snapshot of Pakistan's ranking on social indicators related to different SDGs. The picture can only be considered as gloomy. Together with the current bleak economic conditions, only an efficient and innovative approach supported by all stakeholders can help making a progress towards achieving the goals. In this regard media's role in developing a national consensus on prioritizing the SDGs will be crucial. This will help developing a shared vision, making policy decisions and implementing the agreed upon national response plans (Yang 2020).

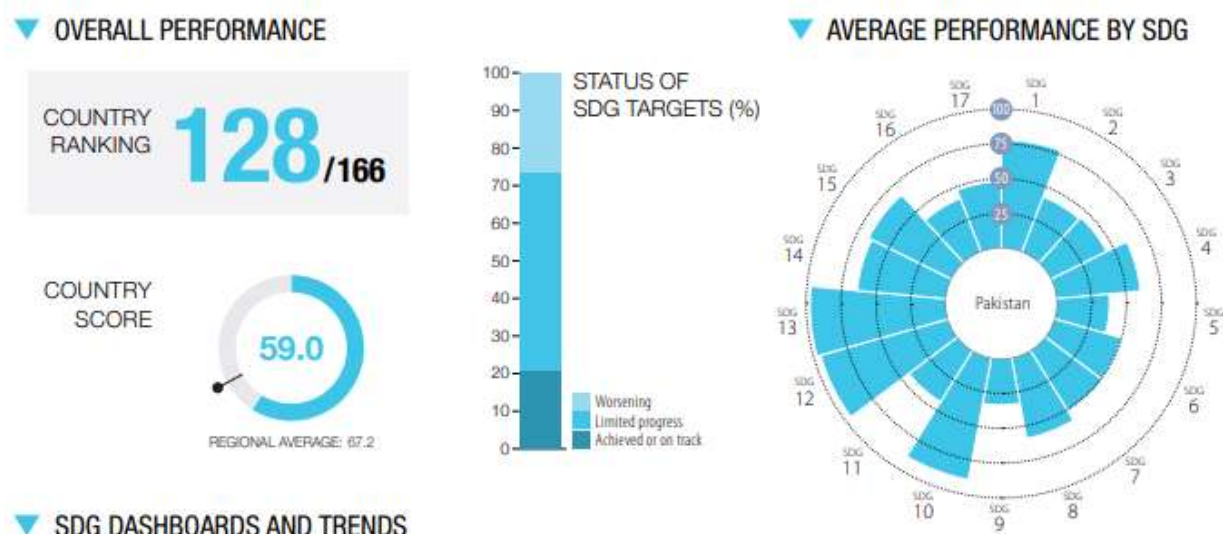
**Table 2:** Ranking of Pakistan on SDG related Social Indicators

SDG	Indicator	Ranking	Ref.
SDG 1: No Poverty	*Human Development	161/192	HDR 2024
SDG 2: Zero Hunger	Hunger Index (GHI)	102/ 125	GHI 2023
SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	Happiest Countries	108/143	WP 2024
SDG 4: Quality Education	Education Ranking	136/203	WPR 2024
SDG 5: Gender Equality	Global Gender Gap	142/146	WEF 2023
SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Environmental Performance Index	144/ 179	EPI 2020
SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	128/166	128/166	SDR 2023
SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Real GDP growth	2.5	IMF 2024
SDG 9: Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	Innovation Index Infrastructure Index	87/128 Not ranked	GE 2022 CMS 2024
SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	World Economic Inequality Index	50/152	WE 2024
SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities	Sustainable Cities Ranking Sustainable Cities Index	<sup>1</sup> 180/183, <sup>2</sup> 181/183 <sup>3</sup> 70/70	NEV 2024 CK 2023
SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	-	No data	OWD 2022
SDG 13: Climate Action	Climate change performance index	30/ 67	CCP 2024
SDG 14: Life Below Water	-	-	
SDG 15: Life on Land	-	-	
SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	WJP rule of law	130/142	WJP 2023
SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals	-	-	

\* Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.544.

<sup>1</sup>Lahore 180/183, <sup>2,3</sup>Karachi 181/183

The overall performance of Pakistan on SDGs as described in a recent UN report has been shown in Figure 1. The Table 3 shows the status and trends on performance on different SDGs.



**Figure 1:** Overall performance on SDGs: Pakistan (SDR 2023)

The SDGs are indivisible, i.e. they are interrelated, interconnected and interdependent. None of these can be achieved in isolation. But indifferent scenario one can identify the areas of highest leverage that create synergies with other SDGs. The system thinking tools should be involved in any effort to prioritize the SDGs that provide the maximum leverage in a particular set of conditions. Media can provide a platform for a dialogue to all stakeholders for this purpose.

**Table 3:** Status and Trends on SDGs in Pakistan (SDR 2023)

Status	Trends
Major challenges remain: SDG-2, SDG-3, SDG-4, SDG-5, SDG-6, SDG-7, SDG-8, SDG-9, SDG-11, SDG-14, SDG-15, SDG-16, SDG-17	Stagnating: SDG-1, SDG-3, SDG-4, SDG-5, SDG-7, SDG-8, SDG-9, SDG-11, SDG-15, SDG-16
Significant challenges: SDG-1	Moderately improving: SDG-16, SDG-12, SDG-13, SDG-14, SDG-17
Challenges remain: SDG-12	On track: SDG-10
SDGs achieved: SDG-13	

Like many other countries around the world, media coverage of various sustainability themes in Pakistani remain selective. The Pakistani media has played an effective role in raising the awareness on gender equality, climate change, clean water access and unrestricted deforestation. But many other themes remain totally neglected. Media can positively support and catalyze this transformation process by putting pressure on the decision makers to invest in the SDGs that matter most.

Pakistan has yet to go a long way to transform its governance for a meaningful progress on SDGs and media can play a key role in meeting SDGs.



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