Paradigmatic Shift in Education: From Millennium Development Goals (MDGs') to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs')

Amithy Jasrotia*
Richa Yadav**

Vivekananda Journal of Research
July- Dec 2019, Vol. 8, Issue 2, 104-116
ISSN 2319-8702(Print)
ISSN 2456-7574(Online)
© Vivekananda Institute of Professional Studies
http://www.vips.edu/vjr.php

Abstract

From Millennium Development Goals (MDG) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), there has been a shift in goal setting to achieve overall and inclusive development for everyone. On the whole, education is believed to be the 'golden thread' by which all other goals can be achieved. Later in the process the changed form of education has been observed. Earlier education was believed to be the goal to achieve but now education has become just a 'tool' for achieving rest of the 'goals' set up by United Nations. This changed form of education transformed the real meaning of education. Education is believed to enable people to think for them but now education in Sustainable Development Goals seems like education for 'anything else'. Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) stands for a chance for each human being with the capability to obtain knowledge and skills. With this it also helps in addressing and fighting the issues like climate change, end of poverty, gender equality etc. which can be addressed through teaching and learning process. But the very concept of Education for Sustainable Development is actually sound contrary to the spirit of education. The real meaning of education is somewhere obscuring due to Education for Sustainable Development. Thus, in this concern a long debate has been started whether the Education for Sustainable Development should have eco-centric version or anthropocentric view.

Keywords*: Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, Education, Education for Sustainable Development.*

* Assistant Professor, Dept. of Sociology, University of Rajasthan , Rajasthan.
E-mail: amijas19@gmail.com
** Assistant Professor Department of Electronic Media, Haridev Joshi University of Journalism and Mass Communication, Jaipur.

Introduction

On18th September, 2000, United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration in New York. Leaders of 189 countries gathered to adopt the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The United Nations had set up eight international development goals and all the countries came together to achieve a set of eight measurable goals for the year 2015. In all the goals the second goal was dealing with the achievement of universal primary education. The pledge was that by 2015 all the children including girls and boys should complete a full course of primary schooling.

The MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) provided a common platform for all the member states of United Nations to reach an agreement. Though considerable development was witnessed but the achievements were majorly seen as uneven. Before the expiration of MDGs the post agenda for 2015 started, then the entire focal point shifted towards sustainability. There was a zeal started, to build a sustainable world where the environmental sustainability should be equally valued with social inclusion and economic development. In June 2012, the United Nations Conference on 'Sustainable Development' in Rio de Janeiro gave the new development goals which later known as 'Sustainable Development Goals' (SDG: Knowledge Platform, 2018). In July 2014, the UN General Assembly Open Working Group (OWG) proposed a document which contained the 17 sustainable development goals. These goals then put forwarded for the General Assembly's approval in September 2015. This document set the ground for the new SDGs and the global development agenda with span of 2015-2030 (Sustainable Development Goals Fund,2018).

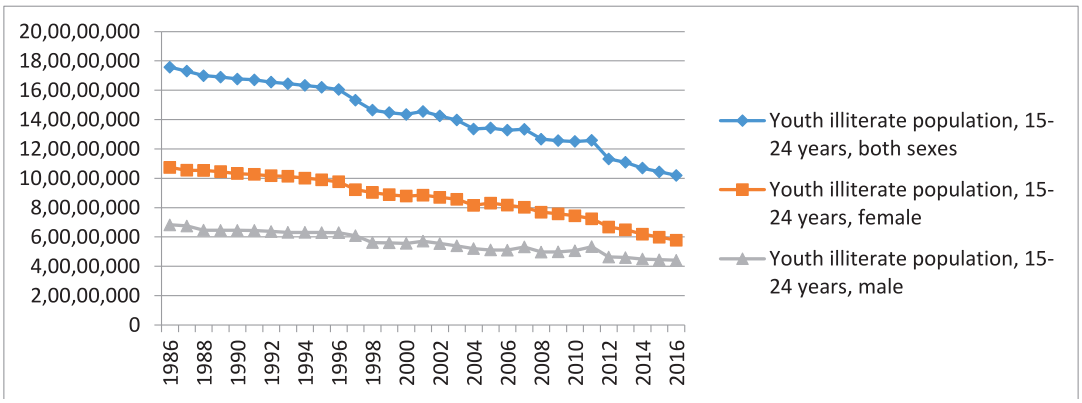
In Agenda 21[1], chapter 26 was the focal point of the description of education, public awareness and training. In this chapter the redefined objective of education is proposed, where the orientation of education towards sustainable development, increasing public awareness and promotion of trainings especially in the context of vocation is well defined. After MDG, at the global level, the literacy rate has increased tremendously. The youth literacy rate has increased from 83 per cent to 91 per cent over the two decades and the number of illiterate youths has declined from 170 million to 115 million. However, the regional and gender disparities are still persisting in the world especially in the least developed countries (UNICEF, 2018).

The UNICEF publication reports on education, 2015 depict that the number of

1 Agenda 21 was the action plan adopted by United Nations for the fulfillment of sustainable development. This was the product of Earth-Summit, the UN conference on Environment and Development, which was held on 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (United Nations Sustainable Development, 1992).

drop-outs at school level have gone down by 42% and for girls it was 47%, despite a rapid rise in population. But still the results are not very impressive because 58 million children (ages between 6 and 11) are yet out of school all over the world (Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All, 2015). "Each and every one of these children is a stark reminder of the broken promise to achieve universal primary education by the original deadline of 2015" (ibid, 2015).

Table no. 1: No. of illiterate and literate Youth in age group 15- 24 years (1985 – 2016) world wide.



Source: Literacy Rates- UNICEF Data

All over the world it is seen that the youth literacy has been increased from 83 per cent to 91 per cent over two decades. And the number of illiterate youths has fallen down from 170 million to 115 million. Due to the expansion of education system it is seen from the above data that literacy rates among youth and adults has showed positive results.

But even with all the positive aspects as shown above, there are certain grey areas which are still to be taken care of for example regional and gender inequalities. In least developed countries the literacy rate is not found to be very impressive. Moreover, among the literates the higher rate found among males than females. Also, from the research of recent years it has been found that 59% of young women all over the world have been reported as illiterate.

Thus, even after all the positive outcomes and all the efforts done by the governments, civil society and the international community, the world has not still achieved *Education for All*. Therefore, after all this progress, 15 years of monitoring has showed only moderate results. Globally, still there are 58 million children who are out of school and around 100

million children do not complete primary education (Literacy Rates- UNICEF Data, 2018).

Educational status in Indian context

In India, as compared to urban areas (86%) the literacy rate in rural areas has come down up to 71%. And in the age group of 7 years and above, the male literacy rate was found higher (83%) than the female (67%) literacy rate (The Economic Times, 2015). Apart from this people who are with disability are only 54% literate in India. In addition, we have 100% enrolment of girls in primary education but the dark side is that we have only 23.3% in higher education. Apart from this we have only 24% gross enrollment in higher education (UNICEF, 2015). Higher education is believed to be the final stage of formal learning which plays very important role in the overall development of national economies and in the construction of creative thoughts. It also helps in contributing the concrete needs of the society and the world.

Majorly the higher education has three important principles namely; freedom and democracy, knowledge and innovation and human kind and their environment (Escotet, 2012). The use of necessary skills for critical thinking and problem solving, the ability to adopt the change, tolerance of ambiguity, and acceptance of human differences are the most important abilities a student develops during the college years. Levine proposes that college education,

"must provide the skills and knowledge needed to live in our world."

(Levine, 1989, p. 21)

Further, Levine argued that college education is the site where students or an individual gets a chance to expand their vision to achieve a balance between meeting their own needs and those of the community in which they are living (Higbee & Dwinell, 1997). Therefore, without education the goals of SDG are believed to be tough to achieve. For universal elementary education, India has achieved considerable progress especially in terms of girl education. We have momentous improvement in the enrolment rate of girls in schools. In primary education in 2013-14 the enrolment ratio for boys and girls was found to be 88%. And at the national level, the literacy rate of male youth was found at 94% and 92% for females. At present, both National Education Policy and Sustainable Development Goal no.4 are sharing the goals of universal quality education and lifelong learning.

Under the flagship scheme of 'Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan' (which started and

complemented with the nutritional support to poor children in schools) aimed at achieving universal quality education for all in India. Due to this India is able to rise in significant rate in elementary education. But despite all these developments we are still not able to curve down the inequalities which are persisting in the education system. And the irony is the disadvantage is the poorest and weaker section of the society. They are the most lagging behind in educational aspect. In O' Brien's words;

> *The world's poorest children are four times more likely not to go to school than the world's richest children, and five times more likely not to complete primary schooling. Conflict remains a steep barrier, with a high and growing proportion of out-of-school children living in conflict zones. Overall, the poor quality of learning at primary level still has millions of children leaving school without basic skills*
>
> (O'Brien, 2016, p.206).

Education adopted as a Goal in SDGs

Thus, when the UN was on the onset for adopting new goals, then there was the realization that education is extremely important for all the t17 SDG goals. Without education it would not be possible to reap the fruits of SDGs. Therefore, the ambitions for education are essentially adopted in Sustainable Development Goal no. 4. This aims to;

> *"ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" by 2030.*
>
> (UN assembly, 2015).

For the first time, in SDG, education is taken as a 'goal' rather than just a mere 'tool' as it was in the MDGs. Education has been considered as pivotal for the realization for the fulfillment of all SDGs. In all it has been seen that education is a stand-alone goal to achieve the rest of SDGs. For the first time, it has been realized that for the fulfillment of SDGs quality education is the only answer to this. Therefore, for policy makers education acts like a force multiplier this would help in enabling self-reliance. It can also help in increasing economic growth by skillful individuals. It was also believed that it would help in improving people's lives by opening up opportunities for better livelihoods. Thus, education was acting like a 'golden thread 'for all the 17 SDGs. Apart from Goal no. 4 other goals are also referring education in one or another sense. For example, Goal

no. 3 is health and well-being, Goal no. 5 is dealing with gender equality, Goal no. 8 is all about descent work and economic growth, Goal no. 12 is responsible consumption and production and Goal no.13 is for climate change mitigation, in all, the role of education has been inevitable and without education we will not be able to touch the sky of SDGs.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

The present educational system portrayed that most of the learning system is either based on functional or on informal base. Further, it's major leaning are towards socialization and for the fulfillment of vocational goals. Ironically the present educational paradigm is not able to take any account for sustainability. The modern educational paradigm is fundamentally derived from either mechanistic or from reductionist approach. The larger gap and poor fit are prevailing between our education model and in our experiences of increasing complexities, interdependence and system breakdown of the world. Thus, lately it has been realized that if we place the present education system within the frame work of sustainable development then only we can meet with our limited resources.

Sterling (2001), very well mentioned that education for sustainability is possible only when we have strong understanding of ecological, partaking worldview by which we can develop a strong ecological educational paradigm and culture. Recognition of sustainable education paradigm needs vision, image, design, and action from all concerned authority. Thus, the major aim of ESD is providing everyone with the opportunities to have necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which can shape our sustainable future. ESD also pushses impetus on teaching and learning process for including the sensitive and time demanding aspect like climate change, disaster and risk education, biodiversity and sustainable consumption (UNESCO, 2014).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) was basically comprised of two pedagogical approaches; one approach was concerned with the environmental education and other was the education to cooperate with the Third World (Boehn & Petersen, 2007). But later ESD was considered as a wider concept and much beyond the context of economic terminology. It was also felt that classroom instructions are also important in imparting ESD goals. The presumption is that a teacher's role and the curricula design are equally important to implement and spread the concepts of sustainable development. And this process was started rapidly through classroom instruction. The major thrust areas of ESD are;

1. Access to quality basic education
2. Reorienting existing education
3. Public awareness and understanding
4. Training programs for all sectors (Agenda 21 -92, UNESCO-96, UNCSD -98, JPOI-2002).

In addition, there is the adoption of International implementing schemes which mostly focus on the vision building and advocacy, consultation and ownership, partnership and networks, capacity building and training, research and innovation, use of Information & Communication technologies and monitoring and evaluation (UNESCO, 2005). Thus, the belief that education is the only source which can provide us some required traits for human development.

In March, 2017, the fifth meeting of the inter-agency and expert group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators took place in Ottawa, Canada. In the meeting, the specific indicator tiers were updated after consideration in the IAEG-SDGs in 2016. It stated that a work plan was established for the Indicator 4.7.1 of Goal 4-Quality Education which is as follows;

> *"Indicator 4.7.1: Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in: (a) national education policies, (b) curricula, teacher education and (d) student assessment and work plan established"*
>
> **(SDGs resources, 2018).**

Thus, it is clearly mentioned that ESD should be incorporated in national education policies including curricula and teacher education and at all levels. It is because elementary education sensitizes early childhood care which leads to strong individual growth, equality particularly gender will lead and help to create gender sensitivity, skill development for applied knowledge system, affirmative actions for the vulnerable leads to equality and liberty, international co-operation in education dissemination, inculcating ideals of non-violence and toleration, nurturing national citizenship, respect for human rights and understandings for cultural diversities.

Communication and ESD

Besides in education, media and other communication agencies have been also suggested to incorporate the messages of ESD. Even, it has been realized that not just the education policies but the communication policies need to be strategized. It must be the role of media to spread the significance and relevance about ESD. Stories related to ESD's accomplishment should be given space in mainstream media to mobilize the people towards achieving the end goal of development. Therefore, the development communication can also play a vital role in telling the people that how education can address the issues of sustainable development and how ESD can be embedded in the key education system of the country. In fact, it is opined that communication technology must also be utilized for creating ESD related knowledge portals for the general public. Students should also be taught the use of this technology to create awareness in the societies of concern.

Critical Assessment of ESD especially in the context of India

The very concept of ESD possess 'questions on itself'. The main aim of ESD is disillusioned somewhere and not able to clear the exact meaning of education. In the academic field the question of ESD is challenging and scholars saying that ESD is actually trying to direct people behave in a certain manner. Thus, Jickiling (1994) while criticizing the concept discussed that;

> *"the talk of 'educating for sustainable' is more suggestive of any activity like training or preparation for the achievement of some instrumental aim. This position seemingly rests on at least two assumptions: first that sustainable development is a clear and uncontested concept; and second, that education is a tool to be used for its advancement"*
>
> (Jickling, 1994; 237).

Though, in India, considering the ESD, many new initiatives were taken by the Government of India in the education system. With the onset of SDGs, there is the announcements of new 103 Kendriya-Vidhyalaya & 62 Navodaya-Vidhyalaya, The Right of Children Free and Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill 2017, Swayam and Teachers Education, the opening of new 14 IIITs, 7 IITs, 7IIMs, 1 NIT and 141 Universities and the announcement of providing full autonomy to the higher educational institutions. In addition, the three-fold increase in budgetary allocation for RUSA has also been set up. Global Initiate for Academic Network (GIAN) for Internationalization of Education,

National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), National Digital Library under National Academic Depository and wi-fi enabled campuses. Research and innovation initiatives are also undertaken under the banner of IMPRINT-I & II and SMART INDIA HACKATHON with student's engagement for common problems.

Local Initiatives taken in some States of India

At the local level we also find some success stories related to education for sustainable development in India through the UNESCO's efforts. Under the flagship of UNESCO one of its significant projects was to provide "World Heritage Biodiversity Scholarships" in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Rajasthan. The school going children (50 in number) of the park staff and local communities were chosen for a scholarship of rupees 500/ month. These scholarship holders were asked to participate in creating awareness regarding conservation and solid waste management. This not only made them the role models for others but also engaged their perception regarding the conservation issues.

Another exemplary programme was initiated in Mangalore regarding safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene education. It was developed by TERI (The Energy and Research Institute). In this two model schools were identified to establish the Water Resource Centre. Since schools were chosen for this project, it brought attitudinal change in the students and they became conscious regarding water borne diseases. It also made them responsible towards water conservation, hand washing habits and other hygiene related issues (Tomar, 2014).

Besides such projects the educational institutes made the teachers and the curricula competent enough to teach the practicalities of the environmental, societal and economic issues. In a country like India the traditional knowledge and values also tried to impart ESD among the students.

> *"In ESD, values have different roles in the curriculum. In some ESD efforts, pupils adopt certain values as a direct result of instruction or modeling of accepted values. In other cultures, studying the relationship between society and the environment leads pupils to adopt values derived from their studies. In cultures where inquisitiveness is encouraged, pupils come to value curiosity and questioning. In democratic societies, pupils also develop shared values around concepts of democratic process, community participation in decision making, volunteerism, and social justice. Each of these approaches contributes to the overall goal of sustainability."*
>
> (Mckeown, 2002)

In India, the NITI – AYOG has been drafted as the main figure for the operationalization of Goal 4 under SDGs. There are number of new initiatives has taken place by the government of India to walk parallel with the world development in a sustainable way. Few important ones are Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Make in India, Skill India and Digital India. On the other hand, it has also been observed that all these new initiatives and programmes are also operating with their shortcomings. For example, after the dawn of these policies it has been illustrated that there is sudden reduction in the budgetary grants for higher education. The establishment of number of private institutions and universities, the fluctuating policy decisions of higher education governing bodies like University Grants Commission (UGC), Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) etc. witting immense effects on the productivity of the entire institutions. And the last and very important is the undue state interference in the policy matters of Universities and in Higher Educational System. Thus, the whole process sometimes seems like 'oxymoron'. It acts more as an antithetical for the development of autonomous thinking.

Conclusions

In the present times, education enabled masses to think for their selves. But the real aim of education seems silent in ESD. It seems like education for 'anything else'. Lots of skepticism has been seen in the effectiveness and coherence of the term ESD. The very, above, concept is in fact working contrary with the spirit of education. Education should be retained its true meaning and students must be taught to analyze those issues that place utmost importance for them. And they should be able to make decisions about themselves. In addition, they also need to be sensitized that 'sustainable development' is the most important part of their reality. Slocombe (1993) mentioned in his words;

> *"The best that could come of sustainable development, in educational term, is the fostering..... of a broad mix of new concepts". In the academic front after the announcement and implementation of ESD the long debate has been started between a number of stances; for example, between the supporters of the eco-centric world-view and those who adhere with the philosophy of anthropocentric world-view."*

The eco-centric approach gives equal importance to everything available to us in the form of nature and we need to accept that no natural resource is second to humankind. Whereas anthropocentric approach states that humans are superior to others and therefore, they can use the nature for their own well-being and sustenance. Thus, the prime question

is of sustenance remains with us. We have to adopt balance approach in the educational sector by adopting both the eco and anthropocentric approach. As the time has arrived where we have to realize that we have to save our tomorrow by sensitizing our today. We should not kill our tomorrow by our today's actions i.e. by exploiting our environment and natural resources unnecessary for fulfilling our need as well as greed. Thus, Education for Sustainable Development can play a pivotal role in resolving this issue and also guide us towards the right direction if we adopt well-adjusted approach while retentively with the true meaning of education.

References

Agirreazkuenaga, L. (2019). *Embedding Sustainable Development Goals in Education. Teachers' Perspective about Education for Sustainability in the Basque Autonomous Community*. *Sustainability*. 11, 1496. https://doi.org/10.3390/su11051496.

Boehn, D., Böhn, D., & Petersen, J. (2007). Education for Sustainable Development: An International Perspective. *Internationale Schulbuch for schung*, 29(2), 139-145. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43056775. Accessed on 7th September, 2018.

Dlouha, Jana & Pospisilova. (2018). Education for Sustainable Development Goals in Public debate: The importance of participatory research in reflecting and supporting the consultation process in developing a vision for Czech education. *Journal of Cleaner Production*. Vol. 172 (20), 4314-4327.

Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action. Retrieved from uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/education-2030-incheon-framework-for-action-implementation-of-sdg4-2016-en_2.pdf. Accessed on 20 September, 2018.

Escotet, Miguel Angel. (2012). *What is the purpose of Education, Knowledge or Utility*. Retrieved from http://miguelescotet.com/2012/what-is-the-purpose-of-higher-education-knowledge-or-utility/. Accessed on 21st August, 2018.

General Assembly resolutions 55/2, United Nations Millennium Declaration, A/RES/55/2 (18 September 2018), Retrieved from http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.pdf. Accessed on 19th September, 2018.

Higbee, Jeanne L. & Dwinell. Patricia L. (1997). *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*. Vol. 14, No. 1 (Fall 1997), 75-79. New York College Learning Skills Association. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42802484. Page Count: 5.

Jickling, B. (1994). Studying Sustainable Development: Problems and Possibilities. *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne De L'éducation,* 19(3), 231-240. doi:10.2307/1495129

Kopnina, H., Washington, H., Taylor, B. et al. (2018). Anthropocentrism: More than Just a Misunderstood Problem. *J Agric Environ Ethics,* 31 (1), 109-127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-018-9711-1• Accessed on March, 2018.

Leicht, A., Heiss, J & Byun, W. J. (2018). *Issues and Trends in Education for Sustainable Development*. UNESCO Publishing.

Literacy rate at 71% in rural India, 86% in urban: Survey. Retrieved from https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/literacy-rate-at-71-in-rural-india-86-in-urban-survey/articleshow/47886609.cms, Accessed on September 25, 2018.

Mckeown, Rosalyn. (2002). *The Education for Sustainable Development Toolkit*. Version 2, Waste Management Research and Education Institution. Retrieved from http://www.esdtoolkit.org on 02.09.2018.

O' Brien, Catherine. (2016). *Education for Sustainable Happiness and Well-being*. Routledge. New York. P.206.

Sterling, Stephen. (2001). *Sustainable Education: Re-Visioning Learning and Change. Schumacher Briefings*. Retrieved from. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED464791. Accessed on 22nd August, 2018.

Sustainable Development Goals Fund. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.sdgfund.org/mdgs-sdgs. Accessed on 23 September, 2018.

Sustainable Development Goals: Knowledge Platform. Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/rio20. Accessed on 20th September, 2018.

Tier 3 Indicators- Updated for 5th meeting of the IAEG-SDGs. (2017). Retrieved from https://medium.com/sdgs-resources/tier-3-indicators-updated-for-5th-meeting-of-the-iaeg-sdgs-7db96e1be281. Accessed on 5th September, 2018.

Tomar, Alka. (2014). *Good Practice stories on Education for Sustainable development in India*. Published by UNESCO. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002325/232544E.pdf. Accessed on 4th September 2018.

UNESCO, 2005. United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development

(2005e2014): International Implementation Scheme. UNESCO, Paris in Jana Dlouha, Laura Machácková-Henderson, Jirí Dlouhý. Learning networks with involvement of higher education institutions. Journal of Cleaner Production 49 (2013) 95-104.

UNESCO. (2014). Education for Sustainable Development. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/newdelhi/areas-of-action/special-themes/education-for-sustainable-development/. Accessed on 4th September 2018.

UNICEF DATA: Monitoring the situation of children and women, Literacy among youth is rising, but young women lag behind (Literacy rates-UNICEF Data, July 2018) , Retrieved from https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/literacy/. Accessed on 16th September, 2018.

UNICEF. (2015). Fixing the Broken Promise of Education for All: Findings from the Global Initiatives on Out-of- School Children. Retrieved from https://data.unicef.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Global-OOSCreport-Full-web_217.pdf. Accessed on 15th of August, 2018.

United Nations Sustainable Development, United Nations Conference on Environment Development (Rio de Janerio, Brazil, 3to 14 June, 1992), Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf. Accessed on 24 September, 2018.

United Nations, Department of Public Information, UN General Assembly's Open Working Group proposes sustainable development goals. 22 July 2014, Retrieved from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/4538pressowg13.pdf. Accessed on 18th September, 2018.