

A World without Hunger and Protection of the Environment - a contradiction?

About Conflicts in achieving SDG Goals 2 and 15

Olivia Schraibman

During the UN Summit of 2015, seventeen sustainable development goals (SDG's) were agreed upon by our world leaders. These goals came into force at the beginning of 2016 and are "related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice" for all¹. All of the seventeen goals are linked in their aim to create a more sustainable future, something that cannot be achieved without success in all areas. However, a problem arises as the process of working towards some of the SDG's can often create contradictions with the efforts being made to achieve others. The following paper will outline the conflict that arises between Goal 2, achieving a world with zero hunger, and Goal 15, promoting healthy life on land.

The second goal of achieving zero hunger was initiated because malnutrition, malnourishment, and starvation continue to be major problems hindering the development of many countries. As stated on the UN website, "795 million people are estimated to be chronically undernourished as of 2014, often as a direct consequence of environmental degradation, drought, and loss of biodiversity."² Countries suffering from such problems, especially Asia as their population makes up 2/3 of those suffering from chronic hunger in the world, face barriers that make developmental virtually progress impossible. Therefore, this goal was created and aims to end hunger and malnutrition by the year 2030³. As stated by the UN, "a world without hunger can positively impact our economies, health, education, equality and social development," all of which are necessary for the ultimate goal of achieving sustainable development and creating a better future for all⁴.

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

² <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-2-zero-hunger.html>

³ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-2-zero-hunger.html>

⁴ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-2.pdf>

As of right now, 821 million people are suffering from chronic hunger⁵. If profound changes cannot be made, it is expected that by the year of 2050, over 2 billion people will be undernourished. Every year, 3.1 million children under the age of five die because of undernourishment. The fact that malnutrition accounts for almost half of children's deaths (45%) worldwide is staggering⁶. It is obvious that something must be done in order to improve food security worldwide, however, it is vital to utilize our environmental resources in a way that is healthy and sustainable. Over-farming and environmental degradation often are the result of efforts to improve food security. Unfortunately, if not managed correctly, these resulting agricultural customs have a direct consequence to SDG fifteen, life on land. As crop diversity is lost and the land is overcultivated, along with the rise of monocultures, life on our earth faces the consequences.

Goal fifteen of protecting and promoting life on land is impossible without the resources that earth naturally provides. Ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, drylands, and mountains all contribute fundamental properties that life is impossible without. That being said, environmental protection is of the utmost importance for the maintenance of all life on earth and the achievement of all seventeen sustainable development goals laid out by the United Nations. Land degradation and deforestation create life threatening problems as the resources necessary for survival continue to be systematically depleted⁷. Aside from providing food security and shelter, forests also are necessary in the fight against climate change and the maintenance of biodiversity. As they cover around 30.7 percent of the earth's surface, profound efforts must be made in order to ensure their protection. As desertification has occurred on over 3.6 billion hectares of land worldwide, biodiversity is continuously threatened. Such instances make achieving any sustainable development goal virtually impossible. Therefore changes must be made in order for earth's ecosystems to remain diverse, healthy, and productive, while also continually protecting and improving food security worldwide⁸.

⁵ <http://www.thp.org/issues/hunger/>

⁶ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

⁷ <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/sustainable-development-goals/goal-15-life-on-land.html>

⁸ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>

Fundamentally, life on land cannot be healthily maintained while chronic hunger remains an international issue, as goals two and fifteen are interdependent, in addition to conflictual. Hunger reduces the productivity of individuals worldwide and makes people more susceptible to diseases, thus creating two barriers in the way of achieving sustainable development. On the other hand, environmental degradation renders efforts to improve chronic hunger ineffective, as exemplified by the UN's statement regarding desertification: "6 billion people depend directly on agriculture, but 52 percent of the land used for agriculture is moderately or severely affected by soil degradation"⁹. A specific example of environmental related issues that encumber efforts to end world hunger is that on the 12 million hectares of land lost each year due to drought and desertification, over 200 million tons of grain could be grown.

That being said, zero hunger is impossible to achieve without the successful implementation of the 15th SDG. Sustainable agricultural practices must be supported, and countries must cooperate on an international scale in order to improve agricultural productivity. Even though these two SDG's are impossible without the success of the other, a conflict arises between the two as many of their practices often clash. For example, the goal of zero hunger can be further supported by extended agricultural production, as more food would be created. However, over-cultivating the land can often lead to soil and water pollution, a result that threatens the 15th SDG, life on land. Moreover, the rise of monocultures to improve and stabilize our worlds food supply has detrimental environmental impacts. This practice dramatically endangers biodiversity as conditions are subsequently created that foster the rise of diseases and harmful bacteria. The environmental resources that all life on our planet cannot survive without, such as the availability of drinking water, minerals, and arable land, as well as earth's fundamental processes, such as pollination, nutrient cycling, and climate regulation, all rely upon the biodiversity of earth's ecosystem. As such, life on land cannot be protected without a process that achieving zero hunger has the potential to threaten.

Finding a balance in the achievement these two goals is of the utmost important. One cannot be achieved without the other, yet they must be worked towards in such a way that contradictory effects are not created. In order to create a system that leads to the achievement of both SDG's, it

⁹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/biodiversity/>

is vital for crop diversity to improve in order to create conditions favorable to prosperous agricultural biodiversity. This is important because agricultural biodiversity results in “more nutritious diets, enhanced livelihoods for farming communities and more resilient and sustainable farming systems”¹⁰. Often times, people take a route that seems easier to provide the most food in the fastest way possible, however this often causes even more issues in the future as agricultural resources will continually be depleted if not properly respected. That being said, targets four and five of goal two must be upheld at all costs in order for improvements to be made world-wide.

Goal two, target four, states that food production systems that improve productivity and production, while also continually working to maintain ecosystems, are a necessity in achieving worldwide sustainable development. Additionally, efforts must be made to strengthen the capacities of ecosystems in such a way that they are better able to withstand “climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters”¹¹. Agricultural practices should not be carried out in such a way that the quality of land and soil are threatened, especially with nutrient depletion and pollution. In order to find a solution to the conflicting issues created in the process of achieving these two goals, efforts made to reduce hunger must also support and promote seed, plant, and animal diversity.

Furthermore, increased investment needs to be made in agricultural and societal development. I believe that spending more money now in order to prevent a crisis in the future is worth the cost, and ultimately cheaper. Investments must be made in such a way that international cooperation can be promoted, rural infrastructure can be improved, agricultural research and technology can be advanced. I agree with the United Nations that an additional \$267 billion dollars per year is necessary and vital in order to end world hunger, and thus promote the furtherance of all other sustainable development goals as well. Also, I concur with the UN that around \$150 billion dollars are needed to be invested in the protection of our forests and world biodiversity. This is necessary because if we don’t make efforts to solve such issues, the subsequent results would prove much more costly. For example, “insects and other pollen-carriers are estimated to be

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

worth more than \$200 billion per year to the global food economy” and “natural disasters caused by ecosystems disrupted by human impact and climate change already cost more than \$300 billion per year.”¹²

Additionally, it is necessary for efforts to be made on a local scale in order for the sustainable development of our world to be promoted, protected, and ensured. It is important for all communities across the globe to be involved in the development and protection of ecosystems in their area. This can be done through practices such as recycling, using renewable energy, respecting wildlife, and supporting local food producers. No efforts are too small, as even the seemingly most simple actions have an impact that could ultimately save our planet and allow all forms of life to flourish across the earth.

Olivia Schraibman

IES student, <https://www.iesabroad.org/city/vienna> (hyperlink)

Wofford College, Spartanburg, South Carolina

¹² <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-15.pdf>

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