Book Review of the

SDG2022_Flipbook

Anuradha J. Bakshi

Department of Human Development

Nirmala Niketan College of Home Science

University of Mumbai

anustra@gmail.com

Change, we agree, is the only constant. Every thought, word and accompanying action, has consequences that manifest as changes. Through individual thought and action, and collective human motivations and action, what kinds of change are we creating for ourselves, our communities, our planet? No doubt, both destructive and constructive changes are bound to co-occur, but what we must ask ourselves, is whether the balance is clearly tipped towards destructiveness. Greed today appears to be consuming us rather than temperance to secure the needs of tomorrow. Therefore, related questions that require our urgent attention include: How many of our changes are irrevocably destructive? How can we tip the balance in favour of constructive changes rather than irrevocably destructive changes? How can our thoughts and actions today help create a sustainable future?

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (see, for example, United Nations [UN], 2015) help us to steer our efforts towards a future that is tenable, a future that is respectful of life and well-being of diverse peoples and species, and one which reduces harm to our planet as a whole. The SDGs, agreed upon by UN member countries in 2015, and actioned thereafter, are targeting a relatively imminent future, one that is now just seven years away (i.e., 2030). The 17 SDGs cover equity in human well-being through goals such as ending poverty (SDG1) and hunger (SDG2); ensuring access to clean water and sanitation (SDG6), clean and affordable energy (SDG7); promoting good health (SDG3) and nutrition

(SDG2); guaranteeing inclusive quality education (SDG4) and decent work (SDG8); reducing inequalities (SDG10) and achieving gender equality (SDG5); and striving for peace (SDG16). The SDGs cover the well-being of the planet and our ecosystems through goals such as combating climate change (SDG13) and halting the loss of biodiversity (SDG15). The term sustainable is specifically used to define the development of the following: human settlements (SDG11), human consumption and production patterns (SDG12), use of terrestrial ecosystems (SDG15), use of aqua and marine ecosystems (SDG14), water management (SDG6), energy (SDG7), agriculture (SDG2), industrialization (SDG9), economic growth (SDG8), and also overall development (SDG16 and SDG17).

This is a book review of a flipbook which accompanies the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2022 (UN, 2022). The title of the flipbook clearly states the purpose and content of the book, *Bringing data to life: SDG human impact stories from across the globe*. Thirty-seven stories spanning 27 countries illustrate recent SDG-related achievements. Each story represents one step that brings us closer to actualising the vision that undergirds SDGs. Each story reminds us that every small or big thought, founded in caring for the well-being of our planet, can result in action that contributes to a sustainable future.

The flipbook is arranged in serial order of the SDGs. For each SDG, two or more examples are presented using both text and photographs. Of course, the editors acknowledge that any example helps serve more than one SDG. Also, each story is captured on a single page and the links to the original story and video are provided. Each story has an informative (e.g., *Meet the "Pad Man": Breaking Taboos and Transforming Lives in Papua, Indonesia*) and catchy title (e.g., *Turning Plastic to Profit, Sowing Seeds of Change*) along with the name of the UN organisation that provided the data. There is a central character in each story, exemplifying one of the "faces" of the SDG-related achievements. An excerpt of this person's message is included in many of the stories. To illustrate, in an example for SDG8, Amena El-Saie, the CEO and co-founder of an NGO in Egypt working to enable sustainable and effective inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in the workplace, shares the following:

> Never make assumptions about the needs of people with disabilities. Instead of making assumptions about their needs, ask questions and educate yourself. I believe that everyone has a role to play in enhancing the inclusion of all persons with disabilities in all communities. (p. 38)

There is considerable breadth in the coverage of topics, a natural outcome of ensuring examples for each of the 17 SDGs. Action taken to address the most urgent sustainability-related concerns has been depicted well. These initiatives range from community radio for migrants in Brazil (SDG16) to collective youth action to protect the coral reefs in Costa Rica (SDG14). Steps taken towards halting harm and redirecting efforts to bolster our planet's natural resources are illustrated through stories on: rainwater harvesting systems in Senegal (SDG6), sustainable tourism in response to climate-change-induced loss of livelihoods in coastal Chile (SDG13), sea cucumber farming in Sri Lanka as a sustainable alternative to farming the depleting population of wild sea cucumbers (SDG14), recycling and upcycling beeswax in Palestine (SDG9), and recultivation and promotion of an endangered wheat variety in Georgia (SDG15).

Women's achievements are showcased throughout the flipbook. These include, for example: women who have set up community kitchen gardens in Panama (SDG2); female farmers in Sri Lanka (SDG5) and the Philippines (SDG13); Women Waste Warriors (3Ws) engaged in Reduce, Recycle, and Reuse (3Rs) livelihood projects in Philippines (SDG12); and women who are stopping female genital mutilation (FGM) in Gambia (SDG5). Female faces of how we are realising the SDGs also include a female energy patriot in Indonesia who is enabling a solar power plant to be put up in a remote village in Indonesia (SDG7) and a woman who founded an NGO to monitor air quality in Kyrgyzstan and provide citizen support and partnership to the government (SDG11).

There are multiple COVID-19 related examples in the flipbook. As part of SDG13, COVID-19 vaccines have been made available for vulnerable individuals in the Philippines such as the homeless, people with a disability and those who had survived gender-based violence. In order to reduce the impact of the digital divide on girls'/children's education during physical closure of schools, schoolgirls in Iraq received a stipend to buy a mobile phone to continue their education online

(SDG4). Similarly, in one area of Brazil, children who were finding studying from home difficult were identified and supported (SDG4).

Many "firsts" are documented in the flipbook. Thus, one of the stories is that of medical oxygen being made available in Somalia for the first time (SDG13). Examples of other firsts are: Chillis grown in Bhutan for the first time (SDG2), a man teaching menstrual health and hygiene management to female and male school students in Indonesia (SDG5), and the introduction and use of energy-saving cooking stoves in Malawi (SDG7).

Whereas the book serves its purpose excellently, I do have some suggestions for other such flipbooks that the UN or another body may publish. A sustainability-achievement-related flipbook can be designed for children, to raise awareness and invite participation of children. This children's SDG flipbook could also creatively present the perspectives or imagined "voices" of other species on the planet such as elephants. For example, instead of presenting the sea cucumber story from the perspective of a farmer, it could be presented from the perspective of wild sea cucumbers, animating the sea cucumbers. A workbook could be designed as a supplementary resource with such a children's flipbook, where a child or a group of children could design and note their actions for each of the SDGs.

The flipbook editors could work to have greater representativeness of countries across the stories. For example, there are five examples from the Philippines and no examples from countries like China, Australia and South Africa. Finally, it is important to note that the SDG Report 2022 presents both data on achievements as well as challenges. The flipbook only presents stories of achievements and not the struggle with new (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine) and continuing (e.g., climate change, conflict and displacement of people) challenges. In fact, at the outstart in the SDG Report 2022, attention is drawn to the grave jeopardy that we are encountering in the realisation of SDG 2020 Agenda "due to multiple, cascading and intersecting crises" (UN, 2022, p. 3). Therefore, the stories of SDG-related achievements notwithstanding, as in the SDG Report 2022 (UN, 2022), I too would like to conclude with the words of Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the UN: "We must rise higher to rescue the Sustainable Development Goals – and stay true to our promise of a world of peace, dignity and prosperity on a healthy planet" (p. 66).

References

United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development.* A/RES/70/1. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs.

United Nations. (2022). *The Sustainable Development Goals Report* 2022. https://unstats.un.org/sdgs.