

HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT AS A STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract: The global economy is currently developing in the alignment with the UN' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as an essential plan for strengthening economic growth in all the countries around the world. It is essential to note that these goals are largely focused on supporting and promoting human capital, which is indispensable for national economies. The link between these two major topics is very clear, in the context that in recent years major investments in human capital development are needed, and the SDGs can successfully support this aspect. On the other way, without developed, smart, and professionally skilled human capital, cannot be registered economic progress, advanced industries, quality education, or efficient healthcare, which are all part of the 17 SDGs. The study explores the interrelated and interdependent relationship between human capital and SDGs, which would help identify solutions for economic growth and prosperity in countries around the world. The focus will be on the main SDGs such as: Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction (SDGs 1, 8, 9), referring to a skilled and healthy workforce that can increase productivity, innovation and income, which are essential for economic growth and reducing poverty; Health and Well-being (SDG 3), where investments in education and health improve health outcomes and life expectancy; Quality Education (SDG 4), which emphasizes quality education and lifelong learning as fundamental building blocks for national development; Reduced Inequality (SDG 5, 10), which involves developing human capital, particularly through education and

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employment opportunities, which helps reduce gender and economic inequalities. The findings indicate that the synergy between all SDGs allows for better alignment between global goals, priorities, and local needs. This ensures that actions taken at the national or local level contribute effectively to the global sustainable development agenda, stimulating effective global cooperation that helps maintain world peace and prosperity.

Keywords: Human capital, Sustainable Development Goals, education, skills.

JEL Classification: J24, I20, O30

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the United Nations established 17 global development goals along with their 169 targets to support the development of countries around the world by 2030, included in the Agenda 2030. (UN, 2025) It is a strategy used by the United Nations (UN) once every 15 years. The Global Goals set by the UN, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), play a key role in supporting global economic processes by promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, as well as ensuring full productive employment and decent work for all. This highlights the importance of the human factor for the prosperity of the global economy. The goals perfectly connect economic, environmental, social, and governance aspects, and are thus classified into four basic categories. Their goal is to successfully integrate innovation and productivity into the economy in order to contribute to economic growth in countries, by unconditionally supporting the human factor as a reliable force in this process. The human factor is crucial, because the achievement of these objectives depends directly on the quality and involvement of the workforce, on the skills and competences of human resources. Each of the 17 existing goals requires skilled and efficient human capital to achieve them, which leads to economic growth. The success of economic transformations requires placing the human factor at the center of strategic processes, and people's hard and soft skills allow prosperity to be stimulated.

Thus, the role of sustainable development goals in the global economy is integrative and transformative, involving a balance between economic growth and human capital development, which is essential for the long-term sustainability and prosperity of economies around the world. In this context, the authors aim to identify the connection between the human factor and sustainable development goals in order to establish the impact of these two essential aspects in supporting human development.

Methods and data. This study employs a mixed-methods approach to comprehensively analyze the role of human capital in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The methods used are monographic analysis, documentary analysis, comparative analysis, historical method and synthesis. This design allows for a holistic understanding of the interconnections between human capital and SDGs.

1. THE ROLE OF THE HUMAN FACTOR IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The human factor is a broad concept that defines the role of people and society in promoting and supporting processes in a country, region, or community. Globally, the human factor is considered a basic resource that involves the physical and intellectual capacities of individuals who develop an organization, community, or country. Over time, economists around the world have highlighted the role and importance of the human factor in a country's economic growth. Theodore W. Schultz is considered an important promoter of human capital theory, introducing the concept of the human factor as an important driver of economic growth, emphasizing the need for investment in education and workforce development, while Gary S. Becker expanded on human capital theory, analyzing investment in education, health, and vocational training as essential factors in economic growth. (Schultz, 1961) At the same time, Alfred Marshall was among the first economists to recognize the role of the human factor in economic growth, pointing out the importance of knowledge and skills, while Elton Mayo, through his studies in the 1930s,

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developed a model based on social premises and human factors within organizations, highlighting worker relationships and motivation. (Nishizawa, 2002).

There is a series of definitions and concepts proposed to identify the notion of human factor:

- According to the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), the human factor is perceived as the knowledge, skills, competencies, and attributes that empower people to contribute to their personal and social well-being, as well as that of their countries; (OCDE, 2007)
- The human factor refers to the human and individual characteristics of people that influence their behavior at work or in society; (UNM, 2025)
- Human factors is an applied field of study that examines human abilities, limitations, behaviors, and processes to inform human-centered designs; (MIT, 2023)
- Human factors is the science that deals with people. It focuses primarily on understanding human capabilities and then applying this knowledge to the design of equipment, tools, systems, and work processes. Human factors is the driving force behind the management of processes and technologies that lead to economic growth; (AUG,2025)
- The human factor is a multidisciplinary field that deals with the study of human behavior and interactions within various systems. Its main objective is to optimize performance, well-being, and safety by integrating knowledge from engineering, design, management, occupational health, psychology, and sociology. (Capotescu, 2025)

Thus, by summarizing all the concepts presented above, we can conclude that there are two main notions: the human factor and human capital. The human factor is a more complex concept, referring to people and their influence in all economic, social, or institutional management processes, while human capital refers to the knowledge and skills of individuals in managing these processes. For this reason, it is essential to identify how the human factor can enhance and streamline the global processes and phenomena set out in the 2030 Agenda.

2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AS STRATEGIC POINTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GLOBAL ECONOMY UNTIL 2030

As mentioned already, the global economy is aiming to hit a bunch of development goals by 2030, which are in the UN's proposed document, Agenda 2030. This agenda is an action plan with people and for people, the planet, and prosperity. It also aims to strengthen universal peace in greater freedom. This major goal will be pursued in all countries of the world, with the aim of achieving global prosperity through a series of actions that will eradicate poverty, create jobs, and bring peace and well-being to the countries of the world. The 17 sustainable development goals are integrated into three basic dimensions: economic, social, and environmental, covering five major areas: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership. The proposed goals are quite ambitious, but necessary. It is important to note that poverty eradication and hunger elimination can be achieved through job creation, access to various social services, access to quality education and training throughout life, in a healthy, environmentally friendly and clean environment. The proper integration of all dimensions enables global economic progress. (Fig.1)

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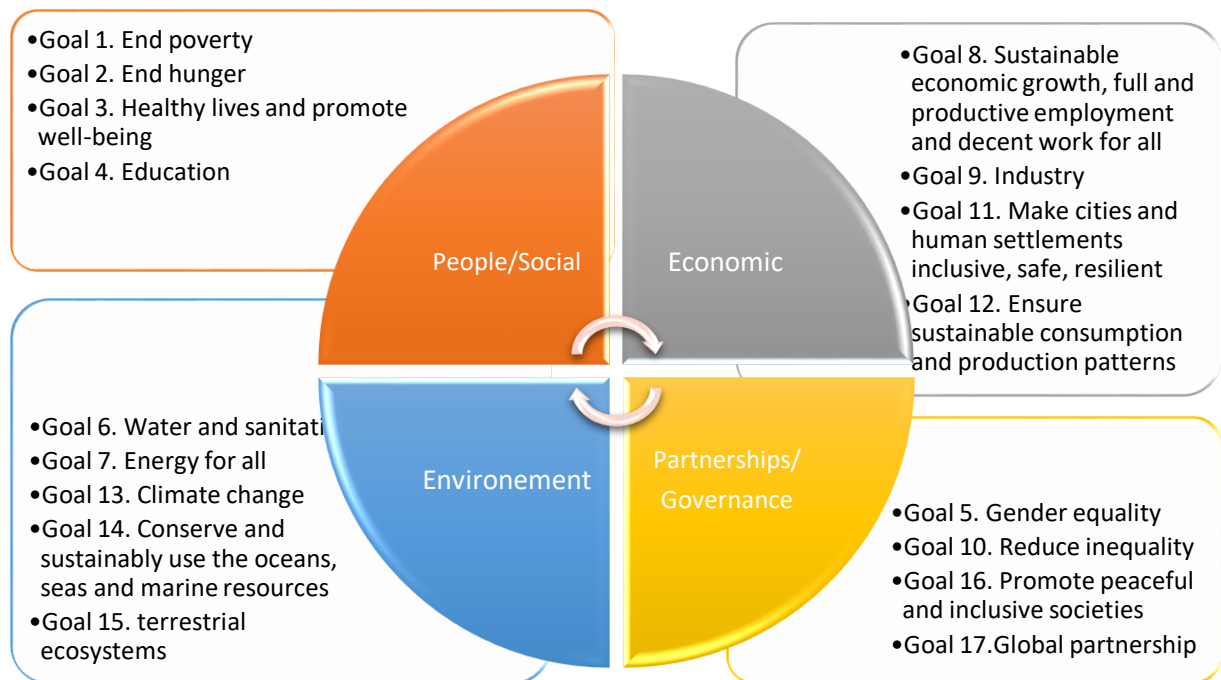


Figure 1. Sustainable development goals by area of action

Source: authors own study

In 2025, a decade after the goals were set, it is necessary to highlight both the progress and challenges that countries and international organizations have encountered. Although conflicts, climate change, economic instability, and growing geopolitical tensions have challenged the achievement of the goals, there is still time until 2030 to turn things around. Impressively, since 2015 there have been some successes in terms of the SDGs, with improvements in key areas including poverty reduction, infant mortality, access to electricity, and the fight against certain diseases. Currently, more than four billion people benefit from some form of social protection, 10% more than ten years ago. Great results have been achieved in reducing infant mortality in underdeveloped countries. Women now hold 27% of seats in parliaments worldwide, up from 22% in the past. Access to electricity has reached 92% of the global population, while internet usage has increased from 40% in 2015 to 68% in 2024. New HIV infections have fallen by 39% since 2010. Malaria prevention efforts have saved 12.7 million lives. More than 110 million additional children are enrolled in school, and the gender gap in education continues to narrow, with more girls completing school. Despite these results, it is estimated that only 35% of the SDGs are on track to be achieved or are making modest progress. Nearly half are progressing too slowly, and 18% are actually regressing. Over 800 million people still live in extreme poverty and hunger. Billions of people live without safe drinking water and sanitation. Women continue to bear 2.5 times more unpaid care work than men. People with disabilities remain disadvantaged in all sectors. Climate records are being broken, with 2024 being the warmest year in history. CO₂ levels are the highest in over two million years. Over 120 million people are displaced, more than double the number in 2015. (SDG, 2025)

It is worth mentioning that continued efforts are crucial, and active human participation remains indispensable.

3. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE HUMAN FACTOR AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

From the previous analysis, it can be seen that sustainable development goals cover a wide range of areas. Firstly, it is people who contribute directly to the implementation of these goals

through individual and collective actions, from adopting sustainable behaviors to getting involved in social, economic, and environmental initiatives. Every person, community, organization, and government has a role to play in achieving the SDGs, thus supporting sustainable development at all levels. The human factor is also seen as the main driver of change, as sustainable development is based on human capital, i.e., skills, education, health, and social equality, which enables inclusive economic growth. Quality education, gender equality, decent work, and safe working conditions are essential to ensuring an active and motivated population capable of innovating and contributing to sustainable prosperity. In addition, the UN agenda emphasizes that human rights, social inclusion, and combating inequalities are fundamental to achieving these goals. The active participation of people in decision-making and policy implementation develops a collective responsibility for environmental protection and social well-being, thus generating a sustainable impact. Therefore, the human factor is the core that gives life and sustainability to the UN goals, through its active involvement, education, respect for rights, and the creation of fair conditions for all individuals. The relationship between the human factor and sustainable development goals is interconnected. On the one hand, the human factor is the most important resource in achieving SDGs, through the optimization and efficient use of its possibilities, and on the other hand, there is a need to improve the components of human capital through access to education, decent work, and health. Eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, protecting the environment, and collaborating between nations are goals that can only be achieved by involving all aspects related to people, their behavior and capabilities, as well as adapting systems and the environment to optimize their performance (Fig.2).

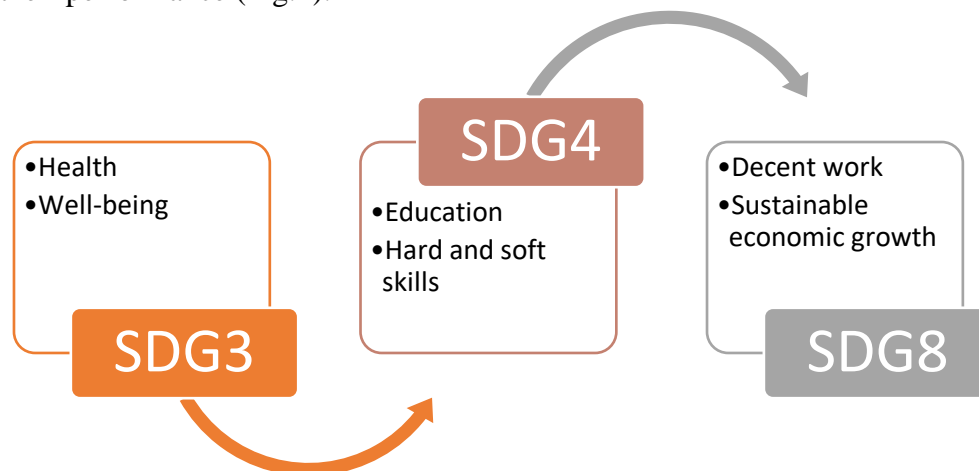


Figure 2. The connection between the human factor and Sustainable Development Goals

Source: authors own study

When analyzing the interconnection between them, it is essential to realize that SDG 3, which refers to health and well-being, and SDG 4, which refers to access to education, improving soft and hard skills, and lifelong learning, determine access to decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). The effective achievement of sustainable development goals depends on the quality of the human factor.

On the other hand, the consequences or benefits of sustainable development are closely linked to increasing human capacity, ensuring social inclusion, protecting human rights, and promoting adequate education and training for the population. Thus, the human factor is both a driver and a beneficiary of the achievement of the SDGs, highlighting the importance of investing in people for sustainable and equitable development.

CONCLUSIONS

Approaching of the interdependencies between the human factor and the Sustainable Development Goals is essential, as it is a complex system made up of many interconnected

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elements. Achieving particular goals is conditional to achieving others. If we refer to SDG 4 - quality education, which aims to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including through education, then SDG 5 - gender equality, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, is also essential. If we refer to SDG 4 - quality education, which aims to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to promote sustainable development, including, among other things, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and the contribution of culture to sustainable development. Thanks to increased access to education and the acquisition of various skills, people can have secure jobs, which contributes to economic growth and prosperity, thus achieving SDG 8. The collaboration between SDG 4 and SDG 8 reduces the number of people with low incomes, eradicating poverty and gender discrimination, or the income gap. In this case, we achieve SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, and SDG 5. On the other hand, the synergy between all SDGs allows for better alignment between global goals, priorities, and local needs. This ensures that actions taken at the national or local level contribute effectively to the global sustainable development agenda, stimulating effective global cooperation that helps maintain world peace and prosperity.

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