

People's Report Card Technical Note

Objective

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a historic commitment by the leaders of the world to make a step change in human wellbeing and environmental sustainability by 2030. Citizens have a crucial role to play in ensuring that their leaders deliver on this commitment. Mass global public engagement is therefore integral to the success of the Global Goals.

The 17 goals, 169 targets, and 241 indicators offer a challenging frame for everyday usage, understanding, and measurement. This is not just important from a communications standpoint, but also in how we go about meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The issues addressed by the SDGs require a sense of co-ownership from policymakers, activists, and the general public in a form that can be readily understood and used. We need a shorthand for the Sustainable Development Goals.

The "People's Report Card" tracks how the world as a whole, and every country, is performing against the Sustainable Development Goals every year from 2016 to 2030. Report cards are something people all over the world understand: A for Mathematics, B for English, D for Chemistry, etc. The People's Report Card uses this familiar scale to provide an assessment of country performance on key SDG concepts.

This document presents the Social Progress Index as a conceptual framework for assessing countries' progress toward meeting targets aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and describes a methodology for classifying this progress using letter grades from "A" to "F."

Concept in Brief

To measure the Sustainable Development Goals rigorously and meaningfully, we do not need to reinvent the wheel. The People's Report Card is powered by the Social Progress Index, which was first introduced in 2013 and has become a leading measure of countries' social and environmental performance. Since this methodology is already refined and appropriate data sources have already been identified, the People's Report Card will use the Social Progress Index framework, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal targets, to track each country's progress on a scale from A to F.

Social Progress Index

Basic Human Needs	Foundations of Wellbeing	Opportunity
Nutrition and Basic Medical Care Water and Sanitation Shelter Personal Safety	Access to Basic Knowledge Access to Information and Communications Health and Wellness Environmental Quality	Personal Rights Personal Freedom and Choice Tolerance and Inclusion Access to Advanced Education

The People’s Report Card is not intended to be a de jure measure of the SDGs. The United Nations is implementing a process to formally measure progress against the SDGs. The People’s Report Card will be a distilled, more accessible assessment of a country’s performance.

Each component of the Social Progress Index is given a letter grade driven by country performance on the component’s indicators. An “A” grade signifies that a country has achieved the target value, “B” to “F” represent distance from achieving the goal. Countries receiving a “B” grade are close enough to the target value that it could be achieved by 2030. A “C” grade signifies that the country is less likely to achieve the target value. Grades “D” through “F” are given to countries whose performance is considerably far from the target value.

The People’s Report Card takes an optimistic approach. **Grades represent what is possible, not what is probable.** A country scoring a “D” may mobilize the resources and political will necessary to make great progress, passing up a stagnating “B” country. **The grades in the People’s Report Card are not predictions.** Rather, grades provide a way of comparing disparate issues to show in which areas a country does best and which areas will require the most improvement to meet the goals. Grades will be reassessed each year. As 2030 approaches, grades will improve for countries showing faster-than-typical progress and deteriorate for countries where actual progress has not keep pace with potential.

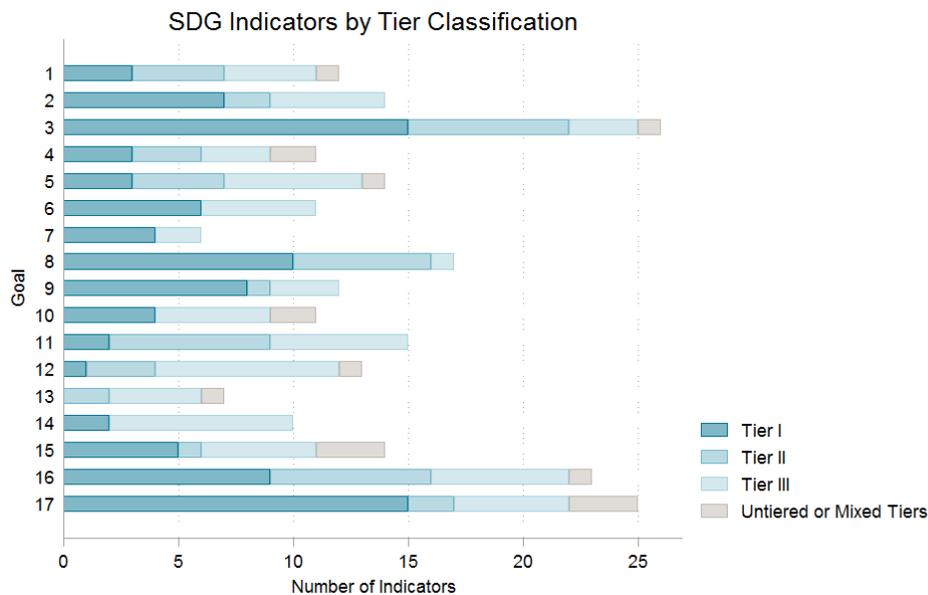
All 133 countries ranked by the Social Progress Index will have complete People’s Report Cards (i.e. grades for all 12 components and an overall grade), covering 94% of the world’s population. An additional 27 countries will have grades for at least nine of the twelve components, bringing coverage up to 99%. Since the People’s Report Card does not have the minimum data requirements of the Social Progress Index, it provides grades for any country or territory that has any data, even if there is not sufficient data to calculate a component score. This not only provides at least limited information to small island nations and other countries and territories often excluded from global data sets, but it shows where more data is most needed. All 193 UN-member states have at least 17 data points. Forty-five non-UN-member countries and territories are included though 36 have fewer than 10 data points.

Using the Social Progress Index as a Measure of the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals are wide-ranging and ambitious, but measurement is challenging. Data exists for more straightforward targets such as “reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births” (Target 3.1) and “halve global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents” (Target 3.6), but others are too vague, multidimensional, or complex to develop concrete measures, such as “ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature” (Target 12.8) and “ensure all learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including among others through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (Target 4.7).

The UN classifies only 41% of the 241 indicators as “tier 1” or “Indicator[s are] conceptually clear, [with] established methodolog[ies] and standards available and data regularly produced by countries.” A further 20% are “tier 2” or “Indicator[s are] conceptually clear, [with] established methodology[ies] and standards available but data [are] not regularly produced by countries.” Nearly one-third of the SDG indicators are classified as “tier 3,” meaning that “Indicator[s] [have] no established methodology and standards or methodology/standards are being developed/tested.”¹ Given the time, expertise, and expense required to design new indicators as well as collect and aggregate the data, it is likely that many – if not most – of the official Sustainable Development Goal indicators will not be measured.

Sustainable Development Indicators by Tier Classification (Source: Center for Global Development)



¹ The remaining 6% of indicators are not classified into any tier as of September 13, 2016

Unlike the Sustainable Development Goals, which are by definition a list of goals rather a conceptual model, the Social Progress Index has been designed and tested over a number years to provide an aggregate assessment of country performance. This involves two critical steps: a) creating a coherent conceptual model for aggregation; b) using econometric techniques to select and weight the most relevant indicators.² Since the Social Progress Index is strongly aligned with the concepts underlying the SDGs, it can serve as an aggregate measure of progress against the goals.

Of the tier 1 SDG indicators, 60% match the concepts measured in the Social Progress Index. Of the indicators not measured by the Social Progress Index, half measure official development assistance, are global in nature (such as representation in international organizations), are input measures such as government spending, or have data for only a small number of countries.

About 20% of the tier 1 SDG indicators are economic in nature and therefore not included in the Social Progress Index framework. By design, the Social Progress Index includes only social and environmental indicators. Economic performance and social performance are strongly correlated, but there are important divergences. Economic performance measures can obscure an understanding of social outcomes, such as whether citizens are healthy, safe, and free. The People's Report Card is intended to be a complement to measures of economic performance.

The Social Progress Index provides a strong foundation for the People's Report Card. It is divided into 12 components in three dimensions focusing on three related questions:

- 1) Does a country provide for its people's most essential needs? (Basic Human Needs)
- 2) Are the building blocks in place for individuals and communities to enhance and sustain wellbeing? (Foundations of Wellbeing)
- 3) Is there opportunity for all individuals to reach their full potential? (Opportunity)

To evaluate country performance on each of these dimensions, they are partitioned into actionable components. The first dimension, Basic Human Needs, assesses how well a country provides for its people's essential needs by measuring access to nutrition and basic medical care, safe drinking water, adequate housing with basic utilities, and if society is safe and secure.

Foundations of Wellbeing measures whether citizens have access to basic education, can access information and knowledge from both inside and outside their country, and if there are the conditions for living healthy lives. Foundations of Wellbeing also measures a country's protection of its natural environment: air, water, and land, which are critical for current and future wellbeing.

² The Social Progress Index aggregates country performance on 53 social and environmental outcome indicators into 12 components that roll up to 3 dimensions. The Social Progress Index normalizes quantifiable data and weights the indicator values using principal component analysis to create a 0-100 score on each of the 12 components. These component scores are averaged into dimension scores and ultimately an overall Social Progress Index score. Countries can be ranked by performance on the Index, dimensions, components, and indicators.

The final dimension, Opportunity, measures the degree to which a country’s citizens have personal rights and freedoms and are able to make their own personal decisions as well as whether prejudices or hostilities within a society prohibit individuals from reaching their potential. Opportunity also includes the degree to which advanced forms of education are accessible to those in a country who wish to further their knowledge and skills, creating the potential for wide-ranging personal opportunity.

The Social Progress Index aggregates country performance on 53 social and environmental outcome indicators into 12 components that roll up to 3 dimensions (see accompanying document, “People’s Report Card Indicator Details” for indicator sources and definitions). The Social Progress Index normalizes quantifiable data and weights the indicator values using principal component analysis to create a 0-100 score on each of the 12 components. These component scores are averaged into dimension scores and ultimately an overall Social Progress Index score.

Social Progress Index

Basic Human Needs	Foundations of Wellbeing	Opportunity
<p>Nutrition and Basic Medical Care</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undernourishment • Depth of food deficit • Maternal mortality rate • Child mortality rate • Deaths from infectious diseases <p>Water and Sanitation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to piped water • Rural access to improved water source • Access to improved sanitation facilities <p>Shelter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of affordable housing • Access to electricity • Quality of electricity supply • Household air pollution attributable deaths <p>Personal Safety</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homicide rate • Level of violent crime • Perceived criminality • Political terror • Traffic deaths 	<p>Access to Basic Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult literacy rate • Primary school enrollment • Lower secondary school enrollment • Upper secondary school enrollment • Gender parity in secondary enrollment <p>Access to Information and Communications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobile telephone subscriptions • Internet users • Press Freedom Index <p>Health and Wellness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life expectancy at 60 • Premature deaths from non-communicable diseases • Obesity rate • Suicide rate <p>Environmental Quality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor air pollution attributable deaths • Wastewater treatment • Greenhouse gas emissions • Biodiversity and habitat 	<p>Personal Rights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political rights • Freedom of speech • Freedom of assembly- /association • Freedom of movement • Private property rights <p>Personal Freedom and Choice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom over life choices • Freedom of religion • Early marriage • Satisfied demand for contraception • Corruption <p>Tolerance and Inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance for immigrants • Tolerance for homosexuals • Discrimination and violence against minorities • Religious tolerance • Community safety net <p>Access to Advanced Education</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Years of tertiary schooling • Women’s average years in school • Inequality in the attainment of education • Globally ranked universities • Percentage of tertiary students enrolled in globally ranked universities

Determining the People's Report Card Grades

There are three steps involved in constructing the People's Report Card:

1. Matching Social Progress Index indicators to Sustainable Development Goal targets
2. Determining the values that correspond to "achieving" the SDG targets in practice (referred to as "anchor values" for the People's Report Card)
3. Assigning grades for each indicator to each country³ for which there is data

Step 1: Matching Social Progress Index Indicators to Sustainable Development Goal Targets

As described above, fewer than half of the proposed SDG indicators are currently classified as "conceptually clear [with an] established methodology and standards available and data regularly produced by countries" or "Tier 1" by the UN Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators. As a result, many SDG indicators do not have a Social Progress Index match simply because no indicator currently exists.

The alignment between the two sets of measures is stronger in the other direction. That is, since data exists for all Social Progress Index indicators, it is easier to match them to closest Sustainable Development Goal, target, and indicator for each Social Progress Index indicator. Twenty-eight of the 53 Social Progress Index indicators are the same or very similar to SDG indicators. An additional 16 are conceptually related to an SDG indicator, but are slightly different. Eight indicators do not have a direct indicator-level match, but match to SDG targets. Only one indicator (Life Expectancy at 60) matches best at the goal level. See accompanying document, "People's Report Card Indicator Details" for detailed matching between the People's Report Card indicators and Sustainable Development Goals.

Step 2: Setting Anchor Values

The motivation behind the People's Report Card letter grade system is to provide an easy way to identify the areas where a country has already met the SDG target ("A"), which targets a country is likely to achieve by 2030 ("B"), and which targets are less likely to be achieved ("C" through "F"). The value of the indicator equivalent to "achieving" the SDG target is referred to as the "anchor value."

When SDG targets are quantified, the anchor values are taken from what is stated directly or implicitly in the text. For example, the anchor value for Child Mortality is 25 based on target 3.2 "by 2030 end preventable deaths of newborns and under-five children, with all countries aiming to reduce neonatal mortality to at least as low as 12 per 1,000 live births and under-5 mortality to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births." The anchor value for Premature Deaths from Non-Communicable Diseases is 13.5

³ The People's Report Card provides grades for territories when there is sufficient data as well as UN-recognized countries. In this document, "countries" is used to mean "countries and territories."

deaths per 100,000, which is calculated using the population-weighted global average in line with target 3.4 “by 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.”

Most SDG targets are not so well defined. The goals frequently use words like “substantially reduce” without specifying a rate or “eliminate” when absolute elimination is not feasible in practice. In the absence of guidance from the targets, guidelines from official bodies are used if available. For example, the anchor value for Homicide Rate is 2 deaths per 100,000 population, which is stated as the “lowest practically attainable level” by the Geneva Declaration on Armed Violence and Development.⁴ In many cases, the organizations constructing the datasets used in the PRC provide values that can be interpreted as a likely value for an SDG target and translated directly to the graded scale. For example, Transparency International classifies countries into tiers from highly corrupt to very clean. In the remaining cases, an evaluation of the data combined with expert opinion was used to set the anchor values. Values used by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network in its SDG Index⁵ were used as reference points.

Anchor values used in the construction of the People's Report Card are presented in the accompanying document, “People's Report Card Indicator Details.”

Step 3: Assigning Grades to Countries

Once the anchor value for each indicator is determined, all countries scoring equal to or better than this value receive an “A”. The next step is to assign the remaining countries the grades “B” through “F.” For this step, indicators are divided into two groups based on the characteristics of the data. Method 1 indicators have time-series data that can be used for projections. Method 2 indicators either do not have sufficient trend data or are not appropriate for projections. Survey data and indicators on discrete scales are graded using this method.

Method 1: Time-Series Data Available

Twenty-seven of the 53 Social Progress Index indicators have sufficient time-series data to use historical performance as a guide for assessing how much improvement is reasonable to expect that a country might achieve by 2030. If historical trends suggest that given a country's current performance, the country could achieve the anchor value in 15 years, the country receives a “B.” If a country's performance does not meet the anchor value, its new value is projected out an additional period of 15 years and compared again to the anchor value. If the country now meets the anchor value, it receives a “C.” If it still does not, the process is continued two more times (“D” and “E”). Countries that have still not met the anchor value receive an “F.”

⁴ <http://www.genevadeclaration.org/measurability/global-burden-of-armed-violence/gbav-2015/executive-summary.html>

⁵ <http://sdgindex.org/>

Historical trends are determined by looking at each country's worst and best performance since 2000 and calculating the annual growth rate. Then, each country's current performance is compared to all other countries' worst performance over the period. The average growth rate for all countries with a worst value within a 20% range of the country's current value is used to project forward (see FAQs for a more detailed description of the calculation used).

This approach is intentionally optimistic. It assumes that what has been achieved by countries since 2000 can be achieved going forward. As a matter of principle, all countries are treated equally regardless of their own past performance or current situation. While it may not be probable that North Korea will achieve the SDG target "Significantly increase access to information and communications technology" (Target 9.c), it is possible. North Korea currently has 11 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people. This is approximately the same number of subscriptions as Romania and Uruguay in 2000. Both countries now exceed 100 subscriptions per 100 people.

It is important to emphasize that this is not a prediction about when a country will achieve an SDG target. A country's actual improvement may be faster or slower than historical trends suggest. Based on the current situation, one would expect Syria and Venezuela to increase access to piped water at a slower rate than Bosnia and Ecuador even though all four countries have a similar level today. However, even with sophisticated modeling customized to each indicator and country, which would not be feasible, projecting future performance in 15 years would be difficult and beyond 15 years would be near impossible. Rather, these projections are merely a device used to assess the distance a country is from the anchor value. A country that receives a "B" might stagnate and not meet the target, while another that is graded a "C" or "D" might rapidly improve.

Applying this standard approach across the indicators provides information on the areas where a country is closest to meeting the SDG target and the areas where it is farther behind. This will provide a strong basis for informing advocacy efforts and determining development and policy priorities. Next year, the first period will be reduced to 14 years, the following year it will reduce to 13 years and so on. Each year of new data will increase the likelihood of accurately assessing whether a country will achieve the target.

Method 2: Time-Series Data Not Available or Projections Are Not Appropriate

The remaining 25 indicators fall into three categories:

- Data that may exhibit trends, but there is not enough years of data for projections (Example: Biodiversity and Habitat from the Environmental Performance Index)
- Data on a fixed, discrete scale (Example: Religious Freedom from the Pew Research Center)
- Data on a fixed, continuous scale (Example: Gallup indicators)

As with Method 1 indicators, countries that currently perform at or better than the anchor value receive an "A" grade. The remaining grades are based on logical intervals. For the indicators on a discrete scale,

such a Religious Freedom from 1 to 4, the grades follow the scale. For others, such as the Press Freedom Index (on a 0 to 100 continuous scale), the breaking points identified by the publishing source are used to determine the levels.

Aggregation

Grades are calculated at the indicator level. In order to calculate component scores, the letter grades are converted to numerical values (A=5 through F=0) and aggregated using the principle component analysis-determined weights from the Social Progress Index.⁶ Following the methodology of the Social Progress Index, four component scores are equally weighted to calculate the each of the three dimensions. The overall score is the equally-weighted average of the three dimensions. Finally, the numerical values are converted back to letter grades A through F. Pluses and minuses are used for A through D at the component, dimension and overall levels to indicate when a country is near the top or bottom of the grade range.

⁶ See the 2016 Social Progress Index Methodology Report for details.
<http://www.socialprogressimperative.org/global-index/methodology/>