



17.7.2017 – Implementation of the 17 goals for sustainable development has begun all over the world. The clock, however, is ticking, and the rate of progress must be speeded up in many areas if the targets for 2030 are to be met.

767 million people still live on less than 1.9 dollars a day, and 793 million routinely go hungry. These staggering numbers, more than the whole population of the European Union combined, are a reminder of the inequity of progress made on the Goals.

The pace at which we reduce maternal deaths must be doubled, says UN Secretary-General António Guterres in the introduction to the Report. Greater investments are needed in green energy solutions and education. Gender inequality remains deeply entrenched, and youth all over the world continue to face alarming rates of unemployment. So, what has actually improved?

To mention just a few examples, global poverty has indeed decreased, from 1.7 billion in 1999 to 767 million in 2013. The proportion of undernourished have declined from 15 % in 2000-2002 to 11% in 2014-2016. The rate of stunted children fell from 33% in 2000 to 23 % in 2016. HIV incidence has been reduced by 46 %, and for children under 5, mortality rates have fallen by 44 %. And 85.3 % of the global population now has access to electricity, up from 77.6 % in 2000.

But the inequities are illustrated by, among others, education. In 2014, two out of three children worldwide participated in pre-primary or primary education. In poorer countries, however, the figure is only four out of ten. And despite considerable gains in primary school enrolment since 2000, 9% of primary-school-aged children were out of school in 2014, with little progress since 2008.

Also, the proportion of the urban population living in slums worldwide fell from 28 % in 2000 to 23 % in 2014. However, in Sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of urban dwellers live in slum conditions.

Goal 12 on sustainable consumption and production patterns is also witnessing some setbacks. Globally, the “material footprint” of human beings increased from 48.5 billion metric tons in 2000 to 69.3 billion metric tons in 2010. Australia and New Zealand has the highest material footprint per capita, 35 metric tons per person, but Europe isn’t far behind with its 20 metric tons per person. As a comparison, in Sub-Saharan Africa has only 2.5 metric tons per person.

This isn’t good news for the fight against climate change, and scientists have been sounding the alarm regarding continued planetary warming, the degradation of our oceans and pace of extinction of many of our wildlife species.