


# Chapter 17

## The Role of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Reducing Health Inequalities

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### ABSTRACT

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) play a crucial role in reducing health inequalities. These goals focus on the social, economic, and environmental factors that contribute to health disparities. SDG 3, “Good Health and Well-being,” aims to provide universal healthcare access and reduce the disease burden, particularly for disadvantaged groups. SDG 1, “No Poverty,” and SDG 10, “Reduced Inequality,” target the elimination of economic barriers to healthcare access. SDG 2, “Zero Hunger,” addresses malnutrition as a key health determinant. Additionally, SDGs 13 and 6 focus on environmental factors such as climate change and access to clean water, which disproportionately affect marginalized groups. By addressing these interconnected factors, the SDGs provide an inclusive and equitable approach to achieving global health equity.*

### INTRODUCTION

One of the main drivers of health inequalities, especially among low-income or disadvantaged groups, is the presence of financial barriers that limit access to essential healthcare services. As global healthcare costs rise, these barriers become

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more severe, preventing many from receiving necessary care and increasing their risk of poor health outcomes and higher mortality rates (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023). Low-income households, in particular, often struggle to afford even basic preventive services. This financial strain, coupled with limited access to treatments, leads to a higher disease burden and deepens existing health disparities (Marmot et al., 2020). In this context, one of the most critical strategies to reduce health inequalities is the reduction of healthcare service costs and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups through targeted financial support. These interventions are vital for ensuring equity in health, as they provide greater opportunities for marginalized populations to access healthcare services that are essential for maintaining good health. The WHO's findings during the global COVID-19 pandemic have further underscored the importance of addressing these inequalities, as crises tend to exacerbate existing health disparities, placing economically disadvantaged populations at even greater risk (WHO, 2023). The pandemic served as a stark reminder that vulnerable populations suffer disproportionately during times of crisis, which necessitates urgent attention from policymakers and healthcare leaders to rectify these systemic inequities. Moreover, policies aimed at reducing health inequalities within the broader context of economic development not only promote equity in health but also contribute to broader societal benefits such as increased workforce participation and enhanced social justice (Marmot et al., 2020).

Addressing health inequalities is inherently tied to the advancement of economic development, as economic growth can help elevate societal welfare by fostering higher levels of value-added production and ensuring a more equitable distribution of wealth. A fair and equitable income distribution is crucial for making healthcare services more accessible to disadvantaged groups. This, in turn, helps to reduce health risks, improve quality of life, and create healthier, more resilient communities (Sen, 1999). Additionally, the process of economic development can be greatly enhanced by improvements in key social determinants such as education, employment, and social protection. When these social determinants are improved, they work in tandem to eliminate inequalities in access to healthcare, thereby providing a solid foundation for sustainable development (Braveman, Egerter, & Williams, 2011). Consequently, the implementation of comprehensive and sustainable economic policies, coupled with increased investments in healthcare infrastructure, and the development of strategies to address social inequalities, is essential to effectively reduce health inequalities (Todaro & Smith, 2020).

Sustainability, in general terms, can be defined as the ability of a society to sustain its living and production systems in the future while minimizing excessive pressure on natural resources and maintaining ecological balances. This concept, central to achieving long-term social and environmental goals, requires a commitment to the preservation of ecosystems, as well as a long-term perspective that ensures the

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