



## COVERAGE OF EDITORIALS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN BANGLADESHI NEWSPAPERS

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### Abstract

Bangladesh is one of the most promising nations towards attaining Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since the SDGs were announced in September 2015, Bangladeshi print media have covered SDG-related issues. This study aims to examine the treatment, mode and theme of SDG-related editorials in Bangladeshi newspapers. Content analysis method has been applied to assess the coverage. Editorials (n=88) were collected from the two leading national newspapers in Bangladesh, *The Daily Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star*, between April 1, 2022, and April 30, 2022, based on circulation and readership. A coding sheet has been developed to measure the coverage under 17 subcategories. These coding have been analyzed manually by two coders and NVivo-14 has been used for the thematic analysis of the editorials. The findings revealed that SDG goal 6: Clean water and sanitation has received the highest priority whereas SDG goals: Affordable energy, Gender equality and Life on land are the least covered area in the newspapers. It is also found that most of the entire editorials have been interpretatively written, while majority of them have adopted proactive approach. The most cited themes of these editorials are development, health and water. However, newspaper coverage has a significant impact on the adoption and implementation of public policies like SDGs. This study explored the extent to which the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are reflected in Bangladeshi newspapers.

**Keyword:** Coverage, Development, SDGs, Editorial, Newspaper

### Introduction

Bangladesh adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and promised to work towards attaining SDGs. It now ranks 109th out of 175 countries in the world in the SDGs index (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [UN ESCAP], 2022). Bangladesh's approach in achieving the SDGs is multi-stakeholder collaboration, which mostly includes the media (Tabassum, 2021).

Newspaper plays a critical role in making significant progress on policy and action agenda. It has now extended their coverage to a wide range of topics, including health, environment, education, economy etc. (Barkemeyer et. al., 2017). Therefore, news analysis identified the areas that receive attention and governmental policies and action plans to be labeled as sustainable development (Schafer, 2013). The role of the newspaper is significant in raising awareness, enhancing participation, and offering a greater perception of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, along with continuing attempts to achieve Agenda 2030 (Martin et. al., 2003). In addition, global programs like the SDGs would struggle to meet their goals without the suitable tools of information transmission and awareness building. In this regard, newspapers continue to be an important source of information about development issues. It plays a crucial role in fostering a collective understanding of societal values regarding sustainability, promoting public involvement, and making contributions to sustainable development (Voci, 2022).

However, after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expired in September 2015, Global leaders and major development institutions recognized the importance of new global partnership for development termed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This initiative aims to enhance people's standard of living by facilitating their access to beneficial resources (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2021).

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The main objective of SDGs is to ensure peace and prosperity in the world. In order to implement this objective, 17 goals were set. These goals are: 1. No poverty, 2. Zero hunger, 3. Good health and well-being, 4. Quality education, 5. Gender equality, 6. Clean water and sanitation, 7. Affordable and clean energy, 8. Decent work and economic growth, 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure, 10. Reduced inequality, 11. Sustainable cities and communities, 12. Responsible consumption and production, 13. Climate action, 14. Life below water, 15. Life on land, 16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions and 17. Partnerships for the goals (United Nations, 2022).

Bangladesh demonstrates significant potential in reaching the SDGs by 2030, which encompass initiatives to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and promote overall well-being and prosperity for all individuals. (UN ESCAP, 2022).

According to the UNDP's 2018 report, the number of poor and extremely poor people in Bangladesh has decreased which supports Goal-1 and it has been included in the UNDP report's orange list. Goal-2, 5, 7, 8 and 10 are also listed in the orange category. Additionally, Goal-3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16 and 17 have included in the red list where Goal-4 has put on the yellow list, which indicates more work needs to be done to achieve this goal. Only Goal 12 and 13 are on the green list. The report suggests, Bangladesh has succeeded in achieving these two goals (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).

Bangladesh has some challenges ahead in the full implementation of SDGs. All citizens, including governments, producers, entrepreneurs and the media, have to work less than one platform to implement sustainable development (Brundtland, 1987).

However, Titus (2017) suggested that print media should prioritize development stories, publish exclusive editorials, and provide extensive feature news to facilitate in-depth analysis and insight into SDG programs, aiming to engage the public more actively in achieving these goals. Similarly, Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012) emphasized the role of the media in the development of any country. Their study collected news from various sources worldwide, including print and online media, and revealed that only a small percentage (2.5%) of news content was related to the SDGs, even in countries considered to be highly SDG-sensitive.

Kayode (2012) analyzed how the media in Nigeria covered development issues, employing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as specific instance. The study found a lack of MDG-related stories on the front and editorial pages, indicating that these organizations did not prioritize these issues as important to society. Therefore, Talabi and Adaja (2019) examined the portrayal of the SDGs campaign in Nigerian media and found that while the coverage was generally positive, the majority of the stories were placed on the inside pages, indicating a lack of significant importance given to the SDGs in Nigerian newspapers.

Pandit (2020) examined how SDGs were covered on the websites of four prominent news media. The findings revealed that CNN-18 was the only channel that extensively covered new ideas, initiatives, and strategies for improving economic conditions and meeting the 2030 vision. This channel also had the most comprehensive coverage of sustainability-related issues with implications at both national and global levels. In contrast, the other examined websites predominantly emphasized topics such as hunger, poverty, education, and to a limited extent, climate action, overlooking the broader range of goals encompassed by SDGs.

Another study conducted in Japan found a significant increase in the use of SDG term in newspapers. According to the data, about 69% of the respondents had heard of the term or seen its logos in newspapers. Among those respondents, about 25% reported that their behavior towards environmental, health, sanitation, and other issues had improved (Uehara & Sakurai, 2021).

Irwansyah (2018) examined how the media utilizes agenda-setting to disseminate information about the SDGs to a broader audience. The study analyzed the media's coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals based on agenda-setting theory. The findings indicated that not all SDGs received adequate coverage in the media, and only a few SDGs were framed within the context of public policy concerns.

Mefalopulos (2008) stated that readers often seek analysis and commentary alongside news coverage. Editorials play a significant role in informing readers about diverse perspectives on topics that may not have received extensive discussion elsewhere in the newspaper. However, we investigated the editorial coverage of the SDGs in this particular study in Bangladesh context. We analyzed how the newspapers in Bangladesh addressed the SDGs in their editorial content, which provides insights into the perspectives and opinions presented to the readership regarding the sustainable development goals.

- R1:** How frequently are Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) addressed in newspaper editorials?  
**R2:** What categories of editorials are covered and how much?  
**R3:** Which editorial modes and to what extent are emphasized?  
**R4:** What themes are prevalent in SDGs editorials?

### **Materials and Method**

This study has followed the quantitative approaches. Content Analysis method has been applied to assess the different aspects of the news coverage which is systematic quantitative approach to assess the content or meaning of communicative messages. Both inductive and deductive coding methods have been applied. The two leading national newspapers namely *The Daily Prothom Alo* and *The Daily Star* are selected on the basis of their circulation, quality and popularity with convenient sampling approach. These two newspapers rank among the top ten in terms of newspaper circulation (Department of Films and Publications, 2023). We included only editorials and a total of 120 editorials have been found from 01 April, 2022 to 30 April 2022. Then, we excluded the 32 editorials which are not directly connected with SDGs goals and targets. Finally, we analyzed (n=88) editorials.

We analyzed the SDGs editorials under three major codes (Goals, Mode and Types) which are predefined set of codes. Firstly, we categorized the goals of editorials on the basis 17 SDG goals set by United Nations. In this study, these 17 Goals broadly defined by 169 targets outlined by the United Nations (UNDP, 2022), are as follows: 1. No poverty (Eradicating extreme poverty, reducing poverty, implementing social protections, ensuring equal rights to ownership, building resilience to economic and social disasters, creating gender-sensitive policies.) 2. Zero hunger (Ensuring access to safe and nutritious food, eliminating all forms of malnutrition, maintaining genetic diversity, improving rural infrastructure, investing in agricultural research and technology, preventing agricultural trade restrictions and subsidies, ensuring stable food commodity markets.) 3. Good health (Reducing maternal mortality, preventing deaths of children under 5 years old, combating communicable diseases, promoting mental health, preventing substance abuse, reducing road injuries and fatalities, providing universal access to reproductive care, achieving universal health coverage, establishing frameworks for tobacco control, ensuring access to affordable vaccines and medicines, increasing health financing, implementing warning systems for global health risks.) 4. Quality education (Providing free primary and secondary education, ensuring quality pre-primary education, promoting technical and higher education, eliminating all forms of discrimination in education, promoting literacy and numeracy, integrating education for sustainable development, building safe schools, expanding higher education scholarships, ensuring an adequate supply of qualified teachers.) 5. Gender equality (Ending discrimination against women, eliminating all forms of exploitation of women, eradicating forced marriages, valuing unpaid care work, ensuring full participation in decision-making processes, ensuring reproductive health and rights, guaranteeing equal rights to property and financial services, promoting women's empowerment in technology, enforcing legislation for gender equality.) 6. Clean water and sanitation (Providing safe drinking water, ensuring adequate sanitation and hygiene, minimizing hazardous chemicals and materials in water, addressing water scarcity, involving local communities in water and sanitation management.) 7. Affordable and clean energy (Ensuring access to modern energy, increasing the global percentage of renewable energy, promoting energy efficiency, technology, and clean energy infrastructure.) 8. Economic growth (Promoting sustainable economic growth, diversifying economic productivity, creating jobs and enterprises, improving resource efficiency, achieving full employment with equal pay, providing youth training, eradicating modern slavery and child trafficking, ensuring safe working environments, fostering beneficial tourism.) 9. Industry, innovation, and infrastructure (Developing sustainable infrastructure, promoting sustainable industrialization, increasing small-scale industries and enterprises, facilitating infrastructure development, supporting domestic technology development, ensuring access to information technology.) 10. Reduced inequalities (Decreasing income inequalities, promoting social, economic, and political inclusion, ensuring equal opportunities, implementing well-managed migration policies, providing special treatment for developing countries, offering development assistance to least developed countries, reducing transaction costs for migrant remittances.) 11. Sustainable communities (Providing safe and affordable housing, establishing sustainable transport systems, encouraging inclusive urbanization, protecting cultural and natural heritage, mitigating the effects of natural disasters, reducing the impact of cities on the environment) 12. Responsible consumption and production (Implementing programs for sustainable consumption, managing natural resources responsibly, reducing food waste,

minimizing the environmental impact of chemicals, promoting waste reduction through recycling, encouraging companies to adopt sustainable practices, raising awareness about sustainable lifestyles, enhancing scientific and technological capacities.) 13. Climate action (Strengthening adaptive capacity to climate hazards, raising awareness, implementing commitments by developed countries, managing climate change-related issues in least developed countries.) 14. Life below water (Combating marine pollution, preserving marine and coastal ecosystems, addressing the impacts of ocean acidification, regulating and ending overfishing, conserving coastal and marine areas, increasing benefits for small island nations.) 15. Life on land (Conserving wetlands, mountains, and drylands, halting deforestation, combating drought, floods, and river erosion, preserving mountain ecosystems, addressing the impact of invasive alien species, integrating national planning efforts, increasing financial resources for biodiversity conservation, promoting sustainable forest management, providing global support to combat species trafficking.) 16. Peace, justice, and strong institutions (Reducing violence and death rates, ending abuse and trafficking of children, ensuring justice for all, combating organized crime, reducing corruption and bribery, developing accountable institutions, promoting participatory decision-making, providing legal identity for all, including birth registration, ensuring public access to information and protecting fundamental freedoms, strengthening institutions to combat crime.) 17. Partnerships for the SDGs (Mobilizing financial resources, transferring marine and ecosystem-friendly technologies, building capacity through training and education, encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships, enhancing data monitoring and accountability.)

Secondly, we analyzed the editorials into four types developed by Neal (1921), which are: I. Editorial of information (immediately serves all necessary information about a particular issue), II. Editorial of interpretation (an approach to covering a sensitive or controversial topic), III. Editorial of criticism (constructively criticize actions, decisions or situations) and IV. Editorial of commendation (appreciate, tribute or commend policymakers, people and organizations).

Thirdly, we divided the mode of the editorials into three codes inspired by Sarker (2012) who describes the three modes or styles of editorial which are I. Pro-active approach where actions are taken before a minor difficulty turns into an issue or a problem. II. Opposing viewpoint where contrary viewpoint about an issue is presented and III. Solution-based where practical solutions are provided for SDGs related problems.

Finally, each editorial has been coded inductively where codes are identified by crude reading the data extracted from editorials. These codes are presented thematically with NVivo-14.

## Results

Table 1 demonstrate that clean water and sanitation are mostly covered goals which is 13.64%. On the contrary, there has no editorial coverage on climate action and life below water. However, three SDGs goals which are gender equality, affordable energy, consumption and production goals has received equal and poor coverage accounting for 2.27%. Additionally, two SDGs goals economic growth and sustainable communities get equal and comparatively large coverage which is approximately 11.36%.

Table 2 indicates that interpretative editorials received the highest coverage which is 37.50% of the total published editorials on SDGs. On the other hand, editorial of commendation got the lower treatment which is 12.50%. The number of editorials of criticism was 26, which is 29.55% and the rest of the editorials are editorial of information, which is nearly 20.45%.

Table 3 shows that editorials on pro-active approach prioritized the most which is 52.27%, while solution-based editorials received the minimum coverage which is 20.46%. Opposing viewpoints got the moderate coverage which is almost 27.27%.

Table 4 demonstrate the top ten cited themes while development is the mostly cited theme which is 16.50%. Health and water are the second most cited themes which is 11.65%. Additionally, figure 1 presented the prevalent themes of the editorials including development, health, water, economy, project, policy, marginalized infrastructure, initiatives, accountability, actions, food, agriculture and urbanization.

Table 1. Coverage of 17 SDGs Goals in Editorials

<b>SDGs in Editorials</b>	<b>(n=88) %n</b>
Poverty	04 (4.55%)
Zero hunger	08 (9.09%)
Good Health	07 (7.95%)
Quality Education	06 (6.82%)
Gender Equality	02 (2.27%)
Clean Water and Sanitation	12 (13.64%)
Affordable energy	02 (2.27%)
Economic Growth	10 (11.36%)
Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	06 (6.82%)
Reduce Inequality	04 (4.55%)
Sustainable Communities	10 (11.36%)
Consumption and Production	02 (2.27%)
Climate Action	00 (0.00%)
Life below Water	00 (0.00%)
Life on Land	03 (3.41%)
Peace and Justice	09 (10.23%)
Partnerships On SDGs	03 (3.41%)

Table 2. Coverage of Different Type of Editorials

<b>Type of Editorials</b>	<b>(n=88) %n</b>
Editorial of Information	18 (20.45%)
Editorial of Interpretation	33 (37.50%)
Editorial of Criticism	26 (29.55%)
Editorial of Commendation	11 (12.50%)

Table 3. Coverage of Different Mode of Editorials

<b>Mode of Editorials</b>	<b>(n=88) %n</b>
Pro-active approach	46 (52.27%)
Opposing viewpoint	24 (27.27%)
Solution-based	18 (20.46%)

Table 4. Top 10 Cited Themes on SDGs Editorials

<b>Themes</b>	<b>(N=101) %n</b>
Development	17 (16.50%)
Health	12 (11.65%)
Water	12 (11.65%)
Economy	10 (9.71%)
Project	10 (9.71%)
Policy	09 (8.74%)
Marginalized	08 (7.77%)
Infrastructure	08 (7.77%)
Initiative	08 (7.77%)
Accountability	07 (6.80%)



Figure 1. Thematic Analysis of the Major Cited Themes of SDGs Editorials with NVivo-14

### Discussion

This study revealed that zero hunger (7.95%), good health (7.95%) and quality education (6.82%) have received comparatively good coverage among 17 goals of SDGs which indicates the emphasis on basic rights issues. Similarly, Ekeanyanwu and Obianigwe (2012) found that the media in developing countries have provided significant coverage to editorials and stories related to achieving SDGs, particularly with regards to basic rights issues.

However, this study indicates that among 120 editorials, 88 editorials are on SDGs goals which show an increasing ratio of SDGs editorial in the selected newspapers. The outcome of this study is aligned with Bhattacharya and Khan (2020) study that Bangladeshi newspapers have played a prominent role in advocating for and promoting the SDGs within the country. They explored the year-wise coverage of the SDGs by Bangladeshi newspapers. The findings indicated that during the initial years of SDGs implementation (2015 to 2016), there was minimal media assistance in localizing the SDGs in Bangladesh. However, the study revealed a significant increase in the prevalence of SDGs-related news articles across different sections of newspapers in the subsequent years (2017 to 2018). These findings are also aligned with the perspective presented by Titus (2017) that print media should place a greater emphasis on development stories and publish extensive editorials that provide insight into SDGs programs.

Neal (1921) introduced the four types of editorials including editorial of information, editorial of interpretation, editorial of criticism, and editorial of commendation. In the context of this study, the editorial of interpretation is utilized to explain how the newspaper covered sensitive or controversial subjects. On the other hand, the editorial of criticism aims to constructively criticize actions, decisions, or situations while providing potential solutions, with the immediate purpose of drawing readers' attention to the problem rather than focusing on the solution. The editorial of information serves to provide essential information about a particular issue, while the editorial of commendation, appreciation, or tribute recognizes and praises policymakers, individuals, or organizations for their noteworthy achievements.

In this study, the results indicate that interpretative editorials received the highest coverage, accounting for 37.50% of the total published editorials on SDGs. On the other hand, the editorial of commendation received the least attention, comprising only 12.50% of the total. The number of editorials of criticism amounted to 26, representing 29.55% of the total, while the remaining editorials fell under the category of Editorial of Information, making up nearly 20.00% of the total.

Baran and Davis (2011) argue that the media development theory, as postulated by McQuail in 2010, suggests that the way information is disseminated in newspaper editorials influences the interpretation given to the message by the audience. The findings of this study align with this theory, as interpretative editorials received the highest coverage, indicating their potential impact on shaping readers' understanding and perception of the SDGs.

Additionally, Sarker (2012) describes three modes or practices of editorial writing that have been applied in the sampled editorials: the pro-active approach, where actions are taken before a small difficulty escalates into a larger issue or problem; the opposing viewpoint, which presents contrary perspectives on an issue; and solution-based editorial writing, where practical solutions for SDGs-related problems are proposed. In this study, the pro-active approach received the highest coverage, accounting for 52.27% of the total published editorials on SDGs. On the other hand, solution-based editorials received the lowest coverage, comprising only 20.46% of the total.

Opposing viewpoints, which present contrary perspectives on an issue, received moderate coverage, accounting for almost 27.27% of the total. The findings suggest that while the pro-active approach was prioritized and opposing viewpoints were given moderate attention, there was a relatively lower focus on presenting solution-based editorials.

### Conclusion

The print media, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh, has a significant impact on the development of organizations, communities, and countries. It determines what issues are given attention and how they are presented to the public. Editorial pieces in newspapers are particularly influential in implementing government development policies as they are widely used to communicate information to the masses. In addition, newspaper editorials provide a platform for public discourse and debate on sustainable development issues, enabling individuals and organizations to express their opinions and concerns. This can result in increased public engagement, which can drive policy change and reform. The print media also guide the governments and policy makers towards achieving sustainable development by educating individuals and society and raising awareness about sustainable development.

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**Data Availability Statement:** The data supporting the findings of this study can be openly accessed from The Daily Star and The Daily Prothom Alo through their respective websites, namely [epaper.thedailystar.net](http://epaper.thedailystar.net) and [epaper.prothomalo.com](http://epaper.prothomalo.com).

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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