

## FINDINGS

According to the Magic Bullet Theory, media seeks to find the best ways to hit target audiences; thus, it is useful to critique how global media communicates issues of sustainable development in terms of hegemony. Media coverage of the Sustainability Goals hint towards what goals should be prioritized and what voices are being represented. To illustrate several perspectives of today's communication about development, we studied how newspaper coverage of the SDGs and also how global nonprofits focus on topics and strategies to engage audiences.

### Newspaper Coverage about the SDGs

As noted earlier, our study was bound by the dates of January 1-April 16, 2016. Each goal has its own set of benchmarks that offer a measurable way to track its implementation and this study measures what issues are being covered and whose voices will be heard. Overall there were 178 articles in total from 26 countries. A majority of the articles focused on countries outside of the United States; for instance, Japan, Philippines, and India were most mentioned.

There was an overlap of specific topics: Poverty, hunger, education, and gender equality. Poverty was found in Goals One, Two, Ten, and Eleven. Hunger was found in Goals One, Two, Three, and Ten. Education was found in Goals Three, Four, Five, Ten, and 16. Gender Equality was found in Goals Four, Five, Ten, and 16. The only goal that did not have an overlap of development topics was Goal 14: Life Below Water.

We also coded for specific examples of newspaper coverage.

- On May 26, 2016, the *South China Morning Post* reported how pregnant women and new mothers are being treated unfairly. It highlights insensitivity and discrimination faced by women in the retail and hospitality industries when it comes to necessary leave of absences.
- There were more than 125 news reports on “marine pollution” and more than 258 reports on “overfishing.” According to *The Guardian* (2016), conflicts have arisen between several countries at a past U.N climate talk, in which countries are debating over the best ways to conserve endangered marine life.
- Goal ONE: Poverty. This topic accumulated 16 articles, 14 of which were about sustainable development. Media that covered Goal One are *Africa Weekly*, *Al Jazeera English*, *Guardian U.K*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Guardian*, *BBC Worldwide Monitoring*, and *U.N News Service*. Geography covered within the articles is Egypt, Ethiopia, Syria, Pakistan, and the Middle East. Some specific articles include *The Aid Pie is Growing, but the Poorest Countries get a Smaller Slice* (The Guardian, 2016), *The Persistence of Poverty in the Arab world* (Aljazeera, 2016), *Ethiopia: Repeating the Achievements of MDGs in SDGs* (The Ethiopian Herald), *Ethiopia: Let's Sustain MDGs Success While Fighting Drought Effects* (The Ethiopian Herald).
- Goal THREE: Good Health and Well-Being. This topic accumulated 29 articles using the keywords sustainable development, epidemics, substance abuse, universal health care, and neonatal mortality. Media that covered the development communication Goal Three were *The Armenpress News Agency (Armenia)*, *The Independent (Africa)*, *The Daily Star India*, *Africa*, *U.K*, *United States*, *China Singapore*, *Australia*, *Health Care*, and *Neonatal Mortality (Australia)*, *The Guardian (Russia)*, *China Daily (China)*, *Salt Lake*

*Tribune (United States)*, and *The Independent*. Geography covered within the findings includes India, Nigeria, Armenia, Namibia, U.K, United States, China, Singapore, and Australia.

- Goal TEN: Reduced Inequalities. Findings revealed how this topic was embedded in many other SDG's. For example, several articles using the simple key term "Reduced Inequalities" covered the topic of hunger and how some countries were struggling to solve the issue within their borders. These articles could easily have been used by Goal One: No Poverty or Goal Two: Zero Hunger as well. Ultimately, both similar and different key terms yielded results that pertained to multiple Development Goals. This revealed an overlap with issues found within several goals, and consequently, exposed how the concerns of one goal may impact another.
- Goal ELEVEN: Sustainable Cities and Communities. This topic yielded a total of 33 articles from 25 different newspapers. The Articles covered communication about international development in 16 countries. Most findings were from the Middle East, India, and Latin America. Countries in Latin America, such as Colombia, are working toward creating a bus system throughout the entire country. Six countries -- Azerbaijan, China, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan-- have implemented a plan that will raise \$78 million to invest in various cities.
- Goal SIXTEEN: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Over 20 newspapers and scholarly articles were found. The Times of India, US Official News, BBC and Qatar News Agency have covered Goal 16. Preventing conflict, or preventing relapse, and seeking to resolve problems politically, need to pay more attention to the citizen's role (Business and Financial Times, 2016).

Final critique: Our study of newspapers covering the Sustainability Goals uncovered several issues, as noted above, but we are especially interested in the lack of coverage by the United States and other superpowers. As stated in [our course text](#), this brings up puzzling questions: What are the implications of social inequalities on media and communication? How does media control shape economic and social participation outside of the ownership class? If, indeed, information is a critical resource and access has always been skewed, it could be very different today, given the proliferation of digital access (Servaes & Oyedemi, 2016).

### **The Strategies of NGOs about Development Issues**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) use multiple online strategies to communicate with global audiences and recruit volunteers, donors, and other allies. Many of these groups focus on providing food-water-energy (the international development nexus) to the under-privileged, or encouraging people in more developed countries to join equality campaigns. Creating videos and other content spread across multiple platforms allows NGOs to reach a worldwide audience about populations that often are unable to easily access such digital media.

One example of strong strategic communication is "[The Power of Humanity](#)" issued by the [International Red Cross](#). While music mimics a heartbeat and images depict life-threatening disasters, volunteers work hard to make sure the people affected are safe. In contrast, the "[We are the American Red Cross](#)" is less successful in reaching a millennial audience because of overly upbeat music and reliance on statistics.

In contrast, the [ONE](#) organization disseminated “[The F Word: Famine is the Real Obscenity](#)” and “[Stand With Eva](#)” to separate development communication campaigns. While the first relies on famous celebrities to describe poverty as obscene, Eva speaks directly to her audience without the presence of a “white savior” as also seen in World Vision’s “[Walking in Sabina’s Shoes.](#)”

*Sabina is much like me. We are both mothers who work hard to take care of our families. But there is one big difference between Sabina and me. Since the age of 7, Sabina has gone to the river nearly every day to fetch water. I stayed with Sabina for 24 hours to watch how she used her time and how she used water.* (World Vision USA, 2010)

Note that World Vision chooses to focus on the perspective of a World Vision worker as she interprets how rural African women make daily journeys to retrieve water. Rather than learn directly from Sabina, viewers hear more about the staffer and her physical difficulties in the native tasks.

Another global public organization, the [Peace Corps](#), also relies on storytelling to credibly highlight what volunteers do while abroad. For instance, in [Peace Corps Digs: Burkina Faso](#), viewers meet Calder Bethke, an American volunteer living in West Africa. Bethke sleeps in a tent when weather permits, gardens food in the courtyard, and works in the fields, just as the natives do. Such storytelling engages audience in authentic experiences rather than relying on famous people or ‘visitor’ perspectives

Alternatively, [WaterAid](#) issued a parody, “[If Men Had Periods](#)” as a loose connection about the seriousness of 1.25 billion women not having access to a toilet. This is an example of creating First World humor for First World audiences, yet the take-away is the gender joke rather than the much more serious issue of water and sanitation.

Final critique: We believe that communicators are more effective using storytelling strategies that give voice to indigenous peoples telling their own stories, in their own language. The method for success today is to connect with audiences through personal narratives, not celebrity participation. These strategies vary in success according to audience demographics: By keeping an audience fixated on how First World voices interpret indigenous experiences, younger viewers feel that the messages is less authentic and diluted. Our study of online content also uncovered a reliance on First World voices, sometimes coming to “save” developing countries. In addition, many messages show a lack of diversity, with white people helping Others. We also find that NGO messages often reinforce the North-South miscommunication rather than building a united front to solve the issues at hand.