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## A Critical Stylistic Analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals

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### Abstract

This study provides a brief critical stylistic analysis of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the aim to understand how specific discourses in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) create development priorities and ideological positions. Applying Jeffries' (2010) Critical Stylistics, the paper examines ten strategies in terms of how agency, responsibility, and consensus are linguistically represented. The results show that the SDG discourse utilises nominalisations, generic pronouns and vague evaluative expressions such as to naturalize global consensus, while concealing power relations and structures of inequality. The paper shows that SDG language is not value neutral but strategically composed for the dissemination of a harmonious image of global development, pointing to the necessity to engage reflexively and critically with international policy discourse.

## تحليل أسلوبى نقدي لأهداف التنمية المستدامة

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### المستخلص

تقدّم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً أسلوبياً نقدياً موجزاً لأجندة الأمم المتحدة 2030 للتنمية المستدامة، بهدف فهم الكيفية التي تُسهم بها خطابات معيّنة في أهداف التنمية المستدامة (SDGs) في تشكيل أولويات التنمية وبناء مواقف أيديولوجية. وبالاستناد إلى الأسلوبية النقدية لجيفريز (2010)، تفحص الورقة عشر استراتيجيات من حيث كيفية التمثيل اللغوي للفاعلية والمسؤولية والإجماع. وتُظهر النتائج أن خطاب أهداف التنمية المستدامة يوظّف الاسمية (Nominalisation) والضمان العامة والتعبيرات التقويمية الغامضة من أجل إضفاء طابع طبيعي على الإجماع العالمي، مع إخفاء علاقات القوة وبنى عدم المساواة. وتبيّن الورقة أن لغة أهداف التنمية المستدامة ليست محايدة قيمياً، بل صيغت استراتيجياً لنشر صورة متناغمة عن التنمية العالمية، بما يشير إلى ضرورة الانخراط التأملي والنقدي في خطاب السياسات الدولية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أهداف التنمية المستدامة؛ الأسلوبية النقدية؛ تحليل الخطاب؛ الأيديولوجيا؛ السياسات العالمية؛ خطاب الأمم المتحدة.

## 1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are one of the most profound global policy architectures of contemporary times. SDGs, part of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (adopted in 2015), set out a plan to eradicate poverty and inequality, promote economic growth, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all. The SDGs as a global development framework have influenced national agendas, institutional focuses and international partnerships. While the goals themselves are generally marketed as neutral and pure good, the language processes through which they are specified have a powerful shaping effect on how development problems are framed; social realities constructed; and certain policies legitimized. Thus, an analysis of the language used in SDG text is crucial for understanding how its rhetoric frames interpretation and shapes global discourse.

Language in policy is never just descriptive; it functions ideologically, strategically, persuasively. The style of the SDG text relies on different stylistic and discursive strategies in order to not simply convey what is wanted, but also to guide how readers are supposed to think about agency, responsibility and development paths. Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010) offers 'the stuff of a toolkit' to map how lexical, grammatical and rhetorical choices produce particular attitudes. When it is coupled with insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2013), this method provides richer knowledge on how policy documents shape social meanings and encode ideological presuppositions. This level of integrated analysis is particularly pertinent for the SDGs, and the global attempt to secure agreement on complex political, economic and environmental issues.

Earlier analyses of the SDGs discourse have primarily explored the content analysis, sustainability communication, or overarching policy framing more comprehensively discussing how governments, businesses and CSOs embrace particular goals. But more specific linguistic features of the main SDG document itself have received much less focus. The existence of this gap also emphasizes the necessity for a more fine-grained stylistic analysis which would be able to uncover the subtle ways in which the text naturalises some narratives of development or attenuates and even suppresses others. Drawing on critical stylistics, we argue that the SDG language is used to create an impression of being universal and shareable, collective responsibility, and peaceful and cooperative global collaboration which belie the power imbalances and contested interests it frequently disguises.

Therefore, the current investigation seeks to examine linguistic and stylistic options made within the SDG text in order to reveal how discursively development priorities and ideological stances are created. Drawing on the textual resources of Critical Stylistics—including naming, transitivity, modality and foregrounding—not only supported but also enriched by interpretive principles underpinning Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Llewellyn-Smith endeavours to offer a sophisticated analysis of what the SDGs are doing rhetorically and ideologically. In using this approach, the paper participates in furthering and deepening research on global policy language via a critical analysis of it: by embodying how sustainable development is linguistically grounded, it brings to the fore the crucial role of critically examining that language.

On these premises the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How are global understandings of development priorities and obligations constructed through linguistic and stylistic choices in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
2. How, then, do the SDGs play with some of these critical stylistic dimensions – including transitivity, naming, modality and evaluative lexis – as they author persuasive stories of development and reader-response?

## **2. Related Literature**

The theory of stylistics (or linguistic poetics) is at the basis of an in-depth analysis of policy texts like the SDGs. Leech and Short provide a principled way of exploring both lexical patterns, grammatical structures, and rhetorical strategies; Simpson presents an integrated stylistic toolkit that links micro-level linguistic analysis with the interpretation of macroscale discourse. Collectively these works lay the analytical groundwork to ascertain how meaning and persuasion are built in policy texts (Leech & Short, 2007; Simpson, 2004, 2021).

Critical perspectives regarding language and society are no less important in explication of the ideological nature of policy talk. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) proposes a three-dimensional model to connect the textual choices with discursive practice and social structures more generally, which shows how language constitutes and reproduces relations of power. It is particularly relevant for analysing global policy texts, which often have aspirations to neutrality whilst functioning as carriers of ideological presuppositions (Fairclough, 1995; 2013).

The SDGs are contained in the United Nations (UN) foundational document, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. This text presents 17 goals that are envisaged as universal,

integrated and indivisible, deploying stylistic choices – including nominalizations, evaluative lexis and agent-backgrounding – which deserve close examination. It is the dominant policy text framing discourse on international development; as such, its language must be read with a critical eye (United Nations, 2015).

The empirical evidence with CDA and framing analysis shows the delicate balance among SDG-relevant discourses. Cummings et al. (2018) illustrate how the document on SDG outcomes is a mixing of managerial, scientific and participatory discourses, influencing what „knowledge“ and „development“ means. Lencucha et al. (2023) compellingly demonstrate how health policies ‘related’ to the SDGs negotiate the discursive tension between economic imperatives and sustainability, noting that linguistic choices subtly favour certain interests and, in doing so, privilege particular policy pathways. These illustrate the ideological vying within SDG talk (Cummings et al., 2018; Lencucha et al., 2023).

An emerging body of corpus-assisted CDA and stylistics literature sheds light on how the institutions portray the SDGs in their reporting and policy communications. These have consistently found a high frequency of abstract nouns, vague evaluation and passives that conceal agency and culpability. Corpus analyses demonstrate that organizations repeatedly resort to rhetorical strategies which in textual structure and stylistics depoliticize development challenges, contributing to recasting of the SDGs as technical solution issues rather than site specific political contentions (cf. Cui, 2024).

Content analysis of communication related to the SDGs also identifies stylistic preferences with respect to euphemistic communicative framing, rhetorical reconciliation of diverging interests and a strong stress on partnership. Such stylistic conventions help to naturalize SDG discourse as one of consent and universal gain, thus concealing dimensions of power, inequality and accountability. Across media, institutional, and national contexts we consistently find that the role of style in constructions of SDGs is paramount (Cui, 2024; Cummings et al., 2018; Lencucha et al., 2023).

However, the number of studies explicitly focusing on critical stylistic analysis of the main text of SDG is less numerous. Many of these studies are macroanalytical, focusing on higher-level discourses or even depending on corpus statistics with little to no description at the level of style. A crucial stylistic perspective can help to bridge that gap by supplementing systematic linguistic analysis of naming, transitivity, modality, foregrounding, and rhetorical patterning

with CDA's focus on Discourses/ideologies/power. The integrated genre analysis provides a more subtle and sensitive lens to understand how the SDGs construct actors, their role responsibilities and global priorities (Leech & Short 2007; Fairclough 2013; Simpson 2021).

## 2.1 Previous Studies

Initiatives to study in depth the SDGs has grown, shifting the focus not only on their contents but also on the language and style through which they are presented. Ali (2025) used a cognitive-stylistics perspective, based on Text World Theory, to examine the SDG text. The focus of this study was on how Performers, Time, Place and sense perceptions are processed in a text's language structure creating mental images for readers about ecological and sustainability matters. It showed how SDG language 'forks' specific thought-modeling and worldviews, illustrating the interpretive potential of textual selection (Ali, 2025).

Also, Agbeleoba, Orebe, Adekunle-Ojo and Owolabi (2025) carried out interdisciplinary ecolinguistic/ critical discourse analysis of environmental stories in SDG advertisements. Their analysis demonstrated how language—the use of metaphor, framing and hedging—shapes ideological stances towards sustainability. They demonstrated that stylistic and rhetorical devices could work to sensitize, rather than desensitize, readers to the environment or hide ecological-or political-economy issues, thereby revealing the power of engaging with not just what is said but how it is said (Agbeleoba et al., 2025).

Ala-Uddin (2019) used a three-level discourse analysis, including the textual level, discursive practice and social practice, to analyze the initial SDG foundational text. The study problematized the understanding of "sustainability" and how discursive practices drive the concept underpinning SDGs. This study resonates with the present research as it highlights the importance of critically questioning not only how SDG language is used, but also why it—and not just its implementation—serves particular interests (Ala-Uddin, 2019).

Using another strategy, a 2024 project combined corpus-based methods and CDA to analyse corporate environmental progress reports—such as Apple's—alongside SDG reporting documents. The study revealed patterns in lexical items, modal expressions and thematic structures across time, showing how induction to the SDG discourse is enacted and (re)constructed in corporations. This points to the wider dissemination and reappropriation of SDG rhetoric beyond official UN texts (Atlantis Press 2024).

As a last example, Notorio, Capistrano and Aquino (2025) looked at SDG portrayals in destination management organization (DMO) websites. Using CDA, they examined which goals were highlighted and how content was framed to examine whether the communication was transparent or not. Their findings showed that the institutional representations of SDGs can either dilute, transform or select elements of the original discourse, for which there is a need to critically examine the stylistic and argumentative constitution of SDG texts (Notorio et al. 2025).

Altogether, these studies point to an increasing tendency within the academic community to apply stylistic, cognitive, ecolinguistic and discourse-analytical approaches to SDG-language – not only in its realisation (or in media texts relating to it) but also in those foundational documents issued by the UN itself. One would expect this to be more common now and indeed, mixed-method designs that integrate corpus analysis with CDA are becoming more widespread, allowing for both a statistical measure of linguistic patterns and qualitative insight into ideological positionings. Although these studies help to underscore the necessity of critically investigating how language constructs sustainability, agency and responsibility, there is a significant gap: hardly any study has carried out an extensive critical stylistic analysis on key SDG texts such as its main documents – in particular by means of concepts including transitivity, naming, modality or foregrounding etc. This lacuna highlights the novelty and significance of the current study.

Previous research provides important knowledge about SDG-discourse, however, our study has a different scope and method. Ali (2025) employed a cognitive stylistics approach to the study of mental representations, but did not investigate how linguistic preferences shape ideology/agency/responsibility. Agbeleoba et al. (2025) integrated ecolinguistic and CDA methods in the analysis of environmental stories, rather than systematically exploring micro level stylistic features of the SDG text. Ala-Uddin (2019) utilized a CDA three-tiered approach for the SDG document but he did not use an elaborate stylistic toolkit to analyse naming, transitivity, modality or foregrounding. Other researches, for example, the 2024 CDA corpus-based one and Notorio et al. (2025) which looked at images of SDGs in corporate or institutional settings, not a stylistic analysis of the UN text overall.

By contrast, the present study uses Critical Stylistics combined with CDA to explore systematically naming, evaluative lexis and foregrounding in the main official SDG text. It reveals how choices of language and style shape the expression of ideology, responsibility, and priorities for global development,

providing a more textured comprehension of SDG discourse, while also supplementing prior literature.

### **The Model Adopted:**

Critical Stylistics marks an attempt to carry out a similar sort of approach in textual analysis, developed by Lesley Jeffries, among others (largely in her 2010 book *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English*). It fills the void between linguistics and CDA. The underlying principle is that the linguistic choices of a text producer are central to the construction of their/its ideology or world view. Rather than a CDA text beginning with a political or social critique for which we then seek out linguistic evidence (a typical criticism levelled at some forms of CDA), CS begins by painstakingly describing the linguistic fabric of the text. It applies a consistent arsenal of analytical methods to show how a text creates a point of view and what its force consists in. By knowing these linguistic cues, Jeffries contends that we can become more critical consumers of media, able to perceive how our writing might subtly use language to persuade.

The ten most important analytical tools are the foundation of Jeffries's model. They are not mutually exclusive; a sentence might make use of several at once. The strength of a text can come from the accumulation of these decisions. And here are the ten tools that illustrate the model:

- 1. Naming and Describing:** Explanation of how people, places and events are named using nouns, adjectives. Such choices are never neutral; they represent a value judgment.
- 2. Representing Actions:** Actions: How things are described in languages as verbs. The verb used can also suggest agency, blame, responsibility or passivity.
- 3. Comparing and Contrasting:** How texts establish identities and oppositions. This creates "us vs. them" stories, or pairs two ideas (for example, "success = wealth").
- 4. Exemplification and Enumeration:** The ways texts employ examples, and lists, in order to suggest representation or scale. There is information in what is not on the list.
- 5. Prioritising:** Ordering of information to provide more or less important. Information that occurs at the start of a sentence/clause/text is usually given prominence.

6. **Implying and Assuming:** How texts communicate meanings that are not explicitly stated. Assumptions are presented as taken-for-granted truths, making them harder to challenge.
7. **Negating:** How saying what cannot ironically evoke the thing not said. It is a pretty strong way of setting up a binary opposition.
8. **Hypothesising:** How to construct possible worlds between texts in modal verbs and counterfactual conditional clauses. This is used to wonder, a wish and threat!
9. **Reporting the Speech of Others:** The process by which a written text reports what others have said. The tense and reporting construction (direct/indirect speech) affect how the reader perceives the quoted source.
10. **Representing Time, Space and Society:** The Role of Deictics on the Construction of a Particular "Viewpoint" for the Reader.

### 3. Research Design

This study proceeds on a qualitative descriptive approach to analysis, underpinned by critical stylistic assessment, which is informed by principles associated with Critical Stylistics (Jeffries, 2010). The design is appropriate since the research seeks to expose how discursive options within the SDGs constitute ideologies, ascribe agency and prioritize global development. The qualitative perspective enables to analyze textual patterns, ideological implications, and representative strategies.

### 4. Data Analysis and Discussion

#### Text 1

“Barbados ranks first and the United States ranks last in UN-based multilateralism. Barbados stands out as the country most committed to UN-based multilateralism, while the United States ranks last in this year’s Index of countries’ support for UN-based multilateralism (UN-Mi). In early 2025, the United States announced its withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO) and formally declared its opposition to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Among G20 countries, Brazil is the most committed to UN-based multilateralism, with Chile leading among OECD countries.” (2025, p. ix).

## **1. Naming and Describing**

Specific nouns and adjectives are employed in the text to categorise countries as with it or against UN-based multilateralism. For instance, “the country most committed is Barbados” endows Barbados with characteristics that are favourable to it, inscribing a value judgement of responsibility and cooperation. Instead, the “United States ranks last” places it in a negative light — one of neglect or resistance. The adjectives “most committed” and “last” are evaluative; they put forth a moral or political hierarchy. A similar situation is observed for Brazil (labeled as “most committed” among the Group of 20), propagating country-mediated positive connotations, with Chile being neutrally but positively portrayed by leading among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

## **2. Representing Actions/Events**

Verbs encode agency and responsibility. For example, “announced its withdrawal” and “formally declared its opposition,” attribute volitional action to the United States, focusing on agency and intentional opposition. “Ranks first” and “stands out” carry energetic, positive significance to Barbados: an idea of action, engagement. Verb selection also sets the two nations in stark contrast: Barbados as actor and the US as reactor or opponent.

## **3. Equating and Contrasting**

The criticality directly presents a binary opposite relation between Barbados in the position of commitment, with US as last. This sets up a “us vs. them” dichotomy among country that cooperate or don't cooperate. Also, the text compares countries from larger groups (G20, OECD) to produce their internal hierarchies of commitment – i.e., Brazil most committed among G20 members; Chile among OECD ones. This reflects status and ideological affinity.

## **4. Exemplifying and Enumerating**

The text lists countries and organizations as examples: “Paris Climate Agreement, World Health Organization, SDGs, 2030 Agenda. These particular institutions are included as examples of the places where US imagines itself in standing contradiction and where it provides actual examples to support our ideological critique. Naming more than one organization also broadens the range over which US withdrawal is taking place; it enhances its apparent scale.

## **5. Prioritising**

Information order as an indicator of foregrounding the first example involves the order of information. The first reference is to Barbados, and it is a positive one, thus setting the latter down as the model country. The US is there too – but after, the bad American things are to follow. The text leads with mentioning Barbados and in so doing backgrounds what the US is up to at least until sentence two, which brings contrast into play but also increases the evaluative wallop.

## **6. Implying and Assuming**

The text identifies a) support for UN-based multilateralism as “positive” and (b) opposition to it therefore a priori “negative.” These value judgements are simply assumed to be sound in the text -the reader is asked to take it on trust that obeying or disregarding UN institutions entails a responsible or irresponsible stance in international affairs (not to mention compliance or opposition to global norms).

## **7. Negating**

Negation is implicit, but oppositional in nature. For instance, by declaring the US ‘opposed,’ the text makes it (cooperative) clear what we mean it is not, which then ironically clarifies our conception of commitment. The dualism of committed (Barbados) and non-committed (US) is deepened through this negation.

## **8. Hypothesising**

In fact, the text uses declarative sentences as opposed to overt speculative presentation. The verb “ranks,” however, suggests some such behavior-based evaluative projection, and with it (at least) a ranking of cognitive-dispensability or other possible world where countries can be ranked on commitment. This enables the reader to read between the lines for future application of country ranking data.

## **9. Presenting the Speech of Others**

There is no direct or indirect speech in this excerpt. It is because reported speech does work [builder.MISS | work] In this case, from stuffy BBC World Service neutrality through to ball-about-on-the-dance floor-lounge-around implications that the US government is to be believed to ppose its actions.

## **10. Representing Time, Space, and Society**

Demonstrative adverbs set time and place reference. “Early 2025” places the U.S. measures in a time frame and gives them a sense of context. Spatial deixis is evident in reference to the names of countries and international institutions, from which a global perspective is drawn. Social deixis operates implicitly: there are countries ‘siding’ as agents in a standard view of the international community (e.g., exemplar Barbados and Brazil), except for US acting as a deviant.

In short, the text creates a transparent evaluative ordering of countries according to their dedication towards UN linked multilateralism. Through naming, verb selection, exemplification, and ordering, Barbados and Brazil are front-and-centre as positive nominees of model countries and the US is placed in negative location. The stylistic options impart ideological judgment, construct global responsibility and lead the reader to implicit support for multilateralism.

## **Text 2**

“For many developing countries, a lack of fiscal space is the major obstacle to SDG progress. Roughly half the world’s population lives in countries that cannot invest adequately in sustainable development due to debt burdens and a lack of access to affordable, long-term capital. Global public goods are vastly underfinanced. UN member states gathering at the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD4) in Seville, Spain (June 30 – July 3, 2025) have an enormous responsibility, not only to their own citizens but to all of humanity” (2025,p.ix).

### **1. Naming and Describing**

Here, countries are referred to as “developing countries,” and the challenges these economies face in securing their finances are expressed as “lack of fiscal space” and “debt burdens.” These labels are not neutral — they resonate with vulnerability and structural disadvantage. The word "enormous responsibility" ascribed to the UN member states invests their behaviour with moral and evaluative significance – what they do is portrayed as something that ought to be done, something for which they are accountable.

### **2. Representing Actions/Events**

Verbs encode agency and responsibility. “Simply cannot invest” and “are vastly underfinanced” signal an inability on the part of developing countries to take action, depicting them as unable not only to act but also to act because of systemic constraint. In contrast, “have an enormous responsibility” ascribes active agency and moral obligation to UN member states; they are the judgment-dealers and enforcers.

### **3. Equating and Contrasting**

The text has built-in contrasts: developing countries are portrayed as underfunded and limited compared to UN member states, which are powerful and responsible. This establishes a muted “us vs. them” tension, with global disparities and moral responsibilities underlined.

### **4. Exemplifying and Enumerating**

The text provides examples to demonstrate scope: “half the world’s population lives in countries that cannot invest adequately” is how big the problem is and what it means. Reference to FfD4, Seville, Spain, 30 June-3 July 2025 is a specific temporal and spatial anchor that highlights the importance of the event.

### **5. Prioritising**

Information is presented to highlight urgency and accountability. The troubled situation of developing countries is mentioned up front, while the duties of UN member states is listed last and made more salient. Dates of affairs (June 30 – July 3, 2025) indicate chronology.

### **6. Implying and Assuming**

The text suggests that SDG progress is a function of financing and cooperation at the global level. It takes it for granted that UN member states have the resources and moral duty to act.

### **7. Negating**

Negation surfaces in roundabout ways: “cannot invest adequately” and “vastly underfinanced” describe what is not — maintaining a tacit contrast with an ideal state where countries might be funding sustainable development sufficiently. This accentuates lack in by what not is said.

## **8. Hypothesizing**

Although the text is largely descriptive, “enormous responsibility” suggests a conditional moral world: If UN member states behave responsibly then progress on the SDG might be possible, if they do not, then development globally is hindered. The evaluative framing includes modal implication.

## **9. Presenting the Speech of Others**

The text does not employ direct speech to report the gathering of UN member states at FfD4 and thereby indirectly reports institutional action. The use of the phrase “have an enormous responsibility” presents the conference as a site of authority and expectation.

## **10. Representing Time, Space, and Society**

Deictic markers locate the event in time (June 30 – July 3, 2025) and space (Seville, Spain). Society is represented by second and third world countries, UN nation states, and the human race with emphasis on relational responsibility through a global perspective.

In sum, this text brings global inequality as well as moral responsibility to the fore. The non-aligned countries gave a “fighting picture” of their limitations and passivity imposed by debt and under-financing, while member states of the UN are presented as morally charged agents. Using naming, verb tense, example and prioritization, the document frames a compelling ideological story that calls for international cooperation and financial investment to bring about global change toward achieving SDGs.

### **Text 3**

“Sustainable development offers high returns: capital should flow to the emerging and developing countries on more favourable terms. The Global Financial Architecture (GFA) is broken. Money flows readily to rich countries and not to the emerging and developing economies (EMDEs) that offer higher growth potential and rates of return. At the top of the agenda at FfD4 is the need to reform the GFA so that capital flows in far larger sums to the EMDEs. Part 1 of this report (also published online by the SDSN in May 2025) offers practical recommendations to scale up and align international financing flows to support global public goods and achieve sustainable development” (2025,p.ix).

## **1. Naming and Describing**

The text deploys value-laden nominal and adjectival evaluation to categorise agents and values. Terms such as “emerging and developing countries” (EMDEs) convey vulnerability or opportunity at the same time, while “Global Financial Architecture (GFA) is broken” has negative implications for the financial system. Descriptions like “higher growth potential and rates of return” put EMDEs in a favorable, investment-related context.

## **2. Representing Actions/Events**

Verbs convey agency and responsibility. “Money flows to rich countries, not to EMDEs” sublimates a systemic imbalance into neglect or structural bias. The phrase “Capital should flow” and the sentence “offers practical recommendations” attribute prescriptive agency to international actors, what is claimed of an order for a state how to act in a system. “Reform the GFA” foregrounds intervention as active rather than reactive.

## **3. Equating and Contrasting**

These contrasts between rich-country (well-budgeted, money receiving) and EMDEs (under-served but high potential), are established in the text. The binary here signals inequality and frames EMDEs as deserving victims. Economic logic also buttresses this contrast: EMDEs provide higher returns, but they get less capital; how unfair is that!

## **4. Exemplifying and Enumerating**

The text lists actors, processes, and outputs: EMDEs, rich countries, Global Financial Architecture in part 1 of this article and practical suggestions. These examples illustrate scope and context and highlight the scale of the challenge and steps being suggested to address it. Referring to SDSN, May 2025 gives a temporal and institutional anchor and also builds in credibility.

## **5. Prioritising**

The relative importance of information is highlighted by sentence position. “High returns to sustainable development” is how the text kicks off; positive side first, then the issue (GFA fails). The solution offered is to reform the GFA, which is grouped after FfD4 but framed as the “first and foremost” agenda at FfD4 indeed symptomatic of urgency and priority.

## 6. Implying and Assuming

The text takes for granted that the allocation of capital is supposed to make economic sense (high return = lots more money), and treats this as so obvious that it barely warrants mention. It is not just a moral obligation, from an economic perspective it makes sense for rich countries and institutions to stand with and for EMDEs. There is another questionable assumption that reform of the GFA, especially in a structural sense, is feasible and appropriate.

## 7. Negating

“Money flows to rich countries and not to EMDEs,” represents abstaining from negation: an emphasis on what is missing rather than an assertion about what exists. This disrespect makes the inequality and bias in the system, which plagues it even more evident- thus adding credence to calls for reform.

## 8. Hypothesising

The text includes hypothetical and modal: *should flow* posits both necessity (for the transform) and possibility, paradoxically constructing a world in which capital allocation aligns with sustainable development priorities. It imagines results if reforms and suggestions are put in place.

## 9. Presenting the Speech of Others

No direct speech is used. The quote refers to “Part 1 of this report (also available on the SDSN website, May 2025),” but implicitly speaks with the authority of an independent recommender or reviewer of policy. It sounds like it is legitimate and has some authority behind it.

## 10. Representing Time, Space, and Society

This is further clarified with “May 2025” and mention of FfD4 a little bit earlier under temporal deixis. Spatial deixis is invoked in opposing rich countries to EMDEs, and social deixis figures in the representation of global actors (financial institutions, countries, SDG stakeholders) with different levels of responsibility versus capacity.

In conclusion, the narrative of EMDEs as relatively underfunded but high potential sits in stark contrast to over funded rich countries and shifts the problematic issues of systemic inequities to that of transgression in the Global

Financial Architecture. The text frames an ideological narrative building regarding the necessity for financial reform and just capital flows through naming, verb deployment, exemplification, prioritization and modal constructions. It integrates evaluative description with prescriptive indirectivity, situating the SDSN at the center of global development rhetoric.

### **Conclusions:**

The analysis of the texts related to the SDG shows ideological position is demonstrating consistent portrayal of countries according to their connection or commitment to sustainable development and/or UN-led multilateralism. Model countries (e.g., Barbados, Brazil) and EMDEs will be rated positively, non-compliant or opposing actors (e.g., United States) negatively. The choice of verbs is loaded, with known perpetrators and targets – UN member states, the rich nations that are morally and politically responsible for creating poverty and inequality; contrasted with developing countries circumscribed in power by their debt ‘burden’ and an imaginary notion of structural incapacity. The texts use oppositional and binary framing to establish clear dichotomies between committed versus non-committed, or rich versus developing countries, thereby reinforcing narratives of global responsibility and justice. Crucially, evaluative information is highlighted by being placed at the start or end of sentence (see Barbados’ outstanding commitment; the shattered Global Financial Architecture).

The texts also employ both exemplification and quantification, listing countries, organizations and global agreements to convey scale and importance. Implicit assumptions are rife, such as that alignment with the ideals contained in the UN SDGs, financial assistance, and systemic change being inherently good things/values taken for granted which reinforces normative constructions of sustainable development. Temporal and spatial markings — such as FfD4, May 2025 or Seville, Spain — firmly ground events in specific environments, highlighting immediacy and global dimensions of operations. Finally, the texts use rhetoric and persuasion in terms of modality and negation, where modal verbs (e.g. should) flow throughout the text, and not-inverted negation in phrases such as *cannot invest or money flows* to focus attention on obligations, inequalities, or possible courses of action. Collectively, these approaches build a compelling ideological story line about who should be empowered to take forward the implementation of the SDGs and what responsibility they bear, and why funding reform is required.

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