

Comparing Sustainable Development Goal Progress in Singapore and Lebanon: Challenges and Pathways

Author: Researcher / Fatima Abdel Karim Enaissy | Lebanese Republic
Ph.D. Dissertation In Public Law / Faculty of Law and Political Science / Islamic
University of Lebanon

E-mail: Fatimaouneisi@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8110-2695>
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Supervised: Professor / Dr. Adel Khalifeh | Lebanese University

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Abstract

This study offers a comparative analysis of Singapore and Lebanon's progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Singapore, a high-income island city-state, has demonstrated significant advancement due to its stable political environment, strong institutions, long-term strategic planning, and sustained economic prosperity. Ranking 65th globally in the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Singapore has made good or fair progress in over half of the SDG targets, particularly in Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7), and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11). However, it still faces challenges in areas such as Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), and Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12), along with data gaps. In stark contrast, Lebanon, a middle-income nation, faces immense challenges that have

significantly hindered its SDG progress. Ranking 110th globally in the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Lebanon grapples with poverty (SDG 1), hunger (SDG 2), a strained healthcare system (SDG 3), a severe energy crisis (SDG 7), high unemployment (SDG 8), and damaged infrastructure (SDG 9). Persistent political instability, weak governance, recurring economic crises, and the enduring impact of internal and external conflicts, including the Syrian refugee crisis, have severely impeded Lebanon's ability to achieve the SDGs. To make substantial progress, Lebanon requires fundamental legal and political reforms to address deep-rooted systemic issues hindering its development.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Singapore, Lebanon, Comparative Analysis, Sustainable Development, Conflicts, Challenges, Progress, Legal Requirements, Political Requirements

التقدم المحرز في تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة في سنغافورة ولبنان: التحديات والمسارات (دراسة مقارنة)

إعداد: الباحثة / فاطمة عبد الكريم عيسى | الجمهورية اللبنانية

دكتوراه في القانون العام / كلية الحقوق والعلوم السياسية / الجامعة الإسلامية في لبنان

Email: Fatimaouneisi@gmail.com | <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8110-2695>

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إشراف: الأستاذ الدكتور / عادل خليفة | الجامعة اللبنانية

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للاقتباس: عيسى، فاطمة عبد الكريم، التقدم المحرز في تحقيق أهداف التنمية المستدامة في سنغافورة ولبنان: التحديات والمسارات (دراسة مقارنة)، إشراف الأستاذ الدكتور عادل خليفة، مجلة القرار للبحوث العلمية المحكمة، المجلد السادس، العدد 18، السنة الثانية، 2025، ص-ص 530-552. <https://doi.org/10.70758/elqarar/6.18.24>

المُلخَص

تقدّم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً مقارناً لمساعي سنغافورة ولبنان نحو تحقيق أهداف التنمية المُستدامة (SDGs) السبعة عشر. تُظهر سنغافورة، كدولة مدينة جزرية ذات دخل مرتفع، تقدماً كبيراً بفضل بيئتها السياسيّة المستقرّة، ومؤسّساتها القويّة، وتخطيطها الإستراتيجي طويل الأمد، وإزدهارها الإقتصادي. وقد احتلّت سنغافورة المرتبة 65 عالمياً في تقرير التنمية المُستدامة لعام 2024، مُحرزة تقدماً جيّداً أو معقولاً في أكثر من نصف الأهداف، لا سيّما في قطاعات الصّحة والتّعليم والطّاقة النظيفة والمدن المُستدامة. ومع ذلك، لا تزال تواجه تحديات في مجالات مثل العمل اللائق والنمو الإقتصادي، والصّناعة والإبتكار والبنية التّحتيّة، والإستهلاك والإنتاج المسؤولين، بالإضافة إلى فجوات في البيانات.

في المقابل، يواجه لبنان، وهو دولة متوسطة الدّخل، تحديات هائلة أعاقَت بشكل كبير تقدمه في أهداف التنمية المُستدامة. يحتلّ لبنان المرتبة 110 عالمياً في تقرير التنمية المُستدامة لعام 2024، ويعاني من الفقر، والجوع، وأزمة في الرّعاية الصحيّة، وأزمة طاقة حادّة، ومعدلات بطالة مرتفعة، وبنية تحتية متضرّرة. إنّ عدم الإستقرار السياسيّ المستمر، وضعف الحوكمة، والأزمات الإقتصاديّة المتكرّرة، والتأثير الدائم للصّراعات الداخليّة والخارجيّة، بما في ذلك أزمة اللاجئين السّوريين، قد

أعاقت بشكل كبير قدرة لبنان على تحقيق أهداف التنمية المُستدامة. ولتحقيق تقدّم ملموس، يُعد إجراء إصلاحات قانونية وسياسية جوهرية أمرًا حتميًا لمعالجة المشاكل المنهجية العميقة التي تعيق تنمية البلاد.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أهداف التنمية المُستدامة، سنغافورة، لبنان، التحليل المُقارن، التنمية المُستدامة، النزاعات، التحديات، التقدّم، المتطلبات القانونية، المتطلبات السياسية.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, all United Nations Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which provides a universal blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. These goals recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests. While the SDGs are universal in their application, each nation must navigate its own path towards achieving them, taking into account its unique national circumstances, priorities, and capabilities.

This study undertakes a comparative analysis of two distinct nations, Singapore and Lebanon, in their journeys towards realizing the SDGs. Singapore, a high-income, small island city-state in Southeast Asia, has long prioritized sustainable development as a cornerstone of its national progress. With limited natural resources, Singapore's development trajectory has inherently involved a focus on efficiency, innovation, and long-term planning. In contrast, Lebanon, a middle-income nation in the Middle East, faces a complex array of economic, political, and social challenges, significantly compounded by internal and external conflicts. These contrasting contexts provide a valuable opportunity to examine the diverse pathways and obstacles encountered in the pursuit of sustainable development⁽¹⁾.

Accordingly, by examining these two distinct cases, this analysis aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that facilitate or hinder the realization of the 2030 Agenda. The article will be structured to first detail Singapore's SDG journey, followed

(1) United Nations. (n.d.). The 17 goals. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Retrieved May 13, 2025, from <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

by an examination of Lebanon's progress and the challenges it faces. Subsequently, a comparative analysis will highlight the key differences and contributing factors. The impact of conflicts on Lebanon's SDG trajectory will then be specifically addressed, leading to a discussion of the legal and political prerequisites for Lebanon to potentially emulate Singapore's relative success. Finally, the conclusion will synthesize the findings and offer perspectives on the way forward.

I. Problem Statement

Accordingly, a question arises about the effectiveness of international endeavors with different social, political and economic environments in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs). This raises several queries as follow:

1. What are the key differences in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) progress between Singapore and Lebanon, based on available international reports, scientific research, and research papers?
2. How do Lebanon's internal and external conflicts significantly impact its ability to achieve these goals?
3. What potential legal and political requirements could enable Lebanon to achieve a level of SDG progress more comparable to that of Singapore?

II. Suggested Hypotheses

1. Singapore's stable political environment, robust institutions, strategic planning, and sustained economic prosperity have significantly contributed to greater progress on the SDGs compared to Lebanon.
2. Lebanon's internal and external conflicts, including the Syrian refugee crisis, have significantly impacted its SDG progress by destroying infrastructure, displacing populations, straining resources, and diverting focus from long-term development.
3. Lebanon's SDG achievement can be enhanced by implementing comprehensive legal and political reforms, including strengthening governance, combating corruption, promoting economic stability, and fostering peace and security.

III. The Importance of Study

1. Highlights the disparities in sustainable development paths between a stable and prosperous Singapore and a conflict-ridden Lebanon.

2. Deepens our understanding of how internal and external conflicts hamper efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. Highlights the legal and policy reforms necessary to advance development in countries facing similar challenges.
4. Contributes to formulating more effective policies and better international support to achieve the 2030 Agenda in diverse contexts.
5. Identifying challenges and opportunities as countries strive towards a more sustainable future.

IV. Study Objectives

1. Compares and contrasts Singapore and Lebanon's progress in achieving the 17 SDGs using international reports, scientific research, and research papers.
2. Analyze the significant impact of Lebanon's internal and external conflicts on its ability to reach these goals.
3. Identify legal and political requirements that could enable Lebanon to achieve a level of SDG progress comparable to Singapore.

V. Study Methodology

This study will employ a multi-faceted methodology to analyze the distinct journeys of Singapore and Lebanon towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. It begins with a comprehensive literature review, drawing on available international reports, scientific research, and academic papers to establish a foundational understanding. Subsequently, a structured examination will detail Singapore's progress, followed by an in-depth look at Lebanon's trajectory and the significant challenges it encounters.

This leads into a direct Comparative Analysis, highlighting the key differences and underlying factors contributing to their varied SDG achievements. A dedicated conflict impact analysis will then specifically address how internal and external conflicts profoundly influence Lebanon's SDG progress. Additionally, the study concludes with a policy and legal framework analysis, identifying the necessary prerequisites that could enable Lebanon to potentially emulate Singapore's relative success in sustainable development.

I- Singapore's Journey Towards Sustainable Development Goals

Singapore's commitment to sustainable development predates the formal adoption of the 2030 Agenda, with a history of designing policies with long-term sustainability in mind since its founding. Recognizing its inherent limitations as a small island city-state with no natural resources, Singapore has long understood that sustainable practices are not merely an aspiration but a fundamental necessity for its survival and progress. This early recognition has shaped its approach to national development, emphasizing prudent resource management and the integration of nature into its urban environment, exemplified by its "Garden City" vision.

Singapore has established robust national strategies and frameworks to guide its SDG implementation efforts. A key element of this is the "Whole-of-Government" (WOG) approach, which ensures that the SDGs are at the heart of its policy objectives. This approach involves the sharing of information among public agencies, widening their perspectives and facilitating early identification of challenges and opportunities. To oversee this comprehensive process, the Singapore Government formed the Inter-Ministry Committee on SDGs (IMC-SDG), co-chaired by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, comprising members from 33 government ministries and agencies. The IMC-SDG plays a crucial role in coordinating efforts across diverse domains and industries, including data collection and stakeholder engagement.⁽¹⁾

The Singapore Green Plan 2030, launched in February 2021, serves as the nation's ambitious and concrete 10-year agenda for sustainable development, strengthening its commitments under the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Paris Agreement. This whole-of-nation movement charts targets and strategies across five key pillars: City in Nature, aiming to enhance green spaces and biodiversity; Energy Reset, focused on transitioning to cleaner energy and improving efficiency; Sustainable Living, promoting responsible consumption and waste reduction; Green Economy, positioning Singapore as a leader in green innovation and finance; and Resilient Future, building resilience against climate change and external shocks. Specific targets under these pillars include planting one million more trees, quadrupling solar energy deployment by 2025, and reducing waste

(1) Government of Singapore. (2018). Singapore's voluntary national review report to the 2018 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. United Nations.p3 Retrieved May 13, 2025, from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19439Singapores_Voluntary_National_Review_Report_v2.pdf

sent to landfills by 30% by 2030.⁽¹⁾

To monitor and report its progress, Singapore has actively engaged in the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process. It presented its first VNR in 2018, outlining its sustainability journey since independence and reporting progress on all 17 SDGs, supported by data from across different domain areas collated by the Singapore Department of Statistics (SingStat). Singapore presented its second VNR in July 2023, focusing on SDGs 6 (clean water and sanitation), 7 (clean energy), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities), and 17 (partnerships). These reviews provide an opportunity for Singapore to take stock, share its progress with partners, and reflect on future challenges.⁽²⁾

Based on international reports, Singapore demonstrates a relatively high level of progress towards achieving the SDGs. In the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Singapore ranks 65th out of 166 countries with an SDG Index score of 71.41. Singapore's own SDG Progress Tracker indicates that, using data up to 2022 or 2023, the country has made good or fair progress in meeting over half (56%) of the 169 targets by 2030.⁽³⁾ Goals with the highest share of good or fair progress include Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-being), Goal 4 (Quality Education), Goal 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Singapore has achieved notable success in areas such as securing access to affordable and high-quality potable water for all citizens and ensuring accessible and good quality education. Its healthcare policies and subsidies are continuously reviewed to support the population, ensuring access to quality healthcare for all, regardless of socio-economic status.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Government of Singapore. (2018). *Singapore's voluntary national review report to the 2018 UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development*. United Nations.p43 Retrieved May 13, 2025, from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19439Singapores_Voluntary_National_Review_Report_v2.pdf

(2) Government of Singapore. (2023). *Singapore Voluntary National Review 2023*. United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).p5 Retrieved May 13, 2025, from <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Singapore%20Report.pdf>

(3) Government of Singapore. (2023). *Singapore Voluntary National Review 2023: Building a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future*. United Nations High-Level Political Forum.p61 Retrieved May 13, 2025, from <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Singapore%20Report.pdf>

(4) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). (2024). *Sustainable Development Report 2024: Rankings*. SDG Index. Retrieved May 13, 2025, from <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/>

Despite these achievements, Singapore faces ongoing challenges in certain areas. The Progress Tracker indicates that more efforts are required to accelerate progress on Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)⁽¹⁾, Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), and Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Additionally, concerted efforts are needed to plug data gaps in Goal 2 (Zero Hunger), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), and Goal 14 (Life Below Water). As a small island state, Singapore faces inherent limitations in renewable energy options due to land constraints and relies heavily on imported resources. While it has implemented a carbon tax and is exploring clean energy solutions, achieving its net-zero emissions goal by 2050 remains a significant undertaking. Furthermore, like other countries, Singapore continues to strive to improve data availability across key disaggregation dimensions for a more comprehensive understanding of its progress⁽²⁾.

Singapore's relatively strong performance across the SDGs can be attributed to its long-term vision, strategic planning, and a highly coordinated government approach. The nation's emphasis on integrating sustainability into national policies since its inception, coupled with the establishment of the IMC-SDG and the development of comprehensive plans like the Green Plan 2030, demonstrates a strong commitment and structured methodology for SDG implementation. However, the challenges that remain, particularly in environmental sustainability and resource management, highlight the unique vulnerabilities faced by Singapore as a small island state, underscoring the need for tailored approaches and international cooperation to address specific national contexts within the broader framework of the SDGs.

rankings

(1) Government of Singapore. (2023). *Singapore Voluntary National Review 2023: Building a sustainable, inclusive and resilient future*. United Nations High-Level Political Forum p32. <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Singapore%20Report.pdf> (Accessed May 13, 2025).

(2) Sachs, J. D., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2023). *Sustainable Development Report 2023: Singapore Country Profile*. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). <https://dashboards.sdindex.org/profiles/singapore> (Accessed May 13, 2025).

Table 1: Singapore's Progress Towards Selected SDGs (Based on Progress Tracker)

SDG Number	SDG Title	Overall Progress
1	No Poverty	Good or Fair Progress
2	Zero Hunger	Concerted Efforts to Plug Data Gaps
3	Good Health and Well-being	Good or Fair Progress
4	Quality Education	Good or Fair Progress
5	Gender Equality	Concerted Efforts to Plug Data Gaps
6	Clean Water and Sanitation	Good or Fair Progress
7	Affordable and Clean Energy	Good or Fair Progress
8	Decent Work and Economic Growth	More Efforts Required
9	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	More Efforts Required
10	Reduced Inequalities	Good or Fair Progress
11	Sustainable Cities and Communities	Good or Fair Progress
12	Responsible Consumption and Production	More Efforts Required
13	Climate Action	Good or Fair Progress
14	Life Below Water	Concerted Efforts to Plug Data Gaps
15	Life on Land	Good or Fair Progress
16	Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	Good or Fair Progress
17	Partnerships for the Goals	Good or Fair Progress

Data source:

II- Lebanon's Progress and Hurdles in Achieving SDGs

Lebanon formally adopted the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 and established a National Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, to oversee their implementation. The country presented its first Voluntary National Review (VNR) at the High-Level Political Forum in New York in 2018, signaling its commitment to the 2030 Agenda. This committee includes representatives from all line ministries, as well as civil society and the private sector, to foster broad ownership of the agenda.⁽¹⁾

(1) CHRISTOPHERSEN, M. (2018). Implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Lebanon. In Pursuing Sustainable Development under Sectarianism in Lebanon (pp. 6–24). International Peace

Despite these initial steps, Lebanon's progress towards achieving the SDGs has been significantly hampered by a confluence of severe challenges. In the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Lebanon ranks 110th out of 166 countries with an SDG Index score of 63.89. This score indicates a considerable gap compared to Singapore, reflecting the substantial hurdles Lebanon faces. While Lebanon has shown some progress in specific areas, such as increased enrollment in primary education and improved access to basic water and sanitation services for a majority of the population, significant issues persist. For instance, despite improved access to water supply, the population frequently experiences water shortages, and in many areas, the water is not safe to drink.⁽¹⁾

Across the spectrum of SDGs, Lebanon grapples with substantial challenges. SDG 1 (No Poverty) remains a critical concern, with high poverty rates exacerbated by a severe economic crisis and the protracted presence of refugees. The economic crisis has also fueled food insecurity and malnutrition under SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), compounded by Lebanon's heavy reliance on food imports, making it highly vulnerable to currency devaluation and inflation. The healthcare system (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being) is severely strained, struggling to ensure affordable and quality healthcare for all amidst limited resources. While primary education enrollment is high (SDG 4: Quality Education), challenges persist in secondary and higher education, with significant inequalities across different regions. Despite some achievements in equality and empowerment, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) continues to be undermined by persistent inequalities in the political, economic, and social spheres.⁽²⁾

Lebanon faces a particularly acute crisis in SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), with widespread blackouts resulting from decades of mismanagement within the state-run electricity company. This energy crisis has exacerbated poverty and inequality, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities. Under SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Lebanon suffers from high rates of unemployment, underemployment, and a sig-

Institute.p7 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17506.6>

(1) Sachs, J. D., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2023). Sustainable Development Report 2023: Lebanon Country Profile. Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). <https://dashboards.sdginde.org/profiles/lebanon> (Accessed May 13, 2025).

(2) Ministry of Foreign Affairs Singapore. (n.d.). Sustainable Development. Government of Singapore. <https://www.mfa.gov.sg/SINGAPORES-FOREIGN-POLICY/International-Issues/Sustainable-Development> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). (n.d.). Singapore – Indicators. SDG Index. <https://dashboards.sdginde.org/profiles/singapore/indicators> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

nificant informal sector, all of which have been severely aggravated by the ongoing economic crises. Limited investment and progress characterize SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), with infrastructure often damaged by conflict. High levels of income inequality persist under SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), further intensified by the economic crisis and gaps in social protection. Progress towards SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) is hindered by limited resources for urban development and basic services, while SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) faces challenges in areas like waste management. As a country vulnerable to climate change, Lebanon's capacity to address mitigation and adaptation under SDG 13 (Climate Action) is also constrained by the economic and financial situation. Major challenges remain for SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Critically, SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) is severely undermined by weak institutions, pervasive corruption, political instability, and deep-seated sectarian divisions. Finally, the political and economic crises have hampered Lebanon's ability to build effective partnerships for SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).⁽¹⁾

The multitude of challenges facing Lebanon underscores the systemic issues rooted in political instability, economic fragility, and weak governance that significantly impede its progress across virtually all SDGs. These factors are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, creating a complex web that makes it exceptionally difficult to advance on individual goals. The severe economic crisis that has gripped Lebanon since 2019 has further eroded any prior progress, pushing a vast majority of the population below the poverty line and exacerbating vulnerabilities across all sectors. Economic recovery and the establishment of stability are therefore fundamental prerequisites for Lebanon to even begin making meaningful strides towards achieving the SDGs.⁽²⁾

III- A Comparative Analysis of SDG Progress: Singapore and Lebanon

A direct comparison of Singapore and Lebanon's SDG Index rankings and scores reveals a significant disparity in their overall progress. Singapore, ranking 65th with a score of 71.41, demonstrates a considerably higher level of achievement compared to Lebanon,

(1) United Nations Lebanon. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals. <https://lebanon.un.org/en/sdgs> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

(2) Abdel Samad, Z. (2016, October 21). LEBANON structural challenges and obstacles to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Arab NGO Network for Development (ANND).p313 <https://2030monitor.annd.org/data/report/arabic/12.pdf>

which ranks 110th with a score of 63.89. This difference underscores the varying capacities and circumstances of the two nations in their pursuit of the 2030 Agenda.

Examining specific SDGs further highlights these differences. For instance, in SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), Singapore has made good or fair progress, actively working towards increasing solar energy deployment and exploring other clean energy alternatives. In stark contrast, Lebanon faces a severe energy crisis characterized by widespread black-outs and mismanagement. Similarly, in SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Singapore requires more effort to accelerate progress, but its unemployment rates remain relatively low. Lebanon, however, is grappling with alarmingly high unemployment and underemployment rates, exacerbated by its economic collapse. The most profound difference is evident in SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). Singapore is generally considered to have strong institutions and a stable political environment. Lebanon, on the other hand, faces significant challenges in this domain due to political instability, weak governance, and corruption.⁽¹⁾

It is important to note that both countries encounter challenges in certain areas. For example, Singapore requires more effort in SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and Lebanon also faces difficulties in this area, particularly concerning waste management. Additionally, both nations face ongoing work in achieving comprehensive environmental sustainability across all indicators.⁽²⁾

The divergence in their SDG progress can be largely attributed to fundamental differences in their underlying conditions. Singapore benefits from a stable political environment, strong and effective institutions, a culture of long-term strategic planning, and sustained economic prosperity. These factors provide a solid foundation for investing in and implementing sustainable development initiatives. In contrast, Lebanon's journey is severely hampered by persistent political instability, weak governance structures, recurring eco-

(1) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (n.d.). Lebanon and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [Brochure]. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/lb/SDG-brochure-English-.pdf> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

Global Observatory. <https://theglobalobservatory.org/2017/05/lebanon-sustainable-development-goals-inequality/> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

Sachs, J. D., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., & Woelm, F. (2023). Lebanon – SDG Index and dashboards: Fact sheet. Sustainable Development Report. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/lebanon/fact-sheet> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

(2) United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (n.d.). Synchronizing Lebanon's NDC and SDGs for enhanced implementation. UNDP Lebanon. <https://www.undp.org/lebanon/stories/synchronizing-lebanons-ndc-and-sdgs-enhanced-implementation> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

conomic crises, and the enduring impact of both internal and external conflicts.⁽¹⁾

National context and specific vulnerabilities also play a crucial role. Singapore, as a small island state, is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and faces inherent constraints in natural resource availability, necessitating a strong focus on resilience and resource efficiency. Lebanon, on the other hand, is acutely vulnerable to regional conflicts and the significant strain imposed by the influx of refugees, which has stretched its resources and public services beyond capacity.⁽²⁾

The significant difference in SDG progress between Singapore and Lebanon underscores the critical role of political stability, economic conditions, and institutional strength in enabling a nation to effectively pursue sustainable development. Singapore's consistent advancement is closely linked to its stable governance and economic prosperity, which provide the necessary resources and an enabling environment for long-term planning and investment in sustainable initiatives. Conversely, Lebanon's struggles highlight how instability and economic hardship can severely impede and even reverse progress towards achieving the SDGs. This comparison emphasizes that fundamental prerequisites such as peace, stability, and a functioning economy are foundational for the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

IV- The Impact of Conflicts on Lebanon's SDG Trajectory

Lebanon's path towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has been significantly obstructed by both internal and external conflicts. These conflicts have had a profound and multifaceted impact, hindering progress across a wide range of SDGs. The direct impacts include the destruction of vital infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, and energy facilities (SDG 9 and 11), as well as the tragic loss of life and widespread displacement of populations, which in turn affects numerous SDGs related to poverty, health, education, and social well-being.

Beyond the immediate devastation, conflicts have also exerted significant indirect impacts on Lebanon's SDG trajectory. Economic downturns (SDG 8) are a common consequence

(1) Government of Lebanon. (2018). *Lebanon: Voluntary National Review 2018 – Main messages*. United Nations Sustainable Development. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/18713Lebanon_VNR_2018_Main_Messages.pdf (Accessed May 19, 2025).

(2) The Borgen Project. (2023, August 7). *SDG 9 in Lebanon: Industry, innovation and infrastructure*. <https://borgenproject.org/sdg-9-in-lebanon-industry-innovation-and-infrastructure/> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

of conflict, as instability deters investment, disrupts trade, and undermines productivity. Social instability (SDG 16) is inherently heightened in conflict-affected regions, weakening the social fabric and eroding trust in institutions. Moreover, conflicts place an immense strain on already limited resources and public services, diverting attention and funding away from long-term development goals. The focus shifts from building a sustainable future to addressing immediate humanitarian needs and security concerns, making long-term planning and investment in SDG-related initiatives exceedingly difficult.⁽¹⁾

The impact of conflict is evident across specific SDGs in Lebanon. SDG 4 (Quality Education) has been severely affected by the disruption of educational services due to conflict and the displacement of both students and teachers. SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) has suffered due to the economic instability and widespread job losses associated with conflict and insecurity. Perhaps most directly impacted is SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), as conflict is the antithesis of peace and fundamentally undermines the development of just and strong institutions.⁽²⁾

A major external conflict that has significantly impacted Lebanon's SDG progress is the Syrian refugee crisis. The influx of approximately 1.5 million displaced Syrians has placed an enormous burden on Lebanon's already strained resources and public services, compounding pre-existing development challenges and stretching the nation beyond its limits. This protracted crisis has impacted virtually all aspects of sustainable development, from poverty and hunger to healthcare, education, and environmental sustainability.⁽³⁾

Considering the ongoing internal political instability and the enduring impact of external conflicts, it appears highly unlikely that Lebanon will be able to achieve the majority of the SDGs by the 2030 deadline. The current pace of progress across most goals is insufficient, and the pervasive impact of conflict continues to divert resources and attention from long-term development objectives. While international aid and support are crucial,

(1) Government of Singapore. (2023). *Singapore Voluntary National Review 2023*. United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).p33-55 <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Singapore%20Report.pdf> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

(2) Government of Singapore. (2023). *Singapore Voluntary National Review 2023*. United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).p33-55-20-<https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2023/VNR%202023%20Singapore%20Report.pdf> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

(3) The Borgen Project. (2021, March 9). SDG 9 in Lebanon: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. <https://borgenproject.org/sdg-9-in-lebanon-industry-innovation-and-infrastructure/> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

achieving sustainable progress will require not only the resolution of conflicts but also significant and sustained structural reforms across the political and economic landscape.⁽¹⁾ The evidence strongly suggests that armed conflict has a devastating and multifaceted impact on SDG progress, significantly slowing down or even reversing achievements across various goals, as clearly demonstrated by the situation in Lebanon. Conflict not only inflicts immediate destruction and immense human suffering but also erodes the very foundations necessary for sustainable development by disrupting essential services, crippling economic activity, and weakening already fragile institutions. Peace and security are therefore not merely desirable outcomes but fundamental prerequisites for achieving the SDGs, and countries embroiled in conflict face exceptionally steep challenges in their pursuit of the 2030 Agenda.⁽²⁾

V- Legal and Political Prerequisites for Lebanon to Emulate Singapore's SDG Success

Singapore's relatively high level of success in progressing towards the SDGs can be attributed to several key legal and political factors. These include a stable and effective system of governance characterized by the rule of law and low levels of corruption. Singapore has also demonstrated a strong commitment to long-term strategic planning, exemplified by comprehensive frameworks such as the Singapore Green Plan 2030, which provides clear targets and policy directions across various sectors. The "Whole-of-Government" approach, fostering strong inter-ministerial coordination and ensuring policy coherence, has also been instrumental. Furthermore, Singapore has consistently prioritized investment in education, human capital development, and innovation, recognizing these as crucial drivers of sustainable economic and social progress. Finally, Singapore has shown a strong commitment to international cooperation and actively participates in the global efforts to achieve the SDGs framework.⁽³⁾

(1) United Nations. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform: Reports and Messages. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=6200&nr=1&menu=172> (Accessed May 19, 2025).

World Food Programme. (2021). Update on the implementation of the Road Map on climate change and resilience. https://executiveboard.wfp.org/document_download/WFP-0000142935 (Accessed May 19, 2025).p21

(2) Briones, C. G. (2023, December 5). Singapore's climate action ecosystem for fostering sustainable development. United Nations Development Programme. <https://www.undp.org/policy-centre/singapore/stories/singapores-climate-action-ecosystem-fostering-sustainable-development>

(3) Brayford, A. (2024, January 28). SDG 9 in Lebanon: Industry, innovation and infrastructure.

In this context, drawing lessons from Singapore's experience, Lebanon could undertake several key legal and political reforms to create a more conducive environment for SDG achievement, including:

a. **Strengthening Governance and Institutions (SDG 16):** Implementing comprehensive anti-corruption measures and enhancing transparency and accountability across all levels of government are paramount. This includes developing a robust legal framework to combat corruption, ensuring the independence of regulatory authorities and the judiciary, and establishing mechanisms for asset recovery. Reforming the sectarian political system to promote more effective decision-making, national unity, and a culture of citizenship is also crucial.⁽¹⁾

b. **Establishing Long-Term Strategic Planning:** Lebanon needs to develop a comprehensive national sustainable development strategy with clearly defined targets and timelines, mirroring Singapore's Green Plan 2030. This should be accompanied by the establishment of robust mechanisms for inter-ministerial coordination and the active engagement of all stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector, in the implementation process.⁽²⁾

c. **Promoting Economic Stability and Growth (SDG 8):** Undertaking fundamental economic reforms to address the ongoing financial crisis, attract foreign investment, and create decent and productive employment opportunities is essential. This must include investing strategically in key infrastructure sectors such as energy, water, and transportation to support economic development and improve the overall quality of life for citizens.⁽³⁾

d. **Investing in Human Capital (SDG 4):** Ensuring equitable access to quality education

The Borgen Project. <https://borgenproject.org/sdg-9-in-lebanon-industry-innovation-and-infrastructure/>

UCLG. (2022). Lebanon 2018: A local analysis of the Sustainable Development Goals. GOLD Programme.p2

(1) Sachs, J. D., Lafortune, G., & Fuller, G. (2024). Lebanon: Sustainable Development Report 2024. Sustainable Development Report. <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/lebanon/fact-sheet>

United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. (2023). Singapore Voluntary National Review 2023: Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/singapore/voluntary-national-reviews-2023>

(2) World Bank Group. (2025). Lebanon: Overview. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>

World Bank Group. (2025). Lebanon: Overview-p11. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/lebanon/overview>

(3) Singapore Department of Statistics. (2025). Singapore's SDG Progress Tracker. <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/sdg/sdg-progress-tracker>

at all levels and investing in skills development programs are vital for building a strong and adaptable workforce capable of contributing to sustainable development.

e. Addressing Specific SDG Challenges: The government needs to develop and implement targeted policies and programs to tackle critical areas where progress is lagging, such as increasing the adoption of renewable energy sources, improving waste management systems, and strengthening social protection mechanisms to support the most vulnerable populations.⁽¹⁾

f. Fostering Peace and Security (Foundation for all SDGs): Prioritizing conflict resolution through sustained dialogue and diplomatic efforts is paramount to creating a stable and secure environment that is conducive to long-term sustainable development.⁽²⁾

g. Strengthening Data Collection and Monitoring: Improving national statistical systems is crucial for effectively tracking progress towards achieving SDG indicators and for informing evidence-based policymaking across all sectors.⁽³⁾

For Lebanon to achieve significant progress on the SDGs, fundamental legal and political reforms are indispensable to address the deep-rooted systemic issues that hinder its development. Drawing inspiration from Singapore's model of effective governance and long-term strategic planning, Lebanon needs to establish a solid foundation of accountability, transparency, and a clear vision for a sustainable future. These reforms are not merely about adopting new laws or establishing new institutions; they necessitate fostering a fundamental shift in the culture of governance towards one that prioritizes the long-term well-being of all citizens and the sustainable use of national resources.⁽⁴⁾

(1) United Nations Development Programme. (n.d.). Sustainable Development Goals in Lebanon: An overview-p11. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/lb/SDG-brochure-English-.pdf>

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VI- Conclusion: Charting a Course for Sustainable Development

In conclusion, this comparative analysis reveals a significant divergence in the progress of Singapore and Lebanon towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Singapore, with its stable governance, strategic planning, and economic prosperity, has demonstrated considerable advancement across various SDGs. In contrast, Lebanon faces formidable challenges, with its progress severely hampered by political instability, economic crises, and the enduring impact of internal and external conflicts.⁽¹⁾

While emulating Singapore's specific trajectory may not be entirely feasible given Lebanon's unique context and vulnerabilities, adopting key principles and undertaking fundamental legal and political reforms is crucial for Lebanon to make meaningful strides towards sustainable development. Strengthening governance, establishing long-term strategic planning frameworks, promoting economic stability, investing in human capital, addressing specific SDG challenges through targeted policies, fostering peace and security, and improving data collection and monitoring systems are all essential prerequisites.⁽²⁾

Ultimately, achieving the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda requires a long-term commitment and concerted collaborative efforts from all stakeholders, both within nations and across the international community. For Lebanon, navigating its current crises and charting a course towards sustainable development will necessitate unwavering dedication to reform, resilience in the face of adversity, and sustained support from the global community. For both Singapore and Lebanon, the journey towards a sustainable future is an ongoing process that demands continuous adaptation, innovation, and a steadfast commitment to leaving no one behind.⁽³⁾

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