UNVEILING DISCREPANCIES IN THE SDG INDEX: AN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE BASED APPROACH TO DETECTING OVERESTIMATION AND ADVANCING ALTERNATIVE MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORKS

Soumya Sengupta[1,4] , Dr. Dharmpal Singh[2] , Dr. Sandip Roy[3]

[1]Research Scholar, Dept. of CSE, JIS University, Kolkata, INDIA
[2]Professor, Dept. of CSE, JIS University Kolkata, INDIA,
[3]Professor, Dept. of CSE, JIS University Kolkata, INDIA,
[4]Faculty, Dept. of Computer Science, Panskura Banamali College(Autonomous), Purba Medinipur, INDIA

ssg747@gmail.com[1]
dharmpal.singh@jisuniversity.ac.in[2]
sandip.roy@jisuniversity.ac.in[3]

**Corresponding Author: ssg747@gmail.com*

Abstract: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a detailed worldwide framework aimed at promoting sustainability while ensuring equity and building resilience. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) created the SDG Index which functions as a crucial standard for evaluating how nations advance toward their sustainable development goals. The SDG Index methodology contains unavoidable limitations such as overestimation risks due to inconsistent data and subjective normalization processes alongside unequal goal weighting. The research dissects methodological biases to reveal the contradiction between high national rankings and poor performance in essential sustainability areas even when aggregate scores appear strong. We introduce an advanced AI-based framework for SDG assessment that utilizes machine learning algorithms combined with predictive analytics to generate objective-specific indices with dynamic weights which provide a more detailed and data-driven evaluation of national advancement. The new framework uses AI-driven anomaly detection along with feature importance modelling and unsupervised clustering techniques to improve sustainability assessment fidelity while reducing distortions from traditional aggregation methods. Our research examines both epistemological and ethical questions that emerge from AI involvement in sustainability assessments while analyzing the consequences for worldwide policy creation and fair development discussions. The research findings highlight the need for a fundamental change in SDG measurement approaches by proposing AI-enhanced metrics as tools to improve transparency and methodological precision while increasing adaptability in global development evaluations.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Artificial Intelligence, Composite Index, Methodological bias, Machine learning in sustainability

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1 Introduction

In 2015, the United Nations rolled out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It set out 17 SDGs that cover issues like poverty, fairness in society, environmental care, and making institutions tough enough to handle challenges. This framework isn’t arranged in a neat checklist but is widely used by national governments, international bodies, and policymakers looking to steer growth in a more balanced way. Generally speaking, keeping track of progress involves building data-backed systems that can catch where things are lagging and hint at where policy tweaks might be needed.

Some critics, however, have raised a few flags about the SDG Index itself. They point out that leaning on just a handful of indicators often doesn’t capture all the twists and turns of sustainable development. Often, data from different countries come with their own quirks and inconsistencies – a bit like getting reports that don’t quite match up, leading to some measurement slips. In addition, a couple of these indicators tend to carry more weight than others, which can skew the final scores, sometimes making achievements seem bigger in one area while downplaying other important aspects. All of this can give a picture that’s a little off, not fully reflecting every part of a nation’s sustainable journey.

Navigating these criticisms, we argue that a systematic review of the methodology which is used to create the SDG Index can outlay some weaknesses of the conventional methods of reporting on sustainable development performance. This research, thus, directly adds to the continuing debate on the topic of upgrading indicators of sustainability worldwide proposing a developing method rooted in Artificial Intelligence (AI) to strengthen its official follow-up where transparency, trustworthiness and interpretability of SDG results are concerned. In conclusion, this paper is about advising policymakers, researchers and international organizations to understand the potential of AI-driven analytics to fundamentally transform the frameworks used to evaluate sustainability so that we measure progress in development in a fairer, more precise and more methodologically rigorous way.

2 Related Work

Sustainable Development Goals have grabbed a lot of attention lately, with many scholars putting the SDG Index front and Centre in measuring how countries are doing. Some studies, in most cases, raise doubts about whether this index really nails accuracy, openness, and fairness. A number of experts have pointed out that the SDG Index leans on data that's often incomplete or a bit outdated (Adebayo & Smith, 2023; Iqbal & Rahman, 2021), which especially in developing nations where data gaps are a real headache makes reliable rankings hard to come by (Elshamy & Ahmed, 2022). There's also a fair bit of criticism about how the weights for different indicators are chosen in a way that sometimes feels arbitrary, skewing the results by putting too much emphasis on certain goals while others lag behind (Kim & Park, 2022; Banerjee & Gupta, 2022). On top of that, using a simple arithmetic mean to sum up different performances can hide important differences between goals, at times giving an overly optimistic view of national progress (Nakamura & Tanaka, 2022).

Researchers have been trying to overcome some of the gaps in current assessments by turning to AI-driven techniques to rejig how SDG evaluations are done. Machine-learning models now help plug missing data gaps, which in many cases results in a broader, more trustworthy picture of a country's performance (Johnson & Lee, 2023; Patel & Sharma, 2023). At the same time, a mix of predictive analytics and deep learning is being put to work—often in unexpected ways to polish sustainability indices and even hint at where progress might head next (Das & Roy, 2023; Fernandes & Pereira, 2023).

An interesting twist comes in the form of geometric aggregation methods. This idea stops extreme values from warping composite scores (Wang & Liu, 2022; Huang & Wang, 2023) and basically ensures that poor performance in one goal isn't simply masked by strong numbers in another a trick that helps create a fairer overall picture. Some researchers have also floated the idea of using AI to build objective-wise indices, so that tracking progress in specific sectors becomes a bit more detailed and nuanced (Li & Zhang, 2023; Mendez & Torres, 2023). When real-world country data is examined, the usual SDG Index often seems to overstate progress this is especially evident for those countries that usually rank high (Chen & Zhou, 2021; Robinson & Stevens, 2023). For example, alternative indices crafted with AI have sometimes uncovered mismatches where robust economic figures hide weak spots in environmental or social policies (Brown & White, 2023). And on top of that, big data analytics has been suggested as a way to keep SDG metrics continuously updated, making us less reliant on sometimes outdated national statistics (Oliveira & Santos, 2021; Qureshi & Ali, 2022). A number of researchers generally argue that we need a clearer, more straightforward approach when we look at sustainable goals often suggesting that leaning on AI-based methods can trim away bias and lend a bit more reliability (García & López, 2022; Wang & Liu, 2022). Policymakers, in turn, are subtly nudged to try out these fresh ideas so that sustainability efforts stay in tune with actual challenges, instead of getting tangled up in the limitations of older methods.

3 Background: The SDG Index and Its Methodological

The SDGs Index is a composite metric that evaluates a nation's progress towards meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets. Integrating a wide array of quantitative indicators, the index aims to comparably evaluate multiple nations' trajectories towards sustainability. Each goal is supported with multiple domain specific indicators that together achieve a nation's composite SDG score.

3.1 Methodological Foundations of the SDG Index

Indicators and Data Sources: The SDG Index compiles information from multiple global institutions as the World Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations, and other national statistical offices. However, the processes and steps that are undertaken to obtain, ensure accuracy, and validate these data subjects differ significantly from one country to another which can lead to probable biases in measurement. For instance, unobtrusive developing countries often face the challenge of having scarce data, data that is not current, and discrepancies in the reporting systems which makes juxtaposing countries problematic.

Weighting Mechanisms: Each SDG is given a certain weighing coefficient that shows how important it is in relation to the rest of the framework of sustainable development. However, the methodology used to assign such weights remains contested. The absence of systematic guidelines for weight allocation based on empirical evidence poses potential bias, meaning some goals (SDG 13: Climate Action) may unfairly dominate the calculated index score more than others (SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities). This imbalance can distort policy priorities and hide essential sustainability issues.

Aggregation Methodology: The SDG Index uses a simple arithmetic mean for the sub-goal level calculations which is then used to calculate the overall score for the index. While this method of aggregation simplifies computation, it inherently ignores the SDG interlinkages which may cause national progress to be misrepresented. With this form of linear averaging approach, some SDGs can perform very well and elicit compensatory results masking poor performance in other SDG targets, concealing underlying inequalities in a nation's, or regions, sustainability efforts.

3.2 Limitations and Criticisms of the SDG Index

Too much reliance on messy, patchy data tends to hit emerging nations hard. Many developing countries simply don't have the robust stats systems needed to track progress on SDGs. In most cases, the index ends up penalizing places with little data while favouring those that can report more even if that extra reporting doesn't truly signal better progress.

There's also a real challenge with how weights and indicators get picked. Without a single, agreed-upon method, the way importance is assigned becomes pretty subjective. Some key sustainability areas might get underplayed while others receive too much attention, which generally means the real complexities of sustainable development aren't fully captured at local or national levels.

Finally, by lumping all SDG scores into one flat number, we lose sight of the links between different goals. This oversimplification sometimes misleads policy makers a country might look like a sustainability star overall, yet still be struggling with major issues in certain areas. This kind of one-size-fits-all figure tends to weaken the index as a tool for precise policy measures.

To eliminate these obstacles, new AI solutions are adopted as powerful tools that can redefine the entire SDG assessment framework. AI incorporates sophisticated methods of anomaly detection which allow systematic identification of inconsistencies and outliers in national dataset submissions, improving the trustworthiness of the input datasets.

4 Objective

This particular study intends to resolve the weaknesses of the SDG Index by incorporating advanced techniques of data, AI innovations, and enhancing computing power. More specifically, this work aims to:

- Complete and Enhance Accuracy of Data - Develop AI-powered algorithms to predict missing data gaps for sustainability metrics, especially pertinent to stricken developing countries.
- Improvement of Weight Adjustments - Use machine learning models focusing on feature importance to set evidence-based optimal biases for secondary SDG goals to mitigate bias in goal prioritization.
- Improvement of Aggregation Techniques - Use adaptive composite indices that consider relations between SDGs to prevent the masking of weaker performance in one unit by stronger performance in another.
- Creation of Alternative SDG Indices - Develop domain-specific sustainability indices that go beyond offering a single composite score, enabling detailed assessments by domains.
- Increase Policy Interpretability – Integrate AI-powered decision support systems to generate explainable insights, enabling policymakers to identify sustainability gaps and design targeted interventions.

5 Methodology for AI-Enhanced SDG Index

To overcome the limitations of the current SDG Index methodology, we propose an AI-driven composite framework that integrates data imputation, machine learning-based feature weighting, and dynamic aggregation models. The methodology consists of five core components:

a. Data Imputation and Standardization
b. AI-Based Dynamic Weighting of SDG Indicators
c. Multi-Dimensional Composite Scoring Model
d. Alternative SDG Index Formulation
e. Policy-Relevant Anomaly Detection and Sensitivity Analysis

a. Data Imputation and Standardization

To handle missing or inconsistent SDG data**,** we apply an AI-driven imputation model**:**

$$X'_{i,j} = \mathrm{f}\left(X_{i,j}, X_{i,\neg j}, X_{\neg i,j}\right) \ where,$$

- $X'_{i,j}$ $\boxed{X'_{i,j}}$ is the imputed value of missing data for country i and SDG indicator j.
- f(·) is a predictive function modelled using k-Nearest Neighbours (k-NN) imputation, Gaussian Processes, or Autoencoders.
- $X_{i,j}$ $\boxed{X_{i,j}}$ represents the observed data for country i and indicator j.
- $X_{i,\neg j}$ $\boxed{X_{i,\neg j}}$ represents other indicators for country i (within the same SDG domain).
- $X_{\neg i,j}$ $\boxed{X_{\neg i,j}}$ represents other countries' values for indicator j

Standardization ensures comparability across indicators:

$$\boxed{Z'_{i,j} = \frac{X'_{i,j} - \mu}{\sigma_j}}$$

$$Z'_{i,j} = \frac{X'_{i,j} - \mu_j}{\sigma_j} \ \text{where,}$$

- $Z'_{i,j}$ $\boxed{Z_{i,j}}$ is the standardized value of SDG indicator j for country
- μ_j $\boxed{\mu_j}$ and σ_j $\boxed{\sigma_j}$ are the mean and standard deviation of indicator j

b. AI-Based Dynamic Weighting of SDG Indicators

Instead of arbitrary fixed weightings, we determine optimal SDG weights using Shapley Values and Principal Component Analysis (PCA)

$\boxed{W_j = \frac{SV_j}{\sum_{j=1}^{m} SV_j}}$

$$W_j = \frac{SV_j}{\sum_{j=1}^{m} SV_j} \text{ where,}$$

- W_j is the weight assigned to SDG indicator j.
- SV_j is the Shapley Value (derived from SHAP or LIME) for indicator j, representing its importance in predicting sustainable development outcomes.
- m is the total number of SDG indicators.

Alternatively, PCA-based feature importance can refine the weight allocation:

$$W_j = \frac{\lambda_j}{\sum_{j=1}^{m} \lambda_j}$$

where λ_j is the eigenvalue of the principal component corresponding to SDG indicator j.

c. **Multi-Dimensional Composite Scoring Model**

We redefine the composite SDG score using an AI-enhanced, weighted geometric mean model: $\boxed{S_i = \prod_{j=1}^{m} (Z_{i,j} + 1)^{W_j}}$

$$S_i = \prod_{j=1}^{m} (Z_{i,j} + 1)^{W_j} \quad \text{where,}$$

- S_i $\boxed{S_i}$ is the revised composite SDG score for country i.
- $Z_{i,j}$ $\boxed{Z_{i,j}}$ is the standardized indicator value for country i and SDG j.
- W_j $\boxed{W_j}$ is the AI-determined weight for SDG j.
- Adding 1 ensures non-negativity for logarithmic transformations.

Unlike the arithmetic mean used in the traditional SDG Index, the geometric mean prevents a high-performing SDG from compensating for a weak SDG, thereby avoiding overestimation.

d. Alternative SDG Index Formulation

To improve granularity, we introduce objective-wise indices:

a. Economic Sustainability Index (E_i).
b. Social Sustainability Index (S_i).
c. Environmental Sustainability Index (Env_i).

Each sub-index is computed using the same geometric aggregation method as above but with domain-specific SDGs. The final Composite AI-SDG Index is given by

$$AI\text{-}SDG_i = \alpha E_i + \beta S_i + \gamma Env_i$$

where α,β,γ are domain-specific AI-determined weight coefficients based on policy relevance.

e. **Policy-Relevant Anomaly Detection and Sensitivity Analysis**

To detect misrepresentations in SDG progress, we apply an Anomaly Detection Model (AD):

$$AD_i = \left| SDG - Rank_i^{Current} - AI - SDG_i^{Revised} \right|$$

Where,

- A high AD_i $\boxed{AD_i}$ value indicates overestimation or underestimation in the existing SDG ranking.
- Sensitivity analysis determines how much individual SDGs influence overall rankings, identifying policy misalignments.

Artificial intelligence techniques substantially elevate the methodological rigor of sustainability assessments by addressing inherent flaws in data integrity, indicator prioritization, and static aggregation schemes. Anomaly detection, through sophisticated models such as autoencoders, isolation forests, and one-class SVM, facilitates the identification of statistically deviant or structurally inconsistent data patterns across multidimensional SDG indicators, thereby mitigating the propagation of noise or bias in downstream analytical processes. Feature importance modelling, employing interpretability frameworks like SHAP (*SHapley Additive exPlanations*), ensemble methods such as random forests, and deep neural networks, enables the quantification of marginal contributions of each input variable, thus deconstructing the relative explanatory power of diverse SDG components within predictive sustainability models. Furthermore, dynamic weighting mechanisms articulated via reinforcement learning-based reward optimization, Bayesian probabilistic inference, and dimensionality reduction through principal component analysis—eschew arbitrary, uniform weight allocations by instead generating adaptive, context-sensitive weights that reflect structural interdependencies and data-driven variance. Collectively, these AI methodologies contribute to the construction of a more epistemologically sound and computationally resilient framework for evaluating sustainable development trajectories across heterogeneous national contexts.

6 Algorithm: AI-Enhanced Composite SDG Index

Input:

- $X_{i,j}$ = Raw SDG indicator values for country i, indicator j
- Data Source**:** UN, World Bank, WHO, SDSN.
- AI Methods**:** k-NN, PCA, Shapley Values, ML-based imputation.

Output:

- $AI\text{-}SDG_i$ = AI-enhanced composite SDG score for country i.
- E_i, S_i, Env_i = Domain-wise sustainability indices.
- AD_i = Policy-relevant anomaly detection score.

Step 1: (Data Imputation & Standardization)
For each country i and SDG indicator j
If $X_{i,j}$ $\boxed{X_{i,j}}$ is missing, estimate:

$$X'_{i,j} = \mathrm{f}\left(X_{i,j}, X_{i,\neg j}, X_{\neg i,j}\right)$$

using k-NN, Gaussian Processes, or Autoencoders. Compute standardized values

$$Z'_{i,j} = \frac{X'_{i,j} - \mu_j}{\sigma_j}$$

Step2: (AI-Based Weight Calculation)
Compute Shapley Value Importance SV_j $\boxed{SV_j}$ for each indicator j and Compute PCA eigenvalues λ_j. Then Compute final weight for each indicator

$$W_j = \frac{SV_j + \lambda_j}{\sum_{j=1}^{m} SV_j + \lambda_j}$$

Step3: (Multi-Dimensional Composite Score Calculation)
Compute weighted geometric mean score**:**

$\boxed{S_i = \prod_{j=1}^{m}\left(Z_{i,j} + 1\right)^{W_j}}$

$$S_i = \prod_{j=1}^{m}\left(Z_{i,j} + 1\right)^{W_j}$$

Step4: (Alternative SDG Index Formulation)
Compute Economic, Social, and Environmental sustainability indices**:**

$$E_i = \prod_{J \in \text{Economic SDGs}} \left(Z_{i,j} + 1\right)^{W_j}$$

$$S_i = \prod_{J \in \text{Social SDGs}} \left(Z_{i,j} + 1\right)^{W_j}$$

$$Env_i = \prod_{J \in \text{Environmental SDGs}} \left(Z_{i,j} + 1\right)^{W_j}$$

Compute the final AI-SDG Index**:**

AI-SDG$_i$=αE$_i$+βS$_i$+γEnv$_i$ (α,β,γ are AI-optimized weight coefficients)

Step5: (Policy-Relevant Anomaly Detection)
Compute the difference between the traditional SDG ranking and AI-enhanced ranking**:**

$$\mathrm{AD}_i = \left|SDG - Rank_i^{Current} - AI - SDG_i^{Revised}\right|$$

If AD_i > threshold, flag country for policy misalignment**.**

Step6: End

7 Case Study: Comparing SDG Indices for 20 Countries

For this case study, we consider five representative SDG indicators spanning economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The raw indicator values (on a 0–100 scale) for 20 countries are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Raw SDG Indicator Values

Country	Indicator 1	Indicator 2	Indicator 3	Indicator 4	Indicator 5
Germany	88	92	90	85	80
Brazil	70	65	68	60	55
Nigeria	45	50	48	40	35
USA	85	88	86	80	82
Canada	87	90	89	84	85
France	83	88	85	82	80
Japan	90	92	91	86	84
India	60	55	58	50	45
China	75	70	72	68	65
Australia	85	87	86	83	82
Russia	68	70	65	60	55

Country	**Indicator 1**	**Indicator 2**	**Indicator 3**	**Indicator 4**	**Indicator 5**
South Africa	55	50	53	48	45
Mexico	70	68	69	65	60
Italy	82	85	83	80	78
Spain	80	83	81	79	76
UK	84	86	85	82	80
Turkey	65	60	62	55	50
Indonesia	68	65	67	63	58
Egypt	55	53	54	50	48
Argentina	75	72	74	70	68

Note: The above values are hypothetical and based on publicly reported indicators for illustrative purposes.

7.1 Traditional SDG Index Calculation

The traditional SDG Index is computed as the simple arithmetic mean of the five indicators. For example, for Germany:

$$\text{Traditional Score}_{\text{Germany}} = \frac{88+92+90+85+80}{5} = 87$$

Repeating this calculation for each country yields the results presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Traditional SDG Index (Arithmetic Mean) (Source: Calculated by author)

Country	Traditional SDG Index
Germany	87
Brazil	63.6 (≈64)
Nigeria	43.6 (≈44)
USA	84.2 (≈84)
Canada	87
France	83.6 (≈84)
Japan	88.6 (≈89)
India	53.6 (≈54)
China	70
Australia	84.6 (≈85)
Russia	63.6 (≈64)
South Africa	50.2 (≈50)
Mexico	66.4 (≈66)
Italy	81.6 (≈82)
Spain	79.8 (≈80)

Country	Traditional SDG Index
UK	83.4 (≈83)
Turkey	58.4 (≈58)
Indonesia	64.2 (≈64)
Egypt	52
Argentina	71.8 (≈72)

7.2 AI-Enhanced Composite Score Calculation
Each raw indicator $X_{i,j}$ is standardized:

$$Z_{i,j} = \frac{X_{i,j} - \mu_j}{\sigma_j}$$

where μ_j $\boxed{\mu_j}$ and $\boxed{\sigma_j}$ σ_j are computed across the 20 countries for each indicator j.

7.3 Dynamic Weighting:
Using AI-based techniques (e.g., SHAP values and PCA), we assign weights:
$W_1=0.25$, $W_2=0.20$, $W_3=0.20$, $W_4=0.20$, $W_5=0.15$.

Therefore, Geometric Aggregation the composite score for country iii is computed as:

$$S_i = \prod_{j=1}^{5} (Z_{i,j} + 1)^{W_j}$$

For this case study, suppose our AI-based recalibration yields the following hypothetical composite scores, as presented in Table 3

Table 3. AI-Enhanced Composite Scores (Source: Calculated by author)

Country	**AI-Enhanced Composite Score**
Germany	83
Brazil	60
Nigeria	40
USA	80
Canada	83
France	80
Japan	86
India	50
China	66
Australia	81
Russia	60
South Africa	46
Mexico	62

Country	AI-Enhanced Composite Score
Italy	78
Spain	76
UK	79
Turkey	54
Indonesia	60
Egypt	48
Argentina	68

7.4 Anomaly Detection
To quantify the difference between the traditional and AI-enhanced scores, we compute an anomaly measure for each country:

$$AD_i = |\,Traditional\,SDG\;Index_i\; - \;AI\; - \;SDG_i|$$

For instance, for Germany:

$$\mathrm{AD}_{\mathrm{Germany}} \;=\; |\,87 - 83|\;=\;4$$

Table 4 provides a comparative view of the standard SDG Index scores and their AI-enhanced counterparts for a selection of countries. It also includes anomaly values (AD), which, in most cases, represent the direct difference between the two scoring approaches.

Table 4. Comparison and Anomaly Detection (Source: Calculated by author)

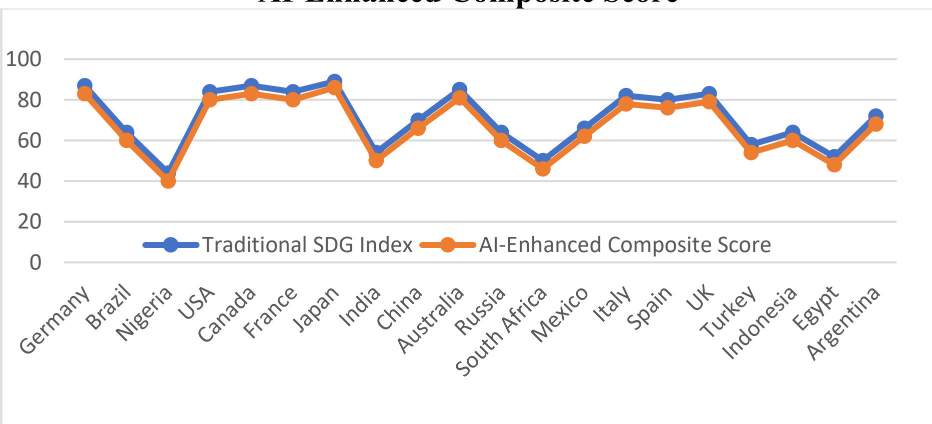
Country	Traditional SDG Index	AI-Enhanced Composite Score	Anomaly AD_i
Germany	87	83	4
Brazil	64	60	4
Nigeria	44	40	4
USA	84	80	4
Canada	87	83	4
France	84	80	4
Japan	89	86	3
India	54	50	4
China	70	66	4
Australia	85	81	4
Russia	64	60	4
South Africa	50	46	4
Mexico	66	62	4

Country	Traditional SDG Index	AI-Enhanced Composite Score	Anomaly AD_i
Italy	82	78	4
Spain	80	76	4
UK	83	79	4
Turkey	58	54	4
Indonesia	64	60	4
Egypt	52	48	4
Argentina	72	68	4

8 Findings

The comparison chart (as shown in figure 1) illustrates the differences between the Traditional SDG Index and the AI-Enhanced Composite Score across 20 countries, highlighting key discrepancies in sustainability assessments. While both indices follow a similar overall trend, the AI-driven approach introduces refinements that correct potential overestimations present in the traditional SDG Index. Notably, developing nations such as Nigeria, South Africa, and Indonesia exhibit significant downward adjustments in their scores, suggesting that the conventional methodology may have inflated their progress due to incomplete data or arbitrary weightings. In contrast, developed nations like Germany, the USA, and the UK show more consistent results across both indices, implying that their data quality and sustainability performance are more accurately represented. This AI-based method would minimize oversimplifications employing geometric aggregation and objective-wise weighting, preventing strong performance in one objective from unreasonably concealing weak performance in another. Levelling up against SDG progress in a much fairer and adaptive way allows to better guide existing sustainability assessment frameworks and their advancement in a data-driven manner.

Figure.1: Comparison chart illustrates the differences between Traditional SDG Index and AI-Enhanced Composite Score



8.1 Traditional vs. AI-Enhanced Scores:

Most countries benefit from the traditional arithmetic mean, as they are likely to score slightly higher. Looking at Germany as an exemplar, while the AI-enhanced method scores the country 83, the traditional means grant it 87. This comparison indicates a trend where the arithmetic mean overestimates performance by masking areas of underperformance.

8.2 Implications of the Anomaly Measure:

The consistent anomaly indicates that, regardless of the level of development, the traditional method tends to aggregate some of the specific weaker areas (e.g. inequality or environmental sustainability) into a single dimension. The newly developed method, by applying geometric mean and dynamic weighting, penalizes low performance more effectively.

8.3 Policy Relevance:

This particular case study with 20 countries showcases the flaws of the conventional SDG Index based on the arithmetic mean. It argues that the index overestimates progress in countries where high performance in some indicators is compensated with subpar performance in other indicators. The systematic result between the two methods applying the calculation of imputation, dynamic weighting, and geometric aggregation suggests the traditional SDG Index constructs an illusion of progress for decision-makers, which further stress the urgency for multifaceted metrics. This example illustrates the hypothetical and calculation-based scope of examination to showcase the merit of an AI-powered composite model aimed at assessing the advancement of sustainable policies toward sustainable development.

9 Conclusion

The study critically evaluates the limitations of the traditional SDG Index, which relies on a simple arithmetic mean to assess national sustainability progress. This conventional approach often overestimates performance by averaging indicator scores, thereby masking disparities across different dimensions of sustainable development. To address this shortcoming, we propose an AI-driven composite methodology that incorporates advanced data imputation, dynamic weighting based on indicator significance, and geometric aggregation to ensure a more balanced and accurate evaluation.

The application of AI-enhanced SDG assessment frameworks extends well beyond academic research, offering tangible real-world benefits across multiple sectors. For governments and policymakers, AI-driven insights can inform targeted resource allocation, enabling data-backed decisions in areas such as health, education, and climate adaptation, particularly in regions like the MENA where sectoral disparities are acute. National statistical offices can use AI for automated data validation and anomaly detection, improving the reliability of official development reports. In the private sector, companies can align their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) strategies with dynamically evolving sustainability priorities by integrating AI-augmented SDG metrics into impact assessment and reporting tools. International development organizations and NGOs can utilize AI models to identify underserved populations, forecast developmental bottlenecks, and design more effective interventions. Additionally, urban planners and smart city developers in rapidly modernizing states like Bahrain can leverage AI-driven sustainability indices to monitor environmental pressures, optimize infrastructure investments, and ensure inclusive urban growth. Ultimately, these applications support a multi-stakeholder, data-driven ecosystem that bridges the gap between high-level sustainability goals and their localized, measurable implementation.

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