

**BENCHMARKING ON THE BASIS OF SOCIAL PROGRESS INDEX AS A TOOL  
OF DESIGNING THE STRATEGY OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**DMITRY KUKSO, OLGA GORDIENKO**  
Polotsk State University, Belarus

*The article summarizes the theoretical basis of sustainable development goals and the tool of benchmarking the progress in their implementation called Social Progress Index.*

It is absolutely clear, that any person in the world would like to live in prosperity, but not everyone has such an opportunity. Quality of life in different parts of the world and often within one country differs a lot. This causes strong tension in the society, intensive migration, xenophobe (starting from discrimination and finishing with extremism), leads to conflicts of different forms (starting from political confrontation and finishing with armed clashes).

So there is a question of what is the reason of such a contrast difference in life conditions and nations' outlook despite the fact that all the citizens of all the countries want the same – to live in prosperity. Is this possible to overcome these problems and provide the prosperity for all?

Today's position of the world community says, that finding the solutions for mentioned problems is the priority for the world development till 2030, which is proved with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), confirmed on United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The SDGs coincided with another historic agreement reached in 2015 at the COP21 Paris Climate Conference. Together with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, signed in Japan in March 2015, these agreements provide a set of common standards and achievable targets to reduce carbon emissions, manage the risks of climate change and natural disasters, and to build back better after a crisis.

Today 17 SDGs include [1]:

1. No Poverty.
2. Zero Hunger.
3. Good Health and Well-Being for people.
4. Quality Education.
5. Gender Equality.
6. Clean Water and Sanitation.
7. Affordable and Clean Energy.
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth.
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.
10. Reduced Inequalities.
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities.
12. Responsible Consumption and Production.
13. Climate Change.
14. Life Below Water.
15. Life on Land.
16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.
17. Partnerships for the Goals.

The goals are interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another. They are relevant for the world in general, but not for every particular country because different countries are on the different level of development and they face different problems. This means that every country should have its own plan of development, which however must be concerned with the global plan and its priorities due to the fact that today's world is a united system from economic, informational and ecological points of view.

At the same time, a purely economic approach to the development with the principle «the richer means the happier» does not guarantee the prosperity because it may lead to different negative consequences for the quality of life, for example to obesity, environmental pollution, increasing risk of cancer and so on. In addition, very often the wealth received is distributed unevenly, which leads to a number of negative social consequences.

This suggests that the priority in global scale should not be the economic growth itself. Humanity should strive to address a range of challenges, such as the 17 SDGs. But there is a question then: how to define the problems of every particular country providing the opportunity to compare the data and evaluate the results globally? How to track the progress and what indicators should be used if economic indicators do not give the understanding of all the problems?

Social progress index can be the answer to these questions. Social Progress Imperative – the organization, which designed Social Progress Index (SPI), – defines social progress as the capacity of a society to meet the basic human needs of its citizens, establish the building blocks that allow citizens and communities to enhance and sustain the quality of their lives, and create the conditions for all individuals to reach their full potential. Improving quality of life is a complex and multilayered endeavor, and past efforts to measure progress simply haven't created a sufficiently nuanced picture of what a healthy society looks like [2].

Social Progress Index (SPI) measures 50 indicators of social and environmental outcomes to create a clearer picture of what life is really like for everyday people. These indicators are divided across three broad dimensions of social progress: Basic Human Needs, Foundations of Wellbeing, and Opportunity. Within each dimension, there are four components that further divide the indicators into thematic categories (see figure 1). Diverse selection of indicators allows for granular analysis of the specific underpinnings of social progress in each country, while the broad categories of the Index framework help to better understand global and regional trends.

Our world average SPI identifies which aspects of social progress are most and least advanced. If the world were a country, it would score 64.85 (out of possible 100) on the Social Progress Index, ranking between Indonesia and Botswana. Breaking this average down across dimensions and components of social progress, there is a wide variation in how countries are performing. The world scores 73.80 in Basic Human Needs and 68.69 on the Foundations of Wellbeing dimensions, but just 51.85 on Opportunity. Creating a society with opportunity for all citizens remains an elusive goal that many nations have failed to achieve.

"Beyond GDP" measurements tend to draw from one of four methodological approaches: the subjective approach, which uses measures such as happiness and life satisfaction; composite indices such as the Human Development Index or OECD Better Life Index; dashboards that present unique, non-aggregated indicators; and the accounting and monetary approach that adjusts economic measures for performance on social outcomes. Each of these approaches has particular advantages and disadvantages (and some prior approaches combine these approaches). However, each approach either amends the measurement of GDP itself, includes components additional to GDP, or develops alternative measures (such as subjective well-being measures) that reflect both economic and social progress. None distinctly measures social progress on its own.

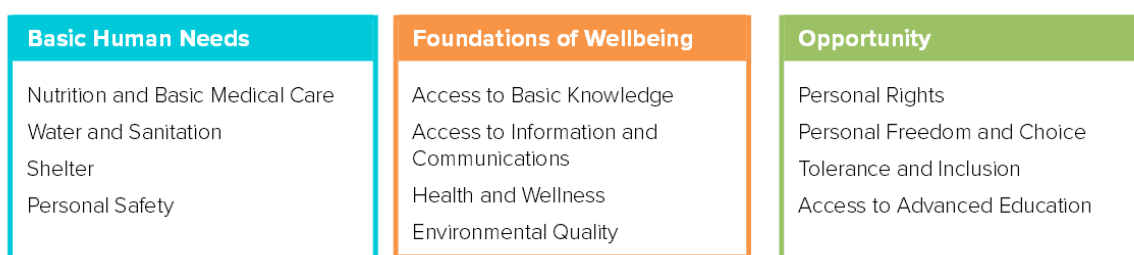


Fig. 1. Dimensions of Social Progress Index

So it means that SPI is tightly connected with SDGs. In case of correct evaluation of SPI the stakeholders – leaders and change-makers from business, government, and civil society – are provided with the data they need to understand where their actions will have the greatest impact, they gain clear picture of weaknesses of society and the most important directions for actions.

This is relevant for Republic of Belarus as well. There is no definite list of prioritized sustainable development goals in the country. The process of formation of main directions of sustainable development goals is still continuing. At the same time Social Progress Imperative has defined SPI for Belarus. This means that there is an opportunity to evaluate social progress and on the basis of this evaluation define the most important areas for actions.

Economics

In 2017 on the global scale of SPI Belarus was ranked 65 of 128 countries in the world with the score 67.80 (the scorecard is given on the picture 2). Simultaneously Belarus was ranked 49 of 128 countries in the world by GDP per capita with the score \$16 662. To understand these numbers it is better to compare them with other countries. Russia which has similar historical background and culture, but different level of GDP per capita, which is much more high – \$23 895 (due to a lot of natural resources), in 2017 was ranked lower by the level of SPI – 67 of 128 countries in the world with the score 67.17. But there is the opposite example: Costa Rica which was 55<sup>th</sup> by the level of GDP per capita equal \$14 647 in 2017 was ranked 28 of 128 countries in the world with the score 81.03 by the level of SPI.

Such a difference proves the fact, that GDP is not a guarantee of success. Russia has a huge wealth comparing it with Costa Rica, but this wealth is not used as a tool for improving lives of people. Social success of Costa Rica gives a chance to Belarus to be a better place for life having the current level of GDP in case of correct using of wealth and real changes in according to problem places defined in the score card of SPI.

Of course, every country has its own peculiarities of social and economic development and culture, but good practices and useful experience can be adapted to the circumstances of the specific region and SPI can help with this through the benchmarking. Benchmarking is a process of comparing one's business processes and performance metrics to industry bests and best practices from other companies [3], but absolutely the same principle can be used on the level of society development.

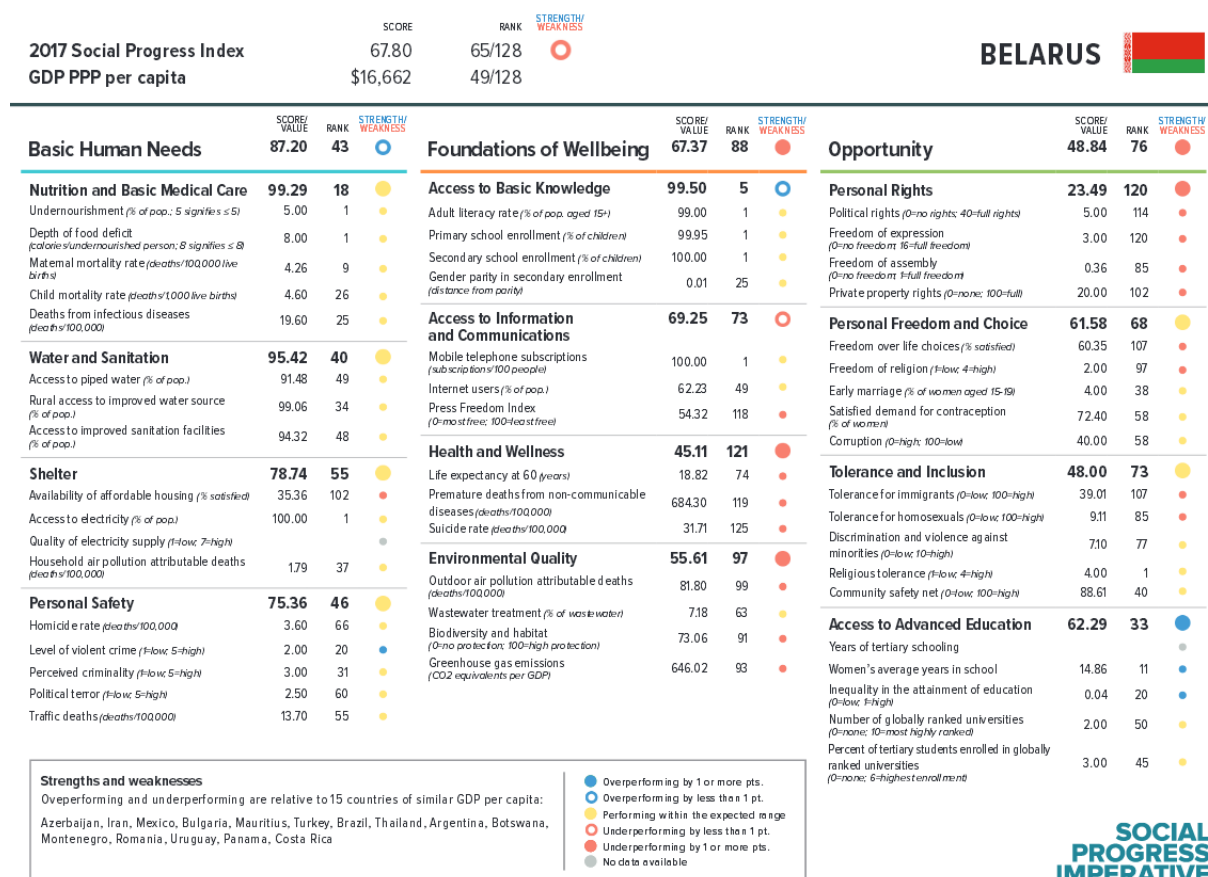


Fig. 2. Social Progress Index 2017: Belarus Scorecard

But this work will be successful only if the system of planning and further implementation is correct and adequate. This issue is directly connected with strategic planning. The development of society should be subject to a common goal – to create quality conditions for people's lives, not only to increase the income. So considering the structure of SPI, authorities in Belarus should pay special attention to the next components of social progress:

- Access to Information and Communication;
- Health and Wellness;

- Environmental Quality;
- Personal Rights.

These components must be key areas for actions in the strategy, which therefore must be developed in according to the structure of governance in the country: for local, regional and national levels as a holistic plan of development. The priority should be given to the local level due to the most essential influence on life conditions of people. Responsible officers must be appointed to make decisions, control the process of implementation and assess the progress as well as financial support must be provided both from national budget and international funds (UNDP, EaP of EU, etc.)

In this case this work will lead to solution of real problems of the society in Belarus. Social progress index gives us clear vision of the problems and benchmarks for solutions. Anyway, political initiative is in the root of real actions, there are many successful examples of development in the world and there is a strong international movement in order to make the world a better place for life.

#### REFERENCES

1. Sustainable development. Knowledge platform [Electronic resource] – Mode of access: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>. – Date of access: 14.10.2017.
2. Social Progress Index [Electronic resource] – Mode of access: <https://www.socialprogressindex.com/overview>. – Date of access: 17.10.2017.
3. Wikipedia [Electronic resource] – Benchmarking. – Mode of access: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benchmarking>. – Date of access: 14.10.2017.