

Sustainable Development at the UN: A 50-Year Overview of Themes and Trends in UNGDC

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Abstract: The United Nations (UN) has always been a core force in promoting global sustainable development, drawing research interest from scholars in various academic fields. The UN General Debate Corpus (UNGDC) is widely adopted in research on diplomatic affairs and economic topics, but few studies have used it to track how sustainability-related topics have changed over time. This research addresses this research gap by using keyword analysis and word collocation network methods to explore how sustainable development has been discussed in UNGDC speeches across fifty years (1972–2024). The research results show obvious thematic changes divided into four clear stages: the early stage (1972–1992) focusing on peace maintenance and institutional fairness; the post-Cold War stage (1992–2000) aiming to build global governance rules, resolve international conflicts and incorporate basic environmental concerns into global issues; the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) period (2000–2015) focusing on measurable goals for poverty elimination, public health improvement and climate protection; and the latest stage (2015–2024) featuring an integrated development model that combines climate action, public health safety and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One major research result is that global sustainability research and practice have formed a systematic thinking mode, in which discussions on climate action, SDGs and health security are closely connected with each other. This discovery of thematic integration provides a clear reference for policy makers to formulate unified policies to deal with complicated and interrelated global problems.

Keywords: United Nations, Sustainable Development, United Nations General Debate Corpus, Keyword Analysis, Collocation Networks.

1. Introduction

From the mid-20th century onward, sustainable development has grounded the core operations of global governance, and the United Nations has led relevant global work in this area. Over the last five decades, the UN has rolled out a wide range of core measures to reconcile economic growth, social justice and ecological preservation. The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment started a new stage of global environmental cooperation. Meanwhile, the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, offered the first clear explanation of sustainable development and effectively combined its three core components into a unified system [1]. Major events that followed, such as the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the 2000 Millennium Development Goals, and the influential 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, have reshaped the overall pattern of global development, with growing focus on inclusivity, universality and internal connections [2]. These practical actions prove that the United Nations has made consistent efforts to cope with diverse and closely linked global challenges.

A lot of academic work has looked deeply at all parts of this change. Historical study records in detail how sustainable development grew into a formal setup inside the United Nations, pointing to big steps such as the Brundtland Report and the Rio Earth Summit [3]. Empirical work focuses on the carrying out and real results of specific goals, such as cutting poverty [4] and climate action [5]. At the same time, studies using discourse analysis (usually based on corpus methods) look at how UN texts describe key issues such as gender equality and global health [6], and have found that words such as “sustainability” and “equity” have grown more important.

However, these current studies still have clear gaps. Although these studies gave useful knowledge for certain time periods or single parts, they lacked a full picture of the change of the United Nations’ sustainable development agenda over the last fifty years. Current research mostly gives partial analysis and cannot fully show how core topics, including peace, poverty, climate change and health interact, grow or drop in focus over time. While recent works have recognized how climate crises [7] and the COVID-19 outbreak [8] change global development focuses, few scholars build strong links between these recent events and early talks on environmental protection and public health. This gap blocks a full view of the long-term shifts and inner ties of these sustainable development topics.

This paper studies UN General Debate speeches from 1972 to 2024 with word count stats and word pairing tools. It records how often different terms appear and looks at their inner links. This method clearly finds lasting core topics and changing issues in global sustainable development. This study mixes real results with true policy changes and academic debates, putting word analysis in real historical and institutional settings. This work makes two big additions to current research. First, it uses detailed data to lay out the full change of the UN’s understanding and action of sustainable development. It clearly shows the UN’s main duties and real ways for dealing with global problems. Second, it links small word features to big historical shifts. It shows that official UN remarks can reflect new global development priorities, and also affect how international groups talk about related academic and policy issues. This work points out the key parts that shape historical trends, finds missed research points, and gives solid proof for later policy work. It also offers useful suggestions to help the UN push fair and inclusive global

sustainable development.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Corpus-based UN Discourse Studies

In the last twenty years, a growing number of scholars have adopted corpus linguistics to study United Nations texts. This approach is highly effective for analyzing large volumes of written documents. By using corpus research tools, academics are able to identify lexical patterns, core themes and evolving research priorities within international organizations [9].

Scholars in this developing research field have analyzed a wide range of UN official documents. Plenty of existing studies review UN resolutions to explore the evolving attitudes toward human rights and global security over decades. Researchers also investigate official documents issued by the UN Secretary-General and affiliate agencies including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to identify the core focuses of the United Nations. Speeches and statements presented at major UN conferences (such as the Stockholm, Rio, and Johannesburg summits) are generally regarded by researchers as critical platforms for conflicting global strategies and perspectives. In addition, meeting documents from bodies including the Security Council and the Human Rights Council allow researchers to examine international diplomatic negotiations and state attitudes toward disputed global issues.

Among all available research materials, the UNGDC has become extremely valuable and serves as a core data source for analyzing multilateral diplomatic language and national diplomatic preferences. The UNGDC collects all opening statements delivered by delegates of UN member states at the annual General Assembly opening sessions starting from 1946 [10]. This database has three major strengths: full content coverage, a lengthy time span, and high-level official speeches. These advantages make it a vital material for researching the evolution of international political discourse.

A host of academic studies have adopted the corpus of UN General Assembly speeches to investigate political, economic and diplomatic topics. For example, Baturo et al. [9] built and applied the UN General Debate Corpus (1970-2014) to examine national policy tendencies and ideological standpoints, and verified that word frequency can reflect a country's core concerns. Brunn-Mercer [11] used a comparable corpus and adopted keyword analysis and collocation network tools to illustrate how UN speeches shape the discourse system of global governance and multilateral cooperation. In further research, Brunn-Mercer [6] directly adopted the corpus established by Baturo et al. to explore the dynamic changes of gender-related language, and clearly demonstrated the shifting importance and diverse usage of terms such as "women" and "gender equality" across different time periods.

These study results fully show the practical use of using corpora to help with discourse studies: they can pick up clear topics and also find hidden discussion ways. But it's important to note that while studies like Brunn-Mercer [6] have shown what diachronic analysis can do, most current studies that use UN corpora still only look at things from a synchronic view, mostly focusing on specific time periods or single topics. This current state of research actually limits how well we can understand how international issues (such as sustainable development) change in their themes as the global

situation and institutional structures change.

2.2. Sustainability in UN Discourse

Since the Stockholm Conference in 1972, sustainable development has become a major topic of discussion at the United Nations. This conference was the first global attempt to link environmental protection with human development [12]. The Brundtland Report [1] later provided the basic definition of sustainable development and established an overall framework encompassing the three aspects of environment, society, and economy. This conceptual triad has been extensively debated and refined by scholars such as Hopwood et al. [13] who critique the often-unresolved tensions between economic growth and ecological limits within the sustainability discourse. This ideological foundation was implemented through several important international agreements, including the 1992 Rio Earth Summit [14], the 2000 Millennium Development Goals [15], and the United Nations discourse system sees colonial and post-colonial resource-plundering economies as the opposite of sustainable resource management, and the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals [2].

In the relevant studies conducted by the United Nations, academic discussions on sustainability often adopt a synchronic perspective, mainly focusing on specific topics or time periods. Taking the research by Calvin et al. [5] as an example, they systematically examined the extent to which the climate change issue was presented in recent United Nations assessment reports, particularly those of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Through quantitative analysis of the frequency and usage context of climate-related terms, the study found that the discussion of the direct impact of climate on development paths, risk management, and system vulnerability significantly increased. This work demonstrates the typical characteristics of synchronic research, providing in-depth and contextually rich observations for understanding the presentation of climate issues within a specific institutional context during a particular period.

We can also observe other thematic studies that focus on different dimensions of sustainable development. In the field of public health and development, Ebi [16] systematically documented the cross-linkages between climate change, health issues, and sustainable development in the UN policy framework, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research revealed how global health security is closely linked to environmental protection and resilient development. In terms of gender equality, Fukuda-Parr [17] critically examined the evolution of gender-related statements and policy integration in the UN sustainable development agenda - from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. These studies traced how the discourse on women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming was shaped within a broader development framework, and sometimes was weakened.

Turning to biodiversity and ecosystem research, Díaz et al. [18] worked closely with UN initiatives via the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). They looked at how falling biodiversity and ecosystem functions act as vital parts to reach sustainable development goals. Likewise, Mace et al. [19] examined how sustainable development goals match or conflict with biodiversity metrics. Their work shows how scholars carry out targeted studies on overlapping issues

within the sustainable development agenda. The United Nations Development Programme [4] also released a dedicated section in its Human Development Report, treating poverty relief as a central task under the Sustainable Development Goals. By checking progress metrics and relevant policies for poverty relief, it pointed out connected difficulties linked to inequality, healthcare and education.

Most existing research uses short-term case studies, which bring one clear advantage. They let researchers dig deep into single sustainability topics based on real situations at a given time. Scholars can then explain how specific issues such as climate change [5] and public health [16] are presented under current political and institutional rules. Still, this advantage also creates obvious drawbacks. Studies limited to fixed time points cannot track changes across years. Past works that focus on separate time periods or isolated topics cannot fully show steady trends, major shifts and long-term directions of UN sustainability work over the past fifty years. For this reason, we still cannot fully grasp how key topics including peace, poverty, climate and health have interacted, changed or been overlooked over decades. For instance, many papers talk about how the climate crisis [5] and the COVID-19 pandemic [16] change today's development plans, but few connect these topics to past discussions on environmental protection and global health. This leaves our understanding of their long-term evolution and mutual relations incomplete.

This research aims to fix this shortcoming. Short-term analyses are useful, yet we still lack a full timeline of sustainability discussions inside the UN. A fifty-year review can reveal new trends, topic adjustments and repeated updates to the global development agenda. To address this issue and sort out developments across fifty years, this paper sets out to answer two main research questions:

1. What are the overall themes of sustainable development in the UN's discourse over the past 50 years?

2. What are the historical themes of sustainable development in the UN's discourse over the past 50 years?

This work uses keyword analysis and collocation networks to study the UNGDC covering 1972 to 2024, moving past separate short-term observations to address the above questions. It follows how sustainability-related topics keep changing, and shows how issues including climate action, poverty relief and health security have appeared, merged and shifted along with global changes. This long-term review aims to present a complete timeline of the UN's sustainability plans, and offers an overall view of how its related statements have developed over time.

3. Method

3.1. UNGDC

The General Debate has taken place at the start of every United Nations General Assembly session since 1946. Delegates from every UN member state can deliver speeches, with no restrictions related to their country's size, power, economic status, location or political system, to state their national stances on different international political issues [10]. National governments share their thoughts on top-priority global topics, including peace and security, economic progress, climate action and UN institutional reform. They further clarify their attitudes toward major global events and core issues, and explain problems by emphasizing the rationality of their own views, so as to gain recognition and support from other nations. The textual data adopted in this

study originates from the official records of UN General Assembly General Debate. The data spans from 1972 (the 27th session) to 2024 (the 79th session). Speakers usually deliver remarks in their domestic languages. In line with UN assembly rules, professional UN translators convert all speeches into the six official UN languages. For non-English original speeches, this study adopts the official English translations released by the UN. All speeches included in the official UN General Assembly archives are preserved in English [9]. Scholar Phillipson [20] and many other researchers have studied the extensive application of English as the core working language in global diplomatic activities. Their findings prove that dominant languages can influence global policy planning and weaken the voice of non-English-speaking countries, which provides important guidance for the methodology of this research. Based on the critical time nodes of the UN's sustainable development initiatives, this study divides all valid textual data from 1972 to 2024 into four independent research stages: 1972-1992, 1992-2000, 2000-2015, and 2015-2024.

3.2. Keyword Analysis

Keyword analysis is one of the most widely used research methods in corpus linguistics and corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) [21]. Scholar Mike Scott put forward a straightforward but vital definition of keywords: these are words that show "abnormal frequency" in a specific corpus when compared with a standard reference corpus [22]. In corpus research, researchers select frequency-based keywords by comparing study texts with large reference text databases, and these keywords can accurately reflect the unique content of research materials. These special words, filtered through statistical tests, can reveal the specific research themes of a study against the general discourse context. This method can objectively find changing thematic features in different texts by calculating and comparing their content differences. The standard steps of keyword analysis include comparing two research corpora to find words that show their differences, or matching one or more target corpora with a fixed reference corpus to pick out prominent words based on baseline data. Such comparisons produce keyword lists for target corpora, and these lists can be regarded as word sets in this study. Researchers can further compare these word sets through basic set calculations to find common and unique vocabulary between different corpora [23]. This study takes the 1972-1992 corpus as the target research corpus and the corpora of 1992-2000, 2000-2015 and 2015-2024 as reference corpora, and adopts the Antconc tool to generate relevant keyword lists. The same research method is applied to generate keyword lists with 1992-2000, 2000-2015 and 2015-2024 serving as target corpora in turn. Finally, this study obtains four independent keyword lists in total.

3.3. Collocation Networks

Collocation networks are a common research framework in corpus linguistics, which can sort out and analyze word connections in text data in a systematic way. Phillips first put forward this concept in 1983 and built a core theoretical system to explain the links between words, texts and the cognitive logic behind discourse expression [24]. Collocation networks help researchers better understand how linguistic meanings connect with each other. There are many different methods to build collocation networks based on different

linguistic features. This study adopts self-designed software to generate collocation network graphs (<http://43.156.130.211:8502>). Gries states that four core indicators for collocation analysis can improve the accuracy of discourse meaning interpretation, including (i) distance, (ii) frequency, (iii) exclusivity, and (iv) directionality [25]. Distance means the search scope around the target node word for matching collocating words, also known as the “collocation window”. The search range can be adjusted flexibly. For example, a one-word range is usually used to analyze English adjectives right before nouns, while a four-to-five-word range on both sides of the node word is adopted for general word association analysis. Frequency is used to count how often two words appear together within a fixed collocation window. For example, the verb “make” often collocates with nouns like “friends” and “mistakes”, reflecting fixed word usage rules in daily language. As the core basis of collocation research, this indicator captures stable word combinations that determine the grammatical structure and overall meaning of written sentences. Exclusivity is the third standard, which judges whether a word combination is unique to a specific node word. For example, “mistake” is closely matched with “make”, but this connection is not exclusive. The word “make” can collocate with many other nouns such as “decision” and “progress”. Such asymmetric word relations show that some words act as fixed semantic cores for specific collocations, while other words have higher flexibility to match diverse vocabularies [24]. The last indicator directionality refers to the unbalanced binding strength between paired words. For example, “affair” has a strong linguistic tendency to match “love”, but this connection is not mutual. The word “love” can collocate with more vocabularies such as “family” and “happiness”, which makes its binding force with “affair” much weaker [26].

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The overall themes of sustainable development of the United Nations over the past 50 years

This part shows and explains what we found from studying keywords and the collocation networks of the UNGDC. It is organized in two steps: first, we identify the two main ideas that have shaped how the UN talks about sustainable development for fifty years; second, we follow how past themes changed through four different times, linking our discoveries to earlier research to clarify what they mean.

Through the analysis of the collocation networks of the UNGDC from 1972 to 2024, it can be clearly seen that “CLIMATE” and “POVERTY” have always been the two core pillars of the United Nations sustainable development issues. These two themes profoundly reflect the core essence of sustainable development – “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [1]. Eradicating poverty (meeting the needs of the present generation) and protecting the Earth’s ecology (ensuring the needs of future generations) are the two fundamental pillars of sustainable development.

According to the collocation network, “CLIMATE”, as a central node, continues to be closely connected with action terms such as “impact”, “action”, “meeting”, “agreement”, reflecting its characteristics as a major challenge that requires global coordination; “POVERTY” is systematically related to words such as “eliminate”, “reduce”, “education” and “hunger”. The connection shows the multi-dimensional characteristics of this topic and its far-reaching impact on human development.

Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY

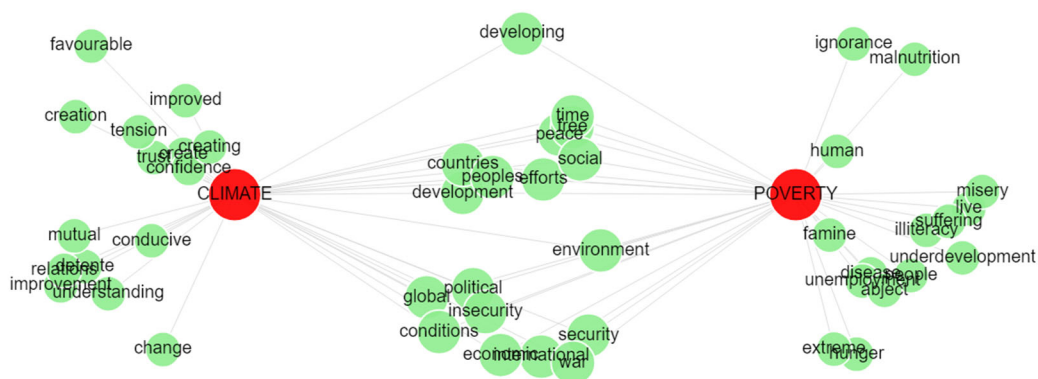


Figure 1. (Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY, 1972–1992)

Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY

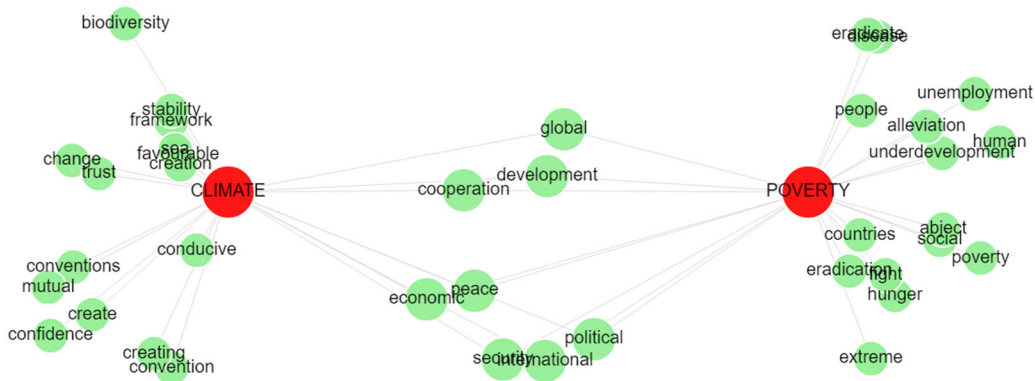


Figure 2. (Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY, 1992–2000)

Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY

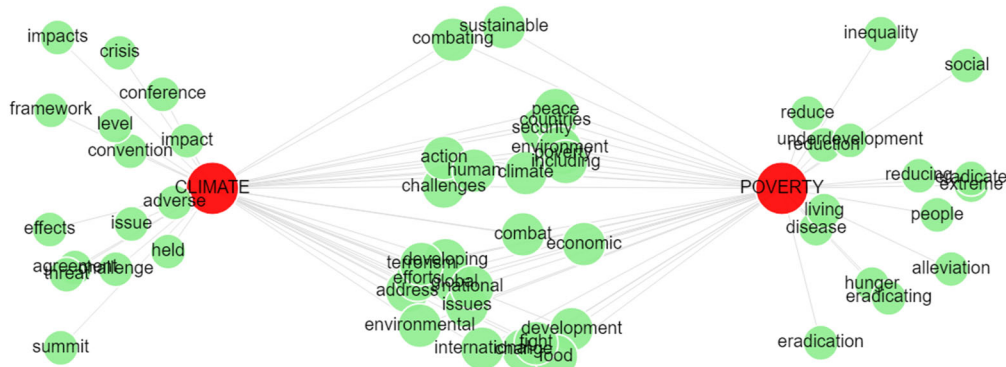


Figure 3. (Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY, 2000–2015)

Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY

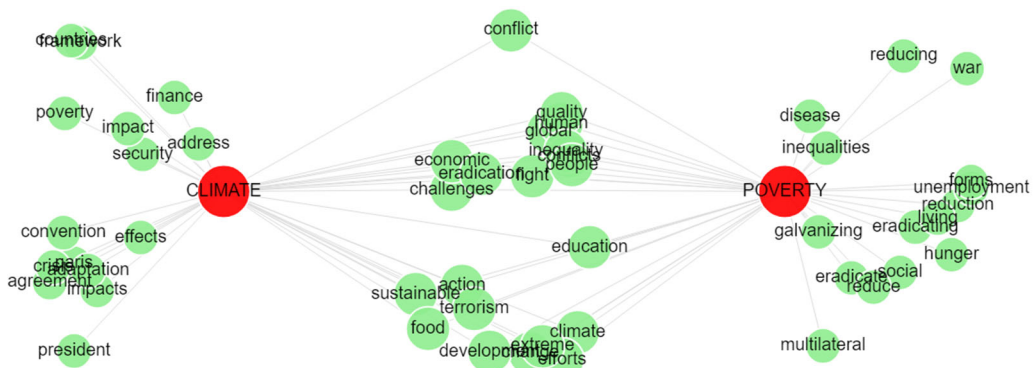


Figure 4. (Merged Network: CLIMATE & POVERTY, 2015–2024)

The evolution of terms around these two core terms reveals an important shift in the United Nations cognitive model - from initially viewing it as an independent issue to gradually recognizing its intrinsic connection. This holistic understanding has become the cornerstone of the contemporary sustainable development agenda, which is not only reflected in the foundational documents such as Our Common Future [1] but also concretely implemented through the 2030 Agenda [2].

4.2. The historical themes of sustainable development of the United Nations over the past 50 years

The longitudinal analysis of the UNGDC shows that the United Nations’ understanding of sustainable development has undergone a remarkable dynamic evolution. The agenda is not static, but continues to respond to the impact of

geopolitical changes, emerging global crises, and deepening scientific awareness. The following is a trace of this development trajectory through the division of four historical stages, combined with keyword analysis results and relevant policies and academic backgrounds.

Table 1. Rank and Keyness of Keywords in UNGDC (1972–1992)

Keyword	Rank	Keyness
Namibia	7	6657.88
Soviet	8	6436.85
independence	9	6047.64
apartheid	10	5570.31
detente	11	5137.4
racist	18	3732.51
disarmament	21	3585.88
race	23	3183.7
liberation	26	2838.96
Zimbabwe	68	1412.06

The keyword analysis of the UNGDC from 1972 to 1992 shows that the concept of sustainable development at this stage is mainly based on the realization of political autonomy and social equity. This period was marked by two important conferences - the Stockholm Conference in 1972 and the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, whose core task was to build a political foundation for sustainable development.

Frequent use of words including “independence”, “liberation”, “Namibia”, “Zimbabwe” and other expressions linked to decolonization proves political self-rule was treated as the basic requirement for development. Texts from UN official speeches frame colonial and post-colonial economic exploitation of natural resources as the opposite of responsible resource protection. This viewpoint aligns with research from post-development scholars represented by Escobar [27], who claim the original idea of “development” originated from colonial expansion, and genuine sustainable progress demands fair knowledge rights and new ways to define social advancement. After newly founded nations such as Namibia, which gained independence in 1990, joined international debates, these states stressed the value of political independence while designing environmental and economic policies. This viewpoint matches a core viewpoint from the Brundtland Report: unequal social structures and environmentally harmful behaviors mostly come from unfair power distributions [1]. For this reason, national sovereign rights became a necessary foundation to escape exploitative historical legacies and explore locally controlled development paths. In this historical phase, widespread criticism targeting “apartheid” and racist governance revealed institutional racial unfairness was viewed as a major barrier to sustainable development. UN speakers stated discriminatory social systems locked societies in poverty and unequal resource allocation, which meant social fairness was indispensable for long-term developmental progress. This viewpoint expanded development research beyond merely pursuing economic expansion, laying a theoretical foundation for the social dimension included in the later three-pillar framework covering economy, society and environment. Cold War conflicts can be traced through frequently used words such as “Soviet,” “detente,” and “disarmament.” Competition between major global powers consumed large amounts of resources for military purposes, which ran counter to global developmental demands, and meanwhile fueled debates

between state-regulated economic systems and market-driven development models. Heavy discussion around disarmament followed the official UN stance that redirecting military spending toward social development would greatly benefit global public interests. Stabilizing bilateral ties between the two superpowers therefore served as a vital guarantee to build a secure environment for worldwide development. To sum up, discussions on sustainable development between 1972 and 1992 mainly centered on political structural reforms: ending colonial governance, eliminating institutional racial discrimination, and easing military tensions from the Cold War. These political changes acted as essential preconditions before environmental protection gradually grew into a formal global sustainable development agenda.

Table 2. Rank and Keyness of Keywords in UNGDC (1992–2000)

Keyword	Rank	Keyness
Bosnia	3	2700.67
cooperation	4	2365.2
globalization	6	2026.98
Rwanda	22	1187.5
Rio	26	1065.82
peace	36	731.78
democracy	37	730.18
environment	75	445.87
rights	78	409.13
peacekeeping	82	375.03
trade	165	196.75

The fall of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War restructured the international landscape, which prompted the UN sustainable development agenda to undergo rapid adjustments. Keyword results from the 1992–2000 period reveal three core focal issues: solving post-Cold War regional conflicts, responding to the impacts of globalization, and enriching the connotation of sustainable development frameworks.

Regional tensions and ethnic conflicts made “peacekeeping” a major UN priority, with specific crisis cases such as “Bosnia” and “Rwanda” becoming central topics in UN discussions. The UN did not treat these crises as isolated incidents. Instead, it defined them as major obstacles blocking global development progress. The repeated references to “Bosnia” reflect worldwide attempts to resolve serious humanitarian emergencies. These crises ruined local public facilities, triggered large-scale population displacement, and broke down basic social systems that support long-term local development. Collier & Hoeffler [28] later carried out research that confirmed the huge economic losses brought by civil conflicts. Their findings supported the UN’s mainstream view in this period that peacebuilding work is an essential part of global development initiatives.

The emerging high-frequency keyword “globalization” shows the dual-sided features of growing global economic integration. Globalization creates new development opportunities, while also bringing risks including widening inequality and weakened national regulatory power. The term “globalization” usually coexists with “cooperation” and “trade”, which proves that the United Nations advocates standardized and well-managed globalization to deliver more equitable development results. This viewpoint is fully explained in official UNCTAD reports [29] and academic studies published by Stiglitz and other researchers [30]. The

World Trade Organization was also founded during this period. Relevant UN discussions built a clear consensus that global economic governance should fully coordinate with social welfare and environmental protection goals.

In addition, this period laid a solid foundation for the institutional construction of global environmental sustainability, which is strongly reflected by the frequent occurrence of the keyword “Rio”. The 1992 Earth Summit [14] acted as a key turning point, whose influence can be seen throughout all textual records of this stage. The term “environment” often appears together with governance terms like “democracy” and “rights”, which represents a major conceptual transformation. This trend means that ecological protection requirements and participatory governance models have been fully incorporated into mainstream development research. It completely changed the previous narrow, technical-only development perspective that ignored political and social factors. Current academic and institutional discussions clearly recognize that sound ecological environments, democratic supervision mechanisms and basic human rights can promote each other and jointly support the complete sustainable development system.

Table 3. Rank and Keyness of Keywords in UNGDC (2000–2015)

Keyword	Rank	Keyness
millennium	1	7558.64
terrorism	2	6384.41
mdgs	4	4081.01
aids	7	2875.31
global	8	2792.59
poverty	9	2724.92
HIV	10	2722.47
governance	13	2171.47
security	17	1603.11
terrorist	18	1581.96
peacekeeping	23	1408.87
sustainable	28	1317.32
climate	38	987.21
Iraq	51	811.94
Kyoto	52	802.14

Global development work took a new turn in the early 2000s, leaning heavily on tangible, quantifiable outcomes. Keyword data from this period proves that measurable development targets took over as the main focus of global dialogue. The frequent appearance of terms related to the “millennium” and “mdgs” clearly reflects this shift toward timed, scheduled development planning.

The Millennium Development Goals [15] set eight key priority areas for all countries, with poverty alleviation set as the core goal. This unified framework created standard wording for global development discussions, especially within public health areas such as tackling “aids” and “HIV”. Even so, many scholars like Sachs [31] questioned this framework. They pointed out that it only addressed superficial issues in developing countries, while overlooking deeper structural problems, including Western consumption habits and long-standing unfair global systems.

Meanwhile, the 9/11 terrorist attacks greatly changed global development priorities, making “terrorism” the second most frequent keyword in UN speeches. Security and development became very closely linked, as unrest and conflict were widely considered as great barriers to achieving

the MDG targets. Numerous mentions of “Iraq” reflect how international tensions and the “war on terror” occupied global diplomatic focus and limited available resources, showing clearly how security emergencies changed and shifted mainstream development agendas [30].

During this period, environmental sustainability continued gaining ground. The terms “climate” and “Kyoto” (referencing the Kyoto Protocol) demonstrated climate change becoming more established in UN debates, though not yet the primary concern. Scientific agreements, visible in reports like the Stern Review and continuing IPCC studies, were having a growing impact on policy discussions. The political process of translating scientific consensus into international policy, however, has been analyzed as complex and contentious by scholars like Haas [32], who introduced the concept of “epistemic communities” to explain how networks of knowledge-based experts influence policy coordination. The UN’s work in developing “governance” systems to handle connected problems of poverty, security, and climate became more defined, preparing for the more unified global agenda that would appear after 2015.

Table 4. Rank and Keyness of Keywords in UNGDC (2015–2024)

Keyword	Rank	Keyness
climate	2	11139.22
sustainable	3	10774
COVID	5	7793.53
pandemic	6	7384.65
global	8	6541.3
SDGS	10	4938.56
health	15	3039.98
inclusive	19	2810.14
multilateralism	21	2728.99
gender	31	1714.89
goals	36	1601.19
vulnerable	43	1430.51
vaccines	49	1264.91
biodiversity	66	1068.78
emissions	73	988.1
carbon	79	891.13

The recent period is characterized by the intertwining of existential crises and a decisive shift towards a coordinated understanding of sustainable development. The discussion presented at the UNGDC clearly demonstrates efforts to integrate climate action, public health, and inclusive development into a strengthened multilateral framework for cooperation.

The climate crisis has become the top topic, with “climate” and “sustainable” ranking second and third, respectively. This reflects the concentrated urgency of the scientific community, represented by a series of reports of the IPCC [5], as well as political milestones such as the 2015 Paris Agreement. Discuss the shift from general environmental concerns to concrete actions on “emissions” and “carbon”, and recognize the interrelationship between climate and “biodiversity” loss, which is detailed in the IPBES [33] assessment. This integrative understanding of planetary boundaries, linking climate and biodiversity, is a central theme in the work of Rockström et al. [34], who have powerfully framed these issues as interconnected systemic risks to the Earth’s life-support systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a heavy impact on the

whole system. It has quickly put words such as “COVID”, “pandemic”, and “health” at the core of development issues. The crisis has exposed the serious vulnerability of the global system, reversed progress in poverty reduction and health [4], and proved that public health is the cornerstone of sustainable development. Promoting the equity of “vaccines” has become a living case study of global justice, which also highlights the practical needs of multilateralism.

This comprehensive response is based on the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, which replaces the Millennium Development Goals and forms a universal and comprehensive agenda. Among them, the emphasis on “inclusive” and “gender” highlights the deliberate focus on solving inequality and not letting anyone fall, which is a lesson learned from the criticism faced in the era of the Millennium Development Goals. The political and conceptual shift from the MDGs to the SDGs, including this heightened focus on inequality and inclusion, has been extensively analyzed by scholars such as Kanie and Biermann [35], who frame the SDGs as an experiment in “global goal-setting” for sustainable development. Another call for “multilateralism” is a direct response to the transnational nature of these complex crises; climate change or infectious diseases cannot be solved by one country alone. In this era, the United Nations discourse strongly demonstrates that the challenges of the 21st century are closely connected, and therefore, the solutions must be so.

5. Conclusion

In short, this paper shows how the United Nations has always changed its way to sustainable development in reply to moving world dynamics. As world issues become more linked, the UN’s power to push united policy answers gets always more important. This history and language view not only explains past changes but also gives help for future rule in this linked world.

However, this work has a few limits. Putting the text into English may lead to the loss of some details of the first speech. Later studies could include multi-language study or look at area views. Though the word study can show the big themes, it catches less of the arguing or convincing content, which needs more deep quality research in these areas.

Across the entire research timeline, climate action and poverty reduction remain two central research themes. These long-term focused topics reflect the core purpose of sustainable development, which is to meet the needs of modern society while preserving living conditions for future generations. The increasingly close link between the two themes shows that people’s understanding of sustainable development has become more comprehensive and structured.

This study adds new findings to existing academic research in several aspects. It provides long-term data support for the UN’s sustainable development plans and fixes the limitations of previous studies that only covered short time frames. In addition, it confirms the practical value of combining text analysis and historical research, and explains how discourse words record and guide the direction of global policy making.

This paper also has some obvious research limitations. Since all multilingual original speeches are uniformly translated into English, some subtle information from the original texts might be lost. Future research can adopt multilingual corpus analysis or carry out studies from different regional perspectives.

Keyword analysis can help identify major research themes,

but this basic method fails to capture the detailed logical relations and persuasive content in the original texts. Follow-up studies can use qualitative analysis to make up for this deficiency and conduct in-depth exploration on these contents. This paper concludes how the UN has continuously adjusted its sustainable development strategies to adapt to changing global situations. Current global problems are closely interrelated, making the UN an increasingly important organizer of unified global policy responses. Combining historical review and text analysis, this study not only sorts out the evolutionary path of sustainable development practices in the past, but also provides practical references for future global governance.

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