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RUNNING HEAD: Communication for all (SDG 1-17)

**Communication for all and the Sustainable Development Goals**

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**Disclosure Statement**

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## Abstract

**Purpose.** Communication is central to the accomplishment of each of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is a fundamental human right.

**Method.** A special issue of International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology (IJSLP, vol. 25, no. 1) was dedicated to communication, swallowing and the SDGs; particularly focussing on people with communication and/or swallowing disability and those who support them.

**Result.** This special issue of IJSLP demonstrates that successful communication at both a global and an individual level is necessary to all 17 SDGs and advances the international call for SDG 18: Communication for All. The achievement of the SDGs is the role of communication professionals, people with communication/swallowing disability, their families and communities.

**Conclusion.** Communication for all is essential for the achievement of the SDGs, “peace and prosperity for people and the planet” (United Nations, 2015a).

*Key words:* Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); communication disability; swallowing disability; speech-language pathology

## **Communication for all and the Sustainable Development Goals**

Sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). In 2015, the United Nations presented 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a “shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future” (United Nations, 2015a). The 17 SDGs address poverty, hunger, health, education, gender, innovation, climate, cities, land, oceans, justice, and partnerships to achieve the goals and are underpinned by five principles, or 5Ps: “people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership” (Sustainable Capacity International Institute, 2015-2020). The 17 SDGs were adopted by the 193 member states of the United Nations in 2015, with the aim to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs further the work achieved by the eight Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), with their broader focus including people with disabilities, older adults, gender, peace, the environment, and Majority World<sup>1</sup> countries (Parwar et al., 2020). Each of the 17 SDGs impacts the world’s citizens and requires commitment from all people across the globe.

Communication is central to the accomplishment of each of the 17 SDGs and is a fundamental human right (McLeod, 2018; Yusha’u & Servaes, 2021; United Nations, 2015a; 1948). Indeed, it is almost impossible to achieve the SDGs without global and individual communication. Since the United Nations presented the 17 SDGs, there has been an international call for SDG 18: Communication for All (Lee, 2023; McLeod et al., 2023; Servaes & Yusha’u, 2023). This call has advocated for the importance of communication to overcome communication barriers, disinformation, and inequalities and support sustainability, inclusion, gender equality, development, social change, and peace in the media, social media, literacy, information, activism, and civil society.

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<sup>1</sup> We use low- and middle-income countries instead of Majority World and the Global South; and high-income instead of Minority World and the Global North.

## ***Communication, Communication Disability and the SDGs***

Communication can occur through several modes, including speech, writing, sign, gesture and other non-verbal modalities. Communication *disability* occurs when a person communicates sufficiently differently from other community members that it affects their life participation. Communication disability is under-recognised, despite not being uncommon (Gil et al., 2020). For example, McLeod and McKinnon (2007) indicate that communication disability in children is more common than hearing impairment, intellectual, and physical/medical disability combined, and Stransky et al. (2018) estimate that 9.9% of adults in the USA have language, voice or speech disabilities. Communication disability can impact many aspects of life and may have multiple causes, or no known cause. Swallowing disability (dysphagia) can affect all ages. Smithard (2016) reports prevalence of dysphagia at 16-23%. Dysphagia can have multiple impacts, for example on health, quality of life, and participation (e.g. socialising around food; González-Fonández et al., 2013).

Many members of the workforce support people who experience communication and/or swallowing disabilities. In high-income countries, speech-language pathologists (also called speech and language therapists, logopedes, orthophonistes) typically provide expertise, advice and training, development of standards, as well the provision of direct services. In low- and middle-income countries there is typically a severe shortage of expertise to meet these needs; however, support can be provided by community-based rehabilitation workers, families and communities (Wylie et al., 2016).

This special issue of the International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology (IJSLP, vol. 25, no. 1) demonstrates that communication is central to all 17 SDGs and advances the call for SDG 18: Communication for All. The commentary papers within this special issue highlight the interrelationship between communication and the SDGs, by specifically focusing on people with communication and/or swallowing disability, and those who work

with and support them. Over 60 groups of authors responded to a call for expressions of interest to contribute to the special issue and, after review, half were accepted. While all of the submissions could have been included, the papers selected represent all of the SDGs, a wide range of countries (prioritising low- and middle-income countries, small island states), people with lived experience of communication/swallowing disability, and professionals from a wide range of disciplines (e.g. speech-language pathology, audiology, engineering, education, health, law, community-based rehabilitation). Steps were taken to address the international critique that the SDGs lack representation of indigenous voices and agendas so the work of First Nations people was included, along with a critique of the colonising aspects of the SDGs (Pillay et al., 2023).

Each evidence-based commentary was peer-reviewed, and authors included evidence relating to the range of SDGs relevant to their work. While all 17 SDGs are included within this special issue, four SDGs frequently were associated with people with communication and/or swallowing disability: good health and well-being (SDG 3), quality education (SDG 4), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), and partnerships for the goals (SDG 17). One SDG was frequently associated with communication professionals (e.g. speech-language pathologists, audiologists, community rehabilitation workers): decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). Papers in this special issue demonstrate that not only can communication professionals contribute to the achievement of SDGs, but also that people who experience communication disability can productively contribute to “peace and prosperity for people and the planet” (United Nations, 2015a). One way to achieve this is by including content about SDGs within communication interventions, as suggested by Crowe et al. (2023). Throughout the world, places such as the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication (CAAC) in South Africa, address multiple SDGs (e.g. 2, 3, 4, 8, 16) as they enhance participation of people with complex communication needs (Dada, Tönsing et al., 2023). Each SDG will be

illustrated using content from papers within this special issue, from Australia, Austria, Benin, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, China, Columbia, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Greece, Iceland, India, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Maldives, Mozambique, Nepal, New Zealand, Nigeria, the state of Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Rwanda, Serbia, South Africa, Uganda, UK, USA, Vietnam (also see Appendix).

***No poverty (SDG 1).*** Poverty is a known determinant of communication and swallowing disabilities across the lifespan (Sherratt, 2023). Children with communication and/or swallowing disability frequently encounter economic and social disempowerment (Weir et al., 2023). Communication professionals can consider unmet economic and social needs (e.g., bills, housing, childcare, food) during their interactions to promote health equity and reduce poverty (Hamill et al., 2023). They can also advocate for approaches to facilitate social and economic autonomy and reduce dependency including: the right to access employment on an equal basis, universal basic income, supported decision-making, and improving the communication accessibility and inclusion of financial services (Weir et al., 2023).

***Zero hunger (SDG 2).*** Many nations across the world experience food shortages, and achievement of zero hunger is crucial to survival. For example, in Northern Mozambique, communication-accessible information has been created in five languages to address humanitarian food assistance for food-insecure communities; the first time many people had received information in their own language (Jagoe, O'Reilly, Gunnell et al., 2023). Hunger can occur even in situations with an abundance of food. Innovations such as using 3D food printing are being used to improve nutrition of older adults with swallowing disability (Chen et al., 2023).

***Good health and well-being (SDG 3).*** Appropriate support for people with communication and swallowing disabilities is key to good health and well-being. Critical

illness and sepsis can impact communication and swallowing (SDG 3), necessitating quality education (SDG 4) for health and medical professionals (Freeman-Sanderson et al., 2023). Self-determined healthcare and digital health autonomy require that health systems provide access to multimodal communication strategies and appropriate technology (Given et al., 2023).

**Quality education (SDG 4).** Quality education is a key component to ensure successful communication. Equally, successful communication enables access to quality education. Inclusive and equitable education is important for children with communication disability, including deaf learners in Nepal who require opportunities to communicate with peers using sign language (Snoddon & Murray, 2023). Families have received education to promote early language development across the Arab world (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and the State of Palestine) (Khattab et al., 2023). Likewise, the UNICEF/WHO Nurturing Care Framework has been used to offer education to almost 2,000 parents, grandparents and caregivers in China to address the needs of children with developmental difficulties (including communication disability), providing a model for adoption in other national health contexts (Camarata et al., 2023). Speech-language pathology students' education has been enhanced by university staff co-teaching with *experts-by experience* (a parent and young man with autism) (Carroll et al., 2023).

**Gender equality (SDG 5).** People experiencing interpersonal violence (e.g. deprivation and physical violence) are more likely to be women and can have communication disability. In a study undertaken in Iraq, people experiencing interpersonal violence have indicated that they require communication support and access to transport (Jagoe, O'Reilly, James et al., 2023).

**Clean water and sanitation (SDG 6). Affordable and clean energy (SDG 7).** Interventions for people with communication disability can integrate materials based on the



SDGs, including how to save water and advocate for affordable and clean energy, providing a context for discussion and actions that contribute to a better future for the planet (Crowe et al., 2023).

***Decent work and economic growth (SDG 8).*** There are many workers who support people with communication and swallowing disability. Community-based rehabilitation (CBR) workers are often the first people to work with people with communication and swallowing disability in low- and middle-income countries. A survey of over 200 CBR workers in Vietnam indicated that they required comprehensive education, training and information about the causes and impact of communication and swallowing disability (Atherton et al., 2023). Over the past decade, university training programmes have begun, establishing the profession of speech-language pathology profession in Vietnam (Atherton et al., 2017). In Cambodia, there is growing momentum to recognise speech-language pathology as a profession within government, health and education sectors, to reduce disparity in service access (Bryce et al., 2023). In contrast, in most high-income countries, SLPs are the professionals who typically support people with communication and swallowing disability. A survey of over 1,700 Australian SLPs showed that approximately 30% reported having intersecting identities, experiences and perspectives relating to their practice (disability, cultural and linguistic background, mental health, caring responsibilities, being LGBTQI+, and experiencing neurodiversity) which provide opportunities to support inclusion and equity (Nancarrow et al., 2023).

***Industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9).*** Significant innovations have improved communication for people with communication disability. Cochlear implants have restored people's sense of hearing for decades (Clark et al., 1978) and now neural protheses are being used to restore vision and signals to the central nervous system (Zoneff et al.,

2023). Automatic speech recognition innovations are being used to solve challenges in children's speech-language pathology assessment and intervention (Baker et al., 2023).

***Reduced inequalities (SDG 10).*** People with communication disability frequently experience inequality. The Context-specific Service Delivery Framework, developed in the Maldives, enables consideration of environmental, social and economic sustainability for reducing inequalities (Zahir et al., 2023). Inequalities are compounded for Australian Aboriginal (First Nations) children's early literacy development (Freeman et al., 2023). Culturally safe speech and language support is required for First Nations children, that takes into consideration the prevalence of chronic middle ear disease and the associated impact on speech and language (Salins et al., 2023).

***Sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11).*** Inclusive architectural design for education and healthcare can be enhanced by including the perspectives of children with communication disability (Gillett-Swan & Burton, 2023). Communication-friendly green and public spaces encourage connection over isolation and are important for sustainable and inclusive cities (Wallis et al., 2023).

***Responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).*** Responsible consumption (e.g. target 12.3: reducing food waste) can be embedded as meaningful written or video presentations within university language education curriculum, using the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Crowe et al., 2023).

***Climate action (SDG 13).*** Climate change increases the frequency and severity of climate-related disasters and extreme weather events that can significantly impact health, wellbeing, and access to education and health services (McGill et al., 2023).

***Life below water (SDG 14).*** Single use plastic straws have been a focal environmental issue despite their relatively small contribution to marine pollution. For people with swallowing disability, plastic straws are an essential assistive technology to drink safely,

particularly in social environments. Straw bans have been described as a “a form of eco-ableism, shallow environmentalism, and discrimination” (Hemsley et al., 2023, p. xxx). A sustainable environmental solution is required for a durable, flexible, single-use straw that is resilient enough to withstand jaw closure without breaking, and to reduce stigma around the use of plastic straws in public spaces.

***Life on land (SDG 15).*** Children with communication disability are particularly vulnerable to the impact of natural disasters, including bushfires. The Royal Far West Bushfire Recovery Program, a multidisciplinary allied health program, has supported the health, wellbeing, resilience, and communication needs of Australian children (McGill et al., 2023).

***Peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG 16).*** People with communication disability need to be counted and have their needs understood appropriately in order to increase protection, inclusion, and participation particularly in humanitarian contexts (Barrett & Marshall, 2023). People with communication disability are over-represented in the justice system (Snow, 2019). Registered intermediaries (Northern Ireland and Ireland) and communication assistants (New Zealand) can reduce barriers for people with communication disability when engaging with justice systems (Kearns et al., 2023). People with communication disability can be protected from modern slavery by methods including accessible information, advocacy, rights-based approaches, access to services, and education (Wailes & Mackenzie, 2023).

***Partnerships for the goals (SDG 17).*** Authentic global partnerships have resulted in (1) communication partner training for health-care workers in Austria, Egypt, Greece, India and Serbia (Isaksen et al., 2023); (2) the creation of online communication resources in over 30 languages for augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and cleft palate speech and feeding, via the Leadersproject.org (Sommer et al., 2023); (3) culturally-secure brain

injury rehabilitation initiatives in Australia, through partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal multidisciplinary team members (Armstrong et al., 2023); and (4) development of a new SLP program in Ghana, clinical partnerships in Kenya, and research programs (Dada, Wylie et al., 2023). The historical dominance of researchers from high-income countries has been contested in East African countries, by creating meaningful partnerships with local stakeholders whereby innovations complement (instead of compete with) existing services (Sowden et al., 2023).

### **Conclusion: Communication for All and the international call for SDG 18**

This special issue provides evidence that the SDGs are “integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable” (United Nations, 2015b, p. 16) and supports the international call for SDG 18: Communication for All (Servaes & Yusha’u, 2023). With the publication of this special issue, IJSLP joins the world to work with the United Nations, to implement the SDGs by publishing this special issue, acknowledging that communication and swallowing are important for “peace and prosperity for people and the planet” (United Nations, 2015a).

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**Appendix. Commentary papers addressing Communication, Swallowing and the Sustainable Development Goals in the special issue of International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology (volume 25, number 1)**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Abbreviated title</b>	<b>Countries (authors and focus)</b>	<b>SDGs</b>
Armstrong et al.	Communication services for First Nations peoples after stroke and traumatic brain injury	Australia (First Nations)	3, 16, 17
Atherton et al.	Community-based rehabilitation workers in Vietnam need assistance to support communication and swallowing	Australia, Vietnam	3, 4, 8, 10, 17
Baker et al.	Harnessing automatic speech recognition through interdisciplinary partnerships for children with communication disability	Australia, USA (International)	3, 9, 17
Barrett and Marshall	Participation, equality, and justice in Rwanda for people who experience communication disability	UK, Rwanda	3, 5, 10, 16, 17
Bryce et al.	Building the speech-language pathology workforce in Cambodia	Australia, Cambodia	1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 17
Camarata et al.	Adapting the UNICEF/WHO Nurturing Care Framework for speech-language pathologists	China, USA	4, 17
Carroll et al.	Community and university partnerships	Ireland	3, 4, 10, 11, 17
Chen et al.	A bit closer: Using 3D food printing	Australia	2, 3, 9, 17
Crowe et al.	Maximise Your Impact: Sustainable Development Goals-Focused Content in Communication Intervention and Teaching	Australia, Iceland, (International)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17
Dada, Tönsing et al.	A framework for addressing participation of persons with complex communication needs in South Africa	South Africa	2, 3, 4, 8, 16
Dada, Wylie et al.	Equitable partnerships in maximising participation of persons with communication disabilities and their families	Australia, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa (International)	17

Freeman et al.	Assessment equity for remote multilingual Australian Aboriginal students	Australia (First Nations)	4, 10, 11
Freeman-Sanderson et al.	Sepsis, critical illness, communication, swallowing	Australia, USA, (International)	3, 4, 10
Gillett-Swan and Burton	Amplifying children's voices: Inclusive design for education and health architecture	Australia, (International)	3, 4, 11, 16
Given et al.	Digital health autonomy for people with communication or swallowing disability	Australia, (International)	3, 10
Hamill et al.	Screening for unmet social needs in paediatric speech-language pathology	Australia	3, 10
Hemsley et al.	Going thirsty for the turtles: Plastic straw bans and people with swallowing disability	Australia, (International)	3, 14
Isaksen et al.	Communication partner training for healthcare workers engaging with people with aphasia	Austria, Columbia, Denmark, Egypt, Greece, India, Ireland, Serbia, UK	10, 17
Jago, O'Reilly, Gunnell et al.	Communicating accessible messages for food insecure communities in Northern Mozambique	Ireland, Italy, Mozambique	2
Jago, O'Reilly, James et al.	Interpersonal violence experienced by people with communication disabilities in Iraq	Iraq, Ireland, UK	5, 16
Kearns et al.	Intermediaries in the justice system for people with communication disability	Ireland, New Zealand, UK	16
Khattab et al.	Promoting early language development in the Arab world	Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, UK	3, 4, 10, 17
McGill et al.	The impact of climate-related disasters on children's communication and wellbeing	Australia	1, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15
Nancarrow et al.	Diversity in the Australian speech-language pathology workforce	Australia	3, 4, 8, 10
Pillay et al.	Questions of suitability: The Sustainable Development Goals	New Zealand, South Africa, International (First Nations)	1-17

Salins et al.	Culturally safe speech-language supports for First Nations children	Australia (First Nations)	3, 4, 8, 10
Sherratt	Ameliorating poverty-related communication and swallowing disabilities	Australia, (International)	1, 2, 10, 13
Snoddon and Murray	Supporting deaf learners in Nepal: Inclusive and equitable quality education in sign languages	Canada, Nepal, USA	3, 4, 16, 17
Sommer et al.	Global partnerships to create communication resources	Benin, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines, USA	3, 4, 8, 10, 17
Sowden et al.	Partnerships between Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda and the United Kingdom for people with communication disability	Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda, UK	3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 17
Wailes & Mackenzie	Protecting people with communication disability from modern slavery	Australia, (International)	1, 3, 4, 8, 10, 16
Wallis et al.	Ensuring communication-friendly green and public spaces for sustainable cities	Australia, (International)	11, 17
Weir et al.	Realising economic and social rights for children with communication and swallowing disability	Australia, Ireland, (International)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 17
Zahir et al.	Designing equitable speech-language pathology services in the Maldives	Maldives, New Zealand, Australia	4, 10
Zoneff et al.	Restoration of the senses and human communication	Australia, (International)	3, 9

Yellow = not yet published