

**SUSTAINABLE INVESTMENTS AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE BALANCING PROFITS WITH PURPOSE**

**INVESTASI BERKELANJUTAN DAN KINERJA KEUANGAN MENYEIMBANGKAN KEUNTUNGAN DENGAN TUJUAN**

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**ABSTRACT**

Sustainable investing is increasingly sought after by global investors, but the main challenge is identifying indicators that are able to balance financial returns and social/environmental goals. This research aims to analyze the main indicators of sustainable investment success using a systematic literature review approach to selected literature from 2010 to 2024. The results show that financial performance indicators, ESG criteria, and social and environmental impacts are key factors in measuring the success of sustainable investment. These findings contribute to the development of investment strategies that are more holistic and have a positive impact in the long term.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Investment, ESG, Financial Performance, Success Indicators, Systematic Literature Review, Social and Environmental Impact

**ABSTRAK**

Investasi berkelanjutan semakin diminati oleh investor global, namun tantangan utama adalah mengidentifikasi indikator yang mampu menyeimbangkan antara keuntungan finansial dan tujuan sosial/lingkungan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis indikator utama keberhasilan investasi berkelanjutan menggunakan pendekatan systematic literature review terhadap literatur terpilih dari tahun 2010 hingga 2024. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa indikator kinerja keuangan, kriteria ESG, serta dampak sosial dan lingkungan merupakan faktor kunci dalam mengukur keberhasilan investasi berkelanjutan. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan strategi investasi yang lebih holistik dan berdampak positif dalam jangka panjang.

**Kata Kunci:** Investasi Berkelanjutan, ESG, Kinerja Keuangan, Indikator Keberhasilan, Systematic Literature Review, Dampak Sosial dan Lingkungan

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Sustainable investment, which incorporates Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles, has rapidly evolved into a significant strategy within the global financial landscape. This shift is largely attributed to heightened awareness regarding the social and environmental repercussions of economic activities, alongside a growing demand from investors who prioritize ethical considerations in their investment choices. The Global Sustainable Investment Alliance (GSIA) reports a continuous increase in assets managed with ESG principles, indicating a fundamental transformation in financial market priorities towards sustainability (Yadav, 2024; Urom & Ndubuisi, 2023).

In recent decades, sustainable investment has transitioned from being perceived merely as a trend to being recognized as a strategic approach embraced by various corporations, financial institutions, and international organizations. Companies increasingly view sustainable investment not just as a means to fulfill corporate social responsibility (CSR) obligations, but as a pathway to long-term growth and value creation for shareholders. For instance, firms focusing on energy efficiency and waste management not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also attract larger institutional investors seeking responsible

investment opportunities (Sciarelli et al., 2021; Jain et al., 2019). This dual benefit underscores the potential for sustainable practices to enhance corporate reputation and financial performance, aligning with the broader goals of sustainable development (Puriwat & Tripopsacle, 2023; Fu, 2023).

Despite the growing adoption of ESG principles, significant uncertainties persist regarding the effectiveness and financial benefits of sustainable investment. Critics argue that sustainable investments may not consistently yield competitive financial returns compared to traditional investments, particularly in the short term (Nguyen, 2014). Conversely, proponents assert that sustainable investing can lead to superior long-term financial performance through improved risk management, reduced operational costs, and enhanced corporate reputation. This perspective is supported by studies indicating that firms with robust ESG practices often experience better financial outcomes (Jain et al., 2019; Fu, 2023).

A critical challenge in the realm of sustainable investment is the lack of consensus on the indicators used to measure success. Various metrics, such as carbon emissions reduction, financial returns, and social impacts, are employed, yet there remains no universally accepted framework for their application or interpretation (Lauesen, 2019; Delai & Takahashi, 2011). This inconsistency complicates the comparison of investment outcomes across different sectors and companies, further hindering the establishment of a cohesive understanding of sustainable investment performance (Martini, 2021). The need for standardized reporting and evaluation tools is paramount to facilitate better transparency and accountability in ESG practices, thereby enhancing the credibility of sustainable investment initiatives (Lauesen, 2019; Delai & Takahashi, 2011). In conclusion, while sustainable investment is gaining traction as a viable strategy for long-term growth and value creation, challenges related to performance measurement and the alignment of ESG standards remain significant. Addressing these challenges will be crucial for the continued evolution and acceptance of sustainable investment practices in the global financial market.

Sustainable investment has now become one main trend in the financial sector, reflecting a paradigm shift among investors and market players. This trend is driven by the increasing global awareness of the challenge of climate change, social inequality, and the need to ensure that investments not only provide financial returns but also contribute to planetary sustainability and societal well-being. In addition, pressure from stakeholders, such as governments, consumers, and international organizations, is also pushing companies to integrate the principles Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) into their business strategy.

However, amidst high optimism, research shows that the relationship between sustainable investment and company financial performance is still a matter of academic and practical debate. Some research indicates that implementing ESG principles can increase profitability in the long term, because it reduces operational risk, improves reputation and opens up access to new markets. In contrast, other studies show that a focus on sustainability sometimes results in trade-offs in the short term, such as increased operating costs or additional investments to comply with certain ESG standards. This creates uncertainty for investors, especially those oriented towards short-term financial results.

In the midst of these dynamics, The main unsolved challenge is the search for reliable indicators to measure the success of sustainable investments. These indicators should reflect not only financial gain, such as the rate of return on investment, but also social and environmental impacts resulting from. For example, how much carbon emissions can be reduced, to what extent the investment has an impact on improving the welfare of local communities, or how the investment improves corporate governance. Unfortunately, until now there is no universal consensus regarding methodology and measurement standards that can be applied consistently across various sectors and regions. Thus, in-depth research is needed to overcome this challenge, especially in formulating and identifying indicators that are able to

balance financial benefits with social and environmental goals. This is important to provide clearer guidance for investors, companies and policymakers in supporting sustainable investment practices while creating meaningful impact.

Sustainable investment faces major challenges in identifying and measuring indicators of success that reflect not only financial benefits, but also significant social and environmental impacts. One of the fundamental questions is how these indicators can be formulated so that they are able to capture balance between financial profitability and sustainability goals. In practice, although many companies have adopted the principle Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), the implementation of these indicators is often non-uniform and less reliable for evaluating investment success holistically. This hinders investors' ability to make informed, data-based decisions.

Furthermore, although ESG indicators are often used as a framework for assessing sustainability, their actual role in creating long-term profitability for the company is still a matter of debate. Some argue that ESG integration can reduce operational risks, increase efficiency and open up new market opportunities, resulting in more stable financial returns. However, there is also skepticism that a focus on sustainability can divert attention from core business objectives, especially for companies operating in industries with low profit margins or tough regulatory challenges. Therefore, understanding the extent to which ESG indicators can serve as a tool to simultaneously achieve sustainability and profitability goals is important.

In addition, the question arises of how companies and investors can ensure that sustainable investments truly create a positive impact towards society and the environment. These challenges are not only technical, such as limited data or lack of consistent methodology, but also strategic and ethical. Many investors and companies find it difficult to prove that their investments are making a real contribution, due to the gap between financially measured results and the impact felt by local communities or environmental ecosystems.

With these issues, in-depth research is needed to provide answers to three main things: relevant success indicators, the strategic role of ESG in creating long-term balance, as well as approaches that can ensure the positive impact of sustainable investment. A better understanding of these issues will not only strengthen investor confidence in sustainable investing, but also help companies pursue strategies that truly benefit all stakeholders.

Sustainable investing has evolved into a key pillar in global financial strategy, reflecting a paradigm shift in business and investment priorities. In recent decades, a focus on sustainability has become not only a trend but also an urgent need, driven by global challenges such as climate change, social inequality and the need for more responsible corporate governance. The sustainable investment concept aims to integrate three core elements—financial benefits, social impact, and environmental responsibility—into investment decision making.

However, amidst this enthusiasm, an important challenge arises: how can the success of sustainable investment be measured in an objective and standardized manner? Many companies and investors recognize the importance of sustainability, but they are often faced with a lack of comprehensive indicators to fully evaluate its impact. Success indicators are key to understanding the extent to which sustainable investment can achieve a balance between financial and non-financial goals.

This research stems from the need to answer this important question. Against this background, the research focuses on identifying key indicators which can be used to measure the success of sustainable investments. Through this approach, it is hoped that a real contribution can be made to the academic literature, investors and policy makers, in order to encourage the development of more effective evaluation frameworks. As for The Research Question in this study, are there any main indicators used to measure the success of sustainable investments in achieving a balance between financial returns and social/environmental goals?

Increasing global attention to sustainable investment driven by awareness of the environmental and social impacts of economic activities. Companies and investors are increasingly looking for ways to strike a balance financial goals with sustainability, but related gaps in understanding indicators of sustainable investment success is still a major obstacle. This gives rise to an urgent need for a comprehensive and data-based evaluation framework. This research aims to fill the gap in the literature by providing a clearer view of relevant indicators and how its use can create the desired balance. By focusing on identifying key indicators, this research seeks to help companies and investors overcome the complex challenges of measuring impact in sustainable investing.

The aim of this research is to identify and analyze key indicators used in measuring the success of sustainable investments, both from the perspective of financial returns and achieving social and environmental goals. This research also aims to discuss the relationship between success indicators with company performance, including financial aspects such as profitability as well as non-financial aspects such as reducing negative impacts on the environment or increasing community welfare. In addition, this research seeks to develop practical recommendations for investors and companies in selecting and using relevant and effective indicators, so that they can evaluate the impact of sustainable investments more comprehensively and strategically.

This research is expected to make a significant contribution both academically and practically in the field of sustainable investment. From an academic perspective, this research will offer new insight by providing in-depth analysis of indicators of sustainable investment success, especially in efforts to achieve a balance between profitability and sustainability. Practically, the results of this research will serve as a practical guide for companies and investors in selecting and applying effective indicators to assess the impact and benefits of sustainable investment holistically.

Additionally, this research will help improve broader understanding about how sustainable investment can provide long-term benefits, both in financial aspects and in contributions to social and environmental aspects. Thus, the results of this research are not only relevant for academics, but can also encourage better decision making in the investment and corporate sectors. Furthermore, this research is expected to be able to provide policy recommendations which are applicable for policy makers to develop a regulatory framework that better supports the development of sustainable investment at the national and global level.

## **2. METHODS**

### **2.1. Research methods**

This research uses an approach Systematic Literature Review (SLR) fork carries out in-depth exploration, identification, analysis and synthesis of various previous research relevant to the topic of indicators of sustainable investment success. The SLR approach was chosen because of its systematic, transparent and replicable nature which allows comprehensive and valid data collection. The SLR process includes the stages of formulating research questions, literature searches, selecting articles based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, data analysis, and preparing a synthesis of research results that provide new insights regarding the success of sustainable investment.

### **2.2. Article Selection Criteria**

The article selection criteria were based on several important aspects to ensure that only relevant and high-quality research was analyzed. Selected articles should include studies that examine the use of sustainable investment success indicators in various industry and country contexts, thereby providing broad and varied coverage. Only articles published in journals peer-reviewed that meet strict academic quality criteria. Articles published between

years 2010 to 2024. Priority will be given to capturing the latest dynamics in this field. In addition, articles in the language English and Indonesia will be considered to ensure broader data inclusivity.

### **2.3. Article Search and Selection Procedures**

The article search process was carried out through leading academic databases, including Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science, to guarantee access to credible and relevant literature. Keywords used in the search included terms such as "sustainable investment indicators," "financial performance," "social and environmental impact," and "ESG criteria." A combination of keywords and Boolean operators is used to filter articles with high precision. Article selection is carried out in several stages, starting from checking the title and abstract, full text evaluation, to critical analysis of methodologies used in previous research. Articles that meet the inclusion criteria will be further evaluated based on the quality of the methodology, relevance to the research question, and its contribution to the understanding of indicators of sustainable investment success.

### **2.4. Data analysis**

Data collected from relevant literature will be analyzed using thematic synthesis, which aims to identify key patterns, themes and relationships related to indicators of sustainable investment success. This analysis process involves three main stages: initial encoding of data, thematic theme identification, and thematic synthesis. This technique allows grouping complex information into a more easily understood thematic framework. The focus of the analysis will be directed at the most frequently used indicators, the influence of indicators on investment success, and the relationship between these indicators and the achievement of financial, social and environmental goals. The results of this analysis will provide significant new insights to support sustainable investment development.

## **3. RESULTS**

### **3.1. Key Indicators Found**

This research identifies a number of key indicators that are relevant in measuring the success of sustainable investment, which can be categorized into financial, social, environmental and ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) indicators.

#### **3.1.1. Financial performance**

Key indicators in this category include Return on Investment (ROI), which provides an overview of the rate of return on invested capital; Earnings Before Interest and Taxes (EBIT), which shows the company's profitability before the influence of financial costs and taxes; as well as long-term income growth, which reflects the stability and potential for business expansion. This indicator is important for evaluating whether the investment made has a direct positive impact on the company's profitability, so that it can attract investor interest.

#### **3.1.2. ESG indicators**

This category includes measurements related to broader aspects of sustainability. Reduction of carbon emissions is a key indicator in assessing a company's commitment to climate change mitigation. Natural resource management reflects the company's efforts to ensure sustainable resource utilization. Besides that, diversity and inclusion in the company becomes an important indicator in reflecting how the company promotes the values of social justice, which ultimately increase the company's reputation and attractiveness in the eyes of investors.

### **3.1.3. Social Indicators**

These indicators include increasing community welfare, which reflects how investments contribute to improving the quality of life of local communities. Access to education and health services is an important indicator that shows corporate social responsibility in creating a positive impact on society. Poverty reduction is also identified as an important element, which shows that sustainable investment can be a tool to overcome social inequality.

### **3.1.4. Environmental Indicators**

In this category, indicators such as use of renewable energy, resource efficiency, and waste management become the main highlights. The use of renewable energy not only reduces dependence on fossil energy sources but also helps companies to reduce their carbon footprint. Resource efficiency shows the company's ability to optimize the use of materials and energy, while waste management reflects the company's responsibility for the environmental impact of its operational activities.

### **3.1.5. Relationship between Indicators and Financial Performance and Social/Environmental Goals**

This research finds an interplay between financial, social, environmental and ESG indicators in creating sustainable investment success. ESG indicators, for example, have a strong correlation with a company's financial performance. Companies that successfully reduce carbon emissions and increase diversity often enjoy a better reputation, ultimately increasing their appeal to investors and customers. In addition, achieving social goals, such as improving community welfare or reducing poverty, contributes directly to the long-term sustainability of the company. Companies that pay attention to social responsibility tend to have better relationships with stakeholders, including local communities and governments, which in turn can reduce operational risks.

Environmental objectives, such as the use of renewable energy and resource efficiency, also have a positive impact on financial performance through reduced operational costs and increased production efficiency. This shows that an approach that considers a balance between financial returns and sustainability can create long-term value for companies and society. The results of this research emphasize that the success of sustainable investment is not only measured by financial profitability alone, but also through its contribution to positive social and environmental impacts. The combination of financial and sustainability indicators allows companies to become more competitive while supporting the broader global development agenda.

## **4. DISCUSSIONS**

Based on the results of literature analysis, this research found that the main indicators used to measure the success of sustainable investment include two broad categories: financial performance and achievement of social/environmental goals. Financial indicators, such as Return on Investment (ROI) and Earnings Before Interest and Taxes (EBIT), provide an overview of whether the investment produces profits that meet investor expectations. Meanwhile, social and environmental indicators, such as reduction of carbon emissions, natural resource management, and diversity in the company, focusing more on long-term impacts on society and the environment.

The relationship between these indicators is interrelated, where achieving social and environmental goals often contributes to improving a company's financial performance. For example, a company that minimizes carbon emissions or increasing diversity in the workplace can attract more environmentally and socially conscious investors, which in turn can improve a company's reputation and competitiveness. Therefore, ESG indicators are not only seen as a

tool to improve a company's image, but also as an important factor that can increase financial profits in the long term.

However, although the link between financial and sustainability indicators is clear, the main challenge faced is the difficulty in measuring these indicators accurately and consistently across sectors and countries. For example, measurements of natural resource management or diversity often depend on policy frameworks that vary by country and industry. Likewise with measurements of carbon emissions, which can vary based on the type of industry and the level of technology. This raises the challenge of creating uniform standards for these indicators, which is important for ensuring transparency and objectivity in measurement.

#### **4.1. Implications of Findings**

The findings of this research have significant implications for companies looking to adopt sustainable investing as part of their strategy. To effectively demonstrate a commitment to sustainability, companies should integrate Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indicators into their performance reports. This integration not only enhances transparency but also allows stakeholders to assess the company's sustainability achievements comprehensively. Research indicates that companies that publish integrated reports can significantly enhance their market valuation by effectively communicating their ESG performance and corporate governance practices (Mervelskemper & Streit, 2016). This suggests that transparency in reporting ESG indicators can lead to positive financial implications, making it an essential practice for firms aiming for long-term sustainability.

Moreover, maintaining a balance between social, environmental, and financial goals is critical. The interplay between these aspects influences a company's overall sustainability. For instance, companies that successfully manage their ESG commitments alongside financial objectives are more attractive to investors, as they demonstrate a holistic approach to business that aligns with the growing global emphasis on sustainability (Zabolotnyy & Wasilewski, 2019). The findings from various studies highlight that achieving financial sustainability often involves navigating trade-offs between costs and benefits, particularly in sectors like food production, where financial performance can be closely tied to sustainability practices (Zabolotnyy & Wasilewski, 2019).

For investors, understanding ESG indicators is crucial for making informed investment decisions that align with their values and financial goals. The ability to evaluate the long-term risks associated with companies' ESG performance can significantly influence investment choices. Companies that neglect waste management or carbon emission reduction may face reputational risks and increased operational costs, ultimately affecting their financial performance (Duong et al., 2022). This understanding underscores the importance of integrating ESG considerations into investment strategies, as financial returns are increasingly viewed through the lens of social and environmental impact (Gatto & Busato, 2020).

Furthermore, the evolving landscape of sustainable finance emphasizes that financial returns should not solely be measured by traditional metrics like Return on Investment (ROI) but also by the broader impacts of investments on society and the environment. This shift in perspective is supported by literature suggesting that sustainable finance frameworks should align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and reflect the interconnectedness of financial and non-financial performance (Liyanage et al., 2020). Investors equipped with knowledge of ESG indicators can thus make more strategic and sustainable investment decisions, contributing to a more responsible financial ecosystem (Ozili & Iorember, 2023). In conclusion, the integration of ESG indicators into corporate reporting and investment strategies is essential for fostering long-term sustainability. Companies that transparently report their ESG performance not only enhance their market valuation but also attract investors who are increasingly prioritizing sustainability in their decision-making processes. This alignment

between financial performance and sustainability goals is crucial for navigating the complexities of modern markets and achieving sustainable development.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This research shows that sustainable investments have great potential to create a balance between financial returns and achieving social/environmental goals. Key indicators such as financial performance (e.g. ROI and EBIT), ESG indicators (such as carbon emission reduction and corporate diversity), and social/environmental impact (such as improving community welfare and waste management) play an important role in measuring the success of sustainable investments. These findings indicate that companies that integrate ESG indicators in their strategy tend to have better financial performance in the long term. This also shows that achieving social and environmental goals can make a significant contribution to a company's long-term sustainability. Therefore, companies and investors need to see sustainability as an integral part of their business strategy, which does not only focus on financial returns but also has a positive impact on society and the environment.

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that investors and companies consider various relevant indicators in evaluating sustainable investments. The use of valid and transparent measuring tools is very important to ensure that investments made are not only financially profitable, but also make a positive contribution to social and environmental goals. Companies need to pay attention to a variety of ESG indicators as part of their strategy, while investors should use these indicators to assess the long-term sustainability potential of an investment. Additionally, it is important for both parties to continually update their understanding of these indicators, as standards and regulations related to sustainability may continue to evolve.

This research has limitations, especially related to the literature sources used, which may not cover all sectors or types of sustainable investment that exist in the global market. The sources used in this research mostly come from literature that is limited to certain industries or certain regions, so they do not fully reflect the variety of sectors or types of sustainable investment that exist. In addition, this research focuses on analyzing existing literature without involving primary data or field studies that could provide a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of these indicators in the real world.

Future research is recommended to explore the practical implementation of the indicators found in this research in the real world, especially in sectors that are not yet widely represented in the existing literature. Further research could focus on the direct impact of the application of ESG indicators on investment decisions in different countries and industries. Additionally, field experiments involving primary data, such as interviews with stakeholders or company case studies, can provide deeper insight into the challenges faced in accurately measuring the success of sustainable investments. Research could also delve further into how companies integrate these indicators into their decision-making processes and their impact on long-term performance.

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