

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

[UPSC Notes]

Full form of SDGs

The full form of SDGs is Sustainable Development Goals. These SDGs have been put in place in the hopes of achieving a future that is accessible and sustainable for everyone. There are a total of 17 SDGs set up by the United Nations.

What are Sustainable Development Goals?

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were defined by the Brundtland Commission's report *Our Common Future* (1987) as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It is the most-acknowledged definition of the concept. Sustainable development calls for concentrated efforts toward building an inclusive, resilient, and wise future for the planet and its people.

The United Nations General Assembly established this set of 17 interlinked goals to be achieved globally in 2012.

What are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals?

There are a total of 17 Sustainable Development Goals:

1. Ending poverty everywhere in all its forms
2. Ending world hunger by achieving food security, improving nutrition, and promoting sustainable agriculture
3. Ensuring healthy lives and well-being for everyone at all stages
4. Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting opportunities for lifelong learning
5. Achieving gender equality and empowering women at all stages of life
6. Ensuring water availability, sustainable management, and adequate sanitation for all
7. Ensuring access to affordable, sustainable, reliable, and modern energy for all
8. Promoting economic growth that is sustainable and inclusive with an assurance of productive employment and decent work for all
9. Building resilient infrastructure, promoting sustainable and inclusive industrialization that fosters innovation
10. Reducing inequalities within and among countries
11. Making human settlements and cities inclusive, safe, and sustainable
12. Ensuring a sustainable pattern of consumption and production
13. Taking quick actions to combat climate change
14. Conserving the oceans, seas, and marine resources and using them mindfully

15. Protecting, promoting, and restoring the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, along with managing forests sustainably, combating desertification, halting biodiversity loss, and reversing land degradation
16. Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for everyone, and building effective, accountable, inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthening the implementation and revitalizing of the global partnership for sustainable development

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Core Elements of Sustainable Development

There are 3 core elements to sustainable development. These are economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These elements have been discussed briefly below;

- **Economic Growth:** This element envisages a sustainable pattern of economic growth, that helps to achieve sustainable livelihood and harmonious living with technology that is important and appropriate.
 - Focusing on economic growth that generates wealth for all, without impacting the environment negatively.
 - Equal distribution of economic resources for well-rounded growth of all.
 - Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** This element envisages the mindful and sustainable use of the natural resources at our disposal.
 - Prevention of mindless and inexhaustible use of natural resources and ensuring their protection and rational use.
 - Several aspects of environmental conservation to be followed through. Steps like investing in renewable energy, judicious use of water, supporting sustainable mobility, innovative and sustainable construction, and architecture, etc— all contribute to achieving environmental sustainability.
- **Social Sustainability:** This element envisages a social sphere where there is equality and equity for all in all aspects of life.
 - Social sustainability can foster a sense of gender equality that shall guarantee the development of people, communities, and cultures to help achieve a better and reasonable quality of life, healthcare, and education across the Globe.

Indicators of Sustainable Development

The three dimensions/core elements of sustainable development were discussed above. However, indicators and targets are further classified under each SDG. There are 17 SDGs with varying targets to achieve and indicators used to measure the success of the initiatives undertaken by the countries participating in the activity.

Sustainable Development Goals in India

India is a UN member and is involved in the SDG initiative kickstarted by the UN General Assembly. The [NITI Aayog](#), too, released the Baseline Report of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index, which studies the progress made by the country comprehensively. Below is the track record of India in the implementation of these 17 Sustainable Development Goals;

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA) was launched in the country to provide meaningful employment to unskilled labourers and simultaneously improve their standard of living.
- National Food Security Act was implemented for the provision of food grains to all at a subsidized rate.
- The flagship program Swachh Bharat Abhiyan undertaken by the Government of India was launched with the objective of making India open-defecation-free.
- Renewable energy generation targets have been decided at 175 GW. This is to be achieved by 2022 by using renewable energy sources like solar energy, wind energy, and others to reduce the dependence on non-renewable sources like fossil fuels.
- Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) and Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) schemes were launched to improve the country's infrastructural aspects.
- After having signed the Paris agreement, India has expressed its strong intent to fight against climate change.

Global issues Related to Sustainable Development

There are multiple barriers to the concept of Sustainable development. These have been discussed below:

- There is a pattern of inequitable growth in national economies (North-South Divide)
- Technological progress has come at the cost of loss of Biodiversity. The mindless use of natural resources has resulted in a severe impact on the biodiversity of the planet. Despite all the efforts being made over the span of 20 years, the loss of the world's biodiversity continues.
- The question and problem of Climate Change is as real and terrible as it can get. It is a global problem, and hence, requires global solutions and global action. Developing countries face particular challenges that should be addressed.
- Climate change and sustainable development are two mutually linked forces. The careful and rational tackling of climate change shall promote sustainable development and encouraging sustainable development shall help reverse climate change.

Global Initiatives on Sustainable Development

There have been multiple steps taken in the direction of an equitable and sustainable future for all its citizens. Few have been discussed below;

- **The Stockholm Conference (1972)** was the first step toward making environmental concern a global concern. This conference led to the Stockholm Declaration which contained an Action Plan and principles. This plan contained some recommendations for an environmental policy.
- **United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP)** was set up in 1972 that served as a catalyst for the development and coordination of an environmental focus on the programs of other similar organizations.

- **The Earth Summit** (1992) turned out to be the direct consequence of the Brundtland Commission's Report. This summit was held in Rio de Janeiro. This culminated in the following Conferences;
 - The Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
 - The Convention on Biological Diversity
 - The Statement on Forest Principles
 - The Rio Declaration
 - Agenda 21
- **Kyoto Protocol** (1997) extended the UNFCCC of 1992 into an international treaty that promised commitment from the state parties towards the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and human-made CO₂ emissions.
- **Rio +10** (2002) was a meeting that convened to discuss organizations practicing sustainable development to mark the 10-year anniversary of the first Earth Summit that took place in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This gave way to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which was held in Johannesburg.
- **Ramsar Convention** (1971) also called the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat is an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of Ramsar sites. The convention happened in the city of Ramsar, Iran after which it was named.
- **The World Heritage Convention** (1972) was a summit to identify and conserve the world's cultural and natural heritage sites. It concisely listed the 'heritage sites' of universal value, be it culturally, naturally, or both, and needed to be preserved.
- **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES, 1973)** is a multilateral treaty that aims to extend protection for endangered species of plants and animals that have the threats of international trade looming over them.

Some other conventions and organizations to read up more about;

- International Whaling Commission, 1946
- Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), 1979
- Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, 1985
- Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, 1987
- Basel Convention, 1989
- Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992
- Global Tiger Forum, 1993
- United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, 1994
- Rotterdam Convention, 1998
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, 2001
- Minamata Convention, 2013
- Climate change mitigation strategies: Carbon sequestration, Carbon sink, Carbon Credit, Carbon trading, Carbon offsetting, Carbon Tax, Geo-engineering.
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Climate Finance Architecture: Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund (AF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF)
- Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) and REDD+
- Paris Agreement 2015
- The Clean Development Mechanism is a way to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) emissions through efficient and sound technologies.

- Global Alliance for Climate-Smart Agriculture (GACSA)
- Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE)

Millennium Development Goals

The Millennium Development Goals are 8 time-bound targets that were set by the United Nations in the September of 2000. These targets were to be achieved by the end of 15 years. These targets under the Millennium Development Goal have been listed below;

1. Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieving universal primary education
3. Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
4. Reduction of child mortality
5. Improvement in maternal health stats
6. Combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
7. Ensured environmental sustainability
8. Development of a global partnership for development

A final report was handed over to the UN in 2015 that stated the positive impact of the setting up of the Millennium Development goal. There was some significant growth in the aspect of maternal mortality rate.

How much progress has been made regarding SDG?

The SDGs have been in place for a while. There have been numerous initiatives that have since been undertaken by governments and organizations all across the world. In 2019, there were 5 progress reports submitted that noted the development that happened across the 17 SDGs set up by the UN. Three of these reports came from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), one from the European Union (EU), and one from the Bertelsmann Foundation. The Basel Institute of Commons and Economics reviewed these five reports and presented their synopsis of them based on the achievement of SDGs completed.

SDG Topic	Rank	Average Rank
Health	1	3.2
Energy, Climate, Water	2	4.0
Education	3	4.6

Poverty	4	6.2
Food	5	7.6
Economic Growth	6	8.6
Technology	7	8.8
Inequality	8	9.2
Gender Equality	9	10.0
Hunger	10	10.6
Justice	11	10.8
Governance	12	11.6
Decent Work	13	12.2
Peace	14	12.4
Clean Energy	15	12.6
Life on Land	16	14.4
Life below Water	17	15.0
Social Inclusion	18	16.4

Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021

The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2021 greatly depicted the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic that was felt by all, though in varying gravitas and impact.

- COVID-19 was seen to further the financial gap among the masses. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that there would be a two-year delay in the SDG implementation investment, owing to the economic setbacks faced by all.
- The pandemic has seen an acceleration in the roll-out of digital services and technologies making universal access to broadband connectivity and digital infrastructure absolute priorities. These shall aid in increasing access to services and tools.
- Notable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on key SDG indicators:
 - **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** This pandemic has pushed an estimated 120 million people into extreme poverty over its span.
 - **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** It has also impacted accessibility to food and increased food insecurity.
 - **SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being):** The global COVID-19 death toll had surpassed 3 million deaths globally(as of April 2021)
 - **SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure)** have also been negatively impacted.
 - There were some temporary gains observed in SDGs 12–15 around sustainable production and consumption, climate action, and biodiversity protection. That progress, too, has been rapidly offset once restrictions were lifted
- COVID-19 has brought to the forefront the limited capacity of Low-Income Developing Countries (LIDCs) to tap into the market of financing. LIDCs have been unable to do what the High-Income countries did, borrowing, because of their lower market creditworthiness.

India's Rank in the SDG Report 2021

India ranked at 120th position in the SDG Report, 2021 with an overall score of 61.9. India dropped by three places in 2021 when compared to the Sustainable Development Report 2020, where India ranked 117th. India has only been able to achieve SDG 13 (Climate Action). It is set on its track to maintain this SDG achievement. Though there are major challenges left to deal with:

- India has been on track to achieve SDG 6 (Clean water & sanitization) with its Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.
- SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) has, however, deteriorated
- SDG 1 (No Poverty); SDG 3 (Good Health & Well Being); SDG 7 (Affordable & Clean Energy); SDG 8 (Decent Work & Economic Growth); SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure); SDG 14 (Life Below Water) have seen some substantial improvement in them though there is a long way to go.