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Sustainable Development Goals

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ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Development Goals (S.D.G.s) also known as the "global goals" because of their universal applicability was adopted by countries in 2015, with a vision of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 S.D.G.s and 169 targets are part of what is known as the [2030 Agenda](#), which recognizes "that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development."¹ In adopting the agenda, countries resolved to take the "bold and transformative steps, which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind." The goals and targets are universal, meaning they apply to all countries around the world, not just emerging countries. Reaching the goals requires action on all fronts – governments, businesses, civil society and people everywhere all have a role to play.

INTRODUCTION

Everyone understands the need to grow their economies, but not everyone takes into account the negatives that unbalanced economic growth can have on the environment and people's well-being. So the Sustainable Development Goals (S.D.G.) is all about looking at the larger picture. It is about improving the lives of everyone at every corner of the globe and achieving it together with mutual co-operation. Economies should grow, companies must thrive, and people should

¹<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

have decent work in order to create new innovative technologies. However, not by harming the environment.

There is a set target which is to be achieved of things like everyone having access to nutritious food regardless of where they live, affordable and quality education for everybody and also freedom of speech and expression, etc.

However, the question is, how can we achieve all of this, and where do we even start with? So these 17 S.D.G.s will help us to live in a world where people and planet will benefit together. It involves global action.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE SDGs

- ***The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, 1972***²: Also known as the Stockholm Conference was a landmark event in the evolution of the concept of Sustainable Development. Recognized the importance of environmental management and the use of environmental assessment management tool. Thus, the name of this Conference was focussed explicitly on "Human Environment".
- ***In 1980, The International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources (I.U.C.N.):*** I.U.C.N. formulated the "World Conservation Strategy" which was launched internationally. It asserted that the conservation of nature could not be achieved without alleviating poverty. Also, the importance of inter-dependence of conservation along with development was stressed upon.
- ***World Commission on Environment & Development (W.C.E.D.):*** This was created in 1983. They published their report entitled "Our Common Future" also known as the "Brundtland Report" in 1987. This report underlined a strong linkage between poverty

1. ²Bac, Dorin Paul. (2008). A history of the concept of sustainable development: A literature review. 17.

alleviation, improvement of environment and social equitability through sustainable economic growth which came to be recognized as *the “3 Pillars of Sustainable Development”*.

- ***The United Nations Conference on Environment & Development (U.N.C.E.D.), 1992:***
Also known as "The Earth Summit", it was held in Rio. One hundred seventy nations, 2500 NGOs participated in this Conference in the presence of 8,000 accredited journalists who documented the proceedings. The central aim of was to identify the principles of an agenda for action towards sustainable development in future. U.N.C.E.D. led to the production of critical international documents such as Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration, Convention on Desertification, Conventions on Bio-Diversity & Climate Change, etc. *The primary outcome of this Summit was the development of Precautionary & Polluter Pays Principle in holding accountability towards the environment.* Agenda 21 which was also an outcome of the Earth Summit consisted of a 900-page document describing steps towards initiating the concept of sustainable development across local, national & international levels as the world moved into the 21st Century.

- ***The Millennium Summit in New York, 2000:*** The Millennium Summit in New York resulted in "Millennium Declaration" which was a set of targets to be achieved by 2015. An interesting fact about the M.D.G.s is that these goals are explicitly applicable only to the developing nations. Presently known as the Millennium Development Goals or the M.D.G.s included a list of 8 goals to be achieved in 15 years which are listed below³-
 1. Eradicate extreme poverty & hunger
 2. Achieve universal primary education
 3. Promote gender equality & empower women
 4. Reduce child mortality
 5. Improve maternal health
 6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria & other diseases
 7. Ensure environmental sustainability

³<https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

8. Develop a global partnership for development

- **World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 2002**: Renewed its commitment towards the pursuit of Sustainable Development with the (Johannesburg Plan of Implementation). Issue of environmental degradation caused by human actions to achieve speedy economic growth thereby threatening the course of life-sustaining natural process and depleting the resources that future generation will need for their progress and prosperity was raised as an alarming concern. Kofi Annan, the then Secretary-General identified five specific areas, also known as W.E.H.A.B. Where both concrete results are essential and achievable. They were:-
 - i. Water & Sanitation(W)
 - ii. Energy(E)
 - iii. Health(H)
 - iv. Agricultural Production(A)
 - v. Bio-diversity &Eco-system Management(B)

United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, (Rio +20) 2012: It resulted in a focused political outcome document which contains clear and practical measures for implementing sustainable development. In Rio, Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of [Sustainable Development Goals \(S.D.G.s\)](#), which will build upon the [Millennium Development Goals](#) and converge with the post-2015 development agenda. The Conference also adopted ground-breaking guidelines on green economy policies. Governments also decided to establish an intergovernmental process under the General Assembly to prepare options on a strategy for sustainable development financing. Governments also agreed to strengthen the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) on several fronts with action to be taken during the 67th session of the General Assembly.

THREE PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

To bring the world's attention and direct action towards meeting difficult challenges, including improving people's lives and conserving our natural resources in a world that is growing in population with ever-increasing demands for food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health services and economic security, it is essential to focus on the three-pillared approach towards sustainable development.

This approach should encompass all aspects and take into consideration the fact that everything is connected: across generations and countries & communities, etc.

The 3 Pillars are:

1. Economic: This includes opportunities for growth, increased G.D.P. & benefits garnered from the same. Also, the stability of the system with proper security. Provision of green jobs and eradication of unemployment. Prevention of practices which misuse resources. Regulation of over-exploitation of natural resources. Inculcation of fair trade practices.

Moreover, we need mechanisms to measure sustainable development. That is why indicators are used. One of the current issues is that directly measuring the G.D.P. is not appropriate for measuring sustainable development. As it is purely based on the calculation of money. Using G.D.P. as the measure does not reflect social inequality and the overexploitation of resources. How about using "happiness" as an indicator just like Bhutan?

2. Social: Social Pillar includes participation & inclusion of everyone. Eradication of poverty at ground levels in developing and underdeveloped countries. The importance of food security and equitable distribution of resources also forms an integral part of the social development leading to sustainability. Access to proper healthcare by every citizen of a country and education, especially that of girl children in developing nations should also be a priority. Moreover, conflict & wars keep taking place around the world. Thus, the maintenance of peace becomes of vital importance.
3. Environmental: Protection of ecosystems & biosphere will fall under this pillar of sustainable development. Increased quality of air, land, water, as well as better management of pollution and waste, is also equally important. Respect and preservation of all species (flora, fauna, marine). Burning issues like climate change and global warming, deforestation, loss of biodiversity due to human activities disrupting ecosystems which in turn have led to the extinction of plants & animals are all because of not taking seriously the environmental pillar.

**THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (M.D.G.S.) & THE ROLE OF
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (2000-2015)**

189 states adopted the Millennium Declaration in Sept 2000 at the U.N. Millennium Summit. The Doctrinal outlines peace, security and development related concerns in areas including the environment, human rights & governance. This Declaration led to the consolidation of a set of inter-connected & mutually re-enforcing development goals, into a global agenda known as the M.D.G.s.

One of the significant differences between the M.D.G.s & the S.D.G.s is that the former is applied to developing countries while the latter is global and extend the focus of international development beyond poverty to sustainability.

**TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT (2015-2030)⁴**

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

⁴<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE SDGs

Despite the reference to the three-pillared approach to sustainable development, the S.D.G.s mostly push environmental interests to the periphery of their concern while prioritizing human focussed social & economic development at the expense of global earth system integrity⁵.

The focus of the S.D.G.s generally remains on improving human development at whatever ecological costs. The universal goals and targets are basically people-centred and not ecology centred.

The S.D.G.s provides nothing new in terms of the type of development they seek to achieve. The developmental view remains a weak, anthropocentric one where socio-economic interests of individual privileged human beings reign supreme.

A framework is required for ecologically sustainable development that can only be achieved if planetary boundaries are not crossed and also if the global earth system integrity is respected. Only then, can the issue of climate change can be dealt with effectively. For example, the M.D.G. 7 set out to "ensure environment sustainability" was silent on water protection and improvement of water quality all over the world.

The socio-economic achievements of M.D.G.s will be impossible without simultaneously protecting the ecological basis that supports them. Example, both the S.D.G.s 1 & 2 aim to end poverty, hunger, etc. and promote sustainable agriculture but do not recognize that this can occur sustainably only if Earth System limits are respected. The natural resources also have their ways to handle the pressure that requires proper handling of the limits.

Similarly, S.D.G. 12 aims to ensure sustainable consumption, but there is lack of details related to what sustainable consumption and production actually would entail and how it is to be achieved in a world with an ever-growing population and dwindling resources.

A set of 229 indicators are categorized in terms of what they measure. That includes people, money, and governance, the industrial flow of energy and materials, and nature. Indicators are useful tools for generating information, but sometimes they oversimplify

⁵ Sustainable Development Goals: Law, Theory & Implementation, Duncan French, Loius J.Kotze

complex issues like overuse of Gross Domestic Product as an indicator of progress has led to a focus on economic growth as the leading indicator of development.

Thus, decisions makers develop policies focusing on economic growth as their main target.

Indicators emphasize on areas which are "measurable" rather than issues that are important in different countries and contexts. Thus, it should be carefully utilized by considering different situations at local and national levels in countries.

CONCLUSION

SDGs not based on local realities and local knowledge. S.D.G.s are ambitious but simultaneously destructive. There is no reality check being done on the anthropocentric activities country wise. There is an end number of policymakers and legislators, but there is a dearth of Climate Scientists who possess a good knowledge of the environment and its system. For example, in the Amazon Forest Fire this year, no seriousness was shown before the incident. The growth of the developing economies, in particular, has to be optimal and sustainable. The problem lies in measuring the actual growth of a country. That needs to be sorted. Only then can there be an equal act of sustainable economies being a reality.

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