

Frequently Asked Questions about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

What is sustainable development?

- ◆ Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- ◆ Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable and resilient future for people and planet.
- ◆ For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonize three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected and all are crucial for the well – being of individuals and societies.
- ◆ Eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions is an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. To this end, there must be promotion of sustainable, inclusive and equitable economic growth, creating greater opportunities for all, reducing inequalities, raising basic standards of living, fostering equitable social development and inclusion, and promoting integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems.

What are the Sustainable Development Goals?

- ◆ The 193 Member States of the United Nations reached consensus on the outcome document of a new sustainable development agenda entitled, “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.
- ◆ This agenda contains 17 goals and 169 targets. The complete list of goals and targets are available at: <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>
- ◆ The outcome document is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>
- ◆ World leaders will officially adopt this universal, integrated and transformative agenda in September to spur actions that will end poverty and build a more sustainable world over the next 15 years.
- ◆ This agenda builds on the achievements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted in 2000 and guided development action for the last 15 years. The MDGs have proven that global goals can lift millions out of poverty.
- ◆ The new goals are part of an ambitious, bold sustainable development agenda that will focus on the three

interconnected elements of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.

- ◆ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets are global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. They are not independent from each other — they need to be implemented in an integrated manner.
- ◆ The SDGs are the result of a three-year-long transparent, participatory process inclusive of all stakeholders and people's voices. They represent an unprecedented agreement around sustainable development priorities among 193 Member States.
- ◆ They have received world-wide support from civil society, business, Parliamentarians and other actors. The decision to launch a process to develop a set of SDGs was made by UN Member States at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012.

What are the elements underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals?

The Goals and targets will stimulate action over the next 15 years in areas of critical importance: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership.

- ◆ People, as we are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.
- ◆ Planet, to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.
- ◆ Prosperity, to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.
- ◆ Peace, to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.
- ◆ Partnership, to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalised global partnership for sustainable development, based on a spirit

of strengthened global solidarity, focussed in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

Why are new goals being adopted this year?

- ♦ The Millennium Development Goals that were launched in 2000 set 2015 as the target year. Recognizing the success of the Goals—and the fact that a new development agenda was needed beyond 2015—countries agreed in 2012 at Rio+20, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development, to establish an open working group to develop a set of sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action.
- ♦ After more than a year of negotiations, the Open Working Group presented its recommendation for the 17 sustainable development goals. In early August 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations reached consensus on the outcome document of the new agenda “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.
- ♦ Member States decided that the UN summit for the adoption of new sustainable development agenda with its 17 goals will be held from 25 to 27 September 2015, in New York and convened as a high-level plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

Why are the Sustainable Development Goals so broad in comparison to the Millennium Development Goals which were very specific?

- ♦ There are 17 sustainable development goals with 169 targets, in contrast to the 8 Millennium Development Goals with 21 targets. The complex challenges that exist in the world today demand that a wide range of issues be covered. It is, also, critical to address the root causes of the problems and not only the symptoms.
- ♦ The Sustainable Development Goals are the result of a negotiation process that involved the 193 UN Member States and also saw unprecedented participation of civil society and other stakeholders. This led to the representation of a wide range of interests and perspectives.

♦ On the other hand, the MDGs were produced by a group of experts behind closed doors. The SDGs are broad in scope because they will address the interconnected elements of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. The MDGs focused primarily on the social agenda.

♦ The MDGs targeted developing countries, particularly the poorest, while the Sustainable Development Goals will apply to the entire world, developed and developing countries.

Aren't 17 SDGs and 169 targets too many, too ambiguous and unrealistic?

Poverty eradication, shared prosperity and planetary sustainability cannot be reduced to a simple formula. The SDGs represent the shared global goals and targets that will be tailored at the country level, informed by context-based evidence.

How are the SDGs different from the MDGs?

- ♦ The 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 targets are broader in scope and will go further than the MDGs by addressing the root causes of poverty and the universal need for development that works for all people. These goals will cover the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection.
- ♦ Building on the success and momentum of the MDGs, the new global goals will cover more ground with ambitions to address inequalities, economic growth, decent jobs, cities and human settlements, industrialization, energy, climate change, sustainable consumption and production, peace and justice.
- ♦ The new goals are universal and apply to all countries, whereas the MDGs were intended for action in developing countries only.
- ♦ A core feature of the SDGs has been the means of implementation—the mobilization of financial resources—as well as capacity-building and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies.
- ♦ The new goals recognize that tackling climate change is essential for sustainable development and poverty eradication. SDG 13 aims to promote urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

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How much will the implementation of this new sustainable development agenda cost?

- ♦ The means of implementation—how to mobilize the financial resources to achieve the sustainable development agenda—is a core feature of the new agenda.
- ♦ This ambitious agenda will require the mobilization of significant resources—in the trillions of dollars. But these resources already exist. There are far more than enough savings in the world to finance the new agenda.
- ♦ Resources need to be mobilized from domestic and international sources, as well as from the public and private sectors. Official development assistance is still necessary to help finance sustainable development to assist the least developed countries.
- ♦ The agenda can be met within the framework of a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development, supported by the concrete policies and actions as outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the outcome document of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development held in July.

How will the new development agenda be implemented?

- ♦ Implementation and success will rely on countries' own sustainable development policies, plans and programmes, and will be led by countries. The SDGs will be a compass for aligning countries' plans with their global commitments.
- ♦ Nationally owned and country-led sustainable development strategies will require equivalent resource mobilization and financing strategies.
- ♦ The 17 SDGs and 169 targets of the new agenda will be monitored and reviewed using a set of global indicators. The global indicator framework, to be developed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators, will be agreed on by the UN Statistical Commission by March 2016.
- ♦ Governments will also develop their own national indicators to assist in monitoring progress made on the goals and targets.
- ♦ The follow-up and review process will be undertaken on an annual basis by the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development through a SDG Progress Report to be prepared by the Secretary-General.
- ♦ The means of implementation of the SDGs will be monitored and reviewed as outlined in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the outcome document of the Financing for Development Conference, to ensure that financial resources are effectively mobilized to support the new sustainable development agenda.

3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 4 QUALITY EDUCATION 5 GENDER EQUALITY

- ♦ A Technology Facilitation Mechanism, to be launched at the September Summit, will address the technology needs of developing countries, the options to address those needs and capacity building.
- ♦ Recognizing the central role of technological cooperation for the achievement of sustainable development, countries agreed on this mechanism at the Financing for Development Conference.

What have the MDGs accomplished?

- ♦ The MDGs have produced the most successful anti-poverty movement in history and will serve as the springboard for the new sustainable development agenda.
- ♦ Poverty and hunger: only two short decades ago, nearly half of the developing world lived in extreme poverty. The number of people now living in extreme poverty has declined by more than half, falling from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 836 million in 2015.
- ♦ Gender equality: The world has also witnessed dramatic improvement in gender equality in schooling since the MDGs, and gender parity in primary school has been achieved in the majority of countries. More girls are now in school, and women have gained ground in parliamentary representation over the past 20 years in nearly 90% of the 174 countries with data.
- ♦ Child mortality: globally, the under-five mortality rate dropped from 90 to 43 deaths per 1,000 live births between 1990 and 2015.
- ♦ Maternal health: the maternal mortality ratio shows a decline of 45% worldwide, with most of the reduction occurring since 2000.
- ♦ Fighting diseases: new infection rates from HIV fell approximately by 40% between 2000 and 2013.
- ♦ Over 6.2 million malaria deaths were averted between 2000 and 2015, while tuberculosis prevention, diagnosis and treatment interventions saved an estimated 37 million lives between 2000 and 2013.
- ♦ Sanitation: Worldwide, 2.1 billion have gained access to improved sanitation and the proportion of people practicing open defecation has fallen almost by half since 1990.
- ♦ Global partnership: official development assistance from developed countries saw an increase of 66% in real terms from 2000 and 2014, reaching \$135.2 billion.

What are the remaining gaps left by the MDGs?

- ♦ About 800 million people still live in extreme poverty and 795 million still suffer from hunger.
- ♦ Between 2000 and 2015, the number of children out of school declined by almost half. However, there are still 57 million children who are denied the right to primary education.
- ♦ Gender inequality persists in spite of more representation of women in parliament and more girls going to school. Women continue to face discrimination in access to work, economic assets and participation in private and public decision-making.
- ♦ Economic gaps still exist between the poorest and richest households, and rural and urban areas.
- ♦ Children from the poorest 20% of households are more than twice as likely to be stunted as those from the wealthiest 20% and are also four times as likely to be out of school. Improved sanitation facilities are only covering half of rural population, as opposed to 82% in urban areas.
- ♦ While the mortality rate for children under five dropped by 53 per cent between 1990 and 2015, child deaths continue to be increasingly concentrated in the poorest regions and in the first month of life.

How will progress of the SDGs be measured? How many indicators will be developed for the 169 targets of the Sustainable Development Goals?

- ♦ The 17 goals and 169 targets will be monitored and reviewed using a set of global indicators. These will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels, which will be developed by Member States.
- ♦ The Inter Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators will develop the global indicator framework which the UN Statistical Commission will subsequently agree on in March 2016. Thereafter, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly will adopt these indicators.
- ♦ Chief statisticians from Member States are working on the identification of the targets with the aim to have 2 indicators for each target. There will be approximately 300 indicators for all the targets. Where the targets cover cross-cutting issues, however, the number of indicators may be reduced.

When are the SDGs expected to start and end?

The SDGs are expected to start on 1 January 2016 and to be achieved by 31 December 2030. However, some targets that build on pre-set international agreements are expected to be achieved even earlier than the end of 2030.

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