

Introduction to Sustainable Development

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Key concepts, principles, and why it matters

1. What Is Sustainable Development?

Definition	Core Idea
Brundtland Report (1987) – “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”	Balances economic growth , social inclusion , and environmental protection .
UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – 17 global goals (2015-2030) that operationalise the concept.	Provides measurable targets for countries, businesses, and individuals.

2. The Three Pillars (The “Triple Bottom Line”)

Pillar	Main Focus	Typical Indicators
Economic	Prosperity, productive employment, innovation, responsible consumption.	GDP per capita, unemployment rate, investment in green technologies.
Social	Equity, health, education, cultural diversity, community resilience.	Life expectancy, literacy rates, gender parity index, poverty incidence.
Environmental	Conservation of ecosystems, climate stability, resource efficiency.	CO ₂ emissions, forest cover, water quality, biodiversity indices.

All three must be pursued **simultaneously**; progress in one pillar should not undermine the others.

3. Key Principles

Principle	Explanation
Intergenerational Equity	Decisions today should not diminish resources or opportunities for future generations.

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Principle	Explanation
Precautionary Approach	When scientific certainty is lacking, avoid actions that could cause serious or irreversible harm.
Integrated Management	Policies, projects, and investments consider cross-sectoral impacts (e.g., land-use planning that links agriculture, water, and biodiversity).
Participatory Governance	Stakeholders—including marginalized groups—have a voice in decision-making.
Resilience & Adaptive Capacity	Systems are designed to absorb shocks (climate events, economic crises) and adapt over time.

4. The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Goal	Brief Description	Example Target
1 – No Poverty	End extreme poverty.	Reduce the proportion of people living on <\$1.90 a day to <3% by 2030.
2 – Zero Hunger	End hunger, achieve food security.	Halve the proportion of undernourished people.
3 – Good Health & Well-Being	Ensure healthy lives.	Reduce maternal mortality to <70 per 100,000 live births.
4 – Quality Education	Inclusive, equitable education.	Ensure all youth complete free, quality secondary education.
5 – Gender Equality	Empower women and girls.	Eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.
6 – Clean Water & Sanitation	Universal access to safe water.	Achieve universal and equitable access to safe drinking water.
7 – Affordable Clean Energy	Ensure access to reliable, modern energy.	Increase the share of renewable energy in the global mix.
8 – Decent Work & Economic Growth	Promote sustained, inclusive growth.	Achieve higher levels of economic productivity.
9 – Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure	Build resilient infrastructure.	Upgrade all industries and increase research & development spending.
10 – Reduced Inequalities	Reduce inequality within and among countries.	Empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all.

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Goal

Brief Description

Example Target

**11 – Sustainable Cities &
Communities**

Make cities inclusive,