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© 26 February, 2018

In September 2015 the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** was adopted by **193 member states of the United Nations**, this was a unanimous decision. The 2030 Agenda is the successor to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and sets the global development agenda for the next 15 years. At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## What are the SDGs?

The SDGs are a universal set of goals, targets, and indicators that focus on development. The SDGs can be broadly grouped into five overarching elements: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership and are made up of 17 inter-related and mutually supporting goals, which in turn comprise of 169 targets.

The signatories of the 2030 Agenda are expected to use these agreed upon SDGs to guide the development of policies, programmes and projects that support and influence the development trajectory of their countries, regions and the world. The ultimate intention is to ensure that all facets of development are included and recognised.



Credit: United Nations

## Moving from the MDGs to the SDGs

In 2000, the MDGs set the agenda for development activities and consisted of eight targets aimed at combatting poverty. While the MDGs set the target and there were quite a few achievements, they were faced with many criticisms. These criticisms mainly included around their legitimacy and how the goals and targets were chosen and set, their narrowness and under emphasis of certain aspects of development, including human rights, gender and the environment, and how the progress was reported and measured.

When the MDGs period was reaching an end, it was agreed by all countries to reform and propose a more widespread, inclusive and reflective set of development goals. The SDGs emerged as an attempt to represent the challenges that countries face in the next 15 years and beyond, and is an attempt to address the root cause of many of them.

The 17 SDGs were identified through widespread consultation over three years on contrast to the MDGs. This process took into account the views of all parties, including national governments, civil society, multilateral development institutions and individuals.

## How do the SDGs differ?

While the MDGs mainly applied to developing countries, the SDGs are universally applicable. That is they apply to all countries, no matter their current development status.

Meeting SDGs require that they are implemented in an integrated manner and is based on the recognition that there is no trade-off between economic, social and environmental development. Indeed each of these aspects is mutually reinforcing and one cannot be achieved without the other, or failure in one area could lead to failure in others. This is in contrast to the MDGs which primarily focussed on the social aspects of development.

By their nature, the SDGs are a set of broad goals and targets, this is so each country can decide on the most realistic and practical way to implement policies, programmes or projects to move towards meeting the SDGs. They build off the MDGs, but offer more ambitious goals.

## The implementation agenda

The agreement of the SDGs in 2015, along with other international agreements in 2015 and 2016 such as the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the **Addis Ababa Declaration on Financing for Development (PDF)**, and the **New Urban Agenda (PDF)** provide the foundations of the new global agenda.

Each country is responsible for implementation and success of the 2030 Agenda and meeting the SDGs to which they have all committed. Implementation will have to be led by them with nationally derived, owned and supported sustainable development strategies.

While agreement has been reached, the implementation and its success will hinge on the requisite capacity, finance and technology being available and deployed to meet the goals. How these resources are mobilised, distributed and utilised are at the core of the implementation agenda, and will continue to be discussed and debated over the lifetime of the SDGs and beyond.

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