

# Reflecting on the Emergence of the UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Call for Action in Scotland

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## Executive Summary

A sustainable Scotland would have flourishing and equitable communities supported by healthy and diverse ecosystems. The wellbeing of people and of the environment would be enabled through prosperity, strong governance and the co-production and implementation of knowledge. This aspiration has been pursued in different ways and to varying extents throughout the history of Scotland. We currently face planetary environmental and social challenges, but also a time of political opportunity to enact this vision. **The aims of this paper are to reflect on historic and contemporary understandings of sustainable development in theory and practice in Scotland and beyond; to describe the emergence of the Sustainable Development Goals; and to begin to explore the implications of these for Scottish institutions.**

Perspectives on sustainable development have changed, with the three pillars model largely superseded by a strong sustainability model in which environmental limits are acknowledged. A strong economy, good governance and the response use of sound knowledge will contribute to a healthy and just society and ecological integrity; human and planetary well-being.

An agreement to launch a set of universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged from the 2012 United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). There followed a three-year process involving UN Member States, 83 national surveys engaging over 7 million people, and thousands of actors from the international community. The goals have thus been heavily negotiated, and have a broad legitimacy amongst all parties. They form the basis of an aspirational world transformation: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

In September 2015, 17 goals and 169 targets were adopted. The SDGs address complex and interlinked social and environmental challenges, retaining a holistic view of development and sustainability. The UN Secretary General developed a 5Ps Framework around Planet, People, Prosperity, Partnership and Peace to support the implementation of the diversity of goals

The SDGs build upon achievement and lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and include and transcend Agenda 21 (1992) and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002). However, whilst the MDGs were aimed at the Global South, the new goals are designed to be universal and implemented within all countries, hence will require domestic implementation within Scotland. A change in our international approach will also occur; SDGs aim to promote a paradigm shift of financing beyond 'development aid', with multi-stakeholder partnerships, social investment and ethical trade.

The goals are non legally-binding, with each country setting its own priorities and reporting to the High Level Forum on Sustainable Development, although some goals are already supported through statutory requirements. Partnership facilitation for this complex agenda is required.

Scotland was one of the first nations to state strong political support for the SDGs. The Post-15 group led interim strategic planning, but discussion of indicator reporting is ongoing. The Scottish Government has already mapped the SDGs against the National Performance Framework. Within the Third Sector, Communities of Interest are coalescing around goals or clusters of goals. International development consultations are exploring our role within the global agenda, whilst at UK level clarity is required to consider how non-devolved responses will be measured and reported. Local Authorities are beginning to discuss their local government plans vis- a-vis to NPF and SDGS.

These emerging processes within National and Local Government and civil society will enable us to embed these goals within ongoing and emerging activities. The SDGs will thus catalyse a sprouting of ideas, a flowering of strategies and a harvesting of positive outcomes in Scotland.

Key ideas for the implementation of the SDGs in Scotland are discussed, including:

1. appropriate **SDG indicator** development and monitoring
2. vertical alignment between local, national and global spheres of implementation and across sectors; **good governance**
3. extensive and effective **partnerships**
4. **support of communities** in the debate and delivery of our aspirations for the future
5. the support of formal, informal and non-formal **learning for sustainability** to support all SDGs
6. the **responsible use of sound science** and other knowledges
7. engagement and partnership with the **private sector**
8. exploration of sustainable routes to enhance **prosperity and wellbeing**
9. building coherent plans of action between **domestic and international agendas**
10. inspiring and enabling **young people** to contribute to SDG implementation



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## 10 Key Facts about the Sustainable Development Goals

1. The notion of sustainable development recognises the interdependence of a flourishing society and healthy environment, now and for future generations. The concept emerged through debates on conservation, wilderness and environmental management alongside discussion on social equality, including abolition of slavery, women's rights and support of the poor over the last two centuries. Contemporary debates recognise the need for humanity to occupy a safe and just space within planetary boundaries.
2. The international agreement on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) originated during the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 as a new global framework to re-direct humanity towards a sustainable pathway. There followed a three-year process involving UN Member States, 83 national surveys engaging over 7 million people, and thousands of actors from the international community, making it the biggest consultation in UN history. The goals have thus been heavily negotiated, and have a broad legitimacy among all parties.
3. 17 goals and 169 targets were adopted in September 2015, setting a rights-based agenda until 2030, leaving no-one behind and promoting social inclusion for the most vulnerable groups. At the same time, they set environmental limits and critical natural thresholds for the use of natural resources.
4. The SDGs thus address complex and interlinked social and environmental challenges, retaining a holistic view of sustainable development. The UN Secretary General developed a Framework to support the implementation of the diversity of goals. This 5Ps framework outlines a focus on Planet, People, Prosperity, Partnership and Peace.
5. Are all SDGs equal? The emphasis on different goals is likely to vary across nations depending on national priorities and statutory requirements. Climate change (SDGs 7 and 13) is likely to remain a significant focus given the international and national

agreements and legislation in place to support climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

6. The SDGs build upon achievement and lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); and include and transcend Agenda 21 (1992) and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (2002). Whilst the MDGs were aimed at the Global South, the new goals are designed to be universal and implemented within all countries. The goals are non legally-binding, with each country setting its own priorities and reporting to the High Level Forum on Sustainable Development.
7. Whilst the MDGs relied on voluntary aid and individual promises from countries, perpetuating a dependence on donor-recipient aid relationships, SDGs aim to promote a paradigm shift of financing beyond 'development aid', with multi-stakeholder partnerships, social investment and ethical trade. The 2030 Agenda includes the United Nations Addis Ababa Action Agenda adopted in July, which sets out the different means necessary to implement the SDGs, including domestic resources, private finance and Official Development Assistance (ODA).
8. A key challenge is how to facilitate partnership in support of a complex agenda. Whilst the success of the SDGs will require commitment from all levels of governments, stakeholders have a critical role in holding governments to account, especially across changes in political leadership. Engagement of different sectors and groups is required. For example, the UN is currently rolling out a major advertising campaign led by film writer and director Richard Curtis to engage the public.
9. Scotland produced some of the great thinkers and pioneers in action around sustainability, and despite her relatively small size has received global recognition in some areas of sustainable development already. These include action on climate change, land reform, learning for sustainability, multi level and integrated governance and support of culture, nature and place. The focus on sustainable economic growth is enriched by debates on wellbeing and attainment.

**10.** Scotland was one of the first nations to state strong political support for the SDGs.

The Post-15 group led interim strategic planning, but discussion of indicator reporting is ongoing. The Scottish Government has already mapped the SDGs against the National Performance Framework. Within the Third Sector, Communities of Interest are coalescing around goals or clusters of goals. International development consultations are exploring our role within the global agenda, whilst at UK level clarity is required to consider how non-devolved responses will be measured and reported.

For further information, see the final document **Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, which states in its Preamble: *“This Agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity”*, and affirms *“the interlinkages and integrated nature of the SDGs are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realised”*.

[http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/L.85&Lang=E)

## **Acronyms**

<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organisation
<b>ODA</b>	Overseas Development Assistance
<b>OWG</b>	Open Working Group
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>SDSN</b>	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCED</b>	UN Conference on Environment and Development
<b>UN DESA</b>	UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>UNDP</b>	UN Development Programme
<b>UN DPI</b>	UN Department of Public Information
<b>UNEP</b>	UN Environment Programme
<b>UNGA</b>	UN General Assembly
<b>WCED</b>	World Commission on Environment and Development



## Section 1: Introduction

*“Achieving sustainable development is the overriding challenge of the 21st century.”*

Vuk Jeremic, President of the 67<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly<sup>1</sup>

A sustainable Scotland would have flourishing and equitable communities supported by healthy and diverse ecosystems. The wellbeing of people and of the environment would be enabled through prosperity, strong governance and the co-production and implementation of knowledge. This aspiration has been pursued in different ways and to varying extents throughout the history of Scotland.

Worldwide we face a convergence of multiple challenges that must be overcome to facilitate our pursuit of sustainability. These include inter-linked difficulties such as climate change, economic uncertainty, international conflict, biodiversity loss and both water scarcity and flooding that exacerbate social inequality and inhibit pathways to prosperity. Episodes of social unrest also derive from this inequality and a lack of development opportunity caused by regulatory and economic contexts.<sup>2</sup> These multiple and inter-related crises call into question the ability of a growing human population to live peacefully and sustainably on this planet, and demand the urgent attention of all parties, including all levels of government, the private and Third sectors and communities and citizens around the world.

This is a key moment of opportunity to reimagine and enact what we wish for our local communities, for Scotland and for international peoples. Although interdependence between the environment and development have been recognised by some since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, the notion of sustainable development is still seen by many to be an idea rooted in environmental concerns, creating a divide between advocates of sustainability and those who believe that commitment to human wellbeing and poverty

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking at the launch of the High-Level Advisory Panel report “The United Nations in the Age of Sustainable Development” <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45801#.Uk1Uaoakovm>

<sup>2</sup> [Unemployment in Europe: get the figures for every country](#), Ami Sedghi & John Burn-Murdoch, January 2013

eradication demand exclusively socioeconomic responses.<sup>3</sup> In addition, despite international commitments, implementation of sustainable development is generally thought to have been poor.

The 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, aimed to address these issues at the international level. The objectives of the Conference were to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development; assess the progress to date and the remaining gaps in the implementation of the outcomes of the major summits on sustainable development; and address new and emerging challenges. Rio+20 also addressed the integration of the so-called three main dimensions of sustainable development – economic, environmental and social – through its two primary themes: (a) a green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development.

One of the most significant outcomes from Rio+20 was the agreement to launch a government-led process to create a set of universal Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This process was led by a 30 member Open Working Group (OWG) under the UN General Assembly (the main deliberative body of the UN). The SDGs were to form an international framework enabling countries and stakeholders to better target and monitor progress on sustainable development. The SDGs were also expected to play a key role in driving action and partnerships on sustainable development, as well as to provide clarity on the interdependence of the dimensions of sustainable development.

The UN SDGs emerging from this process lay out global priorities for the next 15 years (2016-2030) and are intended to inspire and enable action in these areas within and across nations. The concept of the SDGs was based upon the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): eight international goals established in 2001, which aimed to accelerate development in the world's poorest countries. The MDGs have proved highly successful in rallying public, private and political support for global poverty reduction and provided an effective tool to stimulate the generation and collection of new poverty-related data, as well

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<sup>3</sup> [Why we need Sustainable Development Goals](#), Paula Caballero Gómez, Colombian ministry, May 2012:

as additional aid commitments. They have also fostered greater coordination of international development efforts between nation states and other development actors.

While the MDGs prioritised the social dimension of development, the aim for the SDGs is to embody a comprehensive and integrated approach to human development; and hence seek to facilitate sustained socioeconomic growth within the sustainable use of natural resources. Critically, the SDGs represent a shift from the international development focus of the prior Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) towards a responsible response from within every country; they are universal. They thus have to be implemented within every country, requiring a domestic as well as an international development focus from us in Scotland.

Additionally, the 17 SDGs and 169 targets are more numerous than the preceding eight MDGs, representing the collective ambition of civil society to tackle issues of interest and importance to them. The diversity of goals is supported by a framework that recognises the right to dignity and health for all People, expresses determination to protect the Planet from degradation, acknowledges the need for fulfilling lives and Prosperity for everyone, aims to foster Peace with just and inclusive societies and seeks to work in Partnership through global solidarity, focusing on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable whilst mobilising the participation of all countries and their people and institutions. Building upon the successes and lessons learned from the MDGs, the SDGs are an important tool for the pursuit of focused and coherent action on sustainable development, as well as national priority-setting and mobilisation of resources.

This is thus an ideal time to (re)consider the meaning of sustainability and to gather our organisations and individuals to work together to develop our visions for the future and pursue these visions through small and extended networks or groups. Whilst there has been some consideration of the implications of the SDGs and possible mechanisms for government to engage at a national level in Scotland through the existing National Performance Framework, the narrative of this emerging agenda has not yet been captured. The SDGs will not only influence the work of national government, but will also have implications for the functioning of Local Authorities, will engage the Private sector and will

offer opportunities and challenges for the Third sector and communities and individuals. The rights conferred by these goals apply to all people and organisations, but in return the responsibility of implementation is shared.

In this report, we take the opportunity for reflection on the historic unfolding process of sustainability as concept and practice in Scotland; and on the story of the emergence of the SDGs. Scotland was one of the first countries to publically declare support for the SDGs, and a process has been underway for some time to consider how best to respond. We summarise some of the conversation that has taken place to date and seek to deepen and broaden this debate to new as well as existing audiences. We then suggest what the implications of the SDGs might be for different sectors and propose what sort of action might enable us to achieve our aspirations for a sustainable Scotland. A significant aspect of our success within this agenda will relate to our ability to work in partnership within areas of interest, across sectors and with our international partners.

The next Section begins our reflection, describing some of the early history of the concept of sustainable development and preceding notions, highlighting some key influential people and events within a wider political context. We especially focus on the Scottish context. A critical analysis of debates around model and notions of sustainable development broadens this conversation. In Section 3 we employ an international framing to reflect on the MDGs and explain the transition from MDGs to SDGs, starting our description of the conversation to date. We offer a detailed perspective on the UN process and rationale for the SDGs. In Section 4 we reflect on thinking and practice of sustainable development in Scotland and explain how recent and current institutions within the Scottish Government have begun to organise around the SDGs. In Section 5 we conclude by visioning the potential and concluding with a call to action within Scotland, summarising 10 key ideas for implementation of the SDGs in this country.

## **Section 2: What is Sustainable Development?**

The contemporary concept of sustainable development emerged in the 1970s and the first global definition was enshrined in the Brundtland definition of 1987. However, the origins of the concept go back much further. Since 1987 many models have been developed and different forms of practice have been explored. In this section we reflect on the history of the emergence of the concept of sustainable development and different ways of thinking about sustainability.

### ***Sustainable Development Emerges***

The Industrial Revolution changed the nature of human settlement, sped up the use of fossil fuels and consequent emissions and pollution, maintained a new form of feudal inequality within countries and exacerbated inequalities across countries, facilitating colonialism. Resource use increased and people began to pursue empire, migrate around the world and take over 'pristine wilderness' (mostly inhabited already by indigenous peoples). A global transformation and the beginning of 'modernity' occurred, with strong Western influences but also oft neglected wider inputs.

Some voices contradicting the dominant movements emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. These voices included John Muir, a Scot who emigrated to America and promoted conservation and a love of wilderness. Patrick Geddes was a Scot who developed innovative ideas around planning, redeveloping some of the Auld Town in Edinburgh to provide better accommodation for the poor. He also explored ideas around Place- Work- Folk, 'think global, act local' and developed an educational philosophy around the notion of 'hand, heart, and head'. Aldo Leopold called for a 'land ethic' that not only acknowledged humans as a member rather than conqueror of the 'biotic community' but also explained that long term human interests were best served by healthy ecosystems. William Morris also called for a consideration of utopias and a questioning of unthinking industrialization. In the nineteenth century we also see voices critiquing modernity on grounds of human equality, dignity and justice. Some of these voices coalesced around the abolition of slavery, dignity for the poor and women's rights, questioning assumptions of nation states dominant over others and individuals with an inherent right to be held above others. John Stuart Mill

was an English philosopher who debated civil rights in the first half of this century, writing influential texts such as “On Liberty” and even articulating links between land, labour and capital. Women’s voices were loud within these debates. Octavia Hill was an English social reformer who pioneered affordable, decent housing and is sometimes seen as a founder of social work. Of course, the suffragette movement also questioned societal assumptions regarding equality, with Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst prominent UK leaders. However, women’s political rights were established in New Zealand and South Australia, and even in states in America and in Canada, before they were won in UK.

These voices helped to establish the conservation movement and linked human and ecological wellbeing, although the latter notion was not yet well accepted. The first part of the twentieth century was, of course, marked by the World Wars and subsequent changes in demography and empire and emphasis on production. The emergence of a new post-colonial era was glimpsed, promoting nations’ independence and changing international relations around the globe. However, ‘progress’ continued to march onwards and only in 1962 with Rachel Carson’s book “Silent Spring” was the automatic prioritisation of technology questioned and negative consequences of some chemicals on the environment highlighted. Soon afterwards, “The Limits to Growth” was published, exploring the finite character of resources and chiming with the Malthusian debate on global human population limits. Both resource and population debates have since shifted, recognising the complexity of resource use and human adaptation and the potential for education and development opportunities to enable people to make choices around reproductive rates. The notion of modernity was further questioned by ideas in the book “Small is beautiful” in which Schumacher discussed human scale development and appropriate technologies.

At a global scale these debates coalesced in outputs from various international institutions. The World Council of Churches used a concept similar to that of contemporary sustainability in 1974. The idea they framed came mainly from Western environmentalists who recognised the development concerns expressed around human poverty and hunger at that time. The notion of sustainable development was then introduced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in 1980, but was termed and defined more completely by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development

that was chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland and produced a report titled “Our Common Future” in 1987. The definition produced by this Commission is discussed below and the International consequences of this intervention are discussed further in Section 3.

## **Perspectives on Sustainable Development**

There are different definitions and understandings of sustainable development. It is useful to recognise and respect this plurality of perspectives and accept that sustainable development is seen differently by diverse individuals and groups and that its meaning and definition needs to be contextualised to a particular situation. The concept of sustainable development has also evolved over time. This section aims to provide an overview of some of the different ways of thinking about sustainable development to enable a critical and theoretically rigorous underpinning for the implementation of the SDGs in Scotland.

### **The Brundtland Definition**

*“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”* Our Common Future, 1987<sup>4</sup>

The Brundtland report developed a definition that was broad and encompassing. It focused on needs, rather than wants, although needs can be hard to define and agree. Importantly, it also focused on intra and inter-generational equity. This highlighted an aspect of sustainable development that is often neglected in some contemporary models (such as the circles and pillars models below): the requirement for future thinking. Positively visioning the world in which we wish to live rather than focusing merely on the negative crises we have to address can be a constructive way in which to engage people in debates around sustainable development. This approach aligns well with the recent political engagement within Scotland in which aspirations were identified and we explored visions of flourishing people within a place rich in natural and cultural heritage.

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<sup>4</sup> Our Common Future, Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), p.37. Also known as the Brundtland Report, after the former Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/42/ares42-187.htm>

### Three Core Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is often depicted as employing a ‘triple bottom line’ approach,<sup>5</sup> which combines economic development, environmental sustainability and social inclusion as its three core elements. As the concept of sustainable development has evolved over time, these three aspects have been represented in a variety of ways, including as ‘pillars’, overlapping circles and nested circles. As discussed below, each model portrays different interpretations of sustainable development, and the conceptualisation and policy-making implications of these different visualisations has generated substantial discussion and debate.

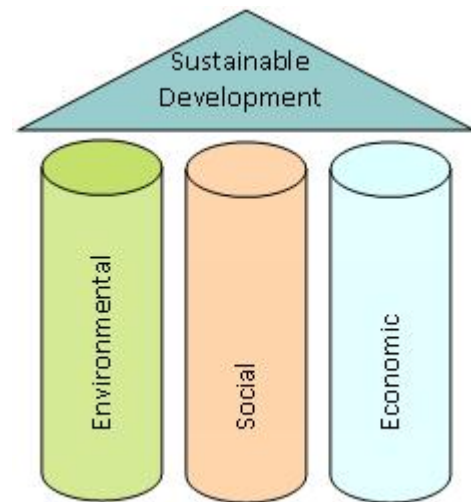


Figure 1: Three pillars model of sustainable development

### Three Pillars Model

The traditional definition of sustainable development is based on the ‘three pillars’ model (Figure 1). This model has been subject to criticism for two primary reasons. First, because it portrays society, the economy and the environment as being independent from one another, failing to acknowledge their inter-linkages and perpetuating a siloed approach to the three factors. Second, because the model represents the three pillars as of equal importance. This implies that trade-offs or compromises (for example substituting human-made capital with natural capital) between the pillars can always be made.<sup>6</sup> In addition, this model implies a static situation, rejecting the future thinking aspects of sustainable development. Following this criticism it has now become more acceptable to refer to the three aspects of sustainable development as ‘dimensions’, reflecting their interdependency.

### Overlapping Circles Model

Unlike the ‘pillars’ model, this depiction acknowledges the intersection of the social, economic and environmental dimensions

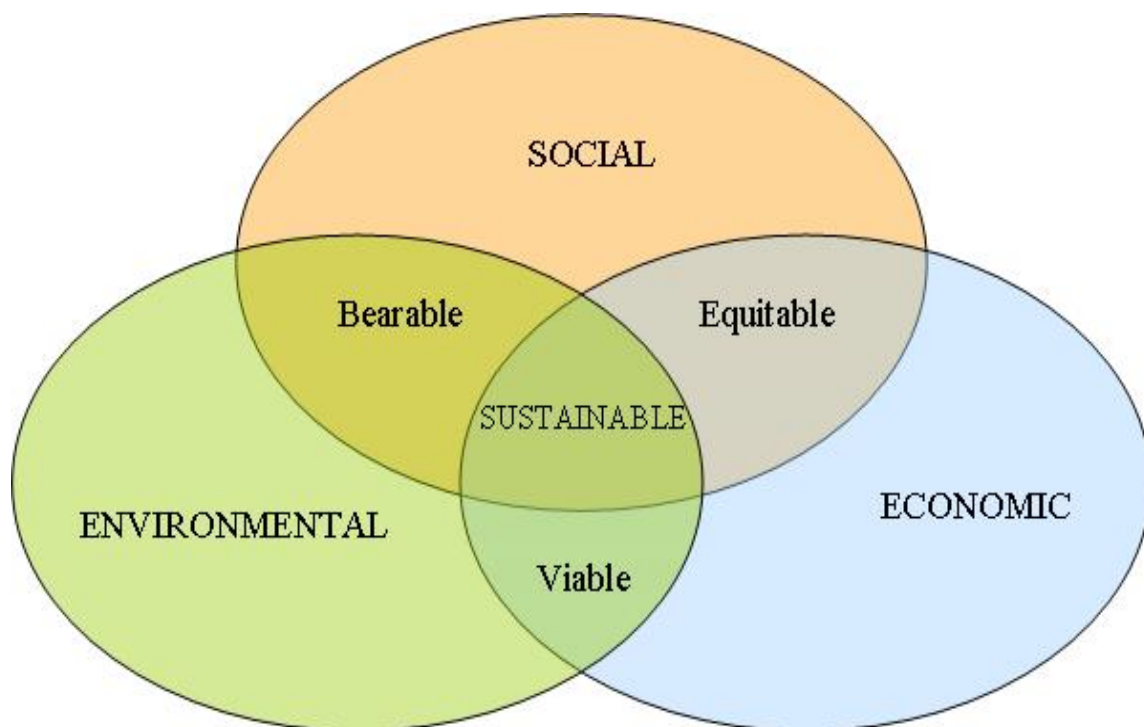
<sup>5</sup> Elkington, J., 1998. [Cannibals With Forks: The Triple Bottom Line of 21st Century Business](#), Conscientious Commerce New Society Publishers

<sup>6</sup> [The Future of Sustainability: Re-thinking Environment and Development in the Twenty-first Century](#), W.M. Adams, 2006



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**Figure 2).** This depiction also implies balance through perfectly overlapping circles. Some definitions suggest that sustainable development occurs only in the central part of these overlapping circles. However, this model has since been critiqued and largely discarded in contemporary debates, partly because the notion of balance implies a equal weighting of the three elements and partly because, although there are interlocking regions, the format of this model still suggests that the three dimensions can exist independently from each other. For example, the blue region representing the economy implies it can exist outside of society and the environment.



**Figure 2: Overlapping circles representation of sustainable development**

### **Strong Sustainability Nested Circles Model**

Strong sustainability is an idea that comes mainly from ecological economics. Different kinds of 'capital' are identified and measured, including natural, human, social, financial, physical and sometimes cultural capitals. Strong sustainability recognises that we cannot always exchange financial for natural capital; in other words, we cannot buy unlimited natural

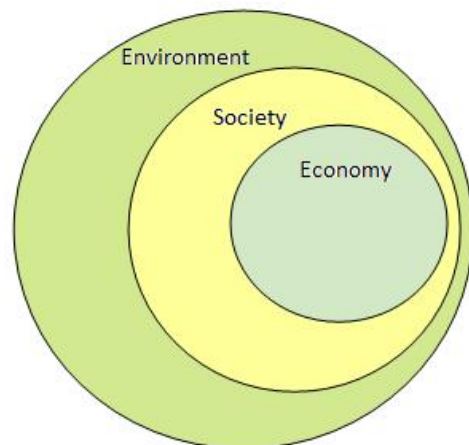
resources. This view has largely superseded the three pillars or overlapping circles perspective in sustainable development thinking.

The nested circle model illustrates how the three dimensions should not be seen as independent from each other, but rather as part of a system, all contributing to the same goal (Figure 3).

The economy exists within our society, and both are supported by the environment, which supplies natural resources and ecosystem services. This

emphasises that the environment, and the natural resources it provides, are the physical reality on which

all life depends and that the economy exists within and is controlled by society.<sup>7</sup> In other words, both economy and society are constrained by, and need to fit within, environmental limits.



**Figure 3: Nested circles model of sustainable development**

In some examples an additional circle is included to represent cultural, political or institutional capital, usually between the society and environment circles. This model has been criticised by those not supporting the notion of capital, since 'capital' implies measurement and valuation. Some of the different views of nature described in Section 1 preclude this idea of capital, since it is largely incompatible with notions of nature as culture; people as land.

### **Principles of Sustainable Development Implementation**

The models above demonstrate rather static relationships between elements. The UK still subscribes to the sustainable development principles accepted by DEFRA in 2005. In this model, a more dynamic and causative relationship between the different elements is depicted. Achieving a sustainable economy, promoting good governance and using sound science responsibly are actions that will promote the main aims of sustainable development – living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy and just society. This

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<sup>7</sup> [Let's Knock Down the Three Pillars of Sustainable Development](#), Victor Anderson, 2011

model is one that thus also acknowledges the important roles of governance and knowledge in implementation strategies.

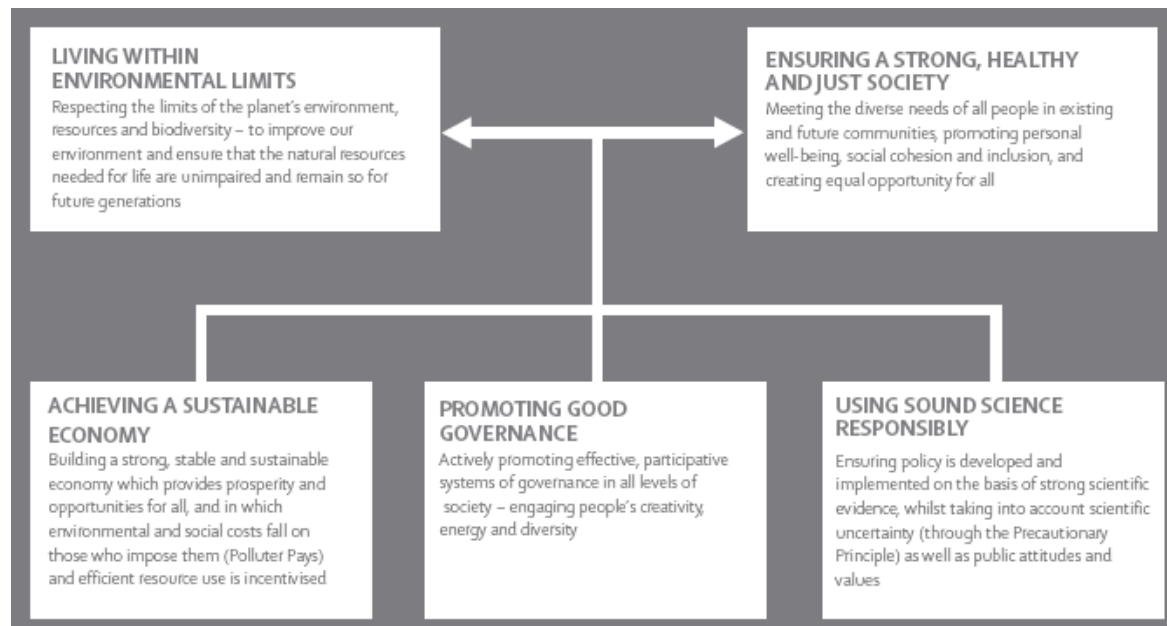


Figure 4: Sustainable Development principles adopted by DEFRA in UK.

## Prosperity and Wellbeing

The relationship between these three different elements, economics, society and environment, and the need to incorporate different views has been considered further. Some of the texts mentioned in Section 1 have continued to generate debate. Recognition of the limits to economic growth, growing social inequalities and discussion of the form of capitalism that is appropriate within our current socio-economic context led to the publication of “Prosperity without growth”, firstly as a report by the Sustainable Development Commission and then as a book by Tim Jackson. These ideas were explored by several nations, notably Norway and Canada, but gained little traction within a global society focused strongly on economic growth and then experiencing recession. The focus then shifted to the notion of ‘prosperity’ and useful debates on ‘wellbeing’. Wellbeing is a term with positive implications that denotes the general condition of an individual or group, and has also been used in reference to the natural environment (planetary wellbeing). It has many interpretations, usually incorporating elements of physical, mental, social and spiritual aspects. Philosophical theory views it in different ways and ethical theory generally supports

wellbeing for moral reasons. Psychologists and economists have explored tools to measure wellbeing, including happiness indices. The concept is often related to quality of life. Once people's basic needs are met, they can improve wellbeing, for example, by connecting, being active, taking notice (being mindful), continuing to learn and giving to others.<sup>8</sup>

Models incorporating some notion of wellbeing include the Oxfam 'doughnut' described in Section 1. The IUCN (1995)<sup>9</sup> produced an 'egg of wellbeing' (Figure 5) to assist in thinking about sustainability assessment.

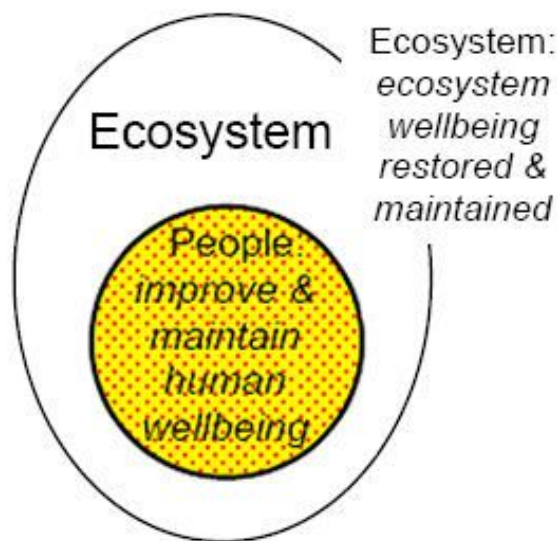


Figure 5: The Egg of Wellbeing

The Welsh Government set out seven wellbeing goals in their Welsh government's Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Bill to implement the sustainable development principles.

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<sup>8</sup> new economics foundation (2008) <http://www.neweconomics.org/publications/entry/five-ways-to-well-being-the-evidence>

<sup>9</sup> described more completely in Irene Guijt and Alex Moiseev with Robert Prescott-Allen (2001) *IUCN resource kit for sustainability assessment*. Available at [http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/resource\\_kit\\_a\\_eng.pdf](http://cmsdata.iucn.org/downloads/resource_kit_a_eng.pdf)



Figure 6: The Wales We Want Diagram

As highlighted by the above models, the challenge for humanity in the 21st century is to eradicate poverty and achieve prosperity and wellbeing for all within the means of the planet's limited natural resources, whilst acknowledging the needs of future generations. Recognising this, in the post-Rio+20 discussions there has been widespread acknowledgement that the SDGs must advance sustainable development in a holistic manner, by addressing and incorporating, in an integrated way, different dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages. A healthy and resilient environment, together with strong and resilient economies, underpins human development, as well as sustained and sustainable social and economic progress.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Progress report of the Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals: [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/941&Lang=E](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/67/941&Lang=E)

## **The Contemporary Rationale for Sustainable Development**

The concept of sustainable development has thus been around for many years and has been theorised in a number of ways. However, the concept remains valid and is undergoing a refocusing through the emergence of the SDGs. Firstly, sustainable development offers a framework within which to think positively about the future; to engage people individually and collectively to vision the world within which they wish to live and then develop strategies to pursue their vision. Such processes themselves engage democratic debate and support pluralism. Secondly, sustainable development offers a practical framework within which to recognise and tackle the ‘wicked problems’<sup>11</sup> of our time. The planetary and human crisis is outlined below.

## **The Planetary and Human Crisis**

The limits of the global environment have been described in various ways since the Rio Earth Summit: “carrying capacity”, “sustainable consumption and production”, “tipping points” or “footprints”. A paper by Rockström *et al.* in 2006 proposed a new approach to sustainability by identifying nine “planetary boundaries”, within which humanity should aim to operate safely.<sup>12</sup> The nine planetary boundaries include global biogeochemical cycles (nitrogen, phosphorus, carbon, and water); the major physical circulation systems of the planet (the climate, stratosphere, ocean systems); marine and terrestrial biodiversity; and anthropogenic forcing (aerosol loading and chemical pollution).

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<sup>11</sup> Rittel H.W.J. & Webber M.M. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4, 155-169.

<sup>12</sup> Rockström, J., W. Steffen, K. Noone, and co-authors. 2009. Planetary boundaries: exploring the safe operating space for humanity. *Ecology and Society* 14(2): 32. <http://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/>



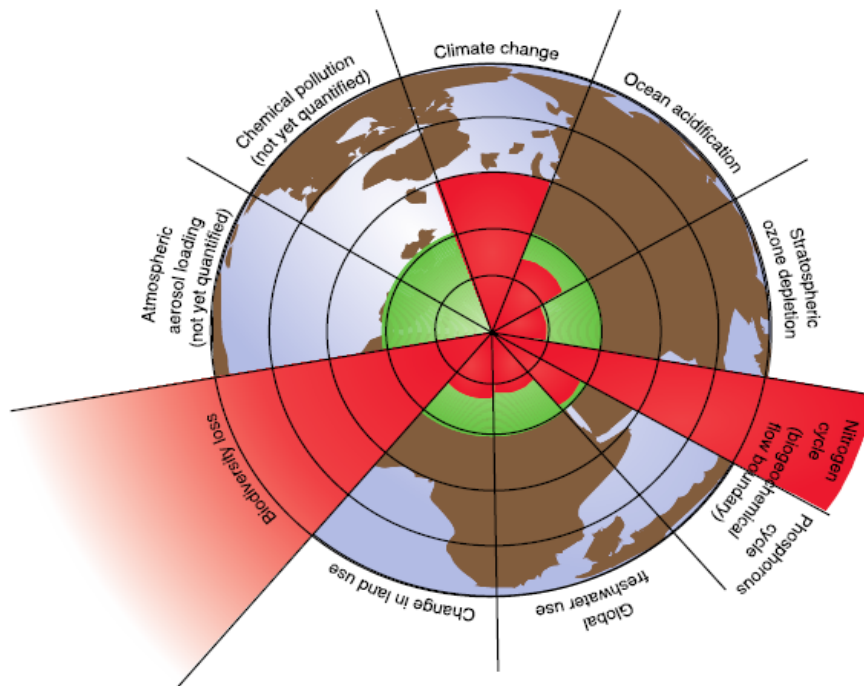


Figure 7: The nine planetary boundaries

Figure 7 shows each of the nine boundaries, with a green zone representing the ‘safe operating space for humanity’. The red areas show the current position within each boundary; biodiversity loss, nitrogen loading and global warming have already exceeded the safe space. There is a significant amount of uncertainty about how long we can stay in the red zone before irreparable damage is done, highlighting the need for urgent action. This perspective also shows how little we know about some processes, highlighting the need for additional knowledge, scientific and otherwise.

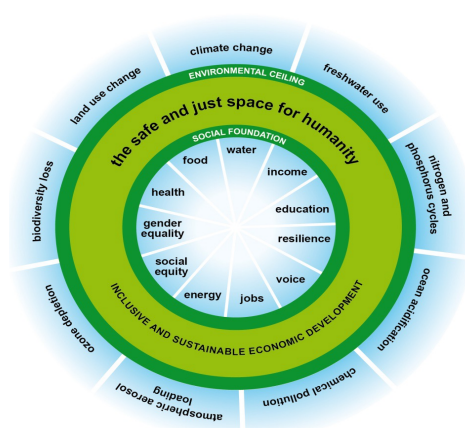
### Safe and just space for humanity

As well as the environmental crises we face, we continue to see increasing social inequality within and across nations. Although the MDGs achieved much, many social and development challenges remain. Taking the concept of planetary boundaries further, a discussion [paper](#) from Oxfam therefore set out a visual framework for sustainable development that combines environmental boundaries with the idea of boundaries for human welfare. Table 1 lists Rockström et al’s nine planetary boundaries together with Oxfam’s 11 social boundaries.

**Table 1: Social and Planetary Boundaries**

Planetary Boundaries	Social Boundaries
Climate change	Food security
Biodiversity loss	Income
Nitrogen and phosphorus cycles	Water and sanitation
Ozone depletion	Healthcare
Ocean acidification	Education
Freshwater use	Employment
Changes in land use	Energy
Particles in the atmosphere	Resilience
Chemical pollution	Gender equality
	Social equity
	Participation

Figure 8 safe and just operating space for humanity illustrates this concept,<sup>13</sup> through a closed system (nicknamed the ‘doughnut’) bounded by a social ‘floor’ (human rights) – below which human welfare reduces – and an environmental ‘ceiling’ – beyond which environmental degradation occurs. In between these two regions is a socially just space, with inclusive and sustainable development that is environmentally safe.<sup>14</sup>



**Figure 8: Safe and just operating space for humanity**

<sup>13</sup> Source: Oxfam. The dimensions of the environmental ceiling are based on Rockström et al (2009b)

<sup>14</sup> [A Safe and Just Space for Humanity](#) Oxfam Discussion Paper, 2012



### **A Working Definition of Sustainable Development**

Whilst different models of sustainable development are relevant within different contexts, it is useful to draw together some common aspects to offer a working definition of sustainable development to underpin the implementation of the SDGs in Scotland. We can see sustainable development as being:

- recognition of interdependence of human and planetary wellbeing
- pursued through good governance, strong science integrated with other knowledges plus a strong economy
- a process, enabling adaptive capacity and resilience to environmental and social change
- capturing a plurality of perspectives within an active dialogical debate and culturally and contextually specific
- recognition of complexity and the need for systems thinking to explore interlinking aspects
- future thinking

### **Critical Summary Points**

The history of the emergence of sustainable development and the different ways of thinking about the concept raise a number of interesting points for contemporary governance of sustainability. This section also explored ways of thinking about sustainable development and identified several key aspects of relevance to the implementation of the SDGs.

- 📍 Firstly, we have a concept initially suggested largely from the perspective of the global North, although attempts were made to located summits within developing nations and to engage countries from across the world.
- 📍 The notion was driven principally by environmentalists, at least initially. There remains much scepticism about 'sustainability' within development circles today, and a lack of understanding of concerns around culture, capitalism and equity among conservationists.

- ☞ The concept was proposed primarily as a compromise to address competing interests (especially environment ‘versus’ development) rather than as recognition of the interdependence of the different components included in sustainable development. Redclift <sup>15</sup> wrote of the ‘oxymoron’ of sustainable development, discussing how difficult it is to see points of interconnectedness rather than focusing on different goals.
- ☞ The concept sat uncomfortably amongst conflicted ideas of ‘progress’ and ‘nature’, giving a louder voice to those protesting the universal benefits of ‘progress’ and stimulating debates about ‘nature’ as wilderness to be preserved; a form of natural capital to be shared and converted to financial wealth; or nature as culture, place and identity. These different ways of seeing the world influence how we interpret the meaning of sustainable development and make it difficult to agree on principles whilst respecting the plurality of perspectives.
- ☞ The definition of the term ‘sustainable development’ was broad and all encompassing (said its proponents) or vague (said those frustrated by a lack of specificity).
- ☞ The three oft cited basic elements of sustainable development are the environment, society and economy. The relationship between these elements has been modelled in different ways, with the three pillars model largely superseded by a strong sustainability model in which environmental limits set boundaries for our economic and social activities, although as we will see, the SDGs framework does not fully embrace this change.
- ☞ There has been a shift from a view of balance between these three elements to seeing economics as a driver of the twin desired outcomes of living within environmental limits and a strong, healthy and just society. A debate on the role of the economy in sustainable development enabled discussion of what prosperity and wellbeing might mean and how we might prioritise these desired measured outcomes.

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<sup>15</sup> Redclift M. (2005). Sustainable development (1987-2005): An oxymoron comes of age. *Sustainable Development*, 13, 212-227.

- ☞ The role of good governance is recognised in several sustainable development models.
- ☞ We need knowledge with which to make decisions and implement sustainable development; whilst this is often cited as science, the Global South and the Third Sector remind us frequently of the need to include other forms of knowledge, including indigenous, practitioner and local knowledges. This includes learning (formal, informal and non-formal) and research for sustainability.
- ☞ These common models do not reflect some of the more recent ideas in international and community development, in which partnership approaches have recently been strongly supported. A shift to more autonomy and empowerment; and learning by doing in mixed groups is supported.
- ☞ The urgency for action remains. We are overstepping planetary boundaries and increasing social inequality within and across nations, meaning that we still need to find ways of remaining within a safe space for humanity.

### Section 3: The International Narrative of Sustainable Development and the SDGs

The emergence of the concept of sustainable development was supported through a large number of international agreements and summits, many moving beyond *thinking* about sustainable development to *action*. In this section, we offer a narrative and analysis of key international events leading to the emergence of the SDGs.

#### International Recognition of Sustainable Development

Although not explicitly named, the concept of ‘sustainable development’ was internationally recognised for the first time at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, or Stockholm Conference, held in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972.<sup>16</sup> The conference is seen as the starting point of global awareness on environmental issues.<sup>17,18</sup> As a matter of fact,

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<sup>16</sup> [Sustainable Development Commission: History of Sustainable Development](#)

<sup>17</sup> Baylis, J., Smith, S., 2005. [The Globalization of World Politics](#) (3rd ed). Oxford University Press. P.454-455

<sup>18</sup> Influential work pre-1970: Silent Spring (Rachel Carson, 1962), Tragedy of the Commons (Garret Hardin, 1968), the Blueprint for Survival (Ecologist magazine, 1972).

before the Stockholm Conference, there were only 10 countries with ministries of environment; by 1982 there were around 110.<sup>19</sup> The Stockholm declaration contained 26 principles on development and the environment, including the acknowledgement that poverty eradication is closely linked to environmental management.<sup>20</sup> The conference also established the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which aims to generate global action to protect the environment.

### **The Brundtland Report**

After the Stockholm conference, the integration of environmental concerns into national economic planning and decision-making was limited, despite on-going environmental issues, such as ozone depletion and global warming, and the increasing depletion of natural resources. By 1983, it was realised that limiting environmental degradation was essential for developing nations.<sup>21</sup>

“Our Common Future”, also known as the Brundtland Report<sup>22</sup>, was published in 1987 by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED or Brundtland Commission). The report aimed to address the issue of sustainable development, with a strong emphasis on the environment, following the findings of the Stockholm Conference. It was produced after 900 days of international discussions by government representatives, scientists, research institutes, industrialists, NGOs and civil society.

It was at the Brundtland Commission, 15 years after the Stockholm Conference, that the term ‘sustainable development’ became commonly accepted<sup>16</sup>. The Brundtland Commission recognised that economic growth was limited by environment factors, which were closely linked to human development such as poverty reduction, gender equality, and income. Their work, and the subsequent report, provided the basis for future UN processes, including the 1992 Earth Summit, the adoption of Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration and the establishment of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

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<sup>19</sup> Clark, R., & Timberlake, L. (1982). Stockholm plus ten. *Earthscan, London, UK*.

<sup>20</sup> [Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment](#)

<sup>21</sup> [UN Briefing Papers/The World Conferences: Developing Priorities for the 21st Century, 1997, 112 pp.](#)

<sup>22</sup> Named after the former Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland, who was Chair of the World Commission on Environment and Development: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/42/ares42-187.htm>

### Box 1. Mandate of the Brundtland Commission

The Brundtland Commission's mandate was to:

1. Re-examine the critical issues of environment and development and to formulate innovative, concrete, and realistic action proposals to deal with them;
2. Strengthen international cooperation on environment and development and assess and propose new forms of cooperation that can break out of existing patterns and influence policies and events in the direction of needed change; Re-examine the critical issues of environment and development and to formulate innovative, concrete, and realistic action proposals to deal with them;
3. Strengthen international cooperation on environment and development and assess and propose new forms of cooperation that can break out of existing patterns and influence policies and events in the direction of needed change;
4. Raise the level of understanding and commitment to action on the part of individuals, voluntary organizations, businesses, institutes, and governments". "The Commission focused its attention on the areas of population, food security, the loss of species and genetic resources, energy, industry, and human settlements - realizing that all of these are connected and cannot be treated in isolation one from another."

The Brundtland Commission definition of sustainable development below is the most frequently quoted. It highlights the need for intergenerational equity, with future generations having the same rights as the present ones:

*"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*<sup>23</sup>

This definition contains within it two key concepts as broken down in the report:

- The concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs imposed by the state of technology and social organisation.

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<sup>23</sup> [Our Common Future](#), Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), p.37

## Earth Summit

The UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, took place in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. It was the first international attempt to move towards a more sustainable pattern of development. Over 100 Heads of State and Government, and representatives from 178 national governments, as well as representatives from a variety of civil service organisations attended the conference. UNCED produced a number of international instruments that still today constitute the framework for sustainable development:

- **Agenda 21** – a voluntary action plan for governmental and intergovernmental organisations regarding sustainable development at international, national, regional and local levels
- **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development** – with its 27 principles to guide sustainable development
- **Rio Conventions** – three legally binding Conventions were opened for signature at the Summit: the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Both Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration were adopted by 178 Member States.

Agenda 21 highlights the importance of economic growth without compromising the environment. It contains detailed proposals for action in social and economic areas, and for conserving and managing natural resources.

Three UN bodies were created to ensure full support for the implementation of Agenda 21:

- The **UN Commission on Sustainable Development** – to support and encourage action by governments, business, industry and other non-governmental groups to bring about the social and economic changes needed for sustainable development;
- The **UN Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development** - to ensure effective system-wide cooperation and coordination in the follow-up to the Summit; and

- The **UN High-level Advisory Board on Sustainable Development**, to advise the Secretary-General and the UN Commission on issues relating to the implementation of Agenda 21.

The Rio declaration established 27 principles on sustainable development, known as the Rio Principles, to guide action on sustainable development.<sup>24</sup> The principles are listed in Table 2: The Rio Principles.

A review of the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Principles was conducted in the lead up to the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). The review found that, for the most part, limited or no progress has been made in the implementation of the Agenda 21 chapters and the Rio Principles.

**Table 2: The Rio Principles**

• <b>Principle 1:</b> Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development.
• <b>Principle 2:</b> States have the right to exploit their own resources and the responsibility to ensure that activities do not cause damage to the environment.
• <b>Principle 3:</b> Development must meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.
• <b>Principle 4:</b> Environmental protection will be an integral part of the development process.
• <b>Principle 5:</b> All States and people shall cooperate in the essential task of eradicating poverty.
• <b>Principle 6:</b> Developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable shall be given special priority.
• <b>Principle 7:</b> States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem.
• <b>Principle 8:</b> Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption should be reduced or eliminated.
• <b>Principle 9:</b> States should cooperate to strengthen endogenous capacity-building for sustainable development.
• <b>Principle 10:</b> Increased participation of all concerned citizens and appropriate access to information concerning the environment.
• <b>Principle 11:</b> States shall enact effective environmental legislation.
• <b>Principle 12:</b> Promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries.
• <b>Principle 13:</b> States shall develop national law regarding liability and compensation for the victims of pollution and other environmental damage.
• <b>Principle 14:</b> Discourage or prevent the relocation and transfer of any activities and substances that cause severe environmental degradation or are harmful to human health.
• <b>Principle 15:</b> Apply the precautionary approach according to State capabilities.
• <b>Principle 16:</b> Promote the internalization of environmental costs and the use of economic instruments, with due regard to the public interest.
• <b>Principle 17:</b> Environmental impact assessment shall be undertaken for proposed activities that are likely to have a significant adverse impact on the environment.
• <b>Principle 18:</b> States shall immediately notify other States of any natural disasters or emergencies likely to produce sudden harmful effects on the environment.
• <b>Principle 19:</b> States shall provide prior and timely notification and relevant information on activities that may have a significant adverse transboundary environmental effect.

<sup>24</sup> [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development](#)

- **Principle 20:** Women have a vital role in environmental management and development.
- **Principle 21:** Youth participation to forge a global partnership in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all.
- **Principle 22:** Participation of indigenous people and local communities and their identity, culture and interests supported.
- **Principle 23:** The environment and natural resources of people under oppression, domination and occupation shall be protected.
- **Principle 24:** States shall respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development, as necessary.
- **Principle 25:** Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.
- **Principle 26:** States shall resolve all their environmental disputes peacefully and by appropriate means in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.
- **Principle 27:** States and people shall cooperate in good faith and in a spirit of partnership in the fulfilment of the principles embodied in this Declaration and in the further development of international law in the field of sustainable development.

## World Summit on Sustainable Development

Ten years after Rio, in 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg to assess progress since the first Earth Summit. Among others, 191 national governments – plus UN agencies, financial institutions, business sector, civil society and subnational and local authorities – attended. The Johannesburg Summit delivered three key outcomes, split into two type of commitments:

### Type I: Commitments and agreements negotiated by governments

- The **Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development** was adopted at the conference, committing UN Member States to sustainable development. The Declaration reaffirms many of the principles of the Rio Declaration.
- The **Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI)** is a negotiated programme of action to guide government activities on sustainable development.<sup>25</sup>

### Type II: Voluntary Partnership Initiatives

The partnership initiatives are voluntary and non-binding collaborations, between governments, business or Civil Society.<sup>26</sup> The partnerships were designed as a means to help implement Agenda 21, particularly at the regional and local levels<sup>27</sup>. Type II partnerships were to be overseen by the United Nations Commission for Sustainable Development, to

<sup>25</sup> World Summit Web Site, Heinrich Boell Foundation: <http://www.worldsummit2002.org>

<sup>26</sup> [Johannesburg Summit 2002 - Information](#)

<sup>27</sup> [The World Summit on Sustainable Development: An Assessment](#), Tom Bigg, IIED



ensure that they continued to implement the goals agreed at Johannesburg. Sustainable Development in Practice

CIFAL Network was established in 2012 under Type II Voluntary Partnership Initiatives as an initiative to build Local Authorities capacity to implement the multi-faceted sustainability agenda

Today, sustainable development is no longer simply an academic notion. Many countries, provinces, cities and villages in both the global north and south, are already putting in place policies and programmes that integrate social development, economic growth, and environmental sustainability (otherwise known as ‘triple-win’ initiatives).

### Origins of the Sustainable Development Goals

*“Rio+20 has given us a new chance. It was not an end, but a new beginning—a milestone on an essential journey. It has given us a new set of tools. Now the work begins.”* UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon<sup>28</sup>

The idea to establish a universal set of SDGs originated during the preparatory process for the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20. However, their concept is based upon an existing set of global goals, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development – also referred to as Rio+20 or Earth Summit 2012, as a reference to the first conference held in Rio in 1992 – took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 2012.

The objectives of the Summit were:

- To **secure renewed political commitment** to sustainable development;
- To **assess progress** towards internationally agreed goals on sustainable development; and
- To address **new and emerging challenges**.

The Summit also focused on two specific themes:

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<sup>28</sup> [Opening remarks at press encounter following briefing of the General Assembly on Outcome of Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, June 2012](#)

- **Green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development**, which concentrated primarily on the intersection between environment and economy; and
- **Institutional framework for sustainable development**, which highlighted the need for strong governance structures at the local, national, regional and global levels; focused on the strengthening of institutions involved in the delivery of sustainable development, as well as the on integration of the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development across the UN system.

The Conference brought together more than 100 Heads of State and Government and saw unprecedented participation from civil society, the private sector and subnational and local authorities, with more than 50,000 people taking part in more than 3,000 official Rio+20 events, and with tens of millions more around the world connecting via social media. Consequently, Rio+20 can be seen as the most open and interactive UN summit in history. Global summits that bring together world leaders to try to establish a new development path for both people and planet are by no means an everyday occurrence. Expectations ahead of Rio+20 were therefore understandably high. Yet as the preparatory process for the summit progressed, the wide range of ambitious commitments many had hoped for failed to materialise. Many UN Member States appeared unwilling to take the bold steps necessary to bring about the systematic changes we need to reverse current trends in social inequalities, environmental degradation and economic instability. When an agreement was finally achieved in Rio de Janeiro, the consensus amongst many stakeholders was that content was not nearly strong or ambitious enough.

The outcomes of Rio+20, which for the most part represented the starting point of new processes rather than decisions on key issues and initiatives, were a contrast to the internationally legally binding global treaties and comprehensive blueprint for action on sustainable development, “Agenda 21”, agreed at the first Rio Earth Summit in 1992. However, Rio+20 took place in a very different world to the 1992 Summit, with international “failures”, such as the Copenhagen climate change talks, still fresh in the mind of countries. This lack of faith in multilateralism, in addition to preoccupations with new challenges such as the global financial crisis, saw many governments reluctant to invest time and resources

in another UN process. Paradoxically, Rio+20 represented a unique opportunity to address these interconnected challenges – something which civil society organisations and other stakeholders attempted to impress on governments throughout the conference process, albeit with mixed results.

Despite the political challenges – and the palpable disappointment of many stakeholders in the immediate aftermath of the Conference – Rio+20 did in fact deliver a number of important commitments. One of the most significant of these, and what can be seen as perhaps the greatest achievement Rio+20, was the agreement by UN Member States to launch a process to establish universal sustainable development goals.

### **The Evolution of the SDGs during the Rio+20 Process**

In July 2011, a High Level Dialogue on the Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development was held in Solo, Indonesia, hosted jointly by the Government of Indonesia and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). The objective of the Dialogue was to support the preparatory process for Rio+20 by providing a forum for delegates and invited experts to share views in an informal context. It was at this meeting that the Government of Colombia, supported by Guatemala, first put forward the proposal for SDGs. The Chair's summary text reflected the value of the idea, saying: "There was a significant interest on the discussion on the sustainable development goals." First to react to the idea of SDGs were participants of the 64th NGO Conference: Sustainable Societies – Responsive Citizens of the UN Department of Public Information (UN DPI) held in September 2011. The concept rallied strong support from civil society and other stakeholders. Also in September 2011, the Government of Colombia formally introduced its proposal for a set of universal SDGs to the Rio+20 preparatory process, during the Latin American and Caribbean Regional Preparatory Meeting.<sup>29</sup>

The proposal highlighted the need for concrete ways of grounding the political commitment to sustainable development, stating that the SDGs could: “translate the Green

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<sup>29</sup> Rio+20: Sustainable development goals: Proposal by the government of Colombia for consideration by the participating countries: [Note by the secretariat Colombia](#)

Economy/Sustainable Development debate into tangible goals, which would focus the broad debate at a practical level,” and “provide a logical sequence and structure to the [sustainable development] process launched almost 20 years ago.”

Throughout the Rio+20 preparatory process the concept of the SDGs gained increasing support from governments at all levels, civil society and the business sector alike and many recommendations on thematic areas that the SDGs could cover were made.

As Rio+20 approached, the SDGs were also endorsed by the 22-member UN High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, which was established by the UN Secretary-General to formulate a new blueprint for sustainable development and low-carbon prosperity. The Panel’s final report, *“Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing”*, released in January 2012, highlights the creation of a set of SDGs as a priority area for action and makes a number of recommendations on the framework and principles that should form the foundation of the goals.

The initial proposal from Colombia recommended that a suite of no more than 10 objectives or goals should be defined and agreed as a key outcome of the Rio+20. However, as the preparatory process progressed, it became apparent that reaching an agreement on the goals themselves was likely to prove too great a challenge for Rio+20 itself.

By April 2012, Colombia had gained additional support from Guatemala and the United Arab Emirates, and the three countries presented a joint concept note on the SDGs and the process to develop them. Recognising that reaching consensus on a set of SDGs at Rio+20 might prove difficult politically, in the time available and risk compromising Rio+20’s ability to come to an agreement, the proposal instead suggests that agreement could be reached on a preliminary, indicative set of SDGs or thematic areas, while the SDGs themselves should be defined by a separate, UN Member State-led process.

Support and advocacy by governments at all levels, civil society and other stakeholders throughout the Rio+20 process eventually led to agreement by UN Member States in the Summit outcome document to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental

process to develop a set of SDGs. This process was led by the UN General Assembly Open Working Group on SDGs.

**Table 3: Paragraph 248 from the Rio outcome document**

“We resolve to establish an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process on sustainable development goals that is open to all stakeholders, with a view to developing global sustainable development goals to be agreed by the General Assembly. An open working group shall be constituted no later than at the opening of the sixty-seventh session of the Assembly and shall comprise 30 representatives, nominated by Member States from the five United Nations regional groups, with the aim of achieving fair, equitable and balanced geographical representation. At the outset, this open working group will decide on its methods of work, including developing modalities to ensure the full involvement of relevant stakeholders and expertise from civil society, the scientific community and the United Nations system in its work, in order to provide a diversity of perspectives and experience. It will submit a report, to the Assembly at its sixty-eighth session, containing a proposal for sustainable development goals for consideration and appropriate action.”

The Rio+20 outcome document did not go as far as to define the themes that the goals should cover, simply stating that the SDGs should address and be focused on priority areas for the achievement of sustainable development, using the outcome document as a guide.

### **Philosophy and Aims of the SDGs**

*“SDGs can address the disconnect [between environmental concerns and human wellbeing and poverty eradication] by articulating complex development challenges.”* Paula Caballero Gómez, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Colombia<sup>30</sup>

In contrast to the MDGs, which primarily focused on the social aspects of development – the SDGs aimed to **“address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their inter-linkages.”**<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> [Why we need Sustainable Development Goals](#), Paula Caballero Gómez, Colombian ministry, May 2012

<sup>31</sup> Paragraph 246 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document

#### SDGs Principles

- Universally applicable
- Common but differentiated responsibilities
- Rights-based and people centred
- Equity
- Voluntary
- Comprehensive and integrated in nature
- Transparency and accountability

It was agreed at Rio+20 that SDGs must be **action-oriented, concise, easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable** to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.

The Rio+20 Outcome document also stated that the SDGs should aim to:

- Be a useful tool for pursuing focused and coherent action on sustainable development;
- Contribute to the full implementation of the outcomes of all major summits in the economic, social and environmental fields;
- Serve as a driver for implementation and mainstreaming of sustainable development in the United Nations system as a whole.
- Build upon commitments already made.
- Not divert focus or effort from the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

In order to achieve the systemic and transformational change required, the SDGs were meant to focus not only on the desirable outcomes but also the root causes of problems or underlying barriers, and address the key drivers of sustainable development.<sup>32</sup>

#### Adoption of the SDGS

*“The stars are aligned for the world to take historic action to transform lives and protect the planet”* – Ban Ki Moon

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<sup>32</sup> [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1813Summary\\_OWG2\\_final.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1813Summary_OWG2_final.pdf)

When the SDGs process was established, a separate set of UN consultations were already underway to consider and make recommendations on the development framework, that was to replace the MDGs at end of 2015. This was known as the Post-MDGs track. Several high-level and expert panels and stakeholder consultations have been established to gather inputs and recommendations on this post MDGs framework. Over one million joined the consultation/campaign The World We Want.

In September 2013, the international community witnessed a historic moment during the General Assembly when Member States recognised the similar aims of these two processes and in order to avoid duplication and facilitate participation, decided to bring together the two tracks and to work towards a single framework and a single set of global goals.

The UN established a Secretariat to facilitate the coordination and coherence across the two work streams, while each of them remained very independent. UN System Task-Team, gathered more than 60 UN agencies and supported the process by generating briefing papers, providing analytical thinking and expertise.

The goals were finally adopted in September 2015 as the result of a three-year process involving UN Member States, 83 national surveys engaging over 7 million people, and thousands of actors from the international community making it the biggest consultation in UN history.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development included 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which set out quantitative objectives across the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development – all to be achieved by 2030. The goals provide a framework for shared action “for people, planet and prosperity,” to be implemented by “all countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership.”

As articulated in the 2030 Agenda document, “never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda.” 169 targets accompany the 17 goals and set out quantitative and qualitative objectives for the next 15 years. These 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.”

A set of indicators and a monitoring framework accompanies the goals. The indicators are defined by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which will present its recommendations to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016. Between now and 2030, the SDGs aim to end poverty and hunger once and for all; to fight inequalities; to ensure the lasting protection of the planet; and to create conditions for a strong economy and shared prosperity.

The critical question to be addressed is how we balance these competing objectives. It is clear that we cannot afford an approach based on ever-increasing levels of extraction, production and consumption. An increasing number of civic society and academic voices advocate a systemic shift towards sustainable lifestyles while decreasing the use of resources and waste emissions.

This is echoed by the Pope’s Encyclical on climate change which argues that *“we have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them”*.

The SDGs – like every form of international agreement – are the result of an uneasy compromise. They nevertheless represent a moment in history, described by many as a once in a generation opportunity for transformational change. The key challenge is how to engage the public in support of a complex agenda consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets. The 5P – people, planet, peace, prosperity and partnership- framework developed by the UN General Secretary capture the broad scope of the agenda.

As with all intergovernmental agreements, the success of these goals will be determined by the willingness of governments to implement them. Scotland officially endorsed the SDGs when Nicola Sturgeon declared: *“the SDG agenda set by the UN tackles some of the world’s*



*greatest problems and offers a vision the Scottish people share. Accordingly, the Government is actively promoting a vertical integration system that aims to align the UN SDG's with its National Performance Framework, under which all services and local policies are to be framed".* At a local level, the Moray Council has recently reviewed the targets and priorities in its 10-year plan to ensure they are aligned with the SDGs and the National Framework, the first local authority to do so.

Before embarking on SDG implementation, countries are taking stock of where their country, sector, region, or city stands with regards to achieving all 17 goals. For J Sachs (2016) a quick 'temperature check' of the key dimensions of sustainable development, including economic development, social inclusion, and sustainable environmental management, can help develop a shared understanding of priorities for implementation. In this way, national and local government actors and other key stakeholders can commence a dialogue on implementation of the SDGs with a common understanding of current conditions and the business-as-usual (BAU) trajectory.

In the years ahead, the UN, governments and NGOs must join together in the race to end world poverty. Reaching agreement on the SDGs is just the first lap. With around 1 billion people still living on less than \$1.25 a day and more than 800 million people without enough food to eat, we have a marathon to run.

### **What's in a name?**

There is confusion over the name of this new agenda and set of international targets, with the original title of 'Sustainable Development Goals' diluted somewhat by the term 'Global Goals', or sometimes 'Global Goals for Sustainable Development'. We strongly propose the use of the term 'Sustainable Development Goals' for the following reasons.

When the Sustainable Development Goals were ratified by the UN in September 2015, they were accepted with that name after a long process of consultation and negotiation with member states, civil society groups and other partners. This process eventually produced a set of negotiated aspirations to which member states and other organisations could aim. These aspirations were framed as goals within the final agreed document: *Transforming our*

*world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The goals comprise a relatively short section within this wider agenda. Retaining the name of Sustainable Development Goals is thus for some stakeholders more representative of the final agreed agenda and invites consideration and engagement of our visions for the future; going beyond the goals, targets and indicators action element, recognising the complexity of the issues we face<sup>33</sup>.

The name partly signified a change from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals. One of the success criteria for the Millennium Development Goals was the integration of these goals into country processes and targets. The term Sustainable Development Goal is expected to enable and empower different countries to adopt and implement this agenda according to their own priorities and processes. There is concern expressed, especially from the global south, about the adoption of 'global goals' that could be seen as imposed by the international community and not owned by national governments and their other institutions (in Africa, for example<sup>34</sup>, also from South America). The term Sustainable Development Goals thus more easily permits ownership within national contexts and the embedding of their pursuit within existing governance procedures. Whilst it is logical to see the terms 'National Sustainable Development Goals' or 'Local Sustainable Development Goals' employed, it is rather silly to consider the 'Local Global Goals'.

The term 'Global Goals' appears to have been promoted in a campaign, Project Everyone<sup>35</sup>, to generate greater public awareness and citizen engagement. This campaign was supported under the umbrella of the United Nations Development Group but developed as an independent campaign without support of all member states. Whilst it is commendable, and indeed necessary, to inform and inspire all citizens to act towards these aspirations, the goals will require formal governmental uptake for us to make significant progress in this wider agenda. The simplification of the name for marketing reasons risks losing the focus of Agenda 2030; a focus on 'development' and on 'sustainability'.

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<sup>33</sup> see comment for example of civil society response to both the change of name post-negotiation and the concern around over-simplification <http://worldmerit.org/blogs/the-un-and-sustainable-development-goals-by-alicia-wallace.aspx>

<sup>34</sup> <https://africapplatform.org/news/why-this-is-sustainable-development-not-global-goals/>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.project-everyone.org>

The term ‘Sustainable Development Goals’ reminds us of the interconnectedness of planetary and human wellbeing. It places sustainability at the heart of the diverse member states aspirations for the future. This is not a form of sustainable development that focuses only on human aspects (as did the Millennium Development Goals), nor is it focused only on environmental concerns. Rather, it attempts to link action on establishing human dignity and security with action on addressing major environmental challenges that exacerbate social inequalities, poverty and insecurity. Hence this 2030 transformational agenda permits us to concurrently address climate change and energy; poverty and the right to work for all; health and water and sanitation; biodiversity and hunger.

There has been suggestion that the term Global Goals was preferred by business interests wishing to avoid perceived constraints of sustainability values. Indeed, there is a potential paradox between economic growth pursued in the way that developed nations have achieved it and the future sustainable management of natural resources<sup>3637</sup>. The term Sustainable Development Goals offers the potential for less developed nations to avoid the ‘grow now, and clean up later’ policies of the Industrial Revolution; they are choosing instead to make the rational choice to develop more cleanly.

Some commentators lament the confusion already instilled by the use of different names for what is a challenging and complex transformational agenda. We thus propose the use of the original, negotiated, regionally preferred, more specific, meaningful name and hence refer throughout this report to the Sustainable Development Goals – henceforth abbreviated as SDGs.

## **International Context**

The SDGs have been supported within a changing world, with many of the planetary and human challenges outlined in Section 2. This context influences the way that the

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<sup>36</sup> see commentator <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2015/08/global-poverty-climate-change-sdgs/> but also additional debates on prosperity and wellbeing

<sup>37</sup> Teng Teng and Ding Yifan (ed) Environment and Development Vol 1, Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems, UNESCO

international community and nation states will take forward the implementation of the SDGs.

A growing acceptance of the severity of climate change led to agreements such as the Kyoto protocol, an international agreement, developed in 1997 and coming into force in 2005, linked to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change<sup>38</sup>, which commits parties to binding carbon emission reduction targets. This has since been updated in several ways, including the Doha Amendment of 2012<sup>39</sup> and most recently the COP21 agreement in Paris in 2015<sup>40</sup> at which, incredibly, 195 countries signed up to agreements. However, some people have criticised this agreement for being too little, too late. Still, the statutory requirements to address climate change will ensure that some action is taken in this area and may influence the distribution of resources made available to address the SDGs.

The nature of international development has shifted. A focus on imported 'expert knowledge' changed to an acceptance of the need for local knowledge and engagement with local communities as well as national governments. However, some of the expectations around approaches such as community based natural resource management failed to be realised, partly because of short term funding cycles and a lack of recognition of complex institutional and power relationships in some circumstances. The focus is now more on multi-actor capacity building and development of partnerships and trade opportunities. This context offers the possibility for different modes of development 'aid' as collaboration.

Economic instability has caused a focus on global and regional recessions. Whilst neoliberalism continues to dominate financial discourse, there are growing debates on alternative forms of capitalism, localism and the use of measures such as prosperity, wellbeing and happiness, as discussed in Section 2, to enable the exploration of new meanings of 'decent work and economic growth' (SDG8) and 'reduced inequalities' (SDG10) across global North and South, for example.

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<sup>38</sup> <http://unfccc.int/2860.php>

<sup>39</sup> [http://unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol/doha\\_amendment/items/7362.php](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/doha_amendment/items/7362.php)

<sup>40</sup> <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/l09r01.pdf>

Complex convergences of climate change, economic instability and political conflict are causing high levels of migration. Political dialogue is becoming polarised to right and left in response. The emphasis on peace, conflict resolution and eradication of corruption will help establish a framework within which the SDGs can be pursued.

This international context presents a promising background to the implementation of the ambitious international SDGs, because the changing context demands action and the shift towards mutually learning, partnership modes of collaboration creates a fertile landscape within which to begin.

### **Critical Summary**

- 🌐 The SDGs represent a return to a holistic perspective of sustainable development, recognising the interdependence of a flourishing society and healthy environment. However, the underpinning theory of balance across the elements of economy, environment and society does not acknowledge later thinking on strong sustainability. It remains to be seen how the 5P framework will support the implementation of the SDGs. However, this framework aligns better with contemporary models of sustainable development. People, Planet and Prosperity can be interpreted as society, environment and economy, whilst Peace represents good governance and reduction of conflict and corruption and Partnership supports working across and with different sectors and groups.
- 🌐 The complexity across areas and large number of interlinked goals represent a challenge for implementation but is advantageous in permitting a systems approach. The universality of the SDGs will be interpreted differently within each country.
- 🌐 International development approaches will be influenced, with social development goals interlinked with environmental goals.
- 🌐 It is likely that not all SDGs will be equal. International binding treaties and national legislation may lead to prioritisation of some goals over others. For example, action on climate change is already agreed. Whilst there is a shift from mitigation to adaptation in practice, statutory requirements for mitigation remain.

- ☞ The implementation of the SDGs requires a strong economy but not a strategy that prioritises economy above other factors. The models of sustainable development in Section 3 clearly indicated the role of economy as a driver towards prosperity and wellbeing rather than the ultimate goal in itself. Not adhering to sustainable development action is likely to worsen the global economic context (e.g. see the Stern report on the economic consequences of not addressing climate change) and social inequality (e.g. the poor are more vulnerable to the consequences of climate change).
- ☞ Implementation of the SDGs will require continued global, national and local conversations. Developing and maintaining dynamic, constructive and collaborative partnerships that are inclusive of all stakeholders will be a challenge at all levels.

#### **Section 4: Scotland and the SDGs**

In this section we offer the narrative of events leading to the current interest in the SDGs in Scotland. We begin by briefly discussing how Scotland has engaged with the concept of sustainable development. We then review the role of Scotland in the implementation of the MDGs and finally describe and analyse the response in Scotland to the emergence of the SDGs.

#### **Current Policy Status of Sustainable Development**

As we saw in Section 2, Scotland has a longstanding interest in aspects of sustainability. The Sustainable Development Commission was very active more recently in promoting a holistic and practical approach to sustainable development in Scotland (and UK) until it closed in 2011. However, Scotland has still made significant advances in some policy areas. Some examples include:

- ☞ Climate change legislation, including one of the most ambitious national targets set in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act (2009). In order to support this, the Scottish Government has promoted community initiatives and behaviour change to reduce carbon emissions and has largely supported renewable energy initiatives where possible within a devolved context.
- ☞ Land reform legislation, including the Community Empowerment Bill, helping to address social inequalities, facilitate community and support a sense of place.

- 🌀 Learning for sustainability, including implementation of recommendations from the One Planet Schools group and a performance in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that earned us global recognition.

In addition, Scotland has re-opened questions of wilderness and re-wilding, pursued sustainable tourism options, strengthened local food businesses and has tackled social inequalities via a focus on attainment and support of education. New national parks have been proclaimed and marine conservation has been pursued. Our poor health record, particularly in deprived areas, is receiving attention via a slew of initiatives, some government funded and some emerging from other sources. With a nod to Geddes' focus on Place-Work-Folk, there has been a reinforcement of links between natural and cultural heritage and support of traditional roles and activities, including arts and craft but also employment such as the crofter, gamekeeper and fisherman.

The past decade has led to a rise in political consciousness in Scotland, with high levels of political engagement represented in the recent independence referendum. Regardless of which way people wished to vote, they discussed visions for the future of Scotland with vigour and passion. Questions over national identity arose, with some polarisation of political views in this area. This democratic flowering and the search for nationhood bode well for a time to reflect back and also plan for the future.

Despite this related and commendable progress, there has been a dispersal of focus on sustainable development itself. There is now a potentially paradoxical emphasis on 'sustainable economic growth', linking this to climate change commitments particularly through the low carbon economy.

For example, the Scottish Government website in 2014 suggested that:

*"Sustainable development is integral to the Scottish Government's overall purpose - to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country, with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish, through increasing sustainable economic growth.*

*For Scotland we are delivering this through our work supporting Scotland's transformation to a low carbon economy."*

In the UK more widely, DEFRA still promotes the sustainable development principles and framework shown in Section 3. However, there has been a tendency to portray economic growth as the primary route to sustainability. The UK sustainable development vision for 2011 stated:

*“This means making the necessary decisions now to realise our vision of stimulating economic growth and tackling the deficit, maximising wellbeing and protecting our environment, without negatively impacting on the ability of future generations to do the same. These are difficult times and tough decisions need to be made.....”* (UK Government website 2014)

### **Sustainable Development in Policy within EU**

In the EU, the term sustainable development has been used less in recent years, with the last major review of sustainable development strategy being in 2009. There has been an attempt to mainstream sustainable development into different sectors, with an emphasis on climate change, resource efficiency and other areas such as air pollution.

*“In particular, the EU has taken the lead in the fight against climate change and the promotion of a low-carbon economy.”*(EU website 2014)

Hence in recent policy in the EU, UK and Scotland we have seen a lack of focus on sustainable development itself. In Europe there has been an attempt to mainstream relevant issues and focus on those. In UK and Scotland the economy has dominated policy objectives under sustainable development, with a focus on delivery through the low carbon or green economy. This trend does not support the three pillars model, less the strong sustainability model of sustainable development discussed in Section 3. It is clearly timely to revisit sustainable development principles nationally as well as in our relationships with other countries.

### **Scotland and the MDGs**

Scotland has been very active during the MDGs period as stated by its 2008 International Framework document: “Scottish Ministers are committed to advancing Scotland's place in the world as a responsible nation by building mutually beneficial links with other countries... As part of [its] International Framework, Scotland has a distinctive contribution to make in its work with developing countries recognising our global responsibility to work together to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)”.



This has been demonstrated by £9M p.a. of International Development Fund distributed to 7 Priority Countries: Malawi, Zambia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Pakistan, Bangladesh and 3 states in India and £6M dedicated to Climate Justice Fund.

Internationally the convergence of the two tracks within the Post-2015 discussion encouraged the integration of the sustainability and international development communities. This dialogue between the two communities has also taken place in Scotland, marked by a series of collaborations, starting as early as September 2013 during NIDOS AGM when Minister Humza Yousaf for Europe and External Affairs announced the establishment of a Scottish Working Group on Post-2015 with membership of both sustainability and international development organisations plus Scottish and UK Government and UN representation.

#### **Purposes of the Post 2015 Working Group**

To provide a forum for the Scottish Voice on the Post 2015 Agenda:

- bringing sectors together and exchanging information;
- discussing and influencing the Post 2015 Agenda

Under the auspices of the Post 2015 Working Group over 25 events took place between April 2014 and March 2016, raising awareness and marking every stage of the debates of the Post-2015 Agenda and engaging over 400 organisations from the public, private, academic and third sectors. Furthermore discussions between Scottish Government departments are taking place seeking the vertical integration between the 17 SDGs and the National Performance Framework presently being revised.

How to build coherent plans of action between the two agendas: domestic and international, development and sustainability remains the great challenge ahead of Scotland.

## Critical Summary Points

- Scotland has ambitious climate change legislation and has made progress in some areas of sustainable development, being recognised as a world leader in its support of community responses to climate change, land reform and learning for sustainability, for example.
- Linkages between natural and cultural heritages reflect historical strengths as well as promoting contemporary development options.
- The renewed political consciousness in Scotland offers an excellent opportunity to reflect back on our history, culture and land whilst developing collective visions for the future.
- Recent policy in Scotland has promoted economic activity above other areas, without explicitly addressing how a strong economy can promote the goals of a healthy society and environment; this focus does not sit easily with models of sustainable development discussed earlier.
- The focus on a low carbon economy aligns with an emphasis on climate change response, offering an opportunity to deepen this focus and link it to other Goal areas.
- Ongoing consultation by Scotland's International Development team will influence future activities.
- The Post-15 Working Group is a cross sectoral group attempting to integrate international development and sustainability agendas within Scotland and to explore how to support the SDG implementation.
- Whilst Government is mapping against the National Performance Framework, the third sector is demonstrating interest and has already begun to consider how to engage. A challenge is to develop constructive yet open partnership means to enable collaboration whilst also permitting non-Government stakeholders to hold Government to account.

## **Section 5: A Call to Action: Implementing the SDGs in Scotland**

In this report we have documented the historical roots of the concept of sustainable development and the ways in which this concept links to current context in Scotland. We have followed the shift from the three pillars model of sustainable development to ones of strong sustainability and wellbeing. We have tried to emphasise the positive potential for sustainable development to permit multiple visions of the future to be imagined, explored and pursued. At the same time, the concept offers a pathway by which we address the very real planetary and human crises of our time, averting disempowering fear and apocalyptic outcomes. We have seen how the international 2030 Agenda supports the current direction taken in Scotland on linking natural and cultural heritage, promoting democratic debate, supporting attainment and enabling collaboration and partnership.

Within Scotland, we now need to see a sprouting of ideas, a flowering of strategies and harvesting of outcomes from the implementation of the SDGs. This will require the engagement of and creativity within each sector and across all areas of sustainability interest as outlined by the SDGs. We envisage that much of this action will be embedded within existing strategies, coalitions and groups.

We hope that in this way the SDGs and Agenda 2030 will catalyse action for the benefit of Scotland and the wider world. This agenda chimes well with the reinvigorated political consciousness present in Scotland over the last few years. It might be said that Scotland is coming of age, and this presents an opportunity for her to thrive as a partner within a community of nations striving for sustainability.

In practical terms, this means that the evolution of the Post 15 group needs to be continued, with mechanisms to engage the private sector and facilitate integration within the wider public sector needed. The Third Sector is mobilising around this revitalised and complex set of priorities with the development of Communities of Interest but will require some resource and support to maintain this focus. Debate on the extent to which emphasis is retained within Scotland or through international partnerships is required. A strategy to tackle SDGs and measure progress through indicators at a Scottish and UK level is needed. A

platform for public discussion, engagement and reflection is desirable. Further thinking about models of sustainable development that underpin our implementation strategy is demanded, by engaging academic and other groups within and beyond our borders. It is critical that we mobilise concern around social justice as well as environmental conservation, in line with the perspectives and actions that preceded today's views on sustainable development. These actions will make our first few years busy, but in pursuing the SDG aims, we can help to fulfil our own goals of making Scotland wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safer and stronger and greener.

### **10 ideas for the implementation of SDGs in Scotland**

We offer some ideas to assist this journey.

1. **Education** (SDG 4) underpins all of the other SDGs. Through learning for sustainability, people and groups can be engaged, informed and inspired to engage in sustainability action. Scotland is a recognised world leader in this area, having achieved significant progress over the recent UN Decade of Action in Education for Sustainable Development and now having an established UN Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development (Learning for Sustainability Scotland). Engaging this network organisation could help deepen learning and democratic participation across formal (school, university college), informal (community, business) and non-formal (media, culture) contexts. However, education is also a route to enable people to generally fulfil their potential and can be employed to tackle attainment and inequalities. Maintaining and strengthening aspects of education in Scotland will be essential: Curriculum for Excellence, outdoor learning, global citizenship, education for sustainable development, for example.
2. The **responsible use of sound science** is a key driver of sustainable development and also underpins the other SDGs. Scholarship that produces and disseminates knowledge for immediate and eventual implementation will be essential not just in the outcome of **knowledge** but in the process, linking to the education SDG as described above. Such scholarship should encourage critical reflection and analysis as well as being solution focused. Sustainability research is often interdisciplinary, participatory, linking theory to

practice and using systems thinking or complexity concepts; typical of mode II or 'post-normal science'. Supporting access to and work within our universities and other research institutes in Scotland and in collaboration with international partners is thus critical. However, integrating academic, local, practitioner and indigenous knowledges is also important.

3. The SDGs will only be met through extensive and effective **partnerships**. Collaborative initiatives can be developed within sectors or topic areas, within and across countries. It is possible that the successor to the Post-15 group could facilitate the partnership goals (SDG 17) for Scotland. However, partnerships will only function well if parties have interest, responsibility and agency in relation to particular sectors or topics. Partnerships require time to develop relationships and trust and to pursue democratic and participatory processes. They often need resources to enable them to fulfil their goals. Existing coalitions and networks can be mobilized within and across nations but will need to be nurtured and formally recognized.
4. **SDG indicators** are the last and critical missing piece of the 2030 Agenda. The Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs), established by the UN Statistical Commission, has been tasked to develop the first indicator set for the Post-2015 development agenda at the global level, and to support its implementation. Member States have pledged that no one would be left behind. In order to ensure that, the IAEG-SDG Members have agreed that indicators should cover the specific groups of population and other disaggregation elements specified in the targets. Furthermore, the Statistical Commission has created a mechanism through a High-level Group, which will provide strategic guidance to capacity building efforts and which will support countries with implementation of the SDG indicators. The challenge ahead of the Statistical Commission is to distinguish between indicators that are valuable for national governments and indicators that are valuable for local governments. The emergence of these indicators will influence what and how we have to measure progress against the SDGs in Scotland.

5. **Good governance** is an essential driver of sustainable development and a key component of the 5Ps framework to support the implementation of the SDGs. Multi-level governance will have to work across scales and achieve vertical integration from community to regional (local authority) to national to international levels. Scotland already has a National Performance Framework and a system of reporting onto which SDG action and reporting can map.
6. Scotland has recognized and supported **community** as an aspiration of and also route towards sustainability, and continued support of this area will underpin progress in SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and all other SDGs. Communities play a key role in the global South but can also be critical in multi-level governance in Global North and to enable grassroots, dynamic, value based responses to sustainability challenges. The Community Empowerment Bill in Scotland will assist communities to address some social inequalities, strengthen resilience and reinforce connection between people and place. However, communities may also be heterogeneous, conflicted and stifle innovation, so this concept should be nurtured to catalyse possible community participation and impacts.
7. The private sector plays an important role in pursuit of the SDGs; not only SDGs 8 (decent work and economic growth) and 9 (infrastructure and innovation) but in many of the mechanisms proposed to address international development and regulate or incentivize behaviours to reduce carbon emissions and other environmental impacts. Linking **business** to community initiatives offers opportunity through growing economic social enterprise, cooperatives, crowd sharing and local trading to support additional means of providing services and outputs.
8. Whilst economic growth is supported within the SDGs, in the global North there is potential to explore further what '**sustainable economic growth**' might comprise. A focus on the low carbon economy or green economy is one way to harness innovation and also achieve other SDGs. The support and pursuit of zero waste and the circular economy are examples of how we can achieve economic outcomes whilst reducing resource use and carbon emissions.

9. Building coherent plans of action between the two agendas: ***domestic and international***, remains the great challenge ahead of Scotland. Although international development is not fully devolved within UK, Scotland has an international development group who maintain longstanding relationships with specific countries. This approach seems likely to produce the greatest progress across goals, but linking domestic and international partners will be challenging.
10. ***Young people*** are crucial civil society actors and implementers of the SDG integrated agenda. The current young people will mature in the next 15 years, the period covered by the SDGs. They will be the generation that will experience the impact of the success or failure of the SDGs. Therefore, SDG implementation should be inclusive and responsive to the needs of the youth. Young Scot in partnership with CIFAL Scotland launched a campaign **SDGs Call- A Thriving Planet Leaves No One Behind** with 17 interactive online SDG activities over 3 months with links on how to get involved. 4,118 young people completed the SDG activities, 17,883 campaign page views 496 Re-Tweets, Comments, Shares & Mentions equating to 63,128 impressions, making the campaign a success in youth engagement. This momentum should be continued through supporting relevant initiatives within schools and other organisations in Scotland.