



By endorsing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, the world community reaffirmed its commitment to Sustainable Development. Through this Agenda, 193 member states pledged to ensure sustained and inclusive economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection, and to do so in partnership and peace.

The 2030 Agenda is universal, transformative and rights-based. It is an ambitious plan of action for countries, the UN system, and all other actors. The Agenda is the most comprehensive blueprint to date for eliminating extreme poverty, reducing inequality, and protecting the planet. The Agenda goes beyond rhetoric and lays down a concrete call to action for people, planet and prosperity. It encourages us to take bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path.

How did we get here?

Gaining momentum since the 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment all the way to the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Summit, the 2030 Agenda is a culmination of more than four decades of multilateral dialogue and debate on tackling environmental, social and economic challenges faced by the world community. Adopted as a result of extensive negotiations among member states, the accountability for the implementation of the Agenda primarily rests with national governments.

Core Principles Underpinning the Agenda

The 2030 Agenda embodies the following core principles:

Universality

The 2030 Agenda is universal in scope and commits all countries, irrespective of their income levels and development status, to contribute towards a comprehensive effort towards sustainable development. The Agenda is applicable in all countries, in all contexts and at all times.

Leaving no one behind

The 2030 Agenda seeks to benefit all people and commits to leave no one behind by reaching out to all people in need and deprivation, wherever they are, in a manner which targets their specific challenges and vulnerabilities. This generates an unprecedented demand for local and disaggregated data to analyse outcomes and track progress.

Interconnectedness and Indivisibility

The 2030 Agenda rests on the interconnected and indivisible nature of its 17 SDGs. It is crucial that all entities responsible for the implementation of SDGs treat them in their entirety instead of approaching them as a menu list of individual goals from which they pick and choose.

Inclusiveness

The 2030 Agenda calls for the participation of all segments of society, irrespective of their race, gender, ethnicity and identity to contribute to its implementation.

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

The 2030 Agenda calls for establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of SDGs in all countries.

Dimensions of the New Agenda

At the heart of the 2030 Agenda are five critical dimensions: **people, prosperity, planet, partnership and peace**, also known as the 5Ps. Traditionally, viewed through the lens of three core elements: social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental protection, the concept of sustainable development has taken on a richer meaning with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda which builds upon this traditional approach by adding two critical components: **partnership** and **peace**. Genuine sustainability sits at the core of these five dimensions.

The five dimensions inform development policy decisions. This means that for a development intervention to be sustainable, it must take into account the social, economic and environmental consequences it generates, and lead to conscious choices in terms of the trade-offs, synergies and spin offs it creates. Additionally, policy makers need to ensure that any intervention is developed, owned and carried forward with the relevant partnerships and leverages the appropriate means of implementation.



In this way, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs together represent a holistic approach to understanding and tackling problems, by guiding us to ask the right questions at the right time.

The Sustainable Development Goals

Contrary to what many believe, the SDGs do not represent the Agenda in its entirety. They are not a summary of the Agenda, but rather focus areas necessary to achieve sustainable development. The 17 goals should be seen as indispensable pieces in a big and complex puzzle. In order to truly understand the Agenda, one needs to look at the puzzle as a whole, but at the same time, it is impossible to complete the puzzle without those pieces. SDGs are the pressure points that have the capability to affect the wellbeing of the entire planet and the people who live on it. Because the SDGs are the result of extensive political negotiations and individual consultations, they are not perfect, but inarguably they represent some of the most urgent and universal needs of the world today.

The SDGs help translate the core values and principles underlying the Agenda into concrete and measurable results

Not all goals have the same standing. While some goals appear more overarching or “finalistic” in nature, others can be seen as “means” to those finalistic goals. For example, the water and energy goals (SDGs 6 and 7) are not, strictly speaking, end goals. We do not want energy and water for their own sake, but because they are means to our true goals like health and wellbeing. However, ensuring access to clean energy and water are such crucial issues that they demand specific focus. Looking at some SDGs as means to others can help us appreciate the interlinkages of the SDGs.

Conclusion

The 2030 Agenda inspires us to think creatively by leveraging innovative approaches and critically rethinking the way we approach the development challenges of today. Advocacy and awareness raising efforts for the goals, which are actionable and achievable, are crucial to mobilize support for the Agenda. However, in order to create long-lasting change, awareness raising and advocacy are not enough.

Substantive knowledge about the Agenda in its breadth and depth will be key to realising the Sustainable Development Goals. By adopting the Agenda, the UN member states committed to an ambitious plan of action which requires the concerted efforts of all segments of society including civil society, development practitioners, the private sector and academia. Each one of us, in our personal capacities, also needs to take concrete steps towards sustainable life choices. A commitment to life-long learning is required to advance the transformational agenda that lies ahead of us.

