



# INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

( Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal )

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 7.560 (SJIF 2024)

## Sustainable Development: Challenges and opportunities in the 21st Century

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DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doi/10.2024-54757146/IRJHIS2402022>

### Abstract:

*In this era of economic development and globalisation the global economies have come together to achieve the objectives of sustainable development. Sustainable development is the only option which is viable for addressing the current issues of global warming and climate change and economic development. The tussle for attaining the objectives of economic prosperity without disturbing the ecological balance has introduced us with the idea of sustainable development. As we all know that faster economic growth is directly related to climate change and hence sustainable development signifies balanced economic development and environmental protection. The objective of the study is to understand sustainable development opportunities and challenges with respect to the 21st century.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, economic development, environment, millennium development goals, sustainable development goals, united nations, climate change, global warming.

### Introduction:

Sustainable development provides us with a perspective to achieve economic development without compromising with the ability of future generations to achieve their economic development objectives. The present conventional methods of economic development are at the cost of natural resources and environmental degradation. Due to recent transnational environmental issues like global warming, climate change and loss of biodiversity the concept of sustainable development has gained immense importance. Our conventional developmental methods generate negative environmental externalities at large scale. The concept of sustainability has multiple dimensions in socio economic domain. In the 21st century world, striking balance between development and environmental protection and implementing the principles of sustainable development is a

challenging task. As we all know that the concept of sustainable development is multidimensional in its nature and hence it requires knowledge and expertise from various domains to interact and function efficiently. It is also imperative to understand the challenges which we are facing and opportunities which are yet to be explored in the process of sustainable development. It can unquestionably stated that sustainable development is an approach to conserve natural resources and a tool to bring about human development.

**Objective of the study:**

The main objective of this paper is to study dimensions of sustainable development and issues and challenges pertaining to it in the 21st century. This paper also aims to identify challenges and issues concerning sustainable development and its implementation. The study also aims to encircle the opportunities in sustainable development and its use for socio economic welfare of the masses across the world.

**Role of United Nations in Sustainable Development:**

The first major action for sustainable development was taken by the United Nations in the form of the Rio Summit in 1992 also known as The Earth Summit. The Rio Summit was organised as a response by all the member nations as a collective global effort to address the issues related to global warming, climate change and sustainability. Later on in 2012 another major effort was made by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in the form of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development also known as Rio+20 or Earth Summit 2012 to secure political, economic and environmental commitment from the member nations. For more than the last three decades sustainable development has been a major pillar of all the policies made by the United Nations at various levels Eg. MDGs and SDGs.

**Shifting from MDGs to SDGs:**

The United Nations Millennium Development Goals are eight goals that United Nations members have agreed to try to achieve by 2015. Following are the eight Millennium Development Goals.

1	To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2	To achieve universal primary education
3	To promote gender equality and empower women
4	To reduce child mortality
5	To improve maternal health
6	To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

7	To ensure environmental sustainability
8	To develop a global partnership for development

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2015 as a new set of international development goals. The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the environment and carry out inclusive human development everywhere. The 17 goals were adopted by all the United Nations member nations in 2015 as a part of the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development which sets out a 15 year plan to achieve the goal by 2030. Following are the Sustainable Development Goals.

1	No poverty
2	Zero hunger
3	Good health and wellbeing
4	Quality education
5	Gender equality
6	Clean water and sanitation
7	Affordable and clean energy
8	Decent work and economic growth
9	Industry, innovation and infrastructure
10	Reduced inequality
11	Sustainable cities and communities
12	Responsible consumption and production
13	Climate action
14	Life below water
15	Life on land
16	Peace justice and strong institution

17	Partnership for the goals.
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(<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>)

The transition from MDGs to SDGs was undertaken after large-scale deliberation since 2012 and the United Nations provided a stage for the deliberation. More than 100 countries participated on multiple platforms. Various reports were studied and panel discussions were conducted on the theme of sustainable development. All the member countries on 25th sept 2015 adopted a set of 17 goals and 169 targets to end poverty and hunger, ensure healthy lives, promotion of wellbeing, inclusive and quality education, combat climate change, reduce inequality, protect forest and biodiversity etc.

### **Global Challenges for Sustainable Development:**

- 1. Technological innovation:** Lack of ultra modern green technology at affordable cost is a major hurdle in the way to attain sustainable development in developing and underdeveloped countries. Consistent efforts in research and development and innovation in new eco friendly technologies is the need of the hour.
- 2. Financing SDGs:** The United Nations provided the platform for SDGs but most of the financing for implementation of SDGs is to be managed by respective nations. The cost of replacement of the existing technological setup is very high which cannot be economically feasible for all the countries and hence financing for sustainable green technology is a major concern when it comes to implementation of SDGs.
- 3. Economic stability and financial resources:** Only the nations with immense financial resources and economic stability can afford to proceed with the ideas of SDGs. Without adequate financial resources and economic stability it is extremely difficult to implement the principles of sustainable development.
- 4. War and political instability:** In case of war or political instability it becomes very difficult to focus on implementation of SDGs and ideas of sustainable development. All the resources are diverted towards winning war and attaining political stability hence the attention on SDGs lacks.
- 5. Lack of efforts at the local level:** The idea of sustainable development will only succeed when it is implemented with full zeal and devotion across various levels of governance. If the principles of sustainable development are not being applied at individual level, household level and local level we cannot see any significant changes in the existing condition.
- 6. Building institutional framework:** The institutional framework is imperative for implementation of any policy at any level. Various departments, ministries, committees and other offices and institutions are required to be established to implement, review, supervise, monitor, inspect and scrutinise the progress of SDGs and make necessary recommendations

and corrections.

7. **Global north south conflict:** The global north south cooperation is said to be lacking when it comes to SDGs and environmental protection. Global south expects financial and technological cooperation from the global north.
8. **Population growth:** The population growth is directly related to the level of environmental degradation. Higher the population higher will be the stress on the existing resources. And hence consistently increasing population is a major concern for SDGs.
9. **Defining indicators:** The lack of defining indicators for sustainable development is a major challenge for sustainable development. These defining indicators help us to understand the and indicate the level of growth in terms of sustainability.
10. **Political will:** The political will amongst all the global leaders can solve all the existing problems related to the SDGs. political will can ensure cooperation with all the member nations and stakeholders for achieving SDGs.

#### **Global Opportunities for Sustainable Development:**

1. **Knowledge exchange:** SDGs give us an opportunity to exchange knowledge and information at global level in various domains which can help the global community in securing better future and economic growth.
2. **Green economy:** Green economy is a recent term which emphasises low carbon emission and efficient use of natural resources. Green economy aims towards achieving the goals of SDGs.
3. **Efficient use of natural resources:** The SDGs play an important role in efficient use of natural resources so that the emission levels can be minimum and the level of environmental degradation is also kept as low as possible without compromising the economic growth potential.
4. **Global and regional cooperation:** Sustainable development and flight against climate change and global warming is not a fight of any particular nation or region. It is a common and shared responsibility of all the nation (global community) and hence SDGs give us an opportunity to establish cooperation at global, regional and local levels amongst various stakeholders.
5. **Global best practices:** globally successful practices, methods, technology and schemes can be shared among the nations to achieve a common goal of sustainable development. Sharing global best practices will also enhance cooperation and partnership among the nations.
6. **Long term economic growth:** Emphasis on SDGs will ensure long term economic growth irrespective of availability of fossil fuels and other natural resources. Hence SDGs play a very important role by providing long term promising economic growth.

7. **Combating climate change and global warming:** Conventional model of economic growth and environmental degradation is responsible for global warming and climate change. Hence to combat global warming and climate change along with other environmental issues it is necessary to implement the principles of sustainable development in the form of SDGs.
8. **Protecting natural resources:** Implementation of SDGs will mark transition from fossil fuel based energy to non conventional sources of energy like solar energy, wind energy and biofuels which will help to preserve the existing stock of natural resources.
9. **Green employment:** The employment opportunities arising from industries catering to the need of ecologically sustainable products will generate green employment. Green jobs or green employment will be primarily from the energy sector, agriculture, cosmetics and other consumer durable items.
10. **Better future and healthy environment:** Sustainable development will fairly insure a better and healthy future by restoring the environment and establishing eco-friendly civilization.

#### Conclusion:

To conclude, sustainable development constantly strives to achieve the targets of socio-political and economic growth without compromising the potential for economic growth of the future generation. Hence we all at every possible level practise the ideals of sustainable development so that we and our upcoming generation will inherit greener, healthier and better life on this planet.

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