WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS?

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals — also known as the SDGs or the Global Goals — came into effect on January 1, 2016 following an historic United Nations Summit in September 2015. 193 governments from around the world agreed to implement the Goals within their own countries in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Over the next fifteen years, with these new Goals that universally apply to all, countries will mobilize efforts to end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind.

These new, interconnected goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, while also identifying new priority areas such as climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice, among others.

Although each country faces specific challenges in pursuit of sustainable development, special attention is given to the most vulnerable countries, in particular, African countries, less developed countries, landlocked countries and small island developing states. There are also serious challenges within many middle-income countries.

For each of the 17 goals, there is a list of specific targets we aim to reach. The targets discussed in this guide have been summarized for ease of reading. For a more detailed list of all the 169 targets, visit GlobalGoals.org.
PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL

Employment is an important part of daily life. It helps keep our economy moving, it helps us earn money to support our families and can offer us a way to contribute to the economic prosperity of others. However, not everyone makes enough money as they should. Sometimes people can’t find work, or are discriminated against because of their identity or ability. In many impoverished areas, adults and children are exploited, or forced to do work in dangerous and underpaid situations, to support their families. Achieving this goal means making sure jobs are available, safe and supportive for everyone. In the process of making a living, we need to make sure we are having a positive impact on our planet too.

TARGETS

- Generate safe, creative work that motivates people to fulfill their potential.
- Ensure our natural resources are respected and protected in economic development.
- Promote decent work and safe working environments for all: men, women, youth, people with disabilities and migrant workers.
- Take action to give more jobs to unemployed youth by increasing access to training.
- End forced labour and child labour in all forms.

“ I am a believer in women, in their ability to do things and in their influence and power. Women set the standards for the world, and it is for us, women in Canada, to set the standards high.”

Nellie McClung
Canadian women’s rights activist
1 Where did it begin?

- Throughout history, workers have been exercising their right to organize and fight for decent work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) was formed in 1919 as part of the League of Nations. When the ILO was incorporated into the UN, labour rights were written into several articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. They defined decent work as employment that respects the fundamental rights of the human person, as well as the rights of workers in terms of conditions of work safety, physical and mental integrity, and earning a wage.

- Labour unions or trade unions are organizations of workers coming together to achieve common goals such as improving safety standards, achieving fair pay and gender equality.

- Local, national and international economic growth depends on the productivity of workers. In order to sustain economic development, people need to be making enough to contribute to their local economy by spending money on goods and services.

- We measure the economic growth of a nation by the total dollar value of all the goods and services produced over a period of time—we call this gross domestic product, or GDP. The global annual growth rate of GDP per capita increased by only 1.3 per cent in 2014, a significant slowdown compared to 2010 (2.8 per cent growth) and 2000 (3.0 per cent growth). Developing regions grew far faster than developed regions, with average annual growth rates in 2014 of 3.1 per cent and 1.4 per cent, respectively. As a means of increasing gross domestic product, investments in economic development create better job opportunities, self-sufficiency and improve quality of life for communities. At the same time, economic development has a direct relationship with the environment and environmental issues. It is important to ensure our well-being does not negatively impact our ecosystems.

2 Why does this issue matter?

- People need jobs, particularly women
The global unemployment rate stood at 6.1 per cent in 2015, down from a peak of 6.6 per cent in 2009, mostly owing to a decline in unemployment in the developed regions. While contributing to the poverty cycle and poor economic, physical, and mental health, unemployment ultimately affects population groups differently. Globally, women and youth (aged 15 to 24) are more likely to face unemployment than men and adults aged 25 and over. In all regions, except Eastern Asia and the developed regions, the unemployment rate among women is higher than that of men.
Financial inclusion
While economic development and employment are important for economic security, access to financial services and credit is essential to inclusive growth. In 2014, 62 per cent of the world’s adult population had an account at a financial institution or a mobile money service provider, an increase from 51 per cent in 2011. During this period, 700 million adults also became account holders, meaning they were able to secure and independently control their finances.1

Inequalities still exist
In 2014, the pay gap ratio between chief executives and median workers in the US was 204-to-1.4 At the top of the list, some CEOs earned more than 1,000 times the salary of their average worker. Government corruption can also impact marginalized individuals and communities by utilizing funds intended for social good and economic development for their own personal benefit. To protest these inequalities and exercise their rights, workers seeking pay raises and better working conditions will often strike. In areas of conflict where human rights are at risk, protests can be met with violent action on behalf of the government.

Who and what are affected?

Women
Existing inequalities between men and women are amplified by lower economic resources and reduced access to employment. Lack of employment can increase women’s dependence on men, increasing men’s decision-making power within households. This can also lead to an increase in unsafe sexual practices and/or risk of intimate partner violence. We also know that many times, women are the first to cut back their food intake to ensure food for their families in times of financial crisis.5

Children
Although the number of children engaged in child labour declined globally by one third from 2000 to 2012 (from 246 million to 168 million), more than half of child labourers in 2012 (85 million) were engaged in hazardous forms of work. Incidences of child labour have typically been highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, where 21 per cent of children were employed as child labourers.6

Migrant workers
As of 2013, an estimated 232 million international migrant workers participated in the world’s economy compared to 174.5 million in 2000.7 Made up of people working outside their home country, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable because there is no systematic monitoring to ensure their rights are being respected. In addition, they are often denied access to federally funded services and educational opportunities for their children.
4 What needs to be done?

- One of our best efforts is providing youth an opportunity to transition to a decent job. To do this, we need investments in education and high quality training to give youth the skills to match the demands of the labour market. They also need access to social protection and basic services, in a non-discriminatory environment.

- The role of the government is to support dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies. By supporting development that respects the rights of labourers, decent work can be had by all.

- In building our communities, we should look for ways to foster community support, personal security, innovation and employment.

- Government policies have been, and still are, developed to protect people from exclusion, forced labour and unequal pay. Governments must act responsibly and protect the rights of workers, and support those rights through training, fair pay and monitoring for safe working conditions.

- Labour unions and coalitions are organizing changes to government legislation to make it easier for migrants to move between jobs, gain opportunities for work permits and allow permanent resident status upon arrival. Since many migrant workers pay taxes to the government of the country they are working in, they should have access to the same benefits.

“We have words for racism and sexism, but wealth discrimination isn’t fully recognized. It is a bias in favor of the wealthy and against labour, the environment and the community. Concern for the public good must become the animating force of our economic order.”

Marjorie Kelly
American journalist
Effective economic development supports gender equality. Empowering women by ensuring they have control and access to resources like land, and ensuring equal pay helps reduce the impact of poverty, provide better opportunities for children and helps support community resilience.

Those encouraging economic development must understand impacts of overconsumption of resources and the impact of emissions on climate change and environmental degradation. Sustainable economic development should provide for the present without sacrificing the ability for the future to do the same.

“We owe it to ourselves and to the next generation to conserve the environment so that we can bequeath our children a sustainable world that benefits all.”

Wangari Maathai
Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel Laureate
Consequences of inaction

- If we fail to provide decent work opportunities for all people, we are sacrificing investments and job opportunities that uphold the social need to share in progress. We are continuing to participate in the cycle of poverty that marginalizes some populations.

- If we do not act, 168 million working children will not have access to education, protection from injury or dangerous conditions and poverty.

- By not pursuing sustainable economic development and supporting environmental policies, we are sacrificing our natural ecosystems and resources in return for an unsustainable future.

REFLECTION AND ACTION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about the issue now that you know more about it?

2. How might this issue have been prevented? What could have been done differently?

3. How has this problem changed over time? Where do you see it going in the future?

4. What questions do you still have?

“Equal pay for women is a matter of simple justice.”

Mary Anderson
American inventor