

Development context

The current development context: positive change

Over recent decades there has been the fastest reduction in poverty in human history. This unprecedented progress has been a combination of many factors including:

- economic growth. Over the period 1990–2010, developing countries grew their Gross Domestic Product, their 'national wealth', by about 6 per cent. [[The Economist](#)]
- better policies to address global poverty, particularly the global commitment to the seventeen [Sustainable Development Goals](#). The SDGs set out an internationally agreed framework to promote development over the period 2015–2030. They are a roadmap for the world to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.
- significant reductions in poverty in particular parts of the world. For example, China cut its poverty rate from 88 per cent in 1981 to 3 per cent by 2017, lifting hundreds of millions out of poverty.

As a result of this progress:

- In 2013, 11% of the world's population lived on less than US\$1.90 a day, the international poverty line, down from 35% in 1990. Nearly 1.1 billion people have moved out of extreme poverty since 1990. In 2013, 767 million people lived on less than \$1.90 a day, down from 1.85 billion in 1990 ([World Bank](#))
- Child death rates have fallen by more than 30 per cent, with about 3 million children's lives saved each year compared to 2000.
- Deaths from malaria have fallen by one-quarter.
- Life expectancy has increased steadily across the world, particularly in most developing countries: world average life expectancy rose from 66 years in 2000 to 72 years in 2016 (World Health Organization).

The development challenge: extreme poverty

However, alongside these very positive changes there remain significant challenges, and extreme poverty remains throughout much of the developing world. Whilst absolute poverty has reduced, there has been growing inequality between rich and poor in many countries and between countries. In 2017, Oxfam calculated that the world's eight richest people owned as much wealth as the poorest half of the world. In addition, in richer OECD countries (such as countries in Europe, North America, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.) the richest [10% of the population earn almost nine times the income of the poorest](#).

In addition, there are many significant challenges such as environmental sustainability, the impact of climate change, demographic change, conflict and civil war, and the global economic situation. These influence the actions to reduce poverty.

What are the 2015–30 Sustainable Development Goals?

Building on progress made up to 2015 by the Millennium Development Goals, the international community has set out a new framework to eradicate poverty, address inequality and tackle climate change. The 17 SDGs set out a plan of action for the period 2015 to 2030. The goals are:

1. **No poverty** – To end poverty in all forms everywhere
2. **Zero hunger** – End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
3. **Good health and well-being** – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. **Quality education** – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. **Gender equality** – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. **Clean water and sanitation** – Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. **Affordable and clean energy** – Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
8. **Decent work and economic growth** – Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
9. **Industry, innovation and infrastructure** – Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. **Reduced inequalities** – Reduce inequality within and among countries
11. **Sustainable cities and communities** – Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
12. **Responsible consumption and production** – Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. **Climate action** – Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. **Life below water** – Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15. **Life on land** – Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. **Peace, justice and strong institutions** – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. **Partnerships for the goals** – Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

What is the response of the international community?

The MDGs were largely considered targets for poorer countries to achieve. Conversely, every country will be expected to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals were also developed through wide consultation, and the resulting targets are for all member states to achieve.

Some countries feel that there are now too many goals with 169 ‘associated targets’ that are hard to measure and assess. One of the major challenges is to systematically collect data and measure results. However, there is a sense of optimism that new technologies and new ways of thinking about development can help to achieve these targets. There is an important shift away from current funding models to a future ‘beyond aid’ which focuses on fighting tax avoidance, local capacity building and job creation.

The UK has talked of a 'golden thread' in which governments, private enterprise and civil society work together to create open societies and economies, end conflict and corruption, and enshrine the rule of law, free speech and property rights. Building infrastructure and persuading Western banks to finance it are strands of the thread. (The Economist, 19 September 2015).

India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi has claimed that much of India's development agenda is mirrored in the Sustainable Development Goals. 'It is not just about fulfilling the needs of the poor and upholding their dignity, nor about assuming moral responsibility for this, but realising that the very goal of a sustainable future cannot be accomplished without addressing the problem of poverty.' (The BricsPost, 26 September 2015).

John Dramani Mahama, President of Ghana, stated that Ghana was an example of a country with two decades of consistent positive economic growth, adding that the last 15 years had helped to address socioeconomic inequalities and disparities in national, regional and global development. He pledged his country's support and commitment to working towards the Sustainable Development Goals and making them a reality. (UN General Assembly, 27 September 2015).

Sources:

[Department for International Development](#)

[The Economist](#)

[The Guardian](#)

[UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)