

Sustainable Development

Background

Defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), sustainable development has emerged as the guiding principle for long-term global development. Consisting of three pillars, sustainable development seeks to achieve, in a balanced manner, economic development, social development and environmental protection.

In 1992, the international community gathered in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, to discuss means to operationalize sustainable development. During this so-called Rio Earth Summit, world leaders adopted Agenda 21, with specific action plans to realize sustainable development at national, regional and international levels. This was followed in 2002 by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which adopted the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The Plan of Implementation built upon the progress made and lessons learned since the Earth Summit, and provided for a more focused approach, with concrete steps and quantifiable and time-bound targets and goals.

In 2012, twenty years after the landmark Earth Summit, world leaders will gather once again in Rio de Janeiro to: 1) secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development; 2) assess the progress the implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments; and 3) address new and emerging challenges. The UN Conference on Sustainable Development, or Rio+20 Earth Summit, will focus on two themes: 1) green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and 2) institutional framework for sustainable development.

The Office of the President of the General Assembly will continue to seek ways to support the ongoing intergovernmental efforts on sustainable development, including the preparatory process for the Rio+20 Earth Summit and the implementation of the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.