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Q8(b)

Discuss the Sustainable Development Goals as set by the United Nations

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · United Nations: Envisaged role and actual record; specialized UN agencies

United Nations: Envisaged role and actual record; specialized UN agencies - aims and functioning; need for UN reforms.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

The 2030 Agenda set 17 Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

They are universal, unlike the more South-focused MDGs.

Review is political and statistical, not judicial.

Finance and COVID shocks are the main delivery problems.

They complement, and do not replace, peace-and-security UN reform.

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals are the UN's 2015-2030 development agenda. Seventeen goals replace the narrower Millennium Development Goals. They bind poverty, planet, and institutions in one list. They are political commitments, not a new Charter court.

Body

What they are

- **Transforming our world:** the 2030 Agenda, adopted at the UN summit in 2015.
- **17 goals** and 169 targets, from no poverty and zero hunger to climate, oceans, gender, and strong institutions (Goal 16).
- **Universal:** unlike MDGs, they apply to rich and poor members. Common but differentiated capacities remain the climate ethic inside them.

How they work

- Voluntary national reviews at the High-level Political Forum.
- Indicators watched by statistical offices and UN agencies.
- **Finance:** Addis Ababa, ODA, tax, and private capital - the weak link.

Political meaning

- They recast development as a UN reform of mandate after 2015, beside peace and rights.
- Critics see a long menu without hard enforcement, a lowest-common-denominator consensus.

- Supporters see a shared language for planning, including India's **NITI Aayog** SDG index practice.

Links to other files

- Climate goals overlap NDCs and, for India, the later COP-26 Panchamrit capacity and intensity pledges.
- Goal 17 (partnerships) is the North-South finance argument in polite form.

Limits

- COVID reversed several indicators. Wars and debt set them back again.
- SDGs do not reform the Security Council. They reform the development story.

Flow diagram

MDGs 2000-2015 -> SDGs 2015-2030
SDGs 2015-2030 -> 17 goals 169 targets
17 goals 169 targets -> Voluntary reviews
Finance gap -.limits. -> 17 goals 169 targets

Conclusion

UN SDGs are a universal 17-goal agenda to 2030, broader than the **MDGs** and softer than a treaty with sanctions. Their power is agenda-setting and national planning language. Their weakness is money and enforcement.

Facts & figures

2015 Agenda 2030

UN summit outcome that launched the SDGs as successors to the MDGs.

17 goals

Including poverty, health, education, climate, inequality, and institutions.

HLPF

High-level Political Forum where States present voluntary national reviews.

MDGs

Eight earlier goals (2000-2015) that the SDGs broadened to a universal list.