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Q8(a)

What do you understand by sustainable development? Discuss the elements of sustainable development as proposed in the UNDP's Sustainable Development Goals Report-2015

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2025 · Sociology GS 1 · 20 marks · Sociology

Sociology - The Discipline: Modernity and social changes in Europe and emergence of sociology; Scope of the subject and comparison with other social sciences; Sociology and common sense.

Core demand of the question

- **Define sustainable development after Brundtland:** present needs without compromising the future
- **Discuss elements as in the 2015 SDG agenda / UNDP framing:** people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership; 17 goals as a set
- **Keep a sociological angle:** inequality, institutions, not only environment
- Do not invent fake UNDP quotations

Revision summary

Brundtland defined sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising the future.

The 2015 SDG agenda, reflected in UNDP reporting, treats that as a multi-goal programme.

Five elements-people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership-organise the set.

Seventeen goals join poverty and inequality to climate, cities, work and institutions.

Sociology stresses unequal needs, risk distribution and weak institutions.

The agenda is a frame for development, not an automatic achievement.

Introduction

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without closing the chances of future generations. The **Brundtland Commission** popularised that formula in 1987. In 2015 the United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, and UNDP's reporting around that agenda treated sustainability as a package of social, economic and environmental aims, not as a green afterthought to growth. Sociology is needed because "needs" are unequally defined and because institutions, not only technology, decide who bears environmental cost.

Body

From definition to the 2015 elements

The 2015 agenda is organised as **seventeen goals** with targets, from no poverty and zero hunger through health, education, gender equality, water, energy, decent work, industry, inequality, cities, consumption, climate, oceans, land, peace and justice, to partnership. UNDP

and UN communications also grouped the agenda as five interlocking "P"s: **people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership**. People names the social floor: poverty, hunger, health, education, gender. Planet names climate, ecosystems and resource limits. Prosperity names inclusive growth and decent work rather than GDP alone. Peace names institutions, rights and an end to violence as development conditions. Partnership names finance, data and global cooperation, including the famous idea of leaving no one behind.

Sociologically this is a shift from earlier modernisation theory, which trusted industrial take-off, and from a narrow environmentalism that ignored livelihoods. **Amartya Sen's** capability concern sits in the background of human development reporting: sustainability without freedom is incomplete. Ulrich Beck's risk society and later environmental sociology add that hazards are socially distributed: a heatwave or a flood is not class-blind.

Critical sociological reading

The elements can become a checklist that states report while extractive growth continues. Indicators may hide unpaid care and informal work. Goal 16 on institutions is easy to praise and hard to fund. Partnership can mean donor agendas. In India, tensions among coal livelihoods, air quality, forest rights and SDG localisation at panchayat level show that the elements collide. Still, as a public language, the 2015 set forces sociology of development to hold inequality, ecology and governance in one frame, which is its intellectual yield.

Flow diagram

Sustainable development -> People
Sustainable development -> Planet
Sustainable development -> Prosperity
Sustainable development -> Peace institutions
Sustainable development -> Partnership
Sustainable development -> Seventeen SDGs 2015

Conclusion

Sustainable development means intergenerational justice in meeting needs. The 2015 UNDP-linked SDG agenda specifies that as people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, operationalised in seventeen goals. The sociological task is to see those elements as institutional and distributional, not as a poster of trees beside a factory.

Facts & figures

Brundtland 1987

Our Common Future: development that meets present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet theirs.

SDGs 2015

Seventeen global goals adopted by UN member states, replacing the narrower MDG poverty-and-social package with a universal agenda.

Five Ps

People, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership as the UNDP/UN grouping of the 2015 agenda's elements.

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