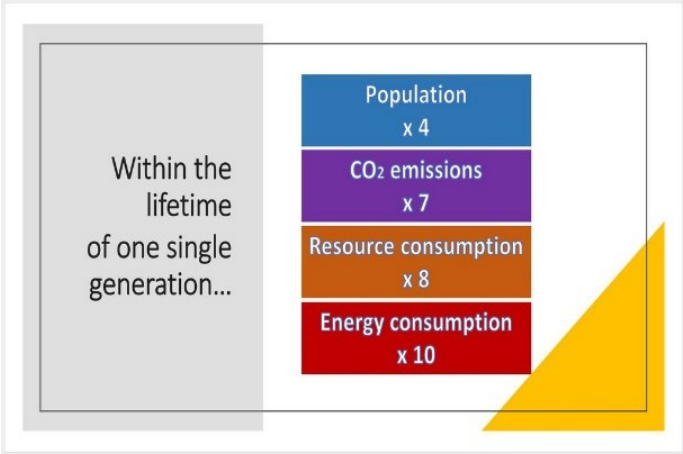
Sustainable – but how?



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We are not on a sustainable path. Within the lifetime of one single generation the world population, global CO_2 emissions, resource and energy consumption increased at an unprecedented rate.



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Data source: Christian Berg. 2020. Online presentation of the new report to the Club of Rome - Sustainable Action. Overcoming the Barriers.

» The goals for a sustainable development are set. However, we currently do not know the conditions under which humanity can implement the measures to achieve these sustainability goals *globally*

Christian Berg. Book: Sustainable Action. Overcoming the Barriers. 2020

» The 2030 Agenda progress report shows at the mid-term that just 12 percent of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) targets are on track. Progress on 50 percent is weak and insufficient. Worst of all, we have stalled or gone into reverse on more than 30 percent of the SDGs.

Antonio Guterres. Secretary-General's remarks to launch the Special Edition of the Sustainable Development Progress Report. 25. April 2023

» ***Greenwashing***

A research project funded by the European Union (2023) revealed that more than half of the environmental claims made regarding products and services - 53% to be exact - are either ambiguous, deceptive, or unfounded, with 40% of claims lacking evidence altogether.

Alexandra Walker and Hélène Guadin. Paint it Green: Strategies for Detecting and Combatting Greenwashing in ESG Ratings. Sustainability Institute. 2024

» Sustainability is on everyone's lips, in politics, business and in private life. Everyone has an idea of what the term means and sets different priorities. The term is therefore in danger of meaning «everything and nothing».

Translated from: Agentur für Forschung. 2019. Wahrnehmung von "Nachhaltigkeit" - Bericht zur qualitativen Studie. Mannheim, 05. September 2019

Definition of Sustainability

Sustainability is a development that satisfies the needs of the present without risking that future generations will not be able to meet their own needs.

Brundtland Report - Our Common Future. World Commission on the Environment and Development, 1987

Sustainability [ecology] is a principle according to which no more can be consumed, than can respectively be regrown, regenerated, and provided again in the future.

Translated from: Duden German Dictionary

Sustainability means - concisely formulated - good life for about ten billion people within the ecological boundaries on our planet.

Translated from: Uwe Schneidewind. Book: Die Grosse Transformation - Eine Einführung in die Kunst gesellschaftlichen Wandels. 2018

Sustainability is a guiding concept to secure and foster humane living conditions for all people worldwide, in the present and future, and to facilitate restoring and preserving the environmental foundations to enable this.

*Mark Lawrence. 2023. **How can I live sustainably?** RIFS Research Institute for Sustainability. Helmholtz Centre Potsdam.*

As simple as these definitions are, it is difficult to achieve a unified, shared understanding of sustainability.

But without a common understanding of sustainability, the transformation to a more sustainable society can hardly be accomplished.

We must move from the deeply internalized attitude of *competition and self-interest* to a basic attitude of *cooperation and common good*, if for example, we really want to curb global climate change.

17 Sustainable Development Goals

UN 2030 Agenda

Overview and explanations



» These goals answer all three design questions for good policymaking in the 21st century:

- What are our needs?
- What are the circumstances?
- Which resources are key?

In detail, they are:

1. Overcome poverty
2. End hunger and ensure healthy nutrition
3. Improve health and well-being
4. Guarantee quality education
5. Guarantee gender equality
6. Guarantee clean water and sanitation
7. Provide affordable and clean energy
8. Decent work and sustainable economic growth
9. Sustainably renew industry, innovation and infrastructure
10. Reduce inequality between and within countries
11. Develop sustainable cities and communities
12. Sustainable consumption and production

13. Climate protection measures
14. Preserve life under water
15. Sustain life on land
16. Peace, justice and strong institutions
17. Partnerships to achieve the goals

Translated from: Maja Göpel. Book: Werte – Ein Kompass für die Zukunft. 2025

» Recent studies on the interactions between the Sustainable Development Goals identify the *conservation of biodiversity* as one of the most potent levers to achieve sustainability.

*Swiss Academy of Sciences. **Achieving the SDGs with Biodiversity**. 2021. PDF*

» Biodiversity loss is not only an environmental concern but an emerging systemic risk for businesses, financial institutions and economies—making it a strategic priority essential for long-term resilience.

Larigauderie A. (2026) What science does biodiversity action still need? Lessons from a decade of IPBES. PLOS Ecosyst 1(1): e0000027.

» We stand at a pivotal moment for business and nature! Businesses and financial institutions – alongside governments and civil society – have both the opportunity and the responsibility to lead the transition toward a more just and sustainable global economy.

For too long, economic growth has come at the expense of biodiversity, eroding the very foundations of human wellbeing, financial stability and long-term prosperity.

This trajectory presents not only an environmental crisis, but a profound systemic risk to economies and societies worldwide.

Yet, current conditions continue to reinforce business-as-usual approaches, falling short of the transformative change urgently needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss.

Jones, M. et al. Impact and Dependence of Business on Biodiversity and Nature's Contributions to People. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). 2026



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» The world is changing – environmentally, socially, economically. The only uncertainties are the pace and direction of that change, and whether societies will find pathways to long-term sustainability and prosperity or instead settle for increasing volatility and accelerating decline.

Transitions are very rarely smooth, and the sustainability transformation is perhaps the most difficult that global societies have faced. Seemingly contradictory truths and deep uncertainties must be factored into short-, medium-, and long-term plans.

Like previous transitions – the ongoing digital transformation is a good example – significant value is at risk, and enormous value can be created.

*Jacco Kroon etal. 2024. Report: **Catching the wave - Seizing the opportunities of sustainability transformation**. Executive Summary. ERM Sustainability Institute and World Business Council for Sustainable Development. PDF*

» Humanity is at a crossroads. Unbounded growth is endangering planetary support systems and increasing inequalities. The transformation towards sustainable futures is an alternative possibility for people and the planet – a just and equitable world for all. This is exactly what the United Nations 2030 Agenda offers and is thus a great gift to humanity.

Transformation towards a sustainable future is possible but ambitious action is needed now. Six transformations are necessary to achieve the SDGs:

- Substantial advances in human capacity are needed through further improvements of education and health care.
- Responsible consumption and production cut across several of the other transformations, allowing us to do more with less.
- It is possible to decarbonize the energy system while providing clean and affordable energy for all.
- Achieving access to nutritional food and clean water for all while protecting the biosphere and the oceans requires more efficient and sustainable food systems.
- Transforming our cities will benefit the majority of the world population.
- Science, technology and innovations are a powerful driver but the direction of change needs to support sustainable development.

  ***The World in 2050. Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**. International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), 2018*

Sustainable development is hardly conceivable

- **without developing an economy that strikes a balance between economic issues and social and environmental responsibility,**

- **without a consistent circular economy,**
- **without a simultaneously cutback in overconsumption by the wealthy,**
- **without decisive measures to drastically reduce socio-economic inequalities,**
- **without a rapid reduction in CO_2 emissions,**
- **without a fundamental change in the way we manage our land.**



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» Apart from systemic change implemented by governments and industries, the large-scale adoption of climate actions by individuals is crucial to a successful mitigation of climate change.

Individual-level changes on the demand side have the potential of mitigating between 41% and 78% of greenhouse gas emissions across building, transport, food and industry sectors.

However, the individual-level potential of emission reduction pathways has so far remained largely untapped. To significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions, individuals need to acquire carbon competence - knowledge about the relative impact of different actions.
Mario Herberz et al. Psychological barriers to improving carbon competence. Nature sustainability 03 August 2026

» Buying fewer new clothes, switching off the lights, recycling materials, avoiding packaging, reducing hot water consumption and heating our homes less in winter – the list of actions we take to try to slow down climate change is long.

And for the most part, we are convinced of the effectiveness of these measures. Yet it is precisely this list of actions that yields comparatively little benefit.

It would help the climate far more if we were to give up flying and driving. Or, if there’s no

other option, we should at least drive an electric vehicle. Using public transport, following a plant-based diet, renting products instead of buying them, and heating with a heat pump avoid a great many greenhouse gas emissions.

However, we tend to systematically underestimate the impact of these climate protection measures.

Translated from: Joachim Laukenmann. Warum wir uns beim Klimaschutz oft selbst belügen. Tages-Anzeiger. 15.08.2026



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» In the race for «more», we lose sight of the fact that «better» is a completely different objective.

Translated from: Maja Göpel. Book: Werte. Ein Kompass für die Zukunft. 2025

» If all parents always strive for their children to have it *better* one day, and confuse this with «*having more and more*», then all children will one day be less well off.

Translated from: Maja Göpel. Unser Wunsch nach mehr, unsere Angst vor weniger. Wie unser Wohlstandsmodell den Planeten ruiniert. Blätter 3/2020, S. 98-106.

Anyone who really wants to change something cannot get around thinking about the dogma of «ALWAYS MORE».

» No intelligent person still believes that the existing economic system and the level of consumption of the present can be continued for another one or two generations, a thought that would have been self-evident in 1900 or 1950. This makes it clear: we are at the end of something.

Translated from: Blom Philipp. Book: Das grosse Welttheater. Von der Macht der Vorstellungskraft in Zeiten des Umbruchs. 2020

» The idea that consumption should be limited according to the needs of a planet shared in common by eight billion is, for many, especially in privileged nations, unthinkable as an individual orientation and forgettable as a political program.

Anna Katsman. Planetary Commons. The New Institute. 25.05.2024

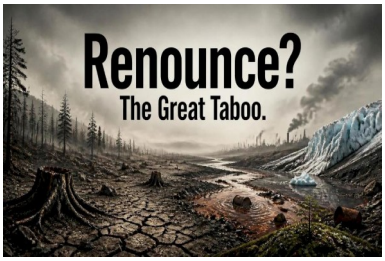
» Many people in the global North have so far been drawing the wrong comparison. They look at their current, comparatively relaxed lives of prosperity and freedom and compare them with acomplex transformation that, it seems, would involve a great deal

of sacrifice, change and uncertainty. The comparison is wrong because it relies on the utopia of continuing as before, which is not actually a viable alternative.

A more honest comparison would be between a society that stabilises today'sexponential trends and the catastrophic social collapse that will occur if these trends*) are not stopped in time.

Translated from: Emanuel Deutschmann. Book.. Die Exponentialgesellschaft. Vom Ende des Wachstums zur Stabilisierung der Welt. 2025.

**) e.g. primary energy consumption, global economic power, world population, carbon dioxide, water consumption, fertiliser consumption, ocean acidification, plastic production, urban population, international tourism and many more.*



Duck-AI-Image-2026

» We do not have to renounce happiness, well-being and justice, but excessiveness, abundance, stress and consumption decadence.

Translated from: Stefan Brunnhuber. Book: Die Kunst der Transformation. Wie wir uns anpassen und die Welt verändern. 2023

» **In rich countries, renunciation means actually nothing more and nothing less than refraining from ruining the planet and in return preserving the basis of life in the future. That's a big word, of course. Couldn't it be a little bit smaller? Unfortunately not.**

Translated from: Maja Göpel. Book: Unsere Welt neu denken. Eine Einladung. 2020

» If global society does not make the shift in mindset from a domination model to a partnership one, humans will not cease to exist. But it would result in a lot of unnecessary suffering, including early death for some, as well as massive biodiversity loss and possible ecosystem breakdown.

*Gaya Herrington. 2022. **Five Insights for Avoiding Global Collapse**.pd*

» Once we have defeated nature, we will find ourselves on the losing side.

Translated quote from Konrad Lorenz, biologist and Nobel Prize winner.



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