



Figure 7.37 The UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development 2015

Despite the existence of the UN, there is no 'world government' with the political authority to exercise jurisdiction over executive, judicial, legislative or military affairs for the whole planet. The UN has a mainly advisory role; its purpose is to foster co-operation between state governments, rather than exerting authority over them. Similarly, international organisations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) exist to take responsibility for managing specific aspects of an increasingly inter-related world, such as regulating the rules of trade or dealing with international public health issues.

There are also a number of different **non-governmental organisations (NGOs)** with varying objectives but generally either to ensure justice and equality for people across the world or to campaign for environmental sustainability (Figure 7.38). The international strength and support for some of these organisations means that they have the authority to challenge the excesses of

negative TNC impacts and of governments supporting them.

The United Nations Development Programme

The UNDP's aims are the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequalities and exclusion. They operate in over 170 countries. The main work of UNDP has been to lead the drive in meeting the **Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**. These eight anti-poverty targets were set in September 2000 and the world committed to achieve them by 2015. Members of the UN are now in the process of defining **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** (Figure 7.37) for the next 15 years. Their aim is to strengthen post-2015 frameworks for:

- development
- disaster risk reduction
- climate change
- global sustainable development.

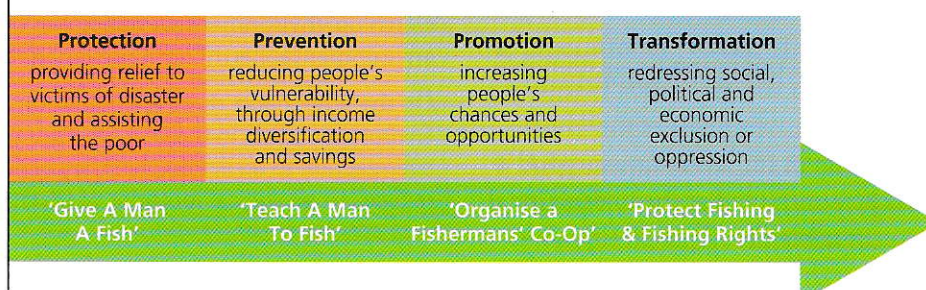


Figure 7.38 Different roles of NGOs

The new agenda is to finish the work of the MDGs, leaving no countries behind. It is due to be adopted by UN member states at the Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015. For progress on the Millennium Development Goals and to clarify the new SDGs, visit the UNDP website at www.undp.org/.

World Trade Organization (WTO)

As a response to globalisation the WTO's focus is on the issue of trade and investment inequities. Injustice has been partially alleviated by some of the processes of globalisation but has undoubtedly been accentuated in other ways. The WTO's commitment to liberalising trade means they are responsible, through negotiations, for combating exploitative practices used by some countries and TNCs, and for removing the protectionist policies adopted by some governments and trading blocs.

World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD)

The **Earth Summit** held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, was important in setting out **Agenda 21** (see textbox), a voluntary action plan agreed by many governments to develop strategies for long-term **sustainable development**. Ten years after Rio, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg brought together thousands of participants, including heads of state, national delegates and leaders from NGOs and businesses. The WSSD focused the world's attention and direct action towards meeting difficult challenges. These included improving people's lives and conserving our natural resources in a world that is growing in population, with ever-increasing demands for food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health services and economic security. Further UN conferences were held to involve government leaders at the highest level, including Rio +20 in 2012. These summits were held:

- to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development
- to assess progress on sustainable development goals and targets
- to advance international co-operation on sustainable development.

According to the WSSD Plan of Implementation, 'good governance, within each country and at the international level, is essential for sustainable development.'

Key term



Sustainable development – Development which recognises that the needs of the present have to be met but doing this without affecting the needs of future generations.

Agenda 21

At the **Earth Summit** in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the international community adopted Agenda 21, a global 'blueprint' for sustainable development. Agenda 21 action plans are intended to be cascaded down through national governments and local authorities, to apply strategies that will encourage more sustainable individual lifestyles and behaviour. The fact that most parts of the UK now have various recycling options as part of their waste collection is a tangible outcome stemming from Agenda 21.

It is seen as a '**top down**' approach which is trying to encourage a '**bottom up**' response, as the ideas initiated in the Agenda are designed to filter down from the UN to national government level and then down to regional and local government decision-making in order to influence the actions of individuals. For example, each local authority in the UK has a Local Agenda 21 (LA21) strategy in line with the UN objectives and actions.

As a global-level agreement, Agenda 21 perhaps demonstrates the difficulty in imposing a strategy for all countries to follow. It has provoked much controversy, not least in the USA where the agreement has seen considerable opposition from some groups. These opponents see Agenda 21 as:

- an attack on personal liberties – for example, car usage, family size
- having a focus on population control (religious groups in particular are against this) – Agenda 21 encourages population sustainability in its ethos but there is no requirement to enforce population policy
- an attack on the idea of 'private property'

Those opponents also view the 'precautionary principle' (which, as part of Agenda 21, suggests that any development should proceed with caution and weigh up environmental impacts) as being 'guilty (of environmental harm) until proven innocent'.

On the other hand, there are many committed environmentalists in the USA who see these points as an overreaction to an action plan they believe is necessary to reduce the ecological footprint of US citizens.

United Nations Environment Programme

The body responsible for supporting a coherent structure of international environmental governance is the **United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)**.

UNEP has been the leading global environmental authority since 1972 and has grown in stature alongside increasing concern about human impacts on the global environment. UNEP's mission statement is *'to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.'* This is a clear reference to the original sustainable development definition given to us by the pre-Rio Brundtland Commission in 1987.

UNEP's work is now part of the UN system-wide preparations for the post-2015 UN Development Agenda – the Sustainable Development Goals.

World summits on climate change

Atmosphere, including global temperature, climate change and ozone depletion, is one of the global commons. In so far as human activity can influence these processes, it can be considered to be outside the political reach of any one nation state and subject to international governance. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the body responsible for overseeing negotiations on reducing greenhouse gas emissions between nations.

At the UN Paris Climate Summit in December 2015, a historic, legally-binding climate deal was struck by world leaders, which will come into force in 2020. After nearly twenty years of disagreement (mainly between the USA and rapidly industrialising economies such as China and India) since the Kyoto Protocol of 1997, all 187 countries at the summit will combine pledges and work together to combat this important global threat. The main aim is to **hold global temperature rises to a maximum of 1.5°C** in order to avert the worst effects of global warming and climate change. The key features of the deal include:

- that all countries will voluntarily cut emissions
- a long-term aim to reduce the net emissions to zero in the second half of the twenty-first century
- that richer developed countries, and some wealthy developing countries, will pledge \$100 billion each year to help developing countries adapt to climate change
- a review mechanism to increase pledges every five years (if they are insufficient) to keep warming below 2°C
- a loss-and-damage mechanism for addressing losses that vulnerable countries face from climate change (such as rising sea levels and increasing storm intensity).

Interactions at all scales

Success in global governance and in regulating the extremes resulting from unchecked globalisation can best be achieved if there is clear communication and understanding of strategies at all scales from global to local (or vice versa). This clarity is often provided by non-governmental organisations which operate across boundaries and at all levels. The 'Agenda 21' action plan has equally attempted to engage governments and individuals at all levels.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

As part of the globalisation process, NGOs have expanded their scope from local and national settings and have increasingly become 'international' organisations.

In the twenty-first century NGOs have emerged as a global force to:

- democratise decision-making (for example, persuading governments to consider 'bottom-up' approaches)
- protect human rights
- provide essential services to the most needy.

There is a distinction to be made between **operational** and **advocacy** (campaigning) NGOs. Both are funded by charitable donations but some also receive money from governments and others from businesses (though this may compromise their independence):

- **Operational NGOs:** Those providing frontline support services to the needy (for example, Oxfam); tend to raise money for each project they undertake.
- **Advocacy NGOs:** Those who focus on campaigns to raise awareness to gain support for a cause (for example, Friends of the Earth); derive money from donations and, in some cases, from membership subscriptions.

In reality, NGOs work increasingly in partnership with other stakeholders like governments and international organisations.

NGOs are becoming more and more important in supporting development. They are often the only co-ordinated organisations to provide a voice for the poor of the world. With greater communication and awareness of issues greater than individual countries, many NGOs such as Amnesty International, Médecins sans Frontières and Greenpeace have emerged. They draw together people focusing on global issues and do not tie themselves to the interests of any government.

Key question

What range of issues might global governance attempt to tackle?

7.5 Global commons

The 'global commons' refers to resource domains or areas that lie outside of the political reach of any one nation state. It is a term used to describe supra-national 'spaces' in which common shared resources can be found. International law recognises four global commons:

- the high seas
- the atmosphere
- Antarctica
- outer space.

Some commentators would argue that **cyberspace** has also emerged as a new domain which meets the definition of a 'global common' by being a resource that is shared by all but is not controlled by any single nation. This includes the development of the worldwide web, one of the main drivers of globalisation.

Principle of common heritage

International law is guided here by the '**principle of the common heritage of mankind**'. This principle establishes that some localities belong to all humanity and that the resources there are available for everyone's use and benefit. It includes taking into account future generations and the needs of developing countries.

Historically, access to these resources (with the exception of fishing and whaling on the high seas) has been difficult.

More recently however:

- advances in science and technology have given easier access to a range of resources
- greater scarcity of resources, especially minerals, fuels and food has put increasing pressure on the global commons to provide resources for a needy and developing world.

These changes mean that the concept of common heritage is being put under increasing pressure.

'The tragedy of the commons'

This concept explains why shared 'common access resources' of any type are likely to be overexploited. If individuals act independently and according to their self-interest, this will be contrary to the interest of the whole group because the shared resource will become depleted.

This is exactly what has happened on a global scale to fish stocks, which have been overfished leading to depletion, marine pollution and loss of sustainability.

It is clear to see the need for international law and clear rules of global governance to protect the commons from over-exploitation.

Legal issues and institutional frameworks

Each of the global commons is covered by a number of international laws or treaties of one kind or another:

- the high seas by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- the atmosphere by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer and the Kyoto Protocol which sets limits on carbon emissions into the atmosphere
- Antarctica by the **Antarctic Treaty Systems (ATS)**
- outer space by the 1979 Moon Treaty which governs exploration and exploitation of its resources and the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space.

Key question

What are the global commons and how can they be protected?