

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

1962 | **Silent Spring**, by Rachel Carson, brings together research on toxicology, ecology and epidemiology to suggest that agricultural pesticides are building to catastrophic levels, linked to damage to animal species and human health.

1967 | **Environmental Defense Fund (EDF)** is formed to pursue legal solutions to environmental damage. The EDF goes to court to stop the Suffolk County Mosquito Control Commission from spraying DDT on Long Island's marshes. www.environmentaldefense.org

1968 | **Biosphere**. Intergovernmental Conference for Rational Use and Conservation of the Biosphere (UNESCO) is held; early discussions occur on the concept of ecologically sustainable development. www.unesco.org

| **Paul Ehrlich publishes *The Population Bomb***, on the connection between human population, resource exploitation and the environment.

1969 | **Friends of the Earth** forms as an advocacy organization dedicated to the prevention of environmental degradation, the preservation of diversity and the role of citizens in decision-making. www.foe.org

| **National Environmental Policy Act** is passed in the United States, making it one of the first countries to establish a national legislative framework to protect the environment. The law sets the basis for environmental impact assessment in the world.

| **Partners in Development and IDRC (1970)**. Report of the Commission on International Development. This is the first of the international commissions to consider a new approach to development, focused on research and knowledge in the South. The report leads to the formation of the International Development Research Centre in 1970. www.idrc.ca

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was published in 1962. Many consider the book's release a turning point in our understanding of the interconnections among the environment, the economy and social well-being. Since then, many milestones have marked the journey toward sustainable development. This timeline captures some of them.

From its inaugural edition in 1997 to the present, the Sustainable Development Timeline has been prepared by Heather Creech, IISD Director of Global Connectivity and staff and associates. This 6th edition officially commemorates the 20th anniversary of IISD, and a future full of sustainable possibilities.



The vision of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) is better living for all—sustainably. Its mission is to champion innovation, enabling societies to live sustainably.

www.iisd.org

1970 | **First Earth Day** held as a national teach-in on the environment. An estimated 20 million people participate in peaceful demonstrations across the United States. www.earthday.net

| **Natural Resources Defense Council** forms with a staff of lawyers and scientists to push for comprehensive U.S. environmental policy. www.nrdc.org

1971 | **Greenpeace starts in Canada** and launches an aggressive agenda to stop environmental damage through civil protests and non-violent interference. www.greenpeace.org

| **Founex Report** is prepared by a panel of experts calling for the integration of environment and development strategies.

| **Polluter pays principle**. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Council says those causing pollution should pay the resulting costs.

| **International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)** is established in the United Kingdom to seek ways for countries to make economic progress without destroying the environmental resource base. www.iied.org

| **René Dubos and Barbara Ward write *Only One Earth***, which sounds an urgent alarm about the impact of human activity on the biosphere, but expresses optimism that shared concern for the planet could lead humankind to create a common future.

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1972 | **UN Conference on the Human Environment and UNEP.** The Stockholm conference is rooted in the pollution and acid rain problems of northern Europe. It leads to the establishment of many national environmental protection agencies and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). www.unep.org

| **Environnement et Développement du Tiers-Monde (ENDA)** is established in Senegal, in 1978 becoming an international NGO concerned with empowering local peoples, eliminating poverty, and promoting southern research and training for sustainable development. www.enda.sn

| **Club of Rome publishes the controversial Limits to Growth**, which predicts dire consequences if growth is not slowed. Northern countries criticize the report for not including technological solutions; Southern countries are incensed because it advocates abandonment of economic development. www.clubofrome.org

1973 | **United States enacts the Endangered Species Act**, becoming one of the first countries to implement legal protections for its heritage in fish, wildlife and plants.

| **Chipko movement is born in India** in response to deforestation and environmental degradation. These women's actions influence both forestry and women's participation in environmental issues. www.rightlivelivelihood.org/recipe/chipko.htm

| **OPEC oil crisis fuels limits-to-growth debate.**

1974 | **Rowland and Molina release work on chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)** in the scientific journal *Nature*, calculating that continued use of CFCs at current rates would critically deplete the ozone layer.

| **Latin American World Model** developed by the Fundación Bariloche. It is the South's response to *Limits to Growth* and calls for growth and equity for the Third World. www.fundacionbariloche.org.ar/LP-mod-latinoam.htm

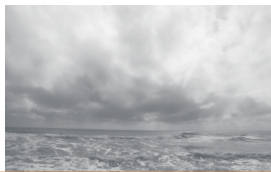
1975 | **CITES.** The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna comes into force. www.cites.org

| **Worldwatch Institute** established in the United States to raise public awareness of global environmental threats and catalyze effective policy responses; begins publishing annual *State of the World* in 1984. www.worldwatch.org

1976 | **Habitat, the UN Conference on Human Settlements**, is the first global meeting to link the environment and human settlement.

1977 | **Green Belt Movement starts in Kenya**, using community tree planting to prevent desertification. www.greenbeltmovement.org

| **UN Conference on Desertification** is held.



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1978 | **Amoco Cadiz oil spill** occurs off the coast of Brittany.

| **OECD Directorate of the Environment** relaunches research on environmental and economic linkages. www.oecd.org

1979 | **Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution** is adopted.

| **Banking on the Biosphere**, IIED report on practices of nine multilateral development agencies including the World Bank, sets the stage for reforms that are still underway.

| **Three Mile Island nuclear accident** occurs in Pennsylvania, United States.

1980 | **World Conservation Strategy** released by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The section "Towards Sustainable Development" identifies the main agents of habitat destruction as poverty, population pressure, social inequity and trading regimes. The report calls for a new international development strategy to redress inequities. www.iucn.org

| **Independent Commission on International Development Issues** publishes *North-South: A Programme for Survival* (Brandt Report), calling for a new economic relationship between North and South.

| **Global 2000 report** is released. It recognizes biodiversity for the first time as critical to the proper functioning of the planetary ecosystem. It asserts that the robust nature of ecosystems is weakened by species extinction.

1981 | **World Health Assembly** unanimously adopts the *Global Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000*, which affirms that the major social goal of governments should be for all peoples to attain a level of health that would permit them to lead socially and economically productive lives. www.who.org

1982 | **World Resources Institute** is established in the United States. It begins publishing biennial assessments of world resources in 1986. www.wri.org

| **UN Convention on the Law of the Sea** is adopted. It establishes material rules concerning environmental standards and enforcement provisions dealing with marine pollution. www.un.org/depts/los

| **International debt crisis** erupts and threatens the world financial system. It turns the 1980s into a lost decade for Latin America and other developing regions.

| **The UN World Charter for Nature** adopts the principle that every form of life is unique and should be respected regardless of its value to humankind. It calls for an understanding of our dependence on natural resources and the need to control our exploitation of them. www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r007.htm

1983 | **Development Alternatives** is established in India. It fosters a new relationship among people, technology and the environment in the South. www.devalt.org

| **Grameen Bank** is established to provide credit to the poorest of the poor in Bangladesh, launching a new understanding of the role of microcredit in development. www.grameen-info.org

1984 | **Toxic chemical leak** leaves 10,000 dead and 300,000 injured in Bhopal, India. www.bhopal.net

| **Drought in Ethiopia.** Between 250,000 and 1 million people die from starvation.

| **Third World Network** is founded as the activist voice of the South on issues of economics, development and environment. www.twinside.org.sg

| **International Conference on Environment and Economics** held by the OECD concludes that the environment and economics should be mutually reinforcing. It helps to shape the report *Our Common Future*.

1985 | **Responsible Care**, an initiative of the Canadian Chemical Producers, provides a code of conduct for chemical producers that has now been adopted in many countries. www.ccpa.ca

| **Climate change.** Meeting in Austria of the World Meteorological Society, the UNEP and the International Council of Scientific Unions reports on the buildup of carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere. They predict global warming.

| **Antarctic ozone hole** discovered by British and American scientists.

1986 | **Chernobyl nuclear station accident** generates a massive toxic radioactive explosion.

1987 | **Our Common Future (Brundtland Report)**. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development weaves together social, economic, cultural and environmental issues and global solutions. It popularizes the term “sustainable development.”

| **OECD Development Advisory Committee** creates guidelines for environment and development in bilateral aid policies. www.oecd.org/dac

| **Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer** is adopted. <http://ozone.unep.org>

1988 | **Chico Mendes**, a Brazilian rubber tapper fighting the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, is assassinated. Scientists use satellite photos to document what the Amazon fires are doing to the rainforest. www.chicomendes.com

| **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** is established to assess the most up-to-date scientific, technical and socioeconomic research in the field. www.ipcc.ch

1989 | **Exxon Valdez tanker runs aground**, dumping 11 million gallons of oil into Alaska’s Prince William Sound. www.evostc.state.ak.us

| **Stockholm Environment Institute** is established as an independent institute for carrying out global and regional environmental research. www.sei.se

1990 | **International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)** is established in Canada and begins publishing the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* as the authoritative record of international negotiations on environment and development. www.iisd.org

| **UN Summit for Children** is held, an important recognition of the impact of the environment on future generations. www.unicef.org/wsc

| **Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe** is established to address environmental challenges across the region, with an emphasis on the engagement of business as well as governments and civil society. www.rec.org

1991 | **The Canadian east coast cod fishery collapses** when only 2,700 tonnes of spawning biomass are left after a harvest of 190,000 tonnes.

| **Hundreds of oil fires burn** in Kuwait for months following the Persian Gulf War.

1992 | **The Business Council for Sustainable Development** publishes *Changing Course*, establishing business interests in promoting sustainable development practices. www.wbcsd.ch

| **Earth Summit**. UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) is held in Rio de Janeiro. Agreements are reached on the action plan Agenda 21 and on the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the non-binding Forest Principles.

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1993 | **First meeting of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development**, established to ensure follow-up to UNCED, enhance international cooperation and rationalize intergovernmental decision-making capacity. www.un.org/esa/sustdev

1994 | **Global Environment Facility** is established, restructuring billions of aid dollars to give more decision-making power to developing countries. www.gefweb.org

| **China’s Agenda 21**, a white paper on the People’s Republic of China’s population, environment and development, is published. China sets an international example for national strategies for sustainable development.

1995 | **Execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa** in Nigeria brings international attention to the links among human rights, environmental justice, security and economic growth.

| **World Trade Organization (WTO)** is established, with formal recognition of trade, environment and development linkages. www.wto.org

1995 | **World Summit for Social Development** is held in Copenhagen. It is the first time the international community expresses a clear commitment to eradicating absolute poverty. www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/index.html

| **Fourth World Conference on Women** is held in Beijing. Negotiations recognize that the status of women has advanced, but obstacles remain to the realization of women’s rights as human rights. www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing

1996 | **ISO 14001** is formally adopted as a voluntary international standard for corporate environmental management systems. www.iso.org

1997 | **Asian ecological and financial chaos**. Land-clearing fires intensified by El Niño-induced drought result in haze blanketing the region and cause US\$3 billion in health costs and fire-related damage. Concurrently, the market crashes, raising questions about currency speculation and the need for government economic reforms.

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1998 | **Controversy over genetically modified (GM) organisms.** Global environmental and food security concerns are raised, the European Union blocks imports of GM crops from North America, and farmers in developing countries rebel against “terminator technology,” GM plants whose seeds will not germinate.

| **Unusually severe weather.** China experiences the worst floods in decades, two-thirds of Bangladesh is underwater for several months from monsoons, Hurricane Mitch destroys parts of Central America, 54 countries are hit by floods and 45 by drought, and the global temperature reaches the highest ever recorded.
<http://lwf.ncdc.noaa.gov/oa/climate/research/1998/ann/extremes98.html>

1999 | **Launch of the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes.** The first of its kind, the tool provides guidance to investors looking for profitable companies that follow sustainable development principles.
www.sustainability-index.com

| **Third WTO Ministerial Conference** held in Seattle. Thousands of demonstrators protest the negative effects of globalization and the growth of global corporations. Along with deep conflicts among WTO delegates, they scuttle the negotiations. The first of many anti-globalization protests, the demonstrations signal a new era of confrontation between disaffected stakeholders and those in power.
www.iisd.org/trade/wto/seattleandsd.htm

2000 | **UN Millennium Development Goals.** The largest-ever gathering of world leaders agrees to a set of time-bound and measurable goals for combating poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women, to be achieved by 2015.
www.un.org/millenniumgoals

| **Miss Waldron’s red colobus monkey is declared extinct,** the first extinction in several centuries of a member of the primate order, to which humans belong. According to the *IUCN Red List*, 11,046 species are now threatened with extinction.

2001 | **9/11.** Terrorists representing anti-Western, non-state interests and ideologies attack the World Trade Center and Pentagon, marking the end of an era of unhindered economic expansion. Stock markets and economies stumble and the United States gears up for a war on terrorism.

| **Fourth Ministerial Conference of the WTO,** held in Doha, Qatar, recognizes environmental and development concerns in its final declaration. www.ictsd.org/ministerial/doha

| **China joins the WTO,** accelerating national structural economic changes. The accession signals China’s emergence, together with India and Brazil, as major new forces in the global economy.

2002 | **World Summit on Sustainable Development** is held in Johannesburg, marking 10 years since the UNCED. In a climate of frustration at the lack of government progress, the summit promotes “partnerships” as a non-negotiated approach to sustainability.
www.worldsummit2002.org

| **Global Reporting Initiative** releases guidelines for reporting on the economic, environmental and social dimensions of business activities. www.globalreporting.org

2004 | **Wangari Muta Maathai is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.** Founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, she is the first environmentalist to be awarded a Nobel Prize.
<http://nobelprize.org/peace/laureates/2004>

| **HIV/AIDS pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa.** In 2004 alone, 2.5 million people in the region die of AIDS, and over three million become newly infected. With only 10 per cent of the world’s population, the region is home to more than 60 per cent of all people living with HIV. www.unaids.org

2005 | **Kyoto Protocol enters into force,** legally binding developed country parties to goals for greenhouse gas emission reductions, and establishing the Clean Development Mechanism for developing countries.

| **Millennium Ecosystem Assessment** is released. 1,300 experts from 95 countries provide scientific information concerning the consequences of ecosystem change for human well-being.
www.millenniumassessment.org

2006 | **Stern Report** makes the convincing economic case that the costs of inaction on climate change will be up to 20 times greater than measures required to address the issue today.
www.sternreview.org.uk

| **NASA reports that the ozone layer is recovering,** due in part to reduced concentrations of CFCs, phased out under the Montreal Protocol.
http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2006/26may_ozone.htm

2007 | **Public attention to climate change increases.** Former U.S. Vice President Al Gore’s documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*, wins an Academy Award, and the IPCC’s alarming forecasts about the planet’s health make headlines. The IPCC and Gore share the Nobel Peace Prize. www.ipcc.ch

| **More signs of ecosystem stress emerge.** In addition to an earlier prediction that fish stocks could disappear in 50 years, scientists say sharks and bee colonies are also at risk.

2008 | **World food, fuel and financial crises converge.** Global food prices increase 43 per cent in one year; growing energy demand in China, India and elsewhere sends energy prices soaring; financial institutions falter over the collapse of mortgage lending in the United States and markets tumble, sending the world into recession.

2008 | **Green economy ideas enter the mainstream.** National governments invest a portion of their economic stimulus in environmental actions, and a low-carbon economy and green growth become new objectives for the future economy.
www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/34/44077822.pdf

| **Increasing urbanization.** For the first time in history, more than 50 per cent of the world’s population lives in towns and cities.
www.unfpa.org/pds/urbanization.htm

2009 | **Fire and ice headlines.** Multiyear sea ice all but disappears from the Arctic Ocean, and the Australian drought that commenced in 2003 leads to the worst wildfires in history.

| **G20 promises phase out of fossil fuel subsidies.** Experts estimate that annual subsidies could amount to \$500 billion, equal to 1 per cent of world GDP.
www.globalsubsidies.org/files/assets/l_policy_brief_on_G-20_Announcement_Oct_09-1.pdf

| **Connectivity throughout the world exceeds predictions.** About 60 per cent of world’s people now have mobile phones, and 25 per cent are on the Internet. Social networking is directly influencing citizen engagement, from the Obama presidential campaign to the contested Iranian election.

| **Copenhagen climate negotiations.** The domestic targets and actions of large emitters such as the United States and China take centre stage, but the international process continues to be seen as critical to measuring whether those actions are meeting the global reductions that science demands. The outcomes of the Copenhagen negotiations are unclear: the process may be in trouble but the Copenhagen Accord itself may be a breakthrough in terms of engaging developing countries.
www.iisd.ca/climate/cop15/