



Exercise 1: Introduction to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Objective:

Students will work in small groups to explore and discuss a selection of the 17 SDGs, focusing on understanding the goals, examining the values behind them, and relating them to their field of study and future profession.

Preparatory Homework (Before the Class):

Ask students to review the UN SDG webpage (<https://sdgs.un.org>) to familiarise themselves with the SDGs and explore the more detailed explanations of at least **three SDGs**. Encourage them to select goals that resonate with their personal interests or their field of study.

Alternatively, this part can be performed in class, if this is preferred. If this is the case, plan for an additional 30 minutes for this part.

Classroom Setup:

- Duration: 1 hour
- Small groups of 3–5 students
- Access to the internet or printed material about the SDGs for reference during discussions.

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Introduction (10 minutes):

Begin the exercise by reminding students of the importance of the SDGs as a global framework that integrates economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainable development. Explain that the goals are interconnected, and understanding them requires seeing how they work together.

2. Small Group Activity (35 minutes):

Divide students into small groups, where they will discuss **three SDGs** of their choice. Each group will take turns in discussing the goals from three key perspectives:

- **Learning about the goals (10 minutes):**

Each group should start by summarising the basic information about their chosen SDGs. What are the key targets? What global issues are these goals addressing? Students can refer to the SDG webpage or their preparatory homework notes for help.

- **Values and Rationales (10 minutes):**

In the next part of the discussion, students will reflect on the underlying values behind the goals. What are the moral or ethical principles driving each SDG? Why do they think these goals are important for sustainable development? Encourage students to share diverse viewpoints, especially considering different cultural, economic, or disciplinary backgrounds.

- **Relating to their field of study and future profession (15 minutes):**

Finally, students will discuss how the selected SDGs connect to their specific area of study. How do these goals relate to the skills and knowledge they are acquiring in their education? How might these SDGs impact their future profession or industry? What role do they see for themselves in contributing to these goals in their career?



3. **Classroom Discussion (15 minutes):**

Bring all groups back together for a class-wide discussion. Ask each group to briefly summarise the SDGs they discussed, the key takeaways from their conversations, and how these goals relate to their studies. Encourage students to note any common themes or contrasting ideas between the groups, emphasising the interconnectedness of the goals.

Follow-up Assignment (Optional):

Students can be asked to write a short reflection (around 300 words) on the exercise, focusing on how their understanding of the SDGs has evolved and how they can contribute to these goals in their future professional roles. Alternatively, this reflection could be done as a group presentation.

Key Takeaways for Students:

- A better understanding of selected SDGs.
- Awareness of the values and motivations behind the goals.
- An introduction to systems thinking by recognising the interconnectedness of SDGs.
- Insight into how their future careers can support sustainable development.

This exercise will help students see the relevance of sustainability to their education and professional futures, while fostering critical thinking about global challenges.



Exercise 2: Exploring Synergies and Trade-offs between the SDGs

Objective:

Students will practice systems thinking by identifying synergies and trade-offs (goal conflicts) between selected SDGs. This exercise will deepen their understanding of how progress on one goal can impact others, positively or negatively, highlighting the complexity of sustainable development.

Classroom Setup:

- Duration: 1 hour
- Small groups of 4-5 students
- Printed SDG cards (or digital versions if working online), with each card representing one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Whiteboard, wall, or table for arranging the cards (or online tools like Miro if in a virtual setting).

Instructions:

1. **Introduction (5 minutes):**
Begin the session by emphasising the interconnected nature of the SDGs. Remind students that while it might be tempting to focus on just one or a few "star goals," the SDGs are indivisible, meaning that progress (or lack thereof) on one goal affects others. Highlight that both synergies and trade-offs exist between the goals.
2. **Group Work Setup (5 minutes):**
Divide the class into groups and provide each group with a set of SDG cards. Explain that they will be focusing on one SDG at a time, exploring both synergies and conflicts with other goals.
3. **Step-by-Step Activity (40 minutes):**
Each group will follow these steps:
 - **Step 1: Select a Primary SDG (5 minutes):**
Ask each group to choose one SDG that they will focus on. This SDG will be placed at the centre of their working space. If appropriate for your class, you can assign a specific SDG to all groups to ensure a broader discussion later on.
 - **Step 2: Identify a Synergy (5 minutes):**
Next, the group selects an SDG that they believe will create a **synergy** with the primary SDG, meaning that progress on one goal will help achieve the other. Place this SDG above the primary one.
Task: Write a short explanation of why they think this synergy exists. (Example: SDG #1 "No Poverty" and SDG #3 "Good Health and Well-Being"—reducing poverty improves access to health services.)
 - **Step 3: Identify a Trade-off (5 minutes):**
Now, the group selects an SDG that has a **trade-off** with the primary SDG, meaning progress on one might hinder progress on the other. Place this SDG below the primary one.
Task: Write a short explanation of why this conflict exists. (Example: SDG #1 "No Poverty" and SDG #13 "Climate Action"—economic growth to reduce poverty can increase environmental degradation.)



- **Step 4: Identify a Supportive Goal (5 minutes):**
The group will then choose another SDG that will **help** achieve the primary goal. Place this SDG to the left of the primary SDG.
Task: Write a short explanation of how this SDG supports progress on the primary SDG. (Example: SDG #4 "Quality Education"—education is key to reducing poverty by improving economic opportunities.)
 - **Step 5: Identify an Obstructive Goal (5 minutes):**
Finally, the group selects an SDG that might **obstruct** the primary goal. Place this SDG to the right of the primary SDG.
Task: Write a short explanation of how this goal could obstruct progress on the primary SDG. (Example: SDG #14 "Life Below Water"—environmental regulations protecting marine life might limit economic opportunities in coastal communities.)
 - **Step 6: Discussion (15 minutes):**
Encourage groups to discuss and explain their choices. They can swap ideas, challenge each other's explanations, and refine their understanding of how interconnected the SDGs are.
4. **Class-wide Discussion (10 minutes):**
Reconvene the class and ask each group to present their primary SDG, the synergies, and trade-offs they identified. Encourage students to discuss any patterns or surprising insights, reinforcing the idea that addressing one goal often involves trade-offs with others. Highlight that different contexts and professional fields may result in different relationships between the goals.

Follow-up Assignment (Optional):

For deeper reflection, students can be assigned to research more about the connections between SDGs that are particularly relevant to their field of study. They could be asked to write a short paper or give a presentation on how their profession can help leverage synergies and mitigate trade-offs.

Key Takeaways for Students:

- Understanding that the SDGs are interconnected and cannot be tackled in isolation.
- Practicing systems thinking by identifying synergies and trade-offs between goals.
- Gaining insights into the complexity of sustainable development challenges.
- Learning to approach sustainability from a multidisciplinary perspective, as no single discipline can address these global challenges alone.

This exercise helps students grasp the intricate balance of pursuing sustainable development, making them more aware of how different goals influence one another in their future professional and personal decision-making.



Exercise 3: Prioritising the SDGs in Professional Practice

Objective:

Students will reflect on how their future profession can contribute to achieving the SDGs. They will rank the SDGs based on their relevance to their field of study and compare rankings with classmates to gain insights into differing perspectives. This exercise encourages critical thinking about how various sectors and professions contribute to sustainable development.

Classroom Setup:

- Duration: 1 hour
- Small groups of 3-5 students
- Printed cards or a digital tool showing the 17 SDGs
- Pen and paper or a digital platform (e.g., Google Docs, Miro) for note-taking

Instructions:

1. Introduction (5 minutes):

Start by explaining the goal of the exercise: students will explore how their future careers can contribute to the SDGs. Each student will reflect on the relevance of the goals to their specific field of study and prioritise the SDGs accordingly. They will then discuss their rankings with their peers to compare perspectives and examine how different goals can be addressed in various professional contexts.

2. Individual Ranking (10 minutes):

Ask students to individually create a **top 5 list** of SDGs that they believe are most relevant to their future profession. They should consider factors such as:

- Which SDGs align most with the goals or challenges in their professional field?
- Which SDGs are they most likely to directly impact through their career?
- How might their professional practice contribute to achieving these SDGs?

Task:

Students should list their top 5 SDGs in order of priority, from the most relevant to the least, and write a brief explanation (1-2 sentences) for each choice.

3. Small Group Discussion (15 minutes):

Divide the class into small groups. In each group, students will share and discuss their individual rankings, focusing on the following points:

- **Why did they rank certain SDGs higher than others?**
- **How do the SDGs they prioritised relate to their field of study or future profession?**
- **Were there any surprising differences or similarities between group members' rankings?**

Encourage students to challenge each other's ideas and explain how their profession might address certain SDGs better than others. This step fosters a deeper understanding of the role of different sectors in sustainable development.



4. **Group Comparison and Analysis (15 minutes):**

After the initial discussion, ask the group to **create a consensus list** of the top 5 SDGs they believe are the most relevant for their professional fields as a whole. This task encourages them to consider multiple perspectives and reach a group consensus.

Task:

Each group will create a final top 5 list and present it to the class. Along with the list, they should note any challenges or disagreements they faced in reaching the consensus.

5. **Class Discussion (15 minutes):**

Bring the groups together and have each group share their final top 5 list. As they present, lead a discussion around the following:

- What were the key factors that led groups to prioritise certain SDGs?
- How did different professional fields influence the ranking of the goals?
- Are there SDGs that seem universally relevant, or are some more context-specific?
- How might their profession, despite its focus on specific SDGs, also support other goals indirectly?

This discussion will encourage students to see the broader picture of how various professions contribute to achieving the SDGs in different ways.

Follow-up Assignment (Optional):

For deeper reflection, students can be assigned to write a brief essay (300-500 words) on how their future profession can contribute to achieving the SDGs they prioritised. They could explore synergies between these SDGs and other goals, and how they might mitigate potential trade-offs.

Key Takeaways for Students:

- Reflection on the relevance of the SDGs to their specific professional fields.
- Understanding that each profession plays a unique role in contributing to sustainable development.
- Awareness that prioritising certain SDGs does not negate the importance of others, but rather highlights where their professional impact may be strongest.
- Insights into how professionals from different fields can collaborate to achieve multiple SDGs together.

This exercise encourages students to critically evaluate their role in global sustainability efforts, emphasising the importance of contributing to the SDGs through their future careers. It also fosters cross-disciplinary awareness by allowing students to explore how other fields approach sustainable development challenges.