

Natural resources in the form of materials, water and land are essential for all life on earth, for producing energy and for regulating the climate. But accelerated economic growth and consumption in recent decades have overexploited the ecosystems that provide these vital goods and services.

The most pressing global environmental challenges we face today, including climate change, desertification, biodiversity loss and soil erosion, all stem from our excessive use of natural resources, which is approaching unsustainable levels in many parts of the world.

For the past few decades, progress in both developed and developing countries has been strictly linked to economic growth, measured in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, the concept of sustainability, coined at the IUCN World Conservation Strategy in 1980 and extended at the UN Earth Summit in 1992, has become a cornerstone of forward-looking development policy in the EU and worldwide. Sustainable development recognises the need to use global natural resources in a way that allows the well-being and prosperity of the present generation around the globe without compromising that of future generations.

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