

THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

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

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

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

| **Paul Ehrlich publishes *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 U.S., one of the first countries to establish a national legislative framework to protect the environment. Sets the basis for environmental impact assessment in the world.

| **Partners in Development / 1970 – IDRC**. Report of the Commission on International Development. First of the international commissions to consider a new approach to development, focused on research and knowledge in the South. Leads to the formation of the International Development Research Centre. www.idrc.ca

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Silent Spring was published in 1962. The book's release was considered by many to be 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 the key events.

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iisd International Institute for Sustainable Development Institut international du développement durable

1970 | **First Earth Day** held as a national teach-in on the environment. An estimated 20 million people participated in peaceful demonstrations across the U.S. earthday.envirolink.org/history.html

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

| **Founex Report** panel of experts calls for the integration of environment and development strategies.

| **Polluter Pays Principle**. OECD Council says that those causing pollution should pay the costs.

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

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

1972 | **UN Conference on the Human Environment/UNEP** held in Stockholm. The conference is rooted in the regional pollution and acid rain problems of northern Europe. 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, becoming in 1978 an international NGO concerned with empowering local peoples, eliminating poverty, and southern research and training for sustainable development. www.enda.sn

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

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

| **Chipko movement born in India** in response to deforestation and environmental degradation. The actions of the women of the community influenced 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 CFCs work** in the scientific journal, *Nature*, calculating that continued use of CFC gases at an unaltered rate 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.** Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna comes into force. www.cites.org

| **Worldwatch Institute** established in the U.S. 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.** First global meeting to link environment and human settlement.

1977 | **Greenbelt Movement** starts in Kenya. It is based on community tree-planting to prevent desertification. www.greenbeltmovement.org

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



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

| **OECD Directorate of the Environment** relaunches research on environment 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 which are still underway.

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

1980 | **World Conservation Strategy** released by IUCN. The section "Towards Sustainable Development" identifies the main agents of habitat destruction as poverty, population pressure, social inequity and trading regimes. It 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). It calls for a new economic relationship between North and South.

| **Global 2000 Report** released. This report 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. www.millenniuminstitute.net/publications/publications.html

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

1982 | **World Resources Institute** established in the U.S. 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 as well as enforcement provisions dealing with pollution of the marine environment. 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 United Nations 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** established in India. It fosters a new relationship among people, technology and the environment in the South. www.devalt.org

| **Grameen Bank** 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 (OECD)** concludes that the environment and economics should be mutually reinforcing. 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 is now adopted in many countries. www.ccpa.ca

| **Climate change.** Austria meeting of World Meteorological Society, UNEP and the International Council of Scientific Unions reports on the build-up of CO₂ and other "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere. They predict global warming. www.wmo.ch: WMO Ref. No. 661.

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

1986 | **Accident at nuclear station** in Chernobyl 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. Popularizes term “sustainable development.”

| **Development Advisory Committee**. DAC members of OECD evolve guidelines for environment and development in bilateral aid policies. www.oecd.org

| **Montreal Protocol** on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer is adopted. hq.unep.org/ozone/Montreal-Protocol/Montreal-Protocol2000.shtml

1988 | **Chico Mendes**, 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** 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** established as an independent institute for carrying out global and regional environmental research. www.sei.se

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

| **UN Summit for Children**. Important recognition of the impact of the environment on future generations. www.unicef.org/wsc/

| **Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe** 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** out of control in Kuwait for months following the Persian Gulf War.

1992 | **The Business Council for Sustainable Development** publishes *Changing Course*. Establishes business interests in promoting SD practices. www.wbcsd.ch

| **Earth Summit**. UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro. Agreements reached on the action plan “Agenda 21” and on the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change and non-binding Forest Principles. www.unep.org/unep/partners/un/unced/home.htm

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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/

| **World Conference on Human Rights**. Governments re-affirm their international commitments to all human rights. Appointment of the first UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. www.unhchr.ch

1994 | **Global Environment Facility**. Billions of aid dollars restructured to give more decision-making power to developing countries. www.gefweb.org/

| **China’s Agenda 21**. White paper on PRC’s population, environment and development is published. China sets an international example for country strategies for sustainable development. eng.cciced.org/cn/default.asp

1995 | **The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa in Nigeria** brings international attention to the linkages between human rights, environmental justice, security and economic growth.

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

| **World Summit for Social Development** held in Copenhagen. First time that the international community has expressed a clear commitment to eradicate absolute poverty. www.un.org/esa/socdev/wssd/index.html

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

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

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

| **UN General Assembly review of the Earth Summit.** Special session acts as a sober reminder that little progress has been made in implementing Agenda 21 and ends without significant new commitments. www.iisd.ca/linkages/csd/ungass.html



1998 | **Controversy over genetically modified organisms.** Global environmental and food security concerns raised over genetically modified (GM) food products. The EU blocks import of GM crops from North America and farmers in developing countries rebel against “terminator technology,” seeds that will only germinate once.

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

| **Multilateral Agreement on Investment.** Environmental groups and social activists effectively lobby against the MAI. This, along with disagreement by governments over the scope of the exceptions being sought, leads to the demise of the negotiations.

1999 | **Launch of the first global sustainability index** tracking leading corporate sustainability practices worldwide. Called the Dow Jones Sustainability Group Indexes, the tool provides guidance to investors looking for profitable companies that follow sustainable development principles. www.sustainabilityindex.com

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

2000 | **Increasing urbanization.** Almost half of the world's population now lives in cities that occupy less than two per cent of the Earth's land surface, but use 75 per cent of Earth's resources. atlas.aas.org

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

| **Miss Waldron's red colobus monkey declared extinct.** It is the first extinction in several centuries of a member of the Primate Order, to which human beings belong. According to the IUCN Red Book, 11,046 species are now threatened with extinction. www.wcs.org/wcspubs/wcsreports/460606/

2001 | **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 World Trade Organization held in Doha, Qatar,** recognizes environment and development concerns in the final Declaration. NGOs and the WTO agree to re-interpret the Agreement on Intellectual Property Rights regarding access to medicines and public health. www.ictsd.org/ministerial/doha/

| **China joins the World Trade Organization** 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** held in Johannesburg marking 10 years since UNCED. In a climate of frustration at the lack of government progress, the Summit promotes “partnerships” as a non-negotiated approach to sustainability. www.johannesburgsummit.org

| **Global Reporting Initiative (GRI).** After five years of a multistakeholder, consensus-building process, GRI releases its guidelines for how organizations should report on the economic, environmental and social dimensions of their business activities. www.globalreporting.org

2004 | **Wangari Muta Maathai awarded Nobel Prize.** Founder of the Greenbelt Movement in Kenya, she is the first environmentalist to be awarded a Nobel prize. 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. www.iisd.ca/process/climate_atm-fccintrot.htm

| **Millennium Ecosystem Assessment** 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.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/stern_review_report.cfm

| **NASA reports recovery of the ozone layer** greater due in part to reduced concentrations of CFCs, phased out under the Montreal Protocol. 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 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's alarming forecasts about the planet's health make headlines. www.climatecrisis.net; www.ipcc.ch

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