



Sustainability in Infrastructure

Short Guide to using the UN SDGs

What is it?

This Short Guide introduces the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of the effort to make infrastructure around the world sustainable.

It provides an overview of what the SDGs are, and overall thoughts on how to consider applying them to an infrastructure initiative.

Purpose & Use

The purpose of this guide is as follows:

- ❖ To provide context to the SDGs so that people can consider how to apply them to an infrastructure initiative.
- ❖ Their application can help infrastructure stakeholders to understand, plan for and work towards overall outcomes from defined infrastructure needs. It's about stitching sustainability into the overall requirement, not sustainability as a separate consideration.

Context / Background

The 17 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals ([SDGs](#)) provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. They are global sustainability goals and targets that exist at a national and global level, and many of their aspects have direct relevance to the world's infrastructure.

The SDGs are intended to exist from 2015 to 2030, upon which time a new set of indicators is foreseen be launched by the UN. The global initiative to achieve the SDGs is often referred to as "[the 2030 Agenda](#)", which was agreed in September 2015 by UN members.



The SDGs can be used at an individual / detailed level to consider how to carry out infrastructure activities, initiatives and projects in a sustainable way. Their consideration, and how to monitor agreed targets to be achieved, can contribute towards national level tracking towards sustainability targets.

[SDG 9](#) focuses on “industry innovation and infrastructure”. The SDG global indicators list explains that the goal of SDG 9 is to “Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.” In addition to the specifics of SDG 9, all other 16 SDGs have [indicators](#), many of which are relevant to infrastructure.

How To

The SDG Global Indicators are high-level (intentionally so, as they are designed at a country level).

To apply the SDGs in a meaningful way, consider the following:

1. Understand the ethos of the SDGs and look at examples of how they have been applied on infrastructure initiatives, perhaps as part of a broader systems approach or plan (e.g., a regional or national plan).
2. Consider aspect of what this means: can your project / initiative link into SDG 6 (clean water & sanitation), SDG 7 (sustainable energy), SDG 10 (reduced inequalities), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 13 (climate action) or any others?
3. Think about which of the 17 SDGs (SDG 9, and others) your infrastructure initiative can impact, and how. Understand the details.
4. Can you specify how you can positively contribute towards achieving the SDGs, either through specific targets that can link to the SDG Global Indicators or through an online tool such as [Accelerating Action](#)?
5. When you identify specific actions, ensure a 360-degree review is undertaken to consider all aspects and angles, and make sure actions are part of the overall project / initiative – they should not be “stand-alone” items or “side projects”.



Tips & Tricks

It is best to think about sustainability holistically, and to apply [systems theory](#) and “systems thinking” to what you do. Systems thinking is a way of making sense of complexity by understanding how “the whole” works and the interlinkages and relationships within the whole, whilst avoiding silos and siloed thinking. One visual way to look at a system is to consider all interconnected aspects as a circle and draw links between them.

Most infrastructure projects have a Sustainability Section of their Integrated Project Plan / initiative (or maybe a Sustainability Strategy / Plan), with people who are responsible for Sustainability. Key to any such plan is how it is stitched into the project / initiative, not stand-alone.

References / Other Useful Links

[The UN SDGs webpage](#)

[SDG 9 – industry innovation and infrastructure](#)

[The critical role of infrastructure for the Sustainable Development Goals \(UNOPS / The Economist Intelligence Unit\)](#)

[Infrastructure for sustainable development – a paper](#)

[How infrastructure investors can contribute to SDG outcomes](#)

[Example of applying the SDGs to an infrastructure project – Sydney Metro \(New South Wales, Australia\)](#)