


# Aligning conservation efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals

**Author:**Karishma Singh<sup>1</sup> **Affiliation:**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Nature Conservation, Faculty of Applied and Health Sciences, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Durban, South Africa

**Corresponding author:**

Karishma Singh,  
singh.karishma@mut.ac.za

**How to cite this article:**

Singh, K., 2024, 'Aligning conservation efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals', *African Journal of Biodiversity Conservation* 1(1), a2. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ajbc.v1i1.2>

**Copyright:**

© 2024. The Author.  
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

## Introduction

The United Nations (UN) established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as a global framework for addressing the world's most pressing social, economic and environmental challenges by 2030. These 17 goals (Figure 1), which build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), aim to make the world more inclusive, equitable and sustainable. The SDGs address interconnected issues such as poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, and peace and justice, offering a road map for countries to achieve sustainable development by aligning national policies with global priorities (United Nations 2015). The principle of 'leaving no one behind', which emphasises the ambition to ensure that the benefits of progress reach all people, particularly the most vulnerable, is central to the SDGs (UN General Assembly 2015). Each goal is interconnected, with specific targets and indicators to track progress.

Aligning conservation efforts with the SDGs is one of today's most important opportunities to ensure a harmonious relationship between human well-being and environmental stewardship. By recognising that environmental health is fundamental to sustainable development, stakeholders from policymakers to businesses to communities can shape a future in which conservation efforts help achieve global goals in economic, social and environmental dimensions.

## Linking conservation with the Sustainable Development Goals

At the heart of the SDGs (Figure 1) is the desire to promote a sustainable future for all, which includes environmental protection, economic growth and social inclusion. Conservation, defined as the protection, restoration, and sustainable management of ecosystems and biodiversity, is critical to achieving these objectives. This is especially true for goals that rely heavily on natural resources, like Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Climate Action (SDG 13), Life Below Water (SDG 14), and Life on Land (SDG 15) (United Nations 2015).

### Ecosystem services and human well-being

Ecosystems provide a variety of services that improve human health, economic stability and societal resilience. These services, such as water purification, soil fertility and pollination, are critical for achieving SDGs 2 (Zero Hunger), 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) (UNDP 2019). For example, restoring wetland ecosystems can improve water purification services, directly affecting water quality and public health (Reed et al. 2017). Furthermore, conservation reduces pollution and exposure to hazardous chemicals, whereas biodiversity aids disease control by maintaining a balanced ecosystem, thereby preventing the spread of zoonotic diseases (Keesing et al. 2010).

### Eco-tourism and sustainable livelihoods

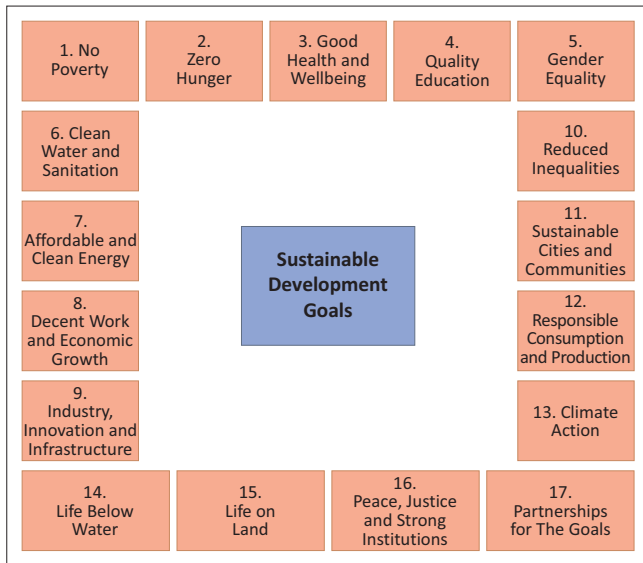
Eco-tourism is an important sector that links conservation to SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by providing income for communities and creating incentives to protect natural landscapes (Honey 2008). Prioritising sustainable tourism allows countries to create resilient economic opportunities for rural and indigenous populations, reducing poverty (SDG 1) and advancing conservation goals.

### Climate resilience and conservation

Forests, wetlands and coastal mangroves serve as carbon sinks, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and contributing to SDG 13 (Climate Action) (Menéndez et al. 2019). To maximise

**Read online:**

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.



Source: Adapted from United Nations, 2015, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations General Assembly, viewed 02 November 2024, from <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

**FIGURE 1:** The 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

climate resilience, policies must incorporate nature-based solutions that leverage ecosystems' potential in addressing climate risks (UNEP 2021). Initiatives such as mangrove restoration along coastlines provide natural storm surge protection while also providing critical habitat for fish, thereby supporting both SDGs 13 and 14 (Life Below Water) (United Nations 2015).

### Community-based conservation

Community-led conservation initiatives can empower local communities, generate job opportunities, and foster a sense of ownership over natural resources. Initiatives that incorporate community-driven conservation models can help achieve SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by creating long-term job opportunities (UNGC 2023; WWF 2021).

Furthermore, conservation projects frequently include education and training, which helps to build local capacity to manage resources sustainably and encourages knowledge sharing about conservation practices, this aligns with SDG 4 (Quality Education) (Pellis, De Jong & Van der Duim 2014; UNGC 2023). In addition, conservation initiatives also

engage and empower women, especially in areas where women are the primary managers of natural resources such as water and forests (UNGC 2023). Women's participation in conservation leadership improves outcomes by bringing diverse perspectives together and promoting equality within communities, thus aligning with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (UNGC 2023; WWF 2021).

Ultimately, conservation goals necessitate collaboration at all levels, from local communities to international organisations. Such partnerships embody the spirit of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), emphasising the need for collaborative action to address complex, interdependent challenges. Moving forward, policymakers, private sectors and communities must develop integrated frameworks that acknowledge nature's critical role in human development. A sustainable and resilient future for both people and the environment is possible by leveraging the synergies between conservation and the SDGs.

### References

- Honey, M., 2008, *Ecotourism and sustainable development: Who owns paradise?*, Island Press, Washington, DC.
- Keesing, F., Belden, L.K., Daszak, P., Dobson, A., Harvell, C.D., Holt, R.D. & Ostfeld, R.S., 2010, 'Impacts of biodiversity on the emergence and transmission of infectious diseases', *Nature* 468, 647–652. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nature09575>
- Menéndez, P., Losada, I.J., Torres-Ortega, S., Narayan, S. & Beck, M.W., 2020, 'The global flood protection benefits of mangroves', *Scientific Reports* 10, 4404. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-61136-6>
- Pellis, A., De Jong, W. & Van der Duim, R., 2014, 'The role of community conservancies in Northern Kenya: Comparative case studies', *Conservation and Society* 12, 182.
- Reed, M.S., Van Vianen, J., Barlow, J. & Sunderland, T., 2017, 'Ecosystem services and poverty alleviation: Trade-offs and governance', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 372, 20160170.
- United Nations, 2015, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations General Assembly, viewed 02 November 2024, from <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2019, *The role of ecosystems in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*, UNDP, viewed 02 November 2024, from <https://www.undp.org/publications/role-ecosystems-achieving-sustainable-development-goals>
- United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), 2021, *Making Peace with Nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity, and pollution emergencies*, UNEP, Nairobi, viewed 02 November 2024, from <https://www.unep.org/resources/making-peace-nature>.
- United Nations General Assembly, 2015, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (A/RES/70/1)*, United Nations, viewed 02 November 2024, from [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A\\_RES\\_70\\_1\\_E.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf).
- United Nations Global Compact, 2023, *Sustainable Development Goals: A call for business action*, UNGC, viewed 02 November 2024, from <https://www.unglobalcompact.org>.
- Worldwide Federation (WWF), 2021, *Engaging communities in conservation: A case for people and nature*, World Wildlife Fund, viewed 02 November 2024, from <https://www.worldwildlife.org/initiatives/community-based-conservation>.