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The Way Forward

Let's Begin

Medium through which we are connected with the rest of the world? Write them below.

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Our planet thrives when we live wise

The haze from neighbouring countries, particularly from Indonesia, has often affected Singapore, illustrating how interconnected our region is. The haze is caused by widespread forest fires in countries like Indonesia, where land clearing practices sometimes involve burning. The smoke from these fires drifts across international borders, affecting air quality in Singapore, Malaysia, and other nearby regions.

For instance, in 2015, Singapore experienced one of its worst haze periods in recent years, with the Pollutant Standards Index (PSI) reaching hazardous levels. This resulted in health

advisories, school closures, and air pollution levels that were harmful to citizens, especially the elderly, children, and those with respiratory conditions.

Now Let's read this story about balancing long term Environmental sustainability vs short term benefits.

Parra's Watermelons

When the late Manohar Parrikar, former Chief Minister of a Goa, a state along the western of India, told this story about his hometown, he wasn't just talking about watermelons. He was talking about how choices made today affect the world tomorrow.

In his village, the older farmers had a simple but smart system they would hold a watermelon-eating contest for the children. While the kids enjoyed the fruit, the farmers carefully collected the best seeds from the biggest, sweetest watermelons for planting next year. This ensured that every new crop would be just as good, if not better.



But when the next generation of farmers took over, their priorities changed. Instead of saving the best fruits for seeds,

they sold them in the market to make quick profits. They used the smaller, lower-quality watermelons for the contest. Within just a few years, the watermelons became smaller, weaker, and less tasty. What was once a thriving, famous produce of Parra disappeared — all because of short-term thinking.

This story is not just about farming — it's about how we make decisions as individuals, as communities, and as a nation.

Singapore faces similar challenges when it comes to sustainability and responsible stewardship.

We enjoy clean water, safe food, green parks, and efficient transport because earlier generations made thoughtful, long-term plans. They planted the “good seeds” — investing in public housing, water management, and education — even when it didn't bring instant rewards.

Today, the challenge for us is the same:

Will we consume resources for short-term convenience, or will we make choices that protect our future?

Will we waste food, water, and energy, or conserve them so others can benefit too?

Will we prioritise profits, or sustainability and shared well-being?

Just like Parra's watermelons, the environment and resources around us respond to the seeds we sow — not just literally, but in our habits, our innovations, and our values.

The story of Parra's watermelons reminds us that true success lies in sustainability — in thinking beyond the present moment and caring for what comes after us.

Whether it's saving energy, reducing waste, choosing greener transport, or developing sustainable technologies, each of us has a role in ensuring that the world we pass on is as rich and vibrant as the one we inherited.

Air, water and land are not accountable to anyone, nor do they confine themselves to boundaries and limitations imposed by humans. The atmosphere, oceans, land, atmospheric gases, forests and climate are the ‘global commons’—they are common resources that belong to the whole planet. Of these, atmosphere and water link the vast expanses of earth.

This means that the regions and the nations of the world are intricately connected. Hence, what affects one part of the world is the concern of everyone on the planet. So, when we burn our plastic wastes, dump garbage in our rivers, litter our roads or waste electricity, let us remember that our action affects not just our village, town, city or country but the whole world.

Climate change, ocean pollution and loss of forests are global problems and not mere country-level concerns. Taking care of the environment, therefore, has to be a combined, concerted effort from all the countries of the world. As global citizens, we too are active contributors to this.

Our Relationship With the Environment - Owner or Caretaker?

Our response to environmental problems depends on our attitude towards the environment. Do we own the environment (egocentric view)? Or are we caretakers (eco-centric view)? Ownership implies that the earth and its resources belong to us and begin and end with us. Therefore, we have the right to use earth’s resources as we please. On the other hand, being a caretaker implies that responsibility has been handed over by those who were there before us and it will be passed on to those who will come after us. This is called ‘stewardship’.

Which attitude do you think would ensure that the earth’s resources are used more responsibly?

Environmental Stewardship - The Caretaker Approach

Environmental stewardship refers to responsible use and

protection of the natural environment through conservation and sustainable practices. All people are encouraged to participate in this process, and it is not the purview of governments and environmental agencies alone.

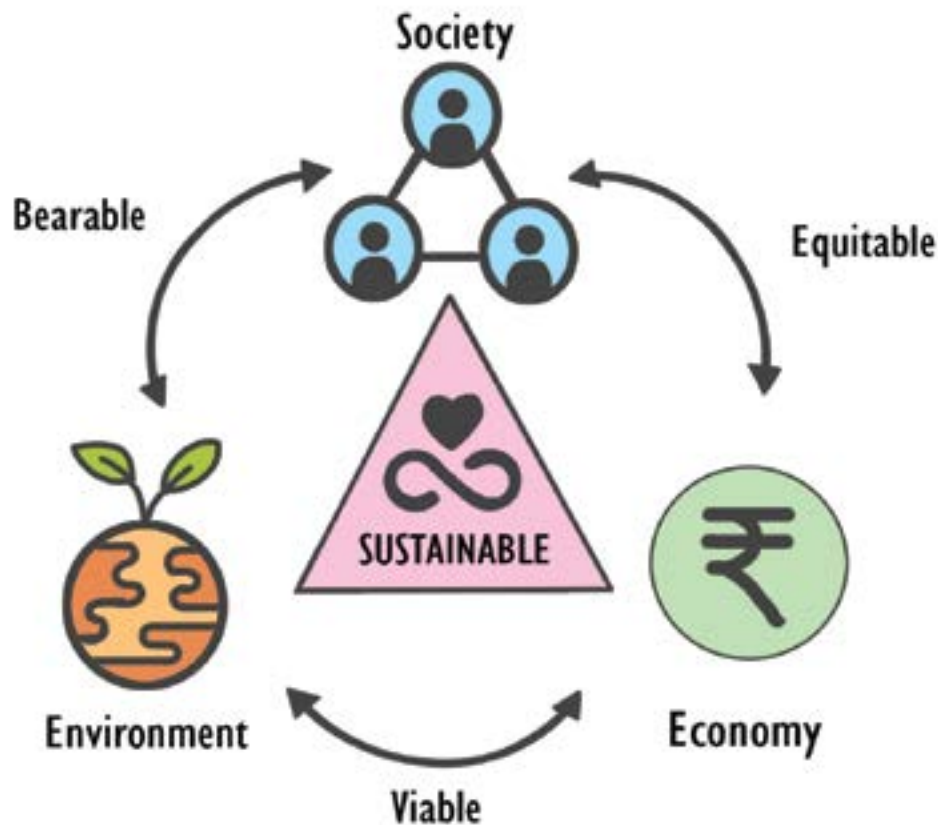
Sustainable Development - The Way Forward

The economic, social and environmental conditions of a country are closely interlinked. What happens to the environment can greatly affect the economic and social structure of human civilisation. Therefore, while economic and social development are extremely important for human society, development that harms the environment would be disastrous and short-term.

If seen the other way around, economic and social conditions of a country also impact the environment. Countries with unstable economies or social conditions (such as war) have been seen to face environmental problems due to indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources.

Keeping this in mind, the United Nations (UN) has understood that the key to a secure world in harmony with its environment is sustainable development.

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It takes into account social and economic development without affecting the environment.



Global Initiatives Towards Sustainability

There are many initiatives that have been taken at a global level to realise a sustainable future. All these have been initiated by the UN. Some of the important initiatives are elucidated below in brief.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was adopted by all UN member states in 2015. It lays out 17 goals that would pave the way for peace and prosperity for the human race and the planet. These are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a call to action to all nations. It is hoped that, through this global partnership, economic and social development will go hand in hand with environmental conservation and protection.



Activity B: Food For Thought

Discuss the following questions in pairs. Share your thoughts with your class.

1. Which of the SDGs are relevant to our country?
2. Do you think our country would be able to achieve these goals by 2030?
3. Can the efforts of our government alone achieve these goals?
4. How do you think Singapore achieving the SDGs would benefit the world at large?

Home Assignment 1

Read up on the following global initiatives—United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and Climate Change in Singapore and The Singapore Green Plan 2030. Assess whether these initiatives have succeeded or are ineffective.

1. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

- International Environmental Treaty, came into effect in 1994
- Signed by 197 parties initially
- **Objective:** To stabilise greenhouse gases (GHG) level in the atmosphere to a level which will not lead to climate change and help countries adapt to climate change in areas such as agriculture and infrastructure. Later, another objective was added to limit global rise in temperature to below 2 degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels
- Industrialised countries were expected to cut down the most on GHG emissions
- Developing countries were given greater flexibility in cutting down emissions because they had to focus on economic development.

2. Climate Change in Singapore : Singapore adopts a proactive long-term effort in addressing rising sea-levels, temperature increases due to global warming, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Singapore's Response to Climate Change:

- **Mitigation Efforts:** Singapore is working to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through various initiatives, including:
Transitioning to natural gas for power generation. Promoting electric vehicles and exploring clean energy solutions.
Investing in carbon capture and storage technologies.

Implementing green building initiatives and promoting sustainable urban development.

3. The Singapore Green Plan 2030

The Singapore Green Plan 2030 is a plan released by the Government of Singapore on 10 February 2021 that sets targets for sustainability in Singapore by 2030. This "collective whole-of-nation effort" supports Singapore's aim to achieve net zero emissions by 2050.[1][2] The plan is spearheaded by five Ministries, being the Ministry of Education, Ministry of National Development, Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Trade and Industry.

It has five key pillars - "City in Nature", "Sustainable Living", "Energy Reset", "Green Economy" and "Resilient Future".

What Are The Green Plan's Key Targets?

- Plant 1 million more trees
- Quadruple solar energy deployment by 2025.
- Reduce the waste sent to landfill by 30% by 2030
- At least 20% of schools to be carbon neutral by 2030
- All newly registered cars to be cleaner-energy models from 2030

The success of these global initiatives has been mixed. There has been a dramatic improvement where all countries have kept the objective as their priority and done their best in fulfilling it. But success is lacking in areas wherein countries are not united in achieving the same goal and where considerations for individual gain overshadow the desire for common good.

Activity C: Assessing Attitudes

Choose the qualities and attitudes you feel are necessary for governments, the people of the world, and nations to ensure a sustainable future for our planet.

Sacrifice individual good for greater good

Sacrifice greater good for individual good

Look at long-term benefits rather than short term ones

Help those who cannot help themselves

Set examples by leading the way in committing to important causes

Prioritise environmental stability over economic gains

Expect other countries to commit before committing oneself to a cause

Work together, keeping differences aside

Feeling of kinship and togetherness among the people of different nations

Singapore and the World, 2030

As global citizens, our greatest contribution to the world would be to achieve the UNSDGs for our country in the shortest possible time. For this, each one of us has to be an active contributor to the development of our country. Don't you agree?

A great way to do this is to 'think global, act local'. What does the phrase mean? Discuss with your class.

One of the most effective ways to achieve environmental sustainability is to use the 'think global, act local' approach. We have already seen how the earth is one big system where everything is interconnected. Therefore, our lifestyle choices and patterns of consumption impact not just our immediate environment but also the earth as a whole. This global outlook has to influence our value systems and lifestyle. As a result, we must take steps at the individual, community, state and country levels to reduce our negative impact on the earth.

Below is an example of the 'think global, act local' approach.

"The more I use my vehicle, the more carbon dioxide I release into the atmosphere, which leads to global warming. So, if I decide to walk, cycle or use public transport whenever possible, I will reduce the emission of carbon dioxide."

Activity D: **Think Global, Act Local**

Write down three ways in which you can apply the 'think global, act local' approach in your life.

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Think Global, Act Local, a Case Study

In 2019, Singapore’s Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources (MSE) drafted its inaugural Zero Waste Masterplan, which mapped out some pathways for building a “sustainable, resource-efficient and climate-resilient nation”. One of these pathways was the move towards a circular economy to reduce emissions, maximise resource efficiency and resilience, and conserve landfill space. As part of the masterplan, the country aims to increase its overall recycling rate to 70 per cent and reduce waste-to-landfill per capita per day by 30 per cent by 2030. The government has also implemented measures to curb food waste, promote e-waste recycling among households, and invest in research and development to drive innovative solutions. While there is still room for improvement, local campaigns coupled with proactive government-driven policies have resulted in a growing awareness of waste management. These efforts demonstrate that even small, targeted changes can drive the transformation towards a more sustainable and environmentally conscious society.

Activity E: Achieving SDGs

Form groups with the help of your teacher. Discuss the different ways in which you think our country can achieve the following SDGs by 2030. Each group has to select one SDG and come up with a roadmap to achieve it by 2030. The roadmap has to include the steps that can be taken by the government as well as citizens and communities using the 'think global, act local' approach. You can create a poster or design an e-poster that can be used to create awareness in your community.

1. No poverty
2. Zero hunger
3. Clean water and sanitation
4. Sustainable cities and communities
5. Sustainable consumption and production
6. Affordable and clean energy

Eye on the Big Picture



Let's Remember

As a country, as communities and as individuals, it is essential for us to expand the vision we have of ourselves to include the whole world. We are not merely inhabitants of a place, part of a community, representatives of a state, or citizens of a country. We are inhabitants of the earth, a vital part of the whole. It is time we embraced the true significance of the grand, thought; 'the whole world is my family'.

Let us act keeping in mind that everything we do has an impact on the earth and its creatures. When each of us do whatever we can to be sustainable, our places, our communities, our country and our world will benefit. Let us do what we can together.

My Space

What I liked most about this lesson...

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I learnt that

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Can your family do its bit towards realising any one SDGs for our country? Discuss with your parents/family members/guardians and decide on any one activity that you could take up collectively towards this goal. Write your family resolution below.

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