Introduction to Sustainable Finance: Syllabus
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1. About the Course

Delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the emissions reductions envisaged by the Paris Agreement will require huge capital investment by the public and by the private sector. According to the United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI), the amount required is between US$ 5-7 trillion a year, including investments in infrastructure, clean energy, water and sanitation, and agriculture. There are clear signs that the finance sector is increasingly prepared to respond to this challenge. By November 2021, there were over 4,000 signatories to the Principles for Responsible Investment and over 200 banks had signed the Principles for Responsible Banking.

Accompanying this growth in interest and investment has been a growth in demand from stakeholders for education and training on sustainable finance, so that they can understand what sustainable finance is, what benefits it can achieve in comparison to traditional approaches to finance, and how it can be brought even further into the mainstream of the financial sector.

This interactive and practical course, 'Introduction to Sustainable Finance', provides you with the basic knowledge you need to understand sustainable finance – its scope, its contribution to supporting action on climate change and sustainable development, the main actors and how financial institutions make decisions on sustainability-related issues. The course also allows you to dig deeper into topics such as sustainable finance instruments (e.g., green, social and, sustainability-linked bonds and loans), methodologies and frameworks for integrating sustainability into financial decisions, key global sustainable finance initiatives (e.g., the Principles for Responsible Banking, the Principles for Responsible Investment and the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures) and sustainable finance regulations. These topics are supplemented by examples and case studies from around the world.

The course is designed for a wide audience, including policymakers interested in understanding how the financial sector might support sustainable development, companies interested in understanding how investors analyse and take account of sustainability issues, finance professionals interested in understanding how their activities might support the goals of sustainable development, and civil society organisations interested in working with the finance sector.

We hope the course contributes to the building of awareness, knowledge and dialogue about sustainable finance, and supports the efforts of all stakeholders in building a more sustainable and resilient economy.

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2. Acknowledgements

This course was originally developed in 2018 by Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken (SEB) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, as part of their Strategic Alliance (STA) on Green Bond Market Development in G20 Emerging Economies, and the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE), a One UN initiative bringing together five UN agencies.

In 2021, the course was comprehensively updated with funding support from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Technical contributions were made by Liesel van Ast (UNEP FI), Christopher Flensborg and Lina Apsheva (SEB), and Dominik Brunner, Yannick Motz, Charlotte Waldraff and Makaio Witte (GIZ). IFC’s Green Banking Academy (Luis Maldonado and Isabel Mantilla) provided an insightful case study on Colombia. The update was managed by UNITAR (Emilian Candrea and Amrei Horstbrink). Inputs to the original version have also been provided by CICERO, Affirmative Investment Management, and UNDP.

Dr Rory Sullivan led the substantive work in updating the existing lessons and case studies, developing new lessons and providing overall guidance on the project. Design and technical implementation were provided by Patrick Cross (Instructional Design and e-Learning Consultant).

About the Partner Organisations

GIZ

GIZ is a German public-benefit federal enterprise that works jointly with governments, international organisations, businesses, civil society actors and research institutions worldwide to foster international cooperation for sustainable development. Through develoPPP.de programmes, GIZ works, on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, with the private sector to support innovative projects in developing and emerging economies for sustainable development. In the field of sustainable finance, GIZ’s approach is to help create enabling framework conditions through policy and reform processes to promote the development of sustainable financial products, and to raise awareness and capacities through training, research and peer learning. For further information, please see: https://www.giz.de/en

SEB

In 2007/2008, the Nordic financial services group SEB AB collaborated with the World Bank and a number of other institutional investors to develop the World Bank’s first green bond. SEB subsequently led several innovative Green Bond issuances, including the first municipal green bond, the first non-supranational green bond and the first corporate green bond. SEB is one of the founding banks of the Green Bond Principles and is a member of the Green and Social Bonds Executive Committee. In addition, SEB has played an active role in the development of other sustainable finance instruments, such as social bonds and loans, and sustainability-linked products. Both SEB and SEB’s clients have received a large number of awards for their sustainable finance instruments from institutions such as Global Capital, Environmental Finance and IFR. For further information, please see: https://sebgroup.com/
**PAGE**

The Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) seeks to put sustainability at the heart of economic policies and practices to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It supports nations and regions in reframing economic policies and practices around sustainability to foster economic growth, create income and jobs, reduce poverty and inequality, and strengthen the ecological foundations of their economies. PAGE brings together five UN agencies – the UN Environment Programme, the International Labour Organization, the UN Development Programme, the UN Industrial Development Organization and the UN Institute for Training and Research – and offers integrated and holistic support to countries on building inclusive green economies. PAGE’s funding partners include the European Union, Germany, Finland, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Sweden and Switzerland. For further information, please see: 
https://www.un-page.org/

**UNEP FI**

The United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative (UNEP FI) is a partnership between UNEP and the global financial sector to mobilise private sector finance for sustainable development. UNEP FI works with more than 450 members, including banks, insurers, investors, and over 100 supporting institutions, to help create a financial sector that serves people and planet while delivering positive impacts. By leveraging the UN’s role, UNEP FI accelerates sustainable finance. For further information, please see: 
https://www.unepfi.org/

**STA**

The Strategic Alliance on Green Bond Market Development in G20 Emerging Economies was a developPPP. de partnership between SEB AB and GIZ, with technical support from CICERO. From 2016 to 2019, the STA supported the development of robust and sustainable green bond markets in emerging economies. For further information, please see: emsdialogues.org.
3. At a Glance

Length: Four modules, 16 lessons

Effort: 440 - 600 minutes (7.5h - 10h)

Price: Free

Subject: Sustainable Finance

Level: Introductory

Language: English

Platform: UN CC:Learn

Assessment: Four quizzes

Certification: Yes
4. Learning Objectives and Structure

Learning Objectives

The e-learning course provides technical knowledge on the contribution that sustainable finance can make to sustainable development, and on how sustainable finance may be deployed in the real-world policy or business context. The course:

- Explains the potential contribution of sustainable finance to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- Explains the core concepts of sustainable finance and the relevance of sustainability considerations for the key actors in the financial system.
- Describes the role that regulation and industry initiatives (self-regulation) play in shaping sustainable finance.
- Describes different sustainable finance products, such as bonds and loans, that may be available to provide the capital needed to support the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Course Structure

The e-learning course is divided into four modules:

1. Sustainable Finance in Context
2. Fundamentals of Sustainable Finance
3. Sustainable Finance: Regulation and Self-regulation
4. Sustainable Finance Products

Each module is composed of several lessons. Participants can navigate through the modules and lessons according to their individual interests and level of knowledge.

Module 1: Sustainable Finance in Context

Module 1 describes the role that sustainable finance can play in delivering global goals on climate change and development. The Module is divided into two lessons:

- Lesson 1: What is Sustainable Finance?
- Lesson 2: Financing International Agreements on Climate Change and Sustainable Development

After completing Module 1, participants will be able to:

- Describe the broad concept of sustainable finance.
- Explain the potential contribution that sustainable finance can make to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
Module 2: Fundamentals of Sustainable Finance

Module 2 explains the core concepts of sustainable finance and the relevance of sustainability to finance sector decision-makers. The Module is divided into five lessons:

- Lesson 3: Sustainable Finance: The Case for Action
- Lesson 4: Sustainable Finance: Key Actors
- Lesson 5: Introduction to Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Risk Management
- Lesson 6: Financial and Sustainability (Impact) Reporting and Communication
- Lesson 7: In Focus: The Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)

After completing Module 2, participants will be able to:

- Explain why finance sector actors are interested in sustainability-related issues.
- Describe the main actors and organisations in the finance system.
- Describe the different approaches that investors, banks and insurers can use to take account of sustainability-related issues in their decisions.
- Explain how finance sector actors report on the financial and sustainability impacts of their decisions, and how this reporting enhances the sustainability of the finance system as a whole.
- Describe the recommendations of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) and explain how these recommendations support finance sector action on climate change.

Module 3: Sustainable Finance: Regulation and Self-regulation

Module 3 analyses the role that regulation and industry initiatives (self-regulation) play in shaping sustainable finance. The Module is divided into three lessons:

- Lesson 8: Sustainable Finance: Policy and Regulation
- Lesson 9: Responsible Banking and Sustainable Insurance
- Lesson 10: Responsible Investment

After completing Module 3, participants will be able to:

- Explain how regulation shapes and influences sustainable finance.
- Explain how industry initiatives contribute to the goals of a sustainable finance system.
- Describe the contribution and influence of key sustainable finance initiatives, in particular the Principles for Responsible Banking, the Principles for Sustainable Insurance and the Principles for Responsible Investment.
Module 4: Sustainable Finance Products

Module 4 describes some of the products, such as bonds and loans, that may be available to provide the capital needed to support the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals and the goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The Module is divided into five lessons:

- Lesson 11: Sustainable Finance Strategies and Products: An Overview
- Lesson 12: The Five Pillars of Sustainable Finance
- Lesson 13: Green Bonds
- Lesson 14: Green Loans
- Lesson 15: Performance-based Instruments
- Lesson 16: In Focus: Sustainable Finance in Colombia

After completing Module 4, participants will be able to:

- Differentiate between use of proceeds and performance-based instruments.
- Describe the sustainability of a particular financial product using the Five Pillars Framework.
- Discuss whether a particular bond meets the requirements of the Green Bonds Principles, the Social Bond Principles or the Sustainability-linked Bond Principles.
- Discuss whether a particular loan meets the requirements of the Green Loan Principles or the Sustainability-linked Loan Principles.
- Describe the key elements of a sustainability-linked bond or loan instrument.
- Describe the key features of sustainable finance policy and practice in Colombia.
5. Methodology

The pedagogical approach of the course reflects the learning needs of professionals employed on a full-time schedule. The course is self-paced, unmoderated and comprised of 16 short lessons delivered through UNITAR’s online Virtual Learning Environment: UN CC:Learn. Each module functions as a stand-alone unit allowing students to create their own learning path.

To accommodate a variety of learning styles, a multi-modal approach to content design and delivery is applied, including textual, audio-visual, reflective and interactive/applied materials. Subject comprehension and retention are supported through introductory questions at the beginning of lessons and summative assessments at the end of each module.

Completion Criteria and Certification

At the end of each module, participants take quizzes that correspond to the learning objectives for the module. The quizzes assess the participant’s understanding of the key facts and concepts discussed in the module.

To receive a Certificate of Completion, participants are required to complete four quizzes, with a minimum of 70% of correct answers.

Navigation and Tracking

Participants can open and transition to any module or lesson at any time using the course page navigation. Participants’ progress towards the course completion can be followed through the course ‘Achievements’ page. The Achievements page features:

- The number of learning units completed, referring to viewing lessons and additional materials.
- The number of required learning units completed, referring to quizzes.
- The participant’s Certificate of Completion, if available.
6. Evaluation

Following completion of the course, all participants are invited to complete a final evaluation, or feedback, questionnaire, which can be found on the participant’s Achievements page. Completing the course evaluation is encouraged as it will help the course developers to improve the content and learners’ experience.

7. Technical Requirements

The course is available for online completion only. UNITAR recommends the following as minimum hardware and software to take this e-learning course:

- Platform: any modern version of Windows (7/8/10) or Mac OSX (10.9 Mavericks (2013) onwards).
- Browser: any modern version of browsers such as Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox or Internet Explorer. Java, cookies and pop-ups must be enabled.