



**International Institute
for Sustainable Finance**

IISF

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION • COURSE 01 OF 06

Foundations of Sustainability

Course Syllabus

Self-paced online course

About 20 hours • 8 modules • 40 lessons

2026 Edition

Version 1.0 • October 2026

sustainablefinance.in

COURSE 01

Course Overview

The concepts, science, institutions, and reporting language on which every later course depends.

Sustainability has a precise vocabulary, a body of scientific evidence, and a growing set of rules. This course sets out all three. It starts from the definitions and the science, moves through the economics and the international agreements, and ends with the standards by which organisations measure and report their performance.

The course names its sources. Participants work directly with the IPCC assessment reports, the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, the GHG Protocol, and the IFRS, GRI, and European reporting standards.

At a glance

Level	Introductory
Format	Self-paced and online. Recorded lessons on the IISF learning platform.
Study time	About 20 hours
Structure	8 modules and 40 lessons
Enrolment	Open throughout the year, with no fixed start date
Access	12 months from enrolment
Assessment	A quiz in every module, then a final quiz
Award	IISF Certificate of Completion for the course
Fee	USD 200. All six courses taken together: USD 1,000.
Prerequisites	None

Who the course is for

- 1 Professionals in any function who need a working command of sustainability.
- 2 Graduates and career changers preparing for roles in sustainability or sustainable finance.
- 3 Candidates intending to take the CSFP, as preparation for Level I.

COURSE 01

Outcomes and Structure

What you will be able to do

On completing the course, a participant should be able to:

CO1	Explain the principal concepts of sustainability, including planetary boundaries, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the just transition.
CO2	Explain the science of climate change and biodiversity loss as set out by the IPCC and IPBES.
CO3	Calculate a simple greenhouse gas inventory under the GHG Protocol and express it in carbon dioxide equivalent.
CO4	Describe the Paris Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the main instruments of carbon pricing.
CO5	Compare the IFRS Sustainability Disclosure Standards, the GRI Standards, and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards.
CO6	Interpret a corporate sustainability report and identify unsupported claims.

Course structure

Module	Title	Lessons	Study time
Module 1	The Idea of Sustainability	5	2 h 15 min
Module 2	Climate Science for Decision-Makers	5	2 h 15 min
Module 3	Nature, Biodiversity, and Resources	5	2 h 15 min
Module 4	People, Rights, and the Just Transition	5	2 h 15 min
Module 5	The Economics of Sustainability	5	2 h 15 min
Module 6	Global Governance and Policy	5	2 h 15 min
Module 7	Measuring and Reporting Sustainability	5	2 h 15 min
Module 8	Sustainability in Organisations and Finance	5	2 h 15 min
Assessment	Revision and final quiz		2 h
Total		40	20 h

MODULE 1 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

The Idea of Sustainability

Where the concept came from, what it means, and how its main frameworks relate to one another.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
1.1	Origins of the concept	From The Limits to Growth (1972) to the Brundtland Report (1987) and its definition of sustainable development.
1.2	Three dimensions	Environmental, social, and economic sustainability; the triple bottom line; weak and strong sustainability.
1.3	Planetary boundaries	The nine boundaries defined by Rockström and colleagues, and Raworth's doughnut of social and ecological limits.
1.4	The 2030 Agenda	The 17 Sustainable Development Goals, their 169 targets, and how progress is measured.
1.5	The vocabulary	How CSR, ESG, sustainability, impact, and transition differ in meaning and in use.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 1.1	Explain the Brundtland definition of sustainable development and distinguish weak from strong sustainability.
LO 1.2	Describe the planetary boundaries framework and the doughnut model.
LO 1.3	Distinguish between CSR, ESG, sustainability, impact, and transition as terms of practice.

Standards and frameworks	Brundtland Report, Our Common Future (1987); UN 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015); planetary boundaries framework (2009, updated 2023); doughnut economics (2017).
Core reading	Marked extract from World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future (1987), Chapter 2.
Key terms	sustainable development; triple bottom line; natural capital; planetary boundary; safe operating space; social foundation; intergenerational equity.
Case study	The Montreal Protocol. How a 1987 treaty reversed damage to the ozone layer, and what it shows about acting on a planetary boundary.
Practice exercise	Map the activities of an organisation you know to the Sustainable Development Goal targets it most affects.

MODULE 2 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Climate Science for Decision-Makers

The physical science on which every climate target, risk assessment, and disclosure rests.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
2.1	Greenhouse gases	Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and fluorinated gases; global warming potentials; carbon dioxide equivalent.
2.2	The evidence	Findings of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, attribution science, and the language of confidence.
2.3	Budgets and pathways	Carbon budgets, the Paris temperature goal, net zero, overshoot, and the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways.
2.4	Physical impacts	Acute and chronic hazards, tipping points, and exposure in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa, and small islands.
2.5	Sources and responses	Emissions by sector, the Kaya identity, and the distinction between mitigation and adaptation.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 2.1	Calculate carbon dioxide equivalent emissions using 100-year global warming potentials.
LO 2.2	Explain carbon budgets, net zero, and the temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.
LO 2.3	Distinguish between mitigation and adaptation, and between acute and chronic physical hazards.

Standards and frameworks	IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (2021 to 2023); IPCC global warming potentials (GWP100); Global Carbon Budget; Shared Socioeconomic Pathways; Kaya identity.
Core reading	Marked extract from IPCC, Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report, Summary for Policymakers.
Key terms	radiative forcing; carbon dioxide equivalent; global warming potential; carbon budget; net zero; overshoot; tipping point; attribution.
Case study	Reading the IPCC. How to read a Summary for Policymakers: scenarios, likelihood terms, and what the report does and does not claim.
Practice exercise	Convert a short emissions inventory covering three gases into carbon dioxide equivalent.

MODULE 3 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Nature, Biodiversity, and Resources

How economies depend on natural systems, what is degrading them, and how the response is organised.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
3.1	Ecosystem services	Provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting services; natural capital; the Dasgupta Review.
3.2	Drivers of loss	The five direct drivers identified by IPBES: land and sea use change, exploitation, climate change, pollution, invasive species.
3.3	The global framework	The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework: four goals, 23 targets, and the 30 by 30 commitment.
3.4	Water, land, and materials	Water stress, deforestation, plastics, and the pressure of material extraction.
3.5	Dependencies and impacts	How a business depends on and affects nature; the ENCORE tool; the TNFD LEAP approach in outline.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 3.1	Classify ecosystem services and explain the concept of natural capital.
LO 3.2	Explain the five direct drivers of biodiversity loss identified by IPBES.
LO 3.3	Identify the nature-related dependencies and impacts of a given sector using ENCORE.

Standards and frameworks	IPBES Global Assessment (2019); Dasgupta Review (2021); Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022); TNFD recommendations and LEAP approach (2023); ENCORE; WRI Aqueduct.
Core reading	Marked extract from IPBES, Global Assessment Report (2019), Summary for Policymakers.
Key terms	ecosystem service; natural capital; direct driver; 30 by 30; dependency; impact; water stress; nature positive.
Case study	Palm oil in Southeast Asia. Deforestation, smallholder livelihoods, and the limits of certification in one commodity.
Practice exercise	Use ENCORE to list the dependencies and impacts of a sector and rank them by materiality.

MODULE 4 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

People, Rights, and the Just Transition

The social dimension: human rights, decent work, equity between countries, and fairness in the transition.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
4.1	The social dimension	Poverty, inequality, decent work, health, and gender, and how they connect to environmental change.
4.2	Business and human rights	The UN Guiding Principles: protect, respect, remedy; the OECD Guidelines; the ILO fundamental conventions.
4.3	The just transition	The ILO Guidelines of 2015, and what a fair transition means for workers, communities, and regions.
4.4	Equity between countries	Common but differentiated responsibilities, climate finance goals, and the loss and damage fund.
4.5	Rights and consent	Indigenous peoples, free, prior and informed consent under UNDRIP, and inclusion.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 4.1	Explain the three pillars of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.
LO 4.2	Explain the concept of a just transition and identify who bears the costs of change.
LO 4.3	Explain common but differentiated responsibilities and the purpose of international climate finance.

Standards and frameworks	UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011); OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises (2023); ILO fundamental conventions; ILO Guidelines for a Just Transition (2015); UNDRIP (2007); New Collective Quantified Goal on climate finance (2024).
Core reading	Marked extract from United Nations, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011).
Key terms	duty to protect; responsibility to respect; access to remedy; due diligence; just transition; decent work; free, prior and informed consent; loss and damage.
Case study	South Africa's Just Energy Transition Partnership. How a coal-dependent economy negotiated finance for a managed transition, and what has proved difficult.
Practice exercise	Prepare a stakeholder map for the closure of a coal-fired power station.

MODULE 5 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

The Economics of Sustainability

Why markets misprice environmental harm, and which instruments correct it.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
5.1	Market failure	Externalities, public goods, and common-pool resources; the approaches of Pigou and Coase.
5.2	Pricing carbon	Carbon taxes, emissions trading in the EU, China, and India, and the EU carbon border adjustment.
5.3	Valuing the future	Discounting, the social cost of carbon, and the debate opened by the Stern Review.
5.4	Growth and decoupling	Relative and absolute decoupling, the circular economy, and the green growth debate.
5.5	Cost curves	Learning curves in solar, wind, and batteries; marginal abatement cost curves; stranded assets.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 5.1	Explain externalities and compare a carbon tax with an emissions trading system.
LO 5.2	Explain the effect of the discount rate on the social cost of carbon.
LO 5.3	Interpret a marginal abatement cost curve and calculate the cost of a carbon price on a product.

Standards and frameworks	Stern Review (2006); EU Emissions Trading System; EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism; India's Carbon Credit Trading Scheme; World Bank State and Trends of Carbon Pricing.
Core reading	Marked extract from Stern, The Economics of Climate Change: The Stern Review (2006), Summary of Conclusions.
Key terms	externality; public good; Pigouvian tax; cap and trade; social cost of carbon; discount rate; decoupling; marginal abatement cost; stranded asset.
Case study	The EU Emissions Trading System. Design, price history, and reform of the world's first major carbon market, launched in 2005.
Practice exercise	Calculate the added cost per tonne of steel under a given carbon price and emissions intensity.

MODULE 6 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Global Governance and Policy

The agreements, institutions, and rule-makers that shape what organisations must do.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
6.1	The climate regime	The UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, nationally determined contributions, the global stocktake, and transparency.
6.2	Article 6	Cooperative approaches under Article 6.2, the Paris Agreement Crediting Mechanism, and voluntary carbon markets.
6.3	National policy	Net-zero targets and clean industrial policy in the EU, China, India, and ASEAN.
6.4	Financial rule-makers	The NGFS, the Basel Committee, the ISSB, IOSCO, and taxonomies in the EU, ASEAN, and India.
6.5	Non-state action	The Science Based Targets initiative, the UN expert report Integrity Matters, ISO guidance, and climate litigation.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 6.1	Describe the architecture of the Paris Agreement, including nationally determined contributions and the global stocktake.
LO 6.2	Explain the purpose of Article 6 and distinguish compliance from voluntary carbon markets.
LO 6.3	Describe the roles of the NGFS, the Basel Committee, and the ISSB in sustainable finance.

Standards and frameworks	UNFCCC (1992); Paris Agreement (2015) and its Article 6; NGFS; Basel Committee climate risk principles (2022); UN High-Level Expert Group, Integrity Matters (2022); ISO Net Zero Guidelines (IWA 42:2022); ICJ Advisory Opinion on climate change (2025).
Core reading	Marked extract from UNFCCC, Paris Agreement (2015), Articles 2, 4, 6, 13 and 14.
Key terms	nationally determined contribution; global stocktake; enhanced transparency framework; internationally transferred mitigation outcome; corresponding adjustment; taxonomy.
Case study	India's nationally determined contribution. The Panchamrit commitments, the 2070 net-zero target, and how a national contribution is read.
Practice exercise	Read a nationally determined contribution and extract its targets, conditions, and finance needs.

MODULE 7 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Measuring and Reporting Sustainability

The accounting and reporting standards through which sustainability performance is measured, disclosed, and assured.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
7.1	Greenhouse gas accounting	The GHG Protocol Corporate Standard: Scopes 1, 2, and 3, boundaries, and the base year.
7.2	Materiality	Financial materiality, impact materiality, and double materiality, and how an assessment is carried out.
7.3	Reporting standards	IFRS S1 and S2, the GRI Standards, and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards compared.
7.4	Jurisdictions	India's BRSR and BRSR Core, adoption of the ISSB standards across Asia, and the EU regime after Omnibus I.
7.5	Targets, ratings, assurance	Science-based targets, why ratings diverge, ISSA 5000, and the rules on green claims.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 7.1	Classify emission sources into Scopes 1, 2, and 3 and calculate a simple inventory.
LO 7.2	Distinguish between financial materiality, impact materiality, and double materiality.
LO 7.3	Compare IFRS S1 and S2, the GRI Standards, and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards.

Standards and frameworks	GHG Protocol Corporate Standard; IFRS S1 and IFRS S2 (2023); GRI Universal Standards (2021); CSRD and ESRS, as amended by Omnibus I (2026); SEBI BRSR Core; SBTi Corporate Net-Zero Standard Version 2.0; ISSA 5000 (2024); ISO 14021.
Core reading	Marked extract from IFRS Foundation, IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures (2023).
Key terms	organisational boundary; Scope 1, 2 and 3; base year; emission factor; double materiality; interoperability; limited assurance; reasonable assurance.
Case study	Reading a BRSR. A listed Indian company's Business Responsibility and Sustainability Report, read line by line.
Practice exercise	Build a Scope 1 and Scope 2 inventory from fuel and electricity data.

MODULE 8 OF 8 • 2 HOURS 15 MINUTES • 5 LESSONS

Sustainability in Organisations and Finance

How sustainability enters governance, strategy, risk, and the allocation of capital.

No.	Lesson	What it covers
8.1	Governance	Board oversight, executive responsibility, incentives, and policy.
8.2	Strategy and transition	Risks and opportunities, scenario thinking, and the elements of a transition plan.
8.3	Climate and nature risk	Physical and transition risk; the four pillars carried from the TCFD into IFRS S2; nature risk under the TNFD.
8.4	How capital responds	Green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, responsible investment, stewardship, and taxonomy alignment.
8.5	Practice and integrity	Roles in the field, professional conduct, and how greenwashing is avoided.

Ref.	On completing this module, you should be able to:
LO 8.1	Describe the role of the board in overseeing sustainability.
LO 8.2	Distinguish between physical risk and transition risk and identify examples of each.
LO 8.3	Describe the main instruments of sustainable finance and the purpose of a taxonomy.

Standards and frameworks	IFRS S2 (governance, strategy, risk management, metrics and targets); TNFD recommendations; Principles for Responsible Investment; ICMA Green Bond Principles; Transition Plan Taskforce Disclosure Framework (2023).
Core reading	Marked extract from Transition Plan Taskforce, Disclosure Framework (2023).
Key terms	board oversight; transition plan; physical risk; transition risk; scenario analysis; use of proceeds; stewardship; greenwashing.
Case study	Ørsted. How a Danish oil and gas company became an offshore wind developer within a decade.
Practice exercise	Draft a one-page sustainability profile of an organisation, covering material issues, risks, and disclosures.

COURSE 01

Learning and Assessment

How you will learn

Recorded lessons	Five lessons in each module, available at any time on the IISF learning platform.
Core reading	One marked extract in each module, of about ten pages, taken from the standards and reports named in this syllabus.
Practice exercise	One exercise in each module, with a worksheet and a worked solution. It is not assessed.
Case study	One case in each module, drawn from practice in advanced and emerging markets.

How you will be assessed

Module quizzes	A short quiz at the end of each of the eight modules.
Final quiz	A quiz covering all eight modules, taken once the module quizzes are complete.
Pass requirement	Completion of the eight module quizzes and a pass in the final quiz. The pass mark is stated on the learning platform.

Certificate

Course certificate	The IISF Certificate of Completion for this course is awarded to participants who meet the pass requirement.
Executive Certificate	Participants who earn the certificate in all six courses receive the IISF Executive Certificate in Sustainability and Sustainable Finance.
Verification	Every certificate carries a reference that can be checked online.

COURSE 01

Core References

The course draws on the sources below. Each module names the standards and frameworks it teaches, and the learning platform links to the current edition of each.

Publisher or author	Document
IPCC	Sixth Assessment Report: Synthesis Report (2023)
IPBES	Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (2019)
United Nations	Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015)
UNFCCC	Paris Agreement (2015)
Convention on Biological Diversity	Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022)
HM Treasury	The Economics of Biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review (2021)
United Nations	Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011)
GHG Protocol	A Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard, revised edition (2004)
IFRS Foundation	IFRS S1 General Requirements and IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures (2023)
Global Reporting Initiative	GRI Universal Standards (2021)
World Bank	State and Trends of Carbon Pricing (annual)

Currency of the syllabus

Standards and regulations are cited as in force in October 2026. Lessons are revised when a named standard changes, and the revision is recorded on the learning platform.

EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

The Learning Pathway

This course is one of six. Each stands alone and may be taken in any order, although Course 1 is recommended first.

Course	Title	Study time
Course 1	Foundations of Sustainability This course	20 h
Course 2	Sustainable Business Models	20 h
Course 3	Sustainable Supply Chains	20 h
Course 4	Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems	20 h
Course 5	Renewable Energy and Green Infrastructure	20 h
Course 6	Impact Investing	20 h

Fees and the Executive Certificate

Each course costs USD 200. The six courses taken together cost USD 1,000. Completing all six earns the IISF Executive Certificate in Sustainability and Sustainable Finance.

Short courses and the CSFP

A short course is assessed by online quiz. The Chartered Sustainable Finance Professional (CSFP) is a designation earned by proctored examination. The short courses carry no exemption from the CSFP examinations, and they are useful preparation for Level I.

About IISF

The International Institute for Sustainable Finance (IISF) is a professional body that sets standards of competence and conduct for sustainable finance, transition capital, climate risk, and responsible investment. It awards the CSFP designation.

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