



Received: 17-12-2024
Accepted: 27-01-2025

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

The Concept of Sustainable Development

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Abstract

Since its inception, the idea of sustainable development has gone through several stages of growth. A comprehensive strategy for growth and advancement, sustainable development aims to satisfy current demands without jeopardising the capacity of future generations to satisfy

their own. It recognises the interdependence between the planet's health and the welfare of its inhabitants and balances economic progress, social inclusion, and environmental protection.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Environmental Sustainability, Social Sustainability, Economic Sustainability

1. Introduction

The first really international conference devoted solely to environmental issues took place in Stockholm, Sweden in 1972 at the Conference on the Human Environment. There, a group of experts explained the connections between development and the environment, saying that "although there were conflicts between environmental and economic priorities in individual instances, they were intrinsically two sides of the same coin" ^[1]. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), whose goal is to "provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations," was also established as a result of the Stockholm Conference. The phrase "sustainable development" was first used in the 1987 Brundtland Report, which was published by the World Commission on Environment and Development. This set the agenda for the 1992 Rio Conference in which sustainable development was a key component of its agenda.

In 1992, the first conference of its kind, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), commonly referred to as the Rio Conference or Earth Summit, succeeded in raising public awareness of the need to integrate environment and development. Ten years later, in Johannesburg, South Africa, leaders from business, government, and non-governmental organisations convened for the Earth Summit 2002. The aim of this summit was to once more agree on a number of actions aimed at achieving comparable objectives.

The third international conference on sustainable development, commonly known as Rio 2012, Rio+20, or Earth Summit 2012, was held by the United Nations with the goal of balancing the world community's environmental and economic objectives.

The idea of sustainable development has become a key foundation for tackling the intricate relationship that exists between social justice, environmental conservation, and economic prosperity. Sustainable development, which was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" by the Brundtland Report in 1987, aims to balance human progress with the protection of ecosystems and natural resources. In-depth discussions of sustainable development's concepts, guiding principles, difficulties, and potential avenues for implementation are covered in this article.

2. Literature review

While neoclassical economic theory later emphasised the importance of clean air and water, renewable resources (fossil fuels, ores), and the necessity of government intervention in cases of externalities and public goods, Karl Marx and classical economists Malthus, Ricardo, and Mill argued about certain elements of sustainable development in the 19th century ^[2-4]. The economic theory that prioritises humans as the lord of natural resources predominated in earlier eras and even the century that followed ^[4, 5].

When the term "sustainable development" was first used in the forestry industry, it referred to practices like afforestation and integrated forest harvesting that shouldn't interfere with the biological renewal of forests^[4]. Though it was originally mostly studied from an ecological point of view, sustainable development quickly expanded to include social and economic dimensions.

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834), an English country clergyman, political economist, and demographer, authored *An Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. He projected that food production could not keep up with population increase and that soon everyone on Earth will either starve to death or live at a subsistence level. He thought that "misery, vice, and moral restraint" kept the populace in control. According to Malthus, "subsistence for man increased in an arithmetical ratio and population, when unchecked, increased in a geometrical ratio"^[6]. Since then, technological advancements have proven him to be incorrect. Production has increased much more rapidly than population, so much so that in real terms, the price of food is much lower today than it was two hundred years ago, or for that matter, even fifty years ago^[7]. This is due to improved farming methods, the development of new farming equipment, and ongoing advancements in agricultural science. However, such technological advancements have also left humans with some environmental concerns.

3. What is sustainable development?

Many perspectives are used to understand sustainable development, which includes social, environmental, and economic aspects. Fundamentally, it seeks to establish equilibrium between these pillars in order to guarantee a robust and just society.

3.1 Some important definitions of sustainable development

- **The 1987 Brundtland Report:** The fundamental definition places a strong emphasis on providing for current needs while making sure that future generations can do the same. A key component of sustainable development is this combined emphasis on present and future needs.
- **The distinction of UNESCO:** UNESCO distinguishes between sustainable development as the means to attain sustainability and sustainability as a long-term objective. This emphasises that sustainable development focusses on the process of achieving sustainability, whereas sustainability itself is an end state.
- **Economic, Social, and Environmental Objectives:** Sustainable development combines social inclusion, environmental preservation, and economic growth. It acknowledges the interdependence of various factors; for example, economic activity must not worsen social inequality or deteriorate environmental quality.

4. Major components of sustainable development

Sustainable development is an all-encompassing approach to growth and progress that strives to meet present needs without endangering the ability of future generations to meet their own. It acknowledges the connection between the well-being of the world's inhabitants and the health of the planet. Three major components of sustainable development are economic, social and environmental sustainability.

4.1 Economic sustainability

Refers to the ability of an economy to sustain itself and its citizens over time without depleting natural resources or jeopardising the welfare of future generations. This concept covers economic growth, poverty reduction, job creation.

4.2 Social sustainability

Its main goal is to ensure that social structures, interactions, and norms advance justice, equity, education, health, and human well-being.

4.3 Environmental sustainability

Aims to maintain ecosystem services and the natural environment in order to promote economic growth and human well-being.

5. Historical background and important milestones

Throughout the 20th century, a number of environmental movements laid the foundation for sustainable development. A major turning point was the 1972 Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which emphasised the necessity of international collaboration in tackling environmental concerns. But the Brundtland Report was the one that solidified the idea into a logical framework for international discussion and policymaking.

- The foundation for global environmental regulation was established at the Stockholm Conference in 1972.
- The Brundtland Report from 1987 gave the phrase "sustainable development" a basic definition and helped popularise it.
- Agenda 21, a thorough plan for sustainable development at the local, national, and international levels, was the product of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

6. Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly presented a set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the UN in New York. Adopted by all United Nations Member States, these 17 goals establish a shared framework for peace and prosperity for people and the planet by 2030. The SDGs consists of 17 goals and 169 targets. Also, 330 indicators were created in March 2015. While some SDGs include new concepts, others expand upon the achievements of earlier Millennium Development Goals. SDGs established in 2015 by UN direct efforts at global development:



Source: UN Sustainable Development here

Fig 1:

7. Obstacles to sustainable development

7.1 Economical Obstacles

A lot of economies put short-term profits ahead of long-term viability, which causes resource depletion and environmental damage. Also unequal access to resources required for sustainable growth is impeded by economic inequality.

7.2 Environmental Difficulties

Climate Change: Ecosystems and human livelihoods are at serious risk due to the rising frequency of extreme weather events.

Loss of Biodiversity: Pollution and habitat degradation endanger species and ecosystem services that are vital to human survival.

7.3 Social Concerns

Cultural Resistance: Implementation attempts may be complicated by cultural values that clash with sustainability measures.

Education Gaps: Public support for required reforms may be hampered by a lack of knowledge about sustainability challenges.

8. How to promote sustainable development

There are several ways to Promote Sustainable Development and overcome its challenges:

- **Frameworks for Policies:** Strong policies that encourage sustainable behaviour across industries must be developed by governments. This includes laws that support the use of renewable energy sources, programs to reduce waste, and sustainable farming methods.
- **Awareness and Education:** It is essential to increase public knowledge of sustainability issues. Programs for education can empower people by educating them about their environmental impact and promoting sustainable practices.
- **Innovation in Technology:** Technological developments can be very helpful in advancing sustainability. Innovations that boost economic growth and lessen environmental impact include waste management systems, smart agriculture solutions, and renewable energy technologies.
- Participation of the Community Involving local communities in sustainability initiatives encourages responsibility and ownership. Initiatives led by the community can successfully tackle regional issues while advancing more general sustainability objectives.

9. Individuals role and contribution to sustainable development

Sustainable development concerns not only government agencies, international bodies, and large companies, but everyone has a role to play. Individuals as well as companies can contribute to sustainable development by

- Learning more about SDGs
- Supporting organisations working towards SDGs
- Involvement in local initiatives
- Exploring sustainable practices
- Reducing energy consumption
- Educating others
- Choosing a sustainable way of living such as using public transportation, reduce, recycle and reuse waste.

10. Conclusion

The idea of sustainable development has been interpreted and criticised in various ways since its inception. A crucial foundation for negotiating the intricacies of contemporary society's interaction with the environment is the idea of sustainable development. Sustainable development provides a route to a more resilient future by striking a balance between social justice, environmental preservation, and economic growth. However, governments, corporations, communities, and individuals must all work together to realise this vision. Adopting sustainable development concepts will be essential as we head into an uncertain future characterised by resource scarcity and climate change, guaranteeing that both current and future generations can prosper on this planet.

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