



## Is it Sustainable ? Exploring the fundamentals

# EXPLORING THE FUNDAMENTALS

Sustainability is a concept which has taken center stage across governmental, private, and business thinking in the past decade or so, and it seems to be here to stay. What exactly does sustainability mean though? By what measure is an activity, policy or decision sustainable?

At its root, sustainability is about three different concepts which have been treated independently in the past, but which have been found to share intrinsic bonds which require all three to be considered together. These aspects have several common names, such as the "3 Ps" or the "3 Es". Those are people, planet, and profit or economy, environment, and equity depending on your preferred alliterative list. To be complete, each of the three really needs a supporting word to complete the image. Just one additional one can add significant meaning to each aspect.

- Social equity
- Environmental stewardship
- Economic development
- The right to work, free from discrimination, for equal pay. (Article 23)
- The right to a standard of living which accommodates food, housing, family care, medical care, and access to education. (Articles 25 and 26).

## SOCIAL EQUITY

Social equity is the process of raising the quality of living to some globally accepted standard in terms of human rights. Most frequently, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights is used as this baseline. The declaration was proclaimed on 10 December, 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly as a common standard worthy of universal protection. Each of these 30 articles must be met in order for a person to be living in such a state as can be considered socially sustainable. These 30 articles are far ranging in their topics, but it is generally the most concise list which covers all the topics critical to a person living a fair life in the modern world. These topics generally cover aspects such as:

- Human equality in rights, dignity, and the expectation of a spirit of brotherhood (Article 1)
- The right to life, liberty, and personal security (Article 3)
- The prohibition of slavery in all its forms (Article 4)
- The freedom of movement within a nation and the right to enter and leave that country (Article 13)
- Freedom of conscience, religion, worship, and opinion in public and in private. (Articles 18 and 19)

Without meeting the social needs of the human population, we are living in a world which is unsustainable in the long-term, where people are made or allowed to suffer for the advancement of others or due to a lack of regard for mankind.

## ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Environmental, or ecological, stewardship is the act of treating natural resources as valuable and limited resources and to use them in a way which ensures they are still available for future generations to use and enjoy. This can mean anything from sustainable forestry, in which woodland is managed and allowed to grow at healthy levels which promote the longevity of ecosystems, to monitoring fish populations and preventing overfishing so that species are not lost due to human activity.

Consideration for the environment and our impacts on it is crucial to long term sustainability because we cannot replace many of the resources which are lost through technology and the natural environment is actively providing services to us which excessive interference cripples. This is why climate change discussion is so frequently tied to the idea of sustainability. Even if we stopped releasing the emissions which have contributed

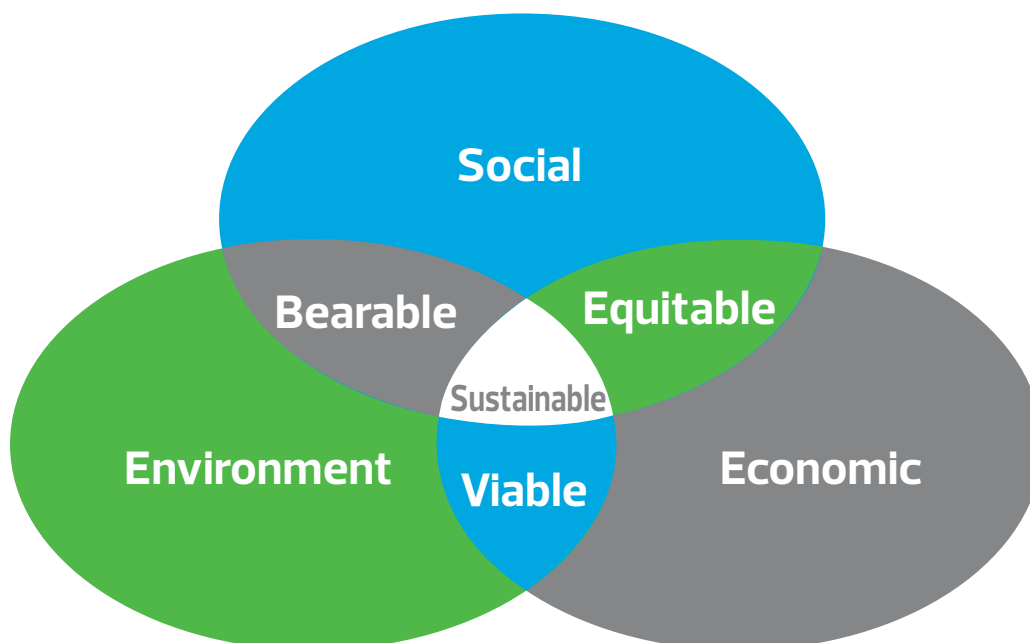
heavily to global warming today, the full effects of our actions may not be realized for the next few centuries (Kelly, 2013). Keep in mind, a large part of those emissions are CO2 being released from oil which scientists believe takes carbon is now added to the cycle and cannot be hundreds of thousands of years to form. Thatrecaptured as oil for another hundred thousand or more years.

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Contrary to some opinions, living sustainably does not mean forgoing a modern living. A crucial aspect of sustainability is continued long term economic development. This, again, exists in conjunction with the other two core sustainability aspects. The needs and means of social equity are generally not possible without economic growth and development. Likewise, our ability to utilize the environment for goods both fuels the economy and allows us to develop new and better ways to do more (in terms of production and technology output) with less (in terms of resources consumed). Sustainable economic development simply means treating social and environmental aspects of sustainability with equal weight in decision making that is traditionally afforded to financial indicators like profit, costs, and shareholder value.

## BALANCE

For sustainability to be achieved these three aspects must exist in a state of balance. The exploitation or ignorance of one aspect forced each other aspect to carry that load. Given that everything is finite, this burden cannot be sustained for the long term. At every level from international governmental partnerships to individual families, decisions will have the greatest overall value, for today and the future, if they consider each aspect. This concept is best described through the use of the below illustration, which examines where the weakness lies in a consideration ignoring any one aspect.



*image from Wikipedia.com*

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