

Social Sustainability: Constraints and achievement

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Abstract --- Sustainability is the capacity to endure. For humans, sustainability is the potential for long-term maintenance of well being, which has ecological, social, economic, political and cultural dimensions. Social sustainability means maintaining social capital. Social capital is investments and services that create the basic framework for society. It lowers the cost of working together and facilitates cooperation. Only systematic community participation and strong civil society, including government can achieve this. Cohesion of community for mutual benefit, connectedness between groups of people, reciprocity, tolerance, compassion, patience, forbearance, fellowship, love, commonly accepted standards of honesty, discipline and ethics, Commonly shared rules, laws, and information promote social sustainability.

Social capital requires maintenance and replenishment by shared values and equal rights, and by community, religious and cultural interactions. Violence and social breakdown can be the most severe constraints to sustainability. The creation and maintenance of social capital, as needed for social sustainability, is not yet adequately recognized. This paper discuss about the sustainability and the inter-dependence among the various societies and how to establish the harmony in the society and the constraints to achieve social sustainability and how to overcome.

Key words: society, community, equity, culture, religion, violence, peace, social sustainability.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable Development: Definition and Meaning

In 1987, the United Nations released the Brundtland Report, which included what is now one of the most widely recognized definitions: *"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*

The United Nations 2005 World Summit Outcome Document refers to the "interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars" of sustainable development as economic development, social development, and environmental protection.

Sustainable development is a holistic approach to improving the quality of life. It postulates that there are intrinsic links among economic, social and environmental well-being. Changes in any one domain will have an impact upon the other two dimensions. From a social perspective in particular, human well-being cannot be sustained

without a healthy environment and is equally unlikely in the absence of a vibrant economy.

While the desired objective of human wellbeing is clear, it is not easy to determine precisely which elements to include in the social sphere. Its connections to the economic dimension, such as quality of work and level of income, are more obvious. But its relationship to the environment as well as to the environment and economy together is more difficult to articulate. (One could argue that environmental challenges are primarily social issues in that they are largely a function of human behavior.)

In addition to understanding the relations among the economic, social and environmental spheres, there are questions as to whether certain social actions are more consistent with the concept of sustainable development than others. While there are no definitive answers, there appear to be some key directions that arise from a studied interpretation of the concept. These include poverty reduction, social investment, and the building of safe and caring communities and maintaining peace and harmonious relationship among communities.

II. HISTORY OF THE CONCEPT

'Sustainability' is a semantic modification, extension and transfer of the term 'sustained yield'. This had been the doctrine and, indeed, the 'holy grail' of foresters all over the world for more or less two centuries.

The first use of the term "sustainable" in the modern sense was by the Club of Rome in March 1972 in its epoch-making report on the "Limits to Growth", written by a group of scientists led by Dennis Meadows and Donella Meadows of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Describing the desirable "state of global equilibrium", the authors used the word "sustainable": *"We are searching for a model output that represents a world system that is: 1. sustainable without sudden and uncontrolled collapse; and 2. capable of satisfying the basic material requirements of all of its people."*

Social Sustainability

Social Sustainability is the least defined and least understood of the three pillars of sustainability and sustainable development. The triad of Environmental Sustainability, Economic Sustainability, and Social Sustainability is widely accepted as a model for addressing sustainability, yet the social aspect has had considerably less attention in public dialogue. The concept of Social Sustainability encompasses such topics as: social equity, livability, health equity, community development, social capital, social support, human rights, labor rights, place making, social responsibility, social justice, cultural competence, community resilience, and human adaptation.

According to the Western Australia Council of Social Services (WACOSS)

"Social sustainability occurs when the formal and informal processes; systems; structures; and relationships actively support the capacity of current and future generations to create healthy and livable communities. Socially sustainable communities are equitable, diverse, connected and democratic and provide a good quality of life."

Dimensions of Social Sustainability

It has the following dimensions

- **Equity** - the community provides equitable opportunities and outcomes for all its members, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable members of the community
- **Diversity** - the community promotes and encourages diversity
- **Interconnected/Social cohesions** - the community provides processes, systems and structures that promote connectedness within and outside the community at the formal, informal and institutional level
- **Quality of life** - the community ensures that basic needs are met and fosters a good quality of life for all members at the individual, group and community level (e.g. health, housing, education, employment, safety)
- **Democracy and governance** - the community provides democratic processes and open and accountable governance structures.

- **Maturity** - the individual accept the responsibility of consistent growth and improvement through broader social attributes (e.g. communication styles, behavioral patterns, indirect education and philosophical explorations)

Also we can speak of Sustainable Human Development that can be seen as development that promotes the capabilities of present people without compromising capabilities of future generations. In the human development paradigm, environment and natural resources should constitute a means of achieving better standards of living just as income represents a means of increasing social expenditure and, in the end, well-being.

The different aspects of social sustainability are often considered in socially responsible investing (SRI). Social sustainability criteria that are commonly used by SRI funds and indexes to rate publicly traded companies include: community, diversity, employee relations, human rights, product safety, reporting, and governance structure.

Constraints of social Sustainability

Social disruptions like **war, crime and corruption** divert resources from areas of greatest human need, damage the capacity of societies to plan for the future, and generally threaten human well-being and the environment.

A major hurdle to achieve sustainability is the alleviation of **poverty**. It has been widely acknowledged that poverty is one source of environmental degradation. Such acknowledgment has been made by the Brundtland Commission report *Our Common Future* and the Millennium Development Goals. According to the Brundtland report, "poverty is a major cause and effect of global environmental problems. It is therefore futile to attempt to deal with environmental problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and international inequality."

Human relationship with the nature is one of the hurdles. According to Murray Bookchin, the idea that humans must dominate nature is common in hierarchical societies. Bookchin contends that capitalism and market relationships, if unchecked, have the capacity to reduce the planet to a mere resource to be exploited. **Health and human**

settlements, inequality and the social injustice also mostly influence the social sustainability.

HOW TO ACHIEVE SUSTAINABILITY IN SOCIAL DOMAIN

i. Poverty reduction

Poverty reduction is a primary objective of sustainable development. This goal arises from warnings by the United Nations which identified poverty as the "greatest threat to political stability, social cohesion and the environmental health of the planet" [United Nations Development Programme 1994: 20]. Poverty is both caused and exacerbated by the

unequal distribution of land as well as other resources and assets.

Communities can help reduce poverty in several ways [Torjman 1998a]. They can meet basic needs by ensuring that their members are adequately nourished, housed and protected from violence. Communities can remove barriers that prevent participation in training programs, the labor market and broader functions, such as recreational and cultural events. They can tackle poverty by building language, educational and job skills. And poverty can be addressed through various forms of local economic development.

ii. Social investment

Social investment is a prerequisite to economic development; a vibrant economy requires a Healthy and educated workforce. Canada ranks near the top of the world in terms of wealth as represented by natural resources. But the World Bank notes that the future success of nations depends on the extent to which they invest in human resources [World Bank 1998/99]. Two major areas for social investment are health and education.

a. Health

Health is attained only partly through the provision of health care services which essentially is a form of remediation. The promotion of health is equally important, particularly in the areas of prenatal and postnatal care. And neither health care services nor health promotion can meet their respective objectives alone. They are both premised upon a healthy environment - clean air and water, a safe food supply and adequate housing. In addition to investments in health that benefit the entire population, there are crucial social

investments to be made at certain stage of the life cycle notably during early childhood. There is ample evidence that investment in early childhood reaps substantial returns in overall health and wellbeing later in life [McCain and Mustard 1999].

b. Education and skills development

Education and skills development are essential to the economic health of individuals and of nations. In order to compete in a rapidly changing knowledge-based economy, both developed and developing nations must invest heavily in education, training and skills formation [Thurow 1999; Betcherman, McMullen and Davidman 1998]. Higher levels of education are associated with enhanced worker productivity and the ability to generate higher incomes.

But investment in education provides the basis not only for economic success. It is also the Foundation for an informed citizenry that comprises the bedrock of democracy.

iii. Safe and caring communities

The concept of sustainable development implies that all individuals and sectors have a responsibility to promote human well-being. They are the caretakers of each other's welfare – much as individuals and all sectors are seen as stewards of the environment.

Safe and caring communities start with the citizen as the base. The active engagement of citizens in building safe and caring communities involves far more than polling their opinions on selected issues or inviting them to present their views at a public consultation.

Communities also can take concrete steps to counter the problem of exclusion. In the past two years alone, the potentially tragic consequences of loneliness and exclusion have been all too apparent in schools and communities throughout North America.

iv. Peace

Peace is the absence of violence, but it also incorporates social justice, human rights, stability and sustainable development. Peace is essential to address the global challenges facing humanity today. Without peace we will be unable to achieve the levels of cooperation, inclusiveness and social equity necessary to solve problems such as climate change, global poverty and the health crisis, the harmonious development.

The lack of peace, that is, a situation of war or conflict, drains away resources that otherwise might be applied (although not necessarily) to promote the well-being of a nation's citizens. In addition, armed conflicts destroy natural resources, infrastructure, and human lives. The establishment of peace permits the recuperation of stable conditions for development and liberates resources for needed investments, although it does not ensure in and of itself that the resulting development will be sustainable.

v. Government

Governments have an important role to play in supporting citizen involvement in public and community problem solving. *And their role is more crucial than ever when it comes to income redistribution and social investment in a rapidly changing, knowledge-based economy.*

Because the social dimension of sustainable development involves no single correct action, the Commissioner also might consider convening a small group of individuals both within and outside government to discuss the work that is being assessed. In effect, they would be engaged in the process of deliberative problem solving – much like the way in which the federal government itself is being encouraged to support communities.

CONCLUSION

The social dimension of sustainable development is concerned primarily with poverty reduction, social investment and the building of safe and caring communities. The strategies for more sustainable social systems include: improved education and the political empowerment of women, especially in developing countries; greater regard for social justice, notably equity between rich and poor both within and between countries; and intergenerational equity. In addition to clear goals, sustainable development provides guidance as to possible means. A wide range of resources should be harnessed in the achievement of these objectives. Complex problems are best tackled through multi-sectoral solutions.

Without achieving the sustainability in social dimension we cannot achieve the sustainability in other dimensions. Only systematic community participation and strong civil society, including government can achieve this. Cohesion of community for mutual benefit, connectedness between groups of people, reciprocity, tolerance, compassion, patience,

forbearance, fellowship, love, commonly accepted standards of honesty, discipline and ethics, Commonly shared rules, laws, and information promote social sustainability.

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