

## Sustainability and Ethics : A Review

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### ABSTRACT

The decisions that we make and the actions that we take have an immediate and undeviating impact on the lives and livelihoods of billions of future humans .Everything that we do , our innovation , our technology , our social development , our learning etc along with a burden of various problems is what we will be handing to our upcoming generations . This paper focuses on the concept of Sustainability amalgamated with Ethics which can be applied practically to give equal say to the future. This paper underlines the moral responsibility that we have towards most of the people that are yet to born. It acknowledges various types of Ethics involved in the process of achieving Sustainability and also gives an introduction to the Ethical context of Sustainability along with the meanings and definitions of sustainability according to one's own prospective. Ethics of Sustainability must be realized and understood to ensure a sustainable present and future.

**Keywords :** Sustainability, Ethics ,Sustainable Development

### I. INTRODUCTION

Everyone on this planet, each person, each country, each community strives for survival and prosperity with a slight regard for its impact on everyone else. A lot of us consume or have consumed the Earth's resources at a rate that would leave little or nothing for the upcoming descendants. On the other hand, majority of us consume or have consumed far too little and live with the odds of poverty, no healthcare, deprived living conditions ,no quality education, hunger and many other sufferings .But, I think the world today is progressing to ensure a process of development which has emerged as the latest development catchphrase, to build a future that is more prosperous, more just, and more secure; that a new era of economic growth can be attained, one based on policies that sustain and expand the Earth's resource base; and that the progress that some have known over the last century can be experienced by everyone on this planet in the years ahead and that development catchphrase is **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**.

“Sustainable development is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”<sup>[1]</sup>

This is most widely accepted and recognized definition of Sustainable Development as it was given by United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development(WCED) in the year 1987 .The modern concept of sustainable development is derived most strongly from this 1987 Brundtland Report and this report was called **Our Common Future** .It took more than 900 days to publish this report and for the first time ever in the history of world , this Brundtland Report placed environmental issues strongly on the political platform and it also concluded that environment and development cannot be taken into account separately. Environment and Development are directly linked and should be treated collectively as a single issue.

Sustainable Development contains within it two key concepts:

- “The concept of 'needs', in particular, the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.”<sup>[1]</sup>

In today's world, where there is a huge unethical competition between developed countries to become more developed and between developing countries to become developed countries, the natural resources are getting depleted at very rapid rate. Petroleum, Natural gas, Coal, Minerals, Forests, Timber and many others are those precious and stealthily diminishing resources which are and which will be required by any country to sustain its economy.

Each and every resource must be utilized ethically, wisely and efficiently taking into consideration about the future generations to come because if these resources are extinguished then the upcoming generations cannot survive and live on Earth. Therefore, we must use the available resources in an optimal manner so that the requirements of the present generations are met without compromising on the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs. In other words, the utilization of all currently available natural resources must be done in a Sustainable way, along with taking into account that the environment suffers relatively least possible degradation.

## Definitions and Meanings of Sustainability

One of the reasons for the widespread application of the sustainability framework is that there are a variety of definitions. Definitions of sustainability may cover all three systems comprising this framework (social, environmental, or economic) or may be skewed to one of them; they may or may not address future generations; and they may address technology, resources, waste, pollution or other issues.<sup>[2]</sup> The following are some definitions of sustainability emphasizing on various aspects as per different authors :

- "Sustainable design is the set of perceptual and analytic abilities, ecological wisdom, and practical wherewithal essential to making things that fit in a world of microbes, plants, animals, and entropy. In other words, (sustainable design) is the careful meshing of human purposes with the larger patterns and flows of the natural world, and careful study of those patterns and flows to inform human purposes." *David Orr, Professor, Oberlin College, Ohio*
- "Sustainability is equity over time. As a value, it refers to giving equal weight in your decisions to the

future as well as the present. You might think of it as extending the Golden Rule through time, so that you do unto future generations as you would have them do unto you."

*Robert Gilman, Director, Context Institute*

- "A transition to sustainability involves moving from linear to cyclical processes and technologies. The only processes we can rely on indefinitely are cyclical; all linear processes must eventually come to an end."

*Dr. Karl Henrik-Robert, MD, founder of The Natural Step, Sweden*

- "Actions are sustainable if: There is a balance between resources used and resources regenerated. Resources are as clean or cleaner at end use as at beginning. The viability, integrity, and diversity of natural systems are restored and maintained. They lead to enhanced local and regional self-reliance. They help create and maintain community and a culture of place. Each generation preserves the legacies of future generations."

*David McCloskey, Professor of Sociology, Seattle University*

- "Clean air, clean water, safety in city parks, low-income housing, education, child care, welfare, medical care, unemployment (insurance), transportation, recreation/cultural centers, open space, wetlands..."

*Hazel Wolf, Seattle Audubon Society.*

- "Leave the world better than you found it, take no more than you need, try not to harm life or the environment, make amends if you do."

*Paul Hawken, The Ecology of Commerce*

The wide variety of definitions for sustainability is both a blessing and a curse. It has something for everyone, but what majority of habitants of Earth derive from these definitions is of utmost importance.

## Ethics In Sustainability

Sustainability is mostly understood to require the properly balanced pursuit of three goods: ecological health, social justice, and economic wellbeing. It is heavily based on the ethical commitment for the welfare not only of contemporary populations but also the

wellbeing and enhanced opportunities of future generations.

Every single person living on this planet Earth has a right to having their needs for water, food, shelter, clothing etc to be met. We, the people living this era have an obligation to upcoming generations to hand over to them a planet which is intact and functioning as good as we received it from our ancestors. But, we should realize that we all are interdependent; present and future generations, but right now it is seen that wealthier and powerful countries control to the maximum extent the fate of everyone else, present and future. Therefore, the application of concept of sustainability requires a good understanding of the ethical aspects which assist them. The specific ethical fields and approaches that are most directly relevant for the ethics of sustainability are: Social, Economical and Environmental ethics.

#### • Social Ethics

It is mainly concerned with the moral principles, dimensions and consequences of the group actions and decisions. It is social because it looks at the decisions which are collective rather than personal and individuals and its implication which affect larger group of people. Social Ethics corresponding to the framework of Sustainability often include justice and fairness, equity and equal opportunity, concern for vulnerable groups, stability and security, and protection of individual liberties.

#### • Economic Ethics

Economic ethics is concerned with the virtuous foundations, characteristics, and consequences of economic activities which are mainly done by the institutions involved. When considering the ethical dimensions of economic systems, institutions, and decisions, a number of significant questions related to sustainability must be taken into account, like security, efficiency, productivity, effectiveness, optimal usage etc. The process of judging the compatibility of economic ethics with the broader goals involved in sustainability is necessary in order to identify and transform unsustainable practices.

#### • Environmental Ethics

The third kind of ethics involved in sustainability are environmental ethics, can be defined as philosophical reflection on and arguments about the value of non-human nature. It believes that humans and non living things both are the parts of society and it emphasizes for moral relationship on account of the humans towards the environment. An ethic of sustainability would be identified with amalgamation of environmental philosophies that emphasize social and economic issues, such as environmental justice and human health issues.

#### Ethical Context of Sustainability

The classic, Brundtland Report definition of sustainable development is "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Indeed this definition suggests a virtuous framework that analogs the rights of both present and future peoples closing contrasting the rights of upcoming versus present generations, and suggest that everyone's needs should be fulfilled before the wants of some are addressed. Some tough questions arise like, how is it possible to address the needs of future people when the needs of the vast majority of the world's present population are not being met? The needs are also categorized into many parameters and which needs are most urgent, which needs can be met slowly? Is this the Earth that we want to give to our descendants? The succeeding generations might be afraid to go out in the Sun because of the harmful UV radiations. They might be frightened to drink water directly from the tap as they don't know which chemicals they are going to drink. The upcoming generations might not love to walk out on roads because they might be scared of the polluted air they might breathe in.

There is a vast range of morally bound questions that must be answered, if not then it signifies majority of us living on this planet have become morally corrupt at our hearts.

Golding addressed this problem in 1972 when he suggested that a moral community can be organized only in one of two ways, by an explicit contract between its

members or by a social arrangement in which each member benefits from the efforts of other members.

With respect to future generations neither an explicit contract nor social arrangement is possible and thus rights cannot be attributed to future generations as a result of a contract or social arrangement.<sup>[3]</sup>

Alternatively, if future generations shared the same interests or social ideals as present peoples, then it could be argued that they have rights equal to ours. Golding argued that, due to technological changes and other factors it is not possible to know the condition of future generations and their conception of life and values. Around the same time frame as Golding's musings about rights of future generations, Walter Wagner (1971) suggested that if we recognized the rights of future generations, then we would experience a greater degree of self-actualization and wellbeing.

Ethically ,In addition to the positive benefits that must be passed on to future generations, harmful consequences must not be passed on., because we are the one who have created majority of these environmental and other problems and now if we pass it on to the future generations , they won't pardon us .Future persons may be thought of proxies for past generations to whom present people owe debts. These debts are repaid by providing as much or more to future generations as our ancestors did for us.<sup>[4]</sup>The upcoming generations have no right that they should handed an Earth which is facing many ugly consequences .

## II. Conclusion

Sustainability coupled with Ethics can be called upon as a Multi-dimensional concept which can be applied directly /indirectly/remotely to every day situations to guide people, Governments , Organizations , NGO etc towards a scenario where both present and future generations can have their share of a potentially better Earth to live .When we link Sustainability with Ethics , it emphasizes on our common social responsibility towards our descendants. There must be a common framework that should call upon present people to consider the conditions of current population which is living an impoverished life and also on the potential conditions of upcoming generations who are at mercy of our consumption and living patterns. It is an Ethical responsibility that must be addressed and understood

significantly .Having a mechanism of Ethical underpinnings to solve many challenges that we are facing or our future generations are bound to encounter.

## III. REFERENCES

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