

Brundtland Report

Brundtland Report, publication released in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) that introduced the concept of sustainable development and described how it could be achieved. Sponsored by the United Nations (UN) and chaired by Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, the WCED explored the causes of environmental degradation, attempted to understand the interconnections between social equity, economic growth, and environmental problems, and developed policy solutions that integrated all three areas.

In response to mounting concern surrounding ozone depletion, global warming, and other environmental problems associated with raising the standard of living of the world's population, the UN General Assembly convened the WCED, an international group of environmental experts, politicians, and civil servants, in 1983. The WCED (also called the Brundtland Commission) was charged with proposing long-term solutions for bringing about sustainable development and continuing it into the 21st century. It was also tasked with finding ways in which the concern for the environment might be translated into greater cooperation between countries regarding issues of development and resource use and creating processes in which all countries could address their own environmental concerns and those of the world over the long term.

The Brundtland Report included chapters covering, among other topics within sustainable development, the role of the international economy, population and human resources, food security, species and ecosystems, energy, industry, and proposed legal principles for environmental protection. Of all the topics covered, however, the Brundtland Report is most often cited for its definition of sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Implicit in this definition are the concept of needs, which emphasized the goal of providing for the essential requirements of the world's poor, and the idea that technology and social organization imposes limits on the ability of the environment to provide for the world's present and future needs.

The Brundtland Report also highlighted global population growth that could not continue indefinitely. It predicted that in the 21st century the world population would stabilize somewhere between 7.7 billion and 14.2 billion people and that more people would live in cities than in rural areas. Although some of the highest population-growth rates were among developing countries, the report pointed out that the environmental impact of an additional individual born in an industrialized country was much greater than of one born in a developing country. The report noted also that declining birth rates of the industrialized world would translate

into a greater burden on the younger generations to support an aging population. For the developing world improved health and education, especially among women, were presented as solutions to the resource and demographic challenges posed by high birth rates.

In addition, the Brundtland Report called on the UN to establish the UN Programme of Action on Sustainable Development to carry out the directives outlined in the report. The report laid the foundations for the Rio Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, which then ultimately led to the creation of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development that same year.

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