**Sustainable development**

**Sustainable development** is a pattern of resource use that aims to meet human needs while preserving the [environment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environment_(biophysical)) so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for future generations. The term was used by the [Brundtland Commission](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Commission) which coined what has become the most often-quoted definition of sustainable development as [development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_development) that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable development ties together concern for the [carrying capacity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrying_capacity) of [natural systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Systems_ecology) with the social challenges facing humanity. As early as the 1970s "sustainability" was employed to describe an [economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy) "in equilibrium with basic ecological support systems." Ecologists have pointed to [The Limits to Growth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Limits_to_Growth), and presented the alternative of a “[steady state economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Steady_state_economy)” in order to address environmental concerns.

The field of sustainable development can be conceptually broken into three constituent parts: [environmental](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environment_(biophysical)) [sustainability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability), [economic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economics) sustainability and [sociopolitical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Society) sustainability.

**Scope and definitions**

The concept has included notions of weak [sustainability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability), strong sustainability and [deep ecology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_ecology). Sustainable development does not focus solely on environmental issues.

In 1987, the [United Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations) released the [Brundtland Report](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Report), which defines sustainable development as 'development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The United Nations [2005 World Summit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2005_World_Summit) Outcome Document refers to the "interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars" of sustainable development as economic development, social development, and environmental protection.[[9]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development#cite_note-8)

Indigenous peoples have argued, through various international forums such as the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and the Convention on Biological Diversity, that there are *four* pillars of sustainable development, the fourth being cultural. *The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity* ([UNESCO](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNESCO), 2001) further elaborates the concept by stating that "...cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature”; it becomes “one of the roots of development understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence". In this vision, cultural diversity is the fourth policy area of sustainable development.

**Economic Sustainability:**

[Agenda 21](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agenda_21) clearly identified information, integration, and participation as key building blocks to help countries achieve development that recognizes these interdependent pillars**. It emphasizes that in sustainable development everyone is a user and provider of information. It stresses the need to change from old sector-centered ways of doing business to new approaches that involve cross-sectoral co-ordination and the integration of environmental and social concerns into all development processes.** Furthermore, Agenda 21 emphasizes that broad public participation in decision making is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving sustainable development.

**Sociopolitical sustainability:**

**Sustainability is a process which tells of a development of all aspects of human life affecting sustenance. It means resolving the conflict between the various competing goals, and involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity famously known as three dimensions (**[**triple bottom line**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triple_bottom_line)**) with is the resultant vector being technology, hence it is a continually evolving process; the ‘journey’ (the process of achieving sustainability) is of course vitally important, but only as a means of getting to the destination (the desired future state)**. However, the ‘destination’ of sustainability is not a fixed place in the normal sense that we understand destination. Instead, it is a set of wishful characteristics of a future system. [Green development](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_development) is generally differentiated from sustainable development in that Green development prioritizes what its proponents consider to be environmental sustainability over economic and cultural considerations. Proponents of Sustainable Development argue that it provides a context in which to improve overall sustainability where cutting edge Green development is unattainable. For example, a cutting edge treatment plant with extremely high maintenance costs may not be sustainable in regions of the world with fewer financial resources. An environmentally ideal plant that is shut down due to bankruptcy is obviously less sustainable than one that is maintainable by the community, even if it is somewhat less effective from an environmental standpoint.

Sustainable development is said to set limits on the developing world. While current first world countries polluted significantly during their development, the same countries encourage [third world countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_world_countries) to reduce pollution, which sometimes impedes growth. Some consider that the implementation of sustainable development would mean a reversion to pre-modern lifestyles.

Others have criticized the overuse of the term:

"[The] **word sustainable has been used in too many situations today, and ecological sustainability is one of those terms that confuse a lot of people. You hear about sustainable development, sustainable growth, sustainable economies, sustainable societies, sustainable agriculture. Everything is sustainable (Temple, 1992).**"

**Environmental sustainability**

Environmental sustainability is the process of making sure current processes of interaction with the environment are pursued with the idea of keeping the environment as pristine as naturally possible based on [ideal-seeking behavior](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ideal-seeking_behavior&action=edit&redlink=1).

An "unsustainable situation" occurs when [natural capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Natural_capital) (the sum total of nature's resources) is used up faster than it can be replenished. [Sustainability](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainability) requires that human activity only uses nature's resources at a rate at which they can be replenished naturally. Inherently the concept of sustainable development is intertwined with the concept of [carrying capacity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrying_capacity). Theoretically, the long-term result of environmental degradation is the inability to sustain human life. Such degradation on a global scale could imply [extinction](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction) for humanity.

**Consequences**

[John Baden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Baden)views the notion of sustainable development as dangerous because the consequences have unknown effects. He writes: "In economy like in ecology, the interdependence rule applies. Isolated actions are impossible. A policy which is not carefully enough thought will carry along various perverse and adverse effects for the ecology as much as for the economy. Many suggestions to save our environment and to promote a model of 'sustainable development' risk indeed leading to reverse effects." Moreover, he evokes the bounds of public action which are underlined by the [public choice theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_choice_theory): the quest by politicians of their own interests, lobby pressure, partial disclosure etc. He develops his critique by noting the vagueness of the expression, which can cover anything:  It is a gateway to interventionist proceedings which can be against the principle of freedom and without proven efficacy. Against this notion, he is a proponent of [private property](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_property) to impel the producers and the consumers to save the natural resources. According to Baden, “the improvement of environment quality depends on the [market economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Market_economy) and the existence of legitimate and protected [property](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Property) rights.” They enable the effective practice of personal responsibility and the development of mechanisms to protect the environment. The State can in this context “create conditions which encourage the people to save the environment.”

**Vagueness of the term**

Some criticize the term “sustainable development”, stating that the term is too vague. For example, both [Jean-Marc Jancovici](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Jean-Marc_Jancovici&action=edit&redlink=1) or the philosopher [Luc Ferry](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luc_Ferry) express this view. The latter writes about sustainable development: "I know that this term is obligatory, but I find it also absurd, or rather so vague that it says nothing." Luc Ferry adds that the term is trivial by a proof of contradiction: "who would like to be a proponent of an “untenable development! Of course no one! [..] The term is more charming than meaningful. [..] Everything must be done so that it does not turn into Russian-type administrative planning with ill effects."