

Sustainable Development as Challenge and Opportunity

Mrs. Kalpana R. Thakare (Kawathekar) ¹,

Associate Professor, Dept. of Arch., K.I.T.S., Ramtek, Nagpur M.S., India

Mrs. Anjali V.Narad ², Assistant Professor, Dept. of Arch., K.I.T.S., Ramtek.

Abstract:

Sustainable developmental need has spread almost globally. Some may consider it as an opportunity, whereas it may look as a challenge for the other. Ultimately it is a matter of our living culture which makes us feel so. Most countries in the world have accepted that sustainable development is an essential development pathway and are busy incorporating its principles into their own policies and programmes. Unfortunately, sustainability has become a “fashionable” concept in theory. Sustainable Development specific to location should be considered with simple and sensible solutions achieving resources conservation. The United Nations have taken sustainable development as very serious and it has established specialist units to deal with the issue and to identify opportunities and activities to support this development theory.

Key words:

Development, Sustainable Development, Built Environment, Resources Conservation

1. Introduction to Development at Global Level:

Development is the continuous improvement in the standard of living and the quality of life of the people in the country. Development includes economic and social development at large. A country's level of development is influenced by a number of interrelated factors such as historical, political, economic, social and environmental. Most developing nations of the world face development challenges as a result of a combination of these factors. Some environmental factors which contribute to a country's level of development, such as natural disasters, are to some extent beyond human control. The majority of the development issues have been created and continued due to the direct actions of humans. The very high rate and

level of development experienced by most rich countries of the world is another factor which perpetuates many challenges faced by people in developing countries. Thus we can say that the world is faced with challenges in all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, social and environmental. More than 1 billion people are still living in extreme poverty and income inequality within and among many countries have been rising; at the same time, unsustainable consumption and production patterns have resulted in huge economic and social costs and may endanger life on the planet, though the “Sustainability” has been present for the last decades in academic papers, syllabuses of Faculties, boardrooms of local authorities and corporations and offices of public relations officers. According to different sources, the concept of sustainability in the sense of a balance between resource consumption and reproduction was however applied to forestry already in the 12th to 16th century. Unfortunately, sustainability has become a “fashionable” concept in theory, but it is considered extremely expensive to be put in practice by major corporations, firms and local or national governments. Both terms derive from the older forestry term "sustained yield", which in turn is a translation of the German term "nachhaltiger Ertrag" dating from 1713. What people tend to neglect and forget is the evolution of the concept of sustainability. Although the history and evolution of a concept might seem unimportant, it could help us predict the future trends and flaws that will appear.

Achieving sustainable development will require global actions to deliver on the legitimate aspiration towards further economic and social progress, requiring growth and employment, and at the same time strengthening environmental protection.

Sustainable development will need to be inclusive and take special care of the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable. Strategies need to be ambitious, action-oriented and collaborative, and to adapt to different levels of development. They will need to systematically change consumption and production patterns, and might entail, inter alia, significant price corrections; encourage the preservation of natural endowments; reduce inequality; and strengthen economic governance.

2. History of the concept of sustainable Development:

The concept of sustainable development was originally synonymous with that of sustainability and is often still used in that way. ‘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 essence of ‘sustained yield forestry’ was described for example by William A. Duerr, a leading American expert on forestry: “To fulfill our obligations to our descendents and to stabilize our communities, each generation should sustain its resources at a high level and hand them along undiminished. The sustained yield of timber is an aspect of man’s most fundamental need: to sustain life itself.” A fine anticipation of the Brundtland-formula.

The term ‘sustainable development’ became commonplace after the publication of a report by the World Commission on Environment and Development (World Commission 1987), widely known as the Brundtland Commission Report, where sustainable development was defined as “Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The idea is that, relative to their respective demographic bases, each generation should bequeath to its successor at least as large a productive base as it inherited from its predecessor. If it were to do so, the economic possibilities facing the successor would be no worse than those it faced when inheriting productive assets from its predecessor. An economy’s productive base includes not only its capital assets (stocks of manufactured, human, and natural capital; knowledge), but also its institutions (including its cultural coordinates).

3. The emergence of the concept:

The 1972 Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden, attended by 113 states and representatives from 19 international organizations, was the first truly international conference devoted exclusively to environmental issues. There, a group of 27 experts articulated the links between environment and development stating that: “although in individual instances there were conflicts between environmental and economic priorities, they were intrinsically two sides of the same coin” (Vogler, 2007, p. 432). Another result of the Stockholm Conference was the creation of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) which has the mission “to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations”.

This conference played a catalytic role in promoting the subsequent adoption of international agreements concerned with ocean dumping, pollution from ships, and the endangered species trade. It also adopted the “Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment,” which

included forward-looking principles, such as Principle 13167, that declared the need for integration and coordination in development planning to allow for environmental protection. However, “the Stockholm conference was limited in its effectiveness because environmental protection and the need for development, especially in developing countries, were seen as competing needs and thus were dealt with in a separate, uncoordinated fashion”. Some critics concluded that “the conference was more concerned with identifying trade-offs between environment and development than with promoting harmonious linkages between the two” (Prizzia, 2007, p. 21). Even UN documents acknowledged after the Stockholm conference that little was accomplished to concretely integrate environmental concerns into development policies and plans. A more integrated perspective that incorporated both economic development and environmental sensitivities was clearly needed.

4. General understanding of Sustainable Development:

In 1983, the UN General Assembly created the World Commission on Environment and Development which was later known as the Brundtland Commission, named after its Chair, Gro Harlem Brundtland, then Prime Minister of Norway and later head of the World Health Organization. In 1987, the Commission published the Brundtland Report, entitled *Our Common Future*. It built upon what had been achieved at Stockholm and provided the most politically significant of all definitions of *sustainable development*: “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The definition contains two major concepts: firstly, the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to whom overriding priority should be given; and secondly the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. In that period the concept of sustainable development acquired political momentum “through rising public concern in the developed countries over the new and alarming phenomenon of global environmental change, and in some ways it replaced fears of nuclear war that had prevailed in the early 1980's” (Vogler, 2007, p. 435).

Some critics argue that “the Brundtland Commission Report's discussion of sustainability is both optimistic and vague. The Commission probably felt that, in order to be accepted, the discussion had to be optimistic, but given the facts, it was necessary to be vague and contradictory in order not to appear to be pessimistic” (Bartlett, 2006, p. 22). Others are even

more critical: “Mrs. Brundtland provided a slogan behind which first world politicians with green electorates to appease, and third world politicians with economic deprivation to tackle, could unite. The formula was of course vague, but the details could be left for later” (Benton, 1994, p. 129). But the fact still remains that the concept of sustainable development was born.

5. Sustainable Development in context of Built Environment:

Urbanization provides new jobs and new opportunities for millions of people in the world, and has contributed to poverty eradication efforts worldwide. At the same time, rapid urbanization adds pressure to the resource base, and increases demand for energy, water, and sanitation, as well as for public services, education and health care.

In many developing countries, rapid urbanization calls for additional resources, and capacity development of local governments has become a pressing issue. It should also be noted that urban areas are constantly evolving as a result of people’s mobility, natural population growth, socioeconomic development, environmental changes, and local and national policies.

During 1950-2010, a net 1.3 billion people was added in small cities, more than double the number of people added in medium cities (632 million) or large cities (570 million). The policy implications of the rising significance of middle and large settlements in the next 15-20 years are worth noting. In the future, these cities will be primarily located in low- and middle-income countries. Since 2007, more than half of the world’s population has lived in urban centres and it is estimated that the proportion will have exceeded 70 per cent by 2050. Eighty per cent of the world’s urban population will live in developing regions, especially in cities of Africa and Asia.

6. Study of efforts in Florida towards sustainable Development:

Florida is experiencing a gradually unfolding quandary in consequence of booming population development and growth in a context of limiting resources. Florida’s population is projected to extend to 27.5 million over the following 25 years, and double in 50 years. Urban development, suburban stretch, transport pressures, coastal densities, habitat fragmentation, and reduced rural lands will be the inescapable result of this population increase unless expansion is managed cleverly. Existing conservation and preservation lands

are under increasingly extreme pressure, and lands that ought to be protected will be lost to development unless they're identified and protected in some specific form shortly. The idealist state programs of Florida Forever and Preservation 2k have saved over 2,000,000 acres, but we must act now to finish the task before the possibility is forever lost. In the keynote speech by the president of the state at the Florida Symposium on Methods for Regional Cooperation in which he emphasized the linkage between Florida's environment and its economy saying, "We are liable to murdering the goose that lays the golden eggs." By this he meant the now colourful economy of the state is critically reliant upon Florida's storied, sun-washed standard of life and its natural environment, now staggering from multiple attacks.

The restrictions on land use are made ever more vital by the unfolding effects of global warming, which are expected to raise sea level twelve inches by 2075. Gurus also envision an enlarging likelihood of more heightened hurricanes striking the Florida coasts where eighty percentage of the populace lives. This confluence of inhibitions makes the identifying of statewide expansion management concerns critically critical. To defer or avoid such planning will end in irretrievable losses of resources and noticeably increased costs in the future when the options will be dreadful and the tradeoffs more economically costly.

Without regard for the way the term is outlined, the puzzle implicit in viable development is that the goals of supportability are interdependent. Indeed, the complex interlinking of the environmental, social, and commercial legs of supportability is clear from even an informal consideration of any one of the points related to expansion management in Florida. As an example, straightforward solutions for maximizing the near-term expansion of the nation's economy would indisputably result in negative results for the natural environment and noticeably corrode the standard of life for its residents.

In the end we must at least maintain the life supporting system offered by the natural part if we are to have any hope of achieving a tolerable society and economy. The current situation isn't new, and way back to the early 1800's the history of Florida has been identified by regular land speculating. What's different about our unfolding difficulty is the high level of agreement among policy makers, developers, land bosses, and conservationists that a limit to development is quickly being approached, beyond that the nation's economy and resources will suffer most likely hopeless damages.

The Image shows the projected home expansion of the state by 2020 in which 2 to 3,000,000 acres of aquifer recharge lands will be developed (conjectured by the Florida Chapter of The Nature Conservancy). It's very clear that this vision of the future isn't consistent with the goals of supportable development. Most would accept that it's time for a different vision of Florida.

7. Recommendations:

Sustainable development in itself is not a political theory but it has been recognised that without political change, sustainable development is not possible. A rampant capitalist society, where the rich have all the access to wealth and resources and where the only thing that matters is economic growth and profit, cannot support sustainable development. Social democratic states where issues of people's health and welfare are paramount in the development cycle are better placed to support sustainable development. This is why the South African political model is well placed to support sustainable development and the ideas encompassed within the sustainable development debate have begun to be merged with all policies related to development. We are also fortunate to have a constitution that protects people's rights to a clean and healthy environment. The challenge now is to mainstream sustainable development thinking and to find sensible and simple solutions to our challenges.

8. Conclusion:

The beauty about sustainable development is that it really is very simple and people have been practising it for centuries. Some will try to explain a lot of the jargon and give a summary of the theory, debates, issues, developments and ideas in simple terms. Rest will provide the learner with examples of programmes where sustainable development is being implemented and a practical guide for some simple things we can do as individually and as development practitioners to make sustainable development happen in our communities.

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10. Authors:

1. Author is a Post Graduate from I.I.T., Roorkee and an academician working under R.T.M. Nagpur University for last 17 years and has handled the duties as Head of the Department and Academic in charge. Now she is an Associate Professor in Department of Architecture, K.I.T.S., Ramtek, M.S., India. The author is pursuing Ph. D. from R.T.M. Nagpur University in Architecture and Planning. She has 22 papers published in National and International conferences and Journals.

2. Author is a faculty in Architecture Department, at K.I.T.S., Ramtek having an experience of teaching for around 6 years. She has published more than 20 papers in National and International conferences and Journals.