

ON 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT' AND 'SUSTAINABILITY': DIFFERENT EXPLANATIONS AND MEANINGS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to review the emergence of the concept of 'sustainable development'. With the emergence and prominence of the term 'development' in the 1950s, it has been found to gain different focus at different points in time. The present paper explores these focuses and shows sequentially, the emergence of concept of 'sustainable development' focus in development discourse. In course of time, the term sustainable development has become a buzz word. The term 'sustainable' and 'sustainable development' started being found and used in different discipline with different meaning. The uses, understandings and meanings of 'sustainability' and 'sustainable development' also evolved within development discourse. In this context, this paper is an attempt to reviewing relevant noteworthy literature with a view to exploring different explanation and meaning of the concepts of 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability'.

Keywords: Agenda 21, Brundtland concept, Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), Earth Summit, human rights, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Rio Declaration, Sloping Land Conversion Program (SLCP), Stockholm Conference, Sustainable Development Program, technical modernisation, Truman Doctrine.

INTRODUCTION

In this review article the emergence and evolution of concept of 'sustainable development' in development discourse has been traced. The attempt is to show the uses, understandings and meanings of evolution of the concepts 'sustainable development' and 'sustainability' and thus to explore different explanations and meaning of the concepts.

DEVELOPMENT

Development is,
a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process which aims at the constant

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improvement of the well being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom. (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1986)¹.

The notion of 'development' or it is better to say 'the notion of conscious development' or 'the idea that development can be fostered' is relatively new. After the World War II, on 20 January 1949, Harry S. Truman in his inaugural speech as the President of the United States introduced the concept of 'fair deal' for the entire world. Using the word 'underdeveloped', Truman, identified the problem of this huge portion of the world and indicated the solution to be modern scientific and technical knowledge of the developed. The Truman Doctrine initiated a new era in the understanding and management of world affairs, particularly those concerning the less economically accomplished countries of the world (Escobar, 1995). As a result, economic development and poverty reduction in the 'underdeveloped' parts of the world became an international agenda. The United Nations and other international organizations like, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD; now World Bank), the International Monetary Fund, etc. were formed with the single focus of improving and reforming the economies rather than bringing political and social changes. By the end of the Second World War, perceptions and policies changed drastically. Only economic growth became a major concern of governments. Social and institutional improvement existed in theory and policy but at a very small scale. As decolonization (between 1945 and 1962) occurred, the international agenda of developing the underdeveloped world was extended to all the poorer nations of the world.

In 1960, W.W. Rostow published '*The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*'. In this ambitious overview of economic development, he put forward a scheme of five stages which all developing countries would pass through. Starting from the 'traditional' stage a society passes through 'preconditions for takeoff', economic 'take-off', 'drive to maturity' and finally reaches the 'age of high mass consumption'. Rostow and other modernization theorists saw development as the 'process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems' created in Europe and the USA from the 17th century (Eisenstadt, 1966), that they believed to be essential to elevate living standards with more goods and services to an expanding population. Donors and the elites of most newly independent countries alike were committed to an almost missionary task, namely development through technical modernisation (Simon, 2000).

Escobar (1995) reported that in one of the most influential documents of the period. Prepared by a group of experts convened by the United Nations with the objective of designing concrete policies and measures 'for the economic development of underdeveloped countries', the report mentioned:

There is a sense in which rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments. Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst, and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated. Very few communities are willing to pay the full price of economic progress. (United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 1951) (p. 4).²

Escobar (1995) summarized saying that “the statement exemplified a growing will to transform drastically two-third of the world in the pursuit of the goal of material prosperity and economic progress” (*ibid.* p. 4).

Development conceived of as economic growth is a quantitative concept and basically means more of the same (Szirmai, 2005). But economic development is not economic growth alone. Economic development refers to growth accompanied by qualitative changes in the structure of production and employment, generally referred to as structural change (Kuznets, 1966). In the early 1950s, structuralist theories located the causes of underdevelopment in lingering colonial trade patterns and recommended import substitution as a solution. It is considered to be the era of engineers. The goal of development was to build infrastructure (roads, electricity, dams) in developing countries.³ The great industrial resurgence, which gathered momentum in the 1950s, was State-directed, disciplined by targets, and frequently led by the public sector. The retreat from the first globalization, which began in 1914,⁴ entered a new phase as capitalist and socialist economies and newly independent colonies embraced inward-looking growth policies (Findlay & O’Rourke, 2008).

With the emergence of the idea that ‘development can be fostered’ and belief in ‘development through technical modernisation’, ‘development’ was being used synonymously with economic growth. It is in the 1960s that this concept came under growing criticism. Many authors such as Dudley Seers, Gunnar Myrdal, Paul Streeten, Hollis Chenery, Mahbub ul Haq and institutions like International Labour Organization (ILO) pointed out that despite the impressive growth records in the post-WWII period in developing countries, much changes had not occurred in the living conditions of the masses of the poor (Szirmai, 2005; Chenery *et al.* 1974; ILO, 1976; Myrdal, 1971; Seers, 1979; Streeten, 1972; ul Haq, 1976). The conclusion drawn was that development involves more than economic growth and changes in economic structures (Szirmai, 2005). 1960s is the era of ‘Green Revolution’. The belief was, ‘technology improves farming’. The goal was to plant better crops to wipe out world hunger.⁵

In the late 1970’s a focus on basic needs was advocated by Paul Streeten, Mahbub ul Haq, Amartya Sen and others. Their advocacy for education, nutrition, health, sanitation, and employment for the poor, reflected an acknowledgment that the benefits of development did not necessarily ‘trickle down’ to the deprived (Harris, 2000). Education was the main focus and actions were concentrated on promoting education.

With a shift in focus to ‘structural adjustment’, experience of 1980’s also included liberalization of trade, eliminating government deficits and overvalued exchange rates, and dismantling inefficient parasitical organizations. International institutions imposed liberal development policies to the Third World countries during the post-WW II period. Between 1970s and 1980s, those proved to be wrong. Many countries were found to have chronic payment problem that indicated that those countries had fallen into economic crisis. The institutions, such as, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, which imposed liberal development policies earlier came up with the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs)⁶ to address the then economic crisis in several African, Latin American, Caribbean and Asian countries between 1980s and 1990s. Through condition-based loan packages, SAPs were introduced “to push countries to the economic growth based on efficiency and stability”

(Abbasoglu, Aysan, & Gunes, 2007). On one hand, SAPs required poor countries to reduce spending on things like health, education and development, on the other hand, debt repayment and other economic policies were prioritized. In effect, the IMF and World Bank have demanded that poor nations lower the standard of living of their people.⁷

EMERGENCE OF 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT' AND 'SUSTAINABILITY'

The significant focus in development consequently shifted to sustainable development. Concern about environment was not new. Environmentalists in the late 1960s and 1970s argued that exponential growth could not be sustained without seriously depleting the planet's resources and overloading its ability to deal with pollution and waste materials (Beder, 2005). For environmental problems industries, Western culture, economic growth and technology were blamed. Even at that time, the environmentalists questioned Western paradigms and strongly criticized inequitable distribution of wealth and resource use. Rachel Carson's '*Silent Spring*' (1962), Paul Ehrlich's '*The Population Bomb*' (1968), and Donella Meadows's '*The Limits to Growth*' (1972) showed the serious harmful effects of accelerating industrial growth and the chemical-dependent agriculture of the Green Revolution. By questioning the very possibility of progress, environmentalism then undercut the rationale and methods of development (Cullather, 2002).

Sustainable development has evolved from philosophical concerns about humankind's responsibility for nature (Passmore, 1974) into locally- and nationally-based environmental groups demanding more attention to the environment (Lowe & Goyder, 1983).

The United Nation's (UN's) first major international conference on international environmental issues 'The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment'⁸ was held in Stockholm, Sweden, from June 5-16, 1972. It became a strong guiding force for the development of international environmental politics at that time (Baylis & Smith, 2005). The Stockholm Conference came up with the framework for future environmental cooperation and consequently the global and regional environmental monitoring networks (Baylis & Smith, 2005) were created. Not only was the awareness of environmental issues among public and governments increased (for example, many governments subsequently created Ministries for the Environment and/or national agencies for environmental monitoring and regulation), but also, later in 1972, a small secretariat 'United Nations Environment Programme' (UNEP) was established in the United Nations as a focal point for environmental action and coordination within the UN system.⁹ Stockholm articulated the right of people to live "in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being."¹⁰ Following the Stockholm Conference, about 50 governments worldwide were instrumental in adopting instruments or national constitutions that recognize the environment as a fundamental human right (Chenje, Mohamed-Katerere & Ncube, 1996). National legislation regarding the environment was also recognized by several different organizations. During 1971-75, 31 major national environmental laws were passed in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), compared to just 4 during 1956-60, 10 during 1960-65 and 18 during 1966-70 (Long, 2000). Again, it is worth mentioning that, in 1972, before the Stockholm Conference, there were only about 10 ministries of environment; but by 1982, some 110 countries had such ministries or departments (Clarke & Timberlake, 1982).¹¹

The idea of sustainable development was proposed in a 1981 report of the U.S. Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), '*Global Futures: Time to Act*'. In this report, sustainable development was introduced as a key concept. Economic development, if it is to be successful over the long term, must proceed in a way that protects the natural resource base of developing countries (p. xxi) (Hecht, 1999). However, while reviewing literature, it has been found that definitions of sustainable development were given by authors even before 1981; to mention, Coomer (1979) wrote, "The sustainable society is one that lives within the self-perpetuating limits of its environment. That society... is not a 'no growth' society... It is rather, a society that recognizes the limits of growth... [and] looks for alternative ways of growing".

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and UNEP in the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN-UNEP-WWF, 1980) defined sustainable development as the "maintenance of essential ecological processes and life support systems, the preservation of genetic diversity, and the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems". Allen (1980) summarized the World Conservation Strategy and suggested that sustainable development is "development that is likely to achieve lasting satisfaction of human needs and improvement of the quality of human life" (p. 23).

In 1983, the United Nations assigned a commission on environment and development under Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland to reconcile the objectives of environmental health and economic growth. The Brundtland Report, '*Our Common Future*' (United Nations, 1987), issued in April 1987, popularized the term 'sustainable development'. Brundtland defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, WCED, 1987). The Brundtland report further noted that this definition relies on two key concepts: one is that of 'needs', 'in particular the essential needs of the world are poor, to which overriding priority should be given'. The other is "the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs" (OECD, 2001).¹²

The apparently simple definition of sustainable development forwarded by the Commission very soon encompassed some very challenging notions, such as those of inter-generational equity, needs and limits (Elliott, 2006).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY: DIFFERENT USES, UNDERSTANDING AND MEANINGS

The core issues and necessary conditions for sustainable development as identified by WCED (1987)¹³ are food security, species and ecosystems, energy, industry and the urban challenge. Pursuit of sustainable development requires:

- A political system that secures effective citizens participation in decision-making;
- An economic system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development;
- A production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development;

- A technological system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance;
- An international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance;
- An administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction.

Subsequent elaborations and analyses have converted the simple Brundtland concept into a sophisticated system with three pillars – one each for the economic, environmental, and social aspects of sustainable development (Pearce, Markandya, & Barbier, 1989; World Bank, 1992, 2003)¹⁴.

In broad terms Tolba (1987 as cited in Pezzey, 1989, p. 68) identified the concept of sustainable development as encompassing:

- Help for the very poor because they are left with no option other than to destroy their environment;
- The idea of self reliant development, within natural resource constraints;
- The idea of cost-effective development using differing economic criteria to the traditional approach; that is to say development should not degrade environmental quality, nor should it reduce productivity in the long run;
- The great issues of health control, appropriate technologies, food self-reliance, clean water and shelter for all;
- The notion that people- centred intervention is needed; human beings, in other words, are the resources in the concept.

In 1992, leaders at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) (unofficially known as the ‘Earth Summit’) (United Nations, 2007), built upon the framework of Brundtland Report to create agreements and conventions on critical issues, such as climate change, desertification and deforestation.¹⁵ Agenda 21; the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development; the Statement of Principles for the Sustainable Management of Forests; United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity were adopted by more than 178 Governments at the Conference (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992.¹⁶

The broad action strategy—Agenda 21— was drafted as the work plan for environment and development issues for the coming decades in 21st century. This was prepared as a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which there has been human impacts on the environment.¹⁷

Built on ideas from the Stockholm Declaration, with a vision to guide future sustainable development around the world, ‘The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development’ offered 27 principles. These principles defined the rights of people to development along with their responsibilities to protect the common environment. The Rio Declaration states that the only way to have long term economic progress is to link it with environmental protection. This will only happen if nations establish a new and equitable global partnership involving governments, their people and key sectors of societies. They must build international agreements

that protect the integrity of the global environmental and the developmental system.¹⁸ Consequently, to ensure effective follow-up of UNCED, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was created in December 1992. CSD was thus responsible to monitor and report on implementation of the agreements at the local, national, regional and international levels.¹⁹

Throughout the 1990s, all the governments who adopted the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development worked for their promises, and regional and sectoral sustainability plans were developed. A wide variety of groups—ranging from businesses to municipal governments to international organizations such as the World Bank—adopted the sustainable development concept and gave it their own particular interpretations.²⁰ These interpretations have increased our understanding of sustainable development within many different contexts. Unfortunately, the Earth Summit +5 review²¹, as expressed in the Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1997, “progress on implementing sustainable development plans has been slow”.²² The identified key trends for the identified ‘uneven’ progress included increasing globalization, widening inequalities in income, and a continued deterioration of the global environment.²³ It was a disappointing progress review with single success stories outweighed by the overall failure of countries to give appropriate political weight to meaningful implementation (Brown, 1997).

In the OECD publication ‘*Sustainable Development: Critical Issues*’ (2001), with the identified international goals,²⁴ the consequences in action were criticised as follows:

International goals for emissions of greenhouse gases, protection of biodiversity, and preventing desertification have been established since the Rio Summit in 1992. A range of other conventions and protocols at the regional level set emission limits for a range of pollutants. Unfortunately the simple existence of these conventions and treaties does not mean that concrete actions leading to their achievement are underway, as lags in implementation have translated into a growing gap between goals and outcomes (p. 14).

The reality was such that, despite decades of ‘development’, poverty in the South continued to increase. Existing development approaches offered elegant models, but they were not working, not bringing the expected outcomes. Alternative paths²⁵ were urgently needed, with this understanding, at the beginning of the twenty-first century there was general agreement, at the global as well as national level, that poverty is unacceptable as part of the human condition (Naseem, 2002).²⁶ Thus, globally it has been recognized that the coexistence of pervasive poverty, with the affluence of a much smaller segment of the population, is ethically unacceptable, economically inefficient, and politically unsustainable. With this reality of inequality and the unacceptability of it, the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed upon at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000 by 190 countries in ten regions. It has been adopted as a framework for the development activities.

The next milestone on the way forward to ensure sustainable development was the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) (also named the Earth Summit 2002), that was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September 2002. Nitin Desai, the Secretary-General of the World Summit on Sustainable Development²⁷, in his introductory note ‘Johannesburg and Beyond: Making Sustainable Development a Global Reality’ (published in

'Global Challenge, Global Opportunity: Trends in Sustainable Development')²⁸ started with the following statement to clarify what the issue is all about:

"Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, sustainable development has emerged as a new paradigm of development, integrating economic growth, social development and environmental protection as interdependent and mutually supportive elements of long-term development. Sustainable development also emphasizes a participatory, multi-stakeholder approach to policy making and implementation, mobilizing public and private resources for development and making use of the knowledge, skills and energy of all social groups concerned with the future of the planet and its people".

With the strengthened commitment to 'full implementation' of Agenda 21 and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and other international agreements, the 'Johannesburg Plan of Implementation' was adopted at the Earth Summit. There, the full implementation of Agenda 21, the Programme for Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Commitments to the Rio principles, were strongly reaffirmed.²⁹

In reality, even the governments had been found to try hard to establish what they promised at the Earth Summit in 2002. The concept of sustainable development has established itself successfully as a central guiding principle for many different political institutions at all levels of public and corporate decision making. Nevertheless, different studies confirmed that sustainable development's meaningful translation into concrete action proves to be a much more difficult challenge (Lafferty, 2004; Lafferty & Meadowcraft, 2000; OECD, 2002; Volkery *et al.* 2006).

The definition of sustainable development, as was given in the Brundtland Report, '*Our Common Future*', became the only acceptable 'true' definition of sustainable development (Jepson, 2004) and still continues to be the most preferred definition.

Unfortunately, from the very inception, the concept 'sustainable development', with its vague descriptive definition, was left open to different possible interpretations and different possible meanings. Consequently, interpretations of the concept exploded with different users proposing different study-specific or context specific definitions. Again, numerous treatments have been highly critical of '*Our Common Future*'; the report has been seen as both ambiguous and contradictory and incapable of specifying the mechanisms and changes necessary to realize sustainable development (Langhelle, 1999). Langhelle (1999) pointed to the limitations of the definition saying,

"... the relationship between sustainable development and economic growth had been over-emphasized, and that other vital aspects of the normative framework were neglected. Social justice (both within and between generations), humanistic solidarity, a concern for the world's poor, and respect for the ecological limits to global development, constitute other aspects of sustainable development; aspects which are indeed relevant for the growing disparity between North and South". (p. 132)

Literature shows that considerable attention had been devoted to the idea of sustainable development itself and even to the broader conceptual framework of the idea. But, the effort

of Brundtland Commission, to integrate environmental policies and development strategies in order to create a foundation for the intergenerational concept had been left out neglected as found in those literatures (Langhelle, 1999). Volkery *et al.* 2006 in their study on 19 countries found that regarding the inter-generational principle of sustainable development, setting long-term objectives contributes to a better inter-generational objective. But only five of the countries (Sweden, Denmark, Germany, the Philippines, and Mexico) considered a strategy outlook that was explicitly intergenerational, that is, spanning upwards of 25–30 years into the future.

The issues of weak and strong sustainability also came up to explain the ways of considering the needs to ensure that future generations can supply their needs. As put in Beder's (2000) words:

There are two different ways of looking at the need to ensure that future generations can supply their needs. One is to view the environment in terms of the natural resources or natural capital that is available for wealth creation, and to say that future generations should have the same ability to create wealth as we have. Therefore, future generations will be adequately compensated for any loss of environmental amenity by having alternative sources of wealth creation. This is referred to as 'weak sustainability'. The other way is to view the environment as offering more than just economic potential that cannot be replaced by human-made wealth and to argue that future generations should not inherit a degraded environment, no matter how many extra sources of wealth are available to them. This is referred to as 'strong sustainability' (p. 230).

In the discussion of intergenerational perspective of sustainable development, along with debate of "whether the weak sustainability or the strong sustainability is acceptable", the issues of intergenerational and intra-generational³⁰ had also been being raised by some (Benton 1999, p. 202; Paul-Marie Boulanger³¹; Brian J Preston³²) and finally, the conclusion drawn was the meaning literally comes as "sustainable development refers to maintaining development over time" (Elliott, 2006).

In reality, in the countries in the south, the concept of intra-generational equity emerged. At this point, it is worth to note what Paul-Marie Boulanger³³ mentioned:

"It is obviously impossible to compensate *ex ante* future generations for facing possible unfavourable circumstances. All that can be done here is trying to make the case that the circumstances they will face will be as favourable as possible, within the limits of what is required by intra-generational equity".

The above discussion leads to a comprehensive understanding about the emergence of sustainable development and its evolution. It also ascertains that sustainable development is a complex concept that leads to many different interpretations in relation to many different contexts. Although, environmental component, along with the economic and social received recognitions in this concept concern issues such as, 'pillars', 'core issues', 'essential requirements', 'needs', 'limitations', 'intergenerational sustainability', 'intra-generational sustainability', 'strong sustainability', 'weak sustainability', etc. debates persist along with the controversies regarding interpretations of sustainable development. The issue of intra-

generational equity has gotten recognition. Before considering intergenerational equity and strong and weak sustainability, it is worth mentioning what Beder (2000) stated,

“The reason that intra-generational equity is a key principle of sustainable development is that inequities are a cause of environmental degradation. Poverty deprives people of the choice about whether or not to be environmentally sound in their activities”.
(p. 233)

However, till now, the consideration of intra-generational perspective of sustainable development is least considered in the context of sustainable development in the present day.

Moreover, with the popularization of the concept of sustainable development, the term ‘sustainable’ became a buzz word not only in development sector but also in every possible sector. They started to use the term with its literal meaning, and sustainable development was thus referred to what Elliott (2006) mentioned, “Maintaining development over time”. In course of time the term ‘sustainable development’ crept into use in many disciplines and in several sectors.

As asserted by Spreng and Wils (2000)³⁴ Sustainable development is a concept with many attractions. One characteristic of the concept is its openness. However, this also means that the concept is sometimes vaguely used and badly understood.

For all the ‘Sustainable Development Program’ as identified by Grosjean and Kontoleon (2009), the duration of the financial incentives or subsidies provided is finite. This is because the aim is to induce a structural economic change at the local level such that this ‘win-win’ objective of poverty alleviation and environmental improvement becomes self-sustainable. These programmes received huge funding that led to their proliferation. Efforts have also been made to investigate the extent to which these programmes have been meeting their dual objective of addressing environmental externalities and economic development, Grosjean and Kontoleon (2009) reported. The sustainability of these sustainable development programmes has been questioned through studying these programmes (Louviere, Hensher, & Swait, 2000; Mercer & Snook, 2004; Grosjean & Kontoleon, 2009).

The Sloping Land Conversion Program (SLCP) in China is the largest sustainable development programs that simultaneously attempts to address rural poverty and externalities from deforestation. Analyses by Bennett *et al.* (2004), Uchida *et al.* (2007), Uchida, Xu, and Rozelle (2005), and Xu and Cao (2001) suggests that the SLCP impact on participating HH income levels and on shifts to non-crop related income generating activities (such as off-farm labour or livestock activities) is not sufficient to make a substantial and long lasting change to pre-program production decisions. Grosjean and Kontoleon (2009) pointed to the various program implementation issues that have been observed. For example, the often involuntary nature of the program, the poor quality and frequent irregularity of the compensation payments, the inadequate training and support to local farmers in replanting and maintaining trees, and the inappropriateness of some of the plots targeted for inclusion in the program have undermined the long-term viability of the program (Xu & Cao, 2001).

The above examples address the issue of sustainability in terms of evaluation. The OECD

Development Assistance Committee glossary (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee, OECD-DAC, 1991),³⁵ in this regard, states, “Sustainability is concerned with measuring whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially sustainable.”

For the World Bank ‘Sustainable development recognizes that growth must be both inclusive and environmentally sound to reduce poverty and build shared prosperity for people today and for future generations.’³⁶

Operations Evaluation Department (OED) defines sustainability as “The resilience to risk of net benefits flows over time”, elaborating the definition with the following questions (White, 2005):

“At the time of evaluation, what is the resilience to risks of future net benefits flows? How sensitive is the project to changes in the operating environment? Will the project continue to produce net benefits, as long as intended, or even longer? How well will the project weather shocks and changing circumstances?” (p. 13)

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) (2002) in its publication, ‘*Assessing Sustainability*’, stated, “Much remains to be done in terms of [sustainability’s] evaluation as an objective.”

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in this context draw our attention. For IMF ‘The SDGs are universal and broader in scope than the MDGs, reflecting the view that development needs to be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable’.³⁷ This explanation again provides a wide meaning of sustainable development. As well, the question can be raised as to how sustainable the sustainable development goals will be and what this sustainability will mean?

CONCLUSION

With the above discussion on sustainable development, the concern about ‘sustainability’ is identified as an inherently dynamic, indefinite and contested concept. ‘Sustainable’, the buzz word dominates not only the development sector but also every possible sectors with the part of its literal meaning – ‘maintaining development over time’ (Elliott, 2006), as I have mentioned earlier. The use of the term sustainability in many other disciplines and sectors failed to capture the ecological aspects of sustainability. Hence, it failed to capture the full sense of ‘sustainable’, as was eulogized in the World Commission’s keynote phrase ‘sustainable development’. In most cases, their consideration is found to be merely the ‘long-term satisfaction of basic human needs’.

ENDNOTES

1. Declaration on the Right to Development. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1986. Retrieved on 21.02.2010. Available at <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/rtd.htm>

2. See, Escobar (1995). *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, 1995.
3. Development. Retrieved on 22.2.2009. Available at <http://youthink.worldbank.org/issues/development/>
4. There are scattered evidences on global integration as a result of advances in ship building and the growth of trade accumulating from the 15th century onward (on 'archaic' globalization, see Bayly, 2002). One scholar maintains that the Roman Empire was a major globalizing force because it expanded markets; imposed peace; and integrated culture, technologies, and ideas (Hitchner, 2008).
5. *Development*. n.3.
6. Structural Adjustment Policies are also known as The Washington Consensus, the Economic Reconstruction Programmes, New Economic Policy, Economic Adjustment Programme and so on.
7. *Structural Adjustment—a Major Cause of Poverty*. Accessed on 15.1.2010. Available at http://www.electricprint.com/edu4/classes/readings/327readings_fall09/r18_struct_bank.pdf.
8. United Nations Conference on the Human Environment is also known as the Stockholm Conference as it was held in Stockholm, Sweden.
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18. Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. Retrieved on 07.05.2009. <http://www.iisd.org/rio%2B5/agenda/declaration.htm>
19. It was agreed that a five year review of Earth Summit progress would be made in 1997 by the United Nations General Assembly meeting in special session. Till now 18 sessions of the CSD has been taken place.
20. United Nations Environment Programme, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. Training module, Introduction to Capacity Building for Environment, Trade and Sustainable Development. Retrieved on 06.07.2009. Available at <http://www.unep.ch/etb/publications/capacityBuilding/TrainingModule148.pdf>
21. Special Session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of Agenda 21.
22. Introduction to Sustainable Development. Retrieved on 06.06.2009. Available at <http://sustainus.org/docs/SD.Gateway.Presentation.pdf>
23. Consequent to the report of 'uneven' and slow progress was a new General Assembly Resolution (S-19/2) that promised further action.
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