

Sustainability: The Myths and Realities in Indian Perspective

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Abstract

Sustainability and sustainable development are multifaceted concept which have garnered significant attention globally as nations grapple with environmental, social, and economic challenges in the near future. These terms are not just concepts that nations can attain in a predetermined amount of time, but are processes of transformation that need the efforts of individuals, neighbours, society, states, and nations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by United Nations are set of parameters which will require suitable framework and integration of multi-discipline facets to achieve success. Nations must also give priority to those areas where sustainability may be attained quickly and where they feel confident enforcing the norms and regulations. Limitations must be placed on the SDGs' implementation because sustainability itself has a very broad range of potential actions. The government's strategies cannot be solely based on the SDGs of the UN. To identify the SDGs based on the nation's needs, careful comprehension and research is needed along with other factors such as economic developments, general population needs, national interest, and World Bank debt or loans. In the Indian context, a nation undergoing rapid development, the discourse on sustainability is particularly pertinent. This paper aims to provide a concise overview of the myths and realities surrounding sustainability within India. The myths often stem from misconceptions about the country's capabilities, cultural practices, and developmental trajectory. Some of the common misconceptions include viewing sustainability as a luxury for developed nations, assuming homogeneity in environmental attitudes across diverse regions, and underestimating the role of traditional knowledge systems in promoting sustainability are some myths. On the other hand, despite facing significant challenges such as population pressure, resource scarcity, and socio-economic disparities, India has demonstrated resilience and innovation in its sustainability endeavours. Realities include the proliferation of grassroots initiatives, government policies promoting renewable energy and conservation, and the integration of sustainability principles into corporate practices are some examples. The present work underscores the importance of dispelling myths and embracing realities to advance sustainability in India. By recognizing the country's diverse socio-cultural landscape, leveraging indigenous knowledge systems, and fostering collaborative partnerships, India can chart a path towards a more sustainable future.

Keywords: Sustainability; Sustainable Development Goals; Enabling factors; India; Framework; Policies.

1. Introduction

The term "*sustainability*" refers to the practice of addressing current demands without compromising the capacity of future generations to address their own needs (Hummels et al. 2021). It covers a wide range of connected topics, including social justice, environmental preservation, and economic growth. The three pillars of sustainability are frequently referred to as the "concept of sustainability," which aims to establish a balanced and harmonious interaction between people, the environment, and profit (Hafizyar and Dheyaaldin, 2019). The three pillars are presented in Fig. 1. Recently, sustainability word has been used in every industry and even in our day-to-day life activities. Sustainability is a subject that is covered in a variety of contexts, including manufacturing, education, and space technologies.

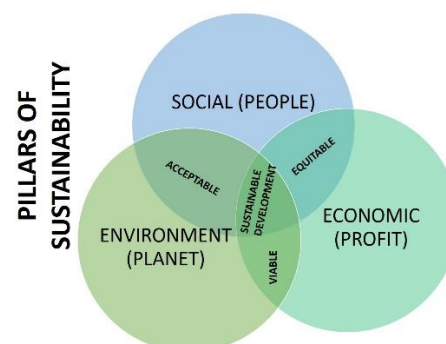


Fig. 1: Three pillars of sustainability for sustainable development

The Sustainable Development targets (SDG) initiative has brought attention to 17 targets and their worldwide accomplishment. However, the definition of sustainability is very broad and includes all aspects of the social, environmental,

human, production, and economic spheres. The 17 SDGs established by the UN appear to be pertinent in every way, however each country must choose and prioritize the goals based on its context such as renewable energy (Haldar et al., 2023). There are no miracles that can help us embrace and complete all of the SDG objectives. The governments of the nations must choose and give precedence to the goals that are directly related to their development and are achievable in real sense.

A healthy and sustainable environment coupled with a robust economy are required for implementing a strong environment that can address sustainability challenges (Flint & Flint, 2013). Without a clear vision, active leadership, sincere intentions, and a dedication to excellence from all stakeholders, including governmental policies, manufacturers, and responsible consumers, this wheel of sustainable growth cannot move forward (Prothero et al., 2011). The communities' different degrees of economic activity, social equity, and environmental health show that sustainability is not everyone's cup of tea and that it represents diversity. The key differentiating factor is the intensity of activity at the intersections of society, environment, economy, and society; as an illustration, the people of Japan have a strong desire to support their nation and promote sustainable development goals from the grass root levels and even integrates education for sustainable development in curriculum (Clark et al., 2020). These interfaces are the breeding grounds for creativity and innovation, where individuals begin to move in the correct path. No government can directly achieve sustainability by the creation of policies; instead, it takes the widespread spread of knowledge among all national stakeholders. The fallacy that achieving sustainability is very expensive ignores the fact that any society's ability to flourish and grow depends on striking a balance between its environmental, social, and economic facets. With guidance from every single person, the balance can be attained. Sustainability is about creating an interconnected, responsible community where producers use sustainable technologies supported by government policies and consumers consume responsibly with the goal of sustaining a high standard of living. Sustainability is not just about creating environmentally friendly or quick fixes to reduce carbon emissions. Limited natural resources, an expanding population, and a delicate ecosystem define our world. We must assume responsibility as a community for educating all

interested parties about the value of sustainability. We cannot afford to hold off on implementing sustainability while waiting for the government to make decisions. We owe it to our future generations to help one another in these important endeavours.

2. Enablers For Achieving Sustainability

Some of the key principles/strategies/parameters (Pinyana et al., 2023) for implementing and achieving the sustainability/contributing towards SDG's are:

- **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (3R's):** By reducing consumption, reusing items, and recycling materials, waste can be minimized and pollution can be reduced.
- **Renewable Energy:** Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on finite resources is achieved by switching from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydroelectric power.
- **Conservation of Biodiversity:** Protecting and restoring natural habitats and ecosystems contributes to maintaining biodiversity, which is vital to ecosystem resilience and human well-being.
- **Green Infrastructure:** The development of urban environments that include green spaces, efficient public transportation, and sustainable architecture can improve the quality of life and reduce the environmental impact of cities.
- **Education and Awareness:** Through education and advocacy, individuals and communities can make informed choices and drive positive change by raising awareness about sustainability issues.
- **Circular Economy:** A circular economy that promotes resource efficiency, recycling, and reusing products can reduce waste and environmental impact by shifting from a linear "take-make-dispose" model to a circular economy.
- **Policy and Regulation:** The implementation of regulations and policies that promote sustainable practices and hold entities accountable for their environmental and social impact is crucial for governments, organizations, and international bodies

3. Sustainability: Myths

There are numerous myths and misconceptions about sustainability (Butters, 2021; Yin et al., 2017) that can impede a clear understanding of the concept. Some of the common myths are:

1. **Sustainability is only about the environment:** Sustainability encompasses both environmental concerns and social and economic dimensions, making it a significant aspect. The goal is not just to save trees or use less plastic; it's to create a balanced and equitable relationship between people, planet, and profit.
2. **Sustainability is too expensive:** Despite having upfront costs, sustainable practices can often result in long-term savings. Investing in energy-efficient technologies may have initial expenses, but it can significantly decrease energy bills over time.
3. **Individual actions don't make a difference:** Collectively, the actions of every individual lead to greater changes. Small lifestyle changes, such as reduced waste, water conservation and support for sustainable products, can create a ripple effect and stimulate demand for more sustainable options.
4. **Sustainability is only for wealthy countries:** Sustainability is a concern that spans the globe, and its principles are applicable to all nations, regardless of their economic status. The negative impacts experienced by industrialized nations can be avoided by developing countries by adopting sustainable practices.
5. **Technology will solve all sustainability challenges:** Although technology can play a critical role, it is not a cure-all. The combination of technological advancements, policy changes, and shifts in individual behavior is often necessary to achieve sustainable solutions.
6. **Sustainability is a trend:** Sustainability is a fundamental shift in how we interact with the world, not just a temporary trend. The need to tackle pressing global challenges and ensure a liveable future for generations to come is the driving force behind it.
7. **Sustainability is only for environmentalists:** Sustainability is a concern for all people, regardless of their background or beliefs. The effort is multidisciplinary and requires the involvement of individuals, communities, businesses, governments, and various sectors.
8. **Sustainability sacrifices convenience:** Although it may be thought that sustainable choices are less convenient, many modern sustainable solutions offer both environmental benefits and convenience. As an example, electric vehicles combine eco-friendliness with convenience. Addressing these myths is crucial for fostering a clearer and more accurate understanding of

sustainability, as well as for encouraging broader participation in creating a sustainable future for our planet and its inhabitants.

4. Sustainability: Realities

To make informed decisions and drive meaningful change, understanding the realities of sustainability is essential (Buckley, 2012). These are some important facts about sustainability:

1. **Interconnectedness:** The sustainability pillars (environmental, social, and economic) are interdependent. One pillar's neglect can have a negative impact on the others. For instance, social and economic inequalities can be caused by environmental degradation.
2. **Limited Resources:** The Earth's resources are limited, and unsustainable consumption patterns can rapidly deplete them. Sustainability aims to ensure that resources are utilized in a responsible manner and conserved for future generations.
3. **Global Challenge:** Sustainability is a global matter that transcends borders. Effectively addressing environmental problems like climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss requires international cooperation.
4. **Long-Term Thinking:** Considering the long-term consequences of our actions and thinking beyond short-term gains is key to sustainability. The goal is to ensure that the well-being of future generations is not compromised by current actions.
5. **Complexity:** The intricate relationships between various systems make it difficult to achieve sustainability. Solutions often call for a systemic approach that considers multiple factors and stakeholders.
6. **Inclusive Approach:** Social equality and justice are an integral part of sustainability. It is not just a question of preserving resources, but also of ensuring that benefits are distributed equitably among all segments of society.
7. **Behavioural Change:** To achieve sustainability, it is necessary to change behaviours and mentalities. People, communities, companies and governments must adopt more sustainable practices and make conscious choices.
8. **Innovation and Collaboration:** Tackling sustainability challenges requires innovation and collaboration between sectors. Progress is dependent on the development of new technologies, business models, and policy frameworks.
9. **Local and Global Action:** Local efforts are equally important, even though global action is

crucial. Local communities are crucial in implementing sustainable practices that cater to their unique needs and resources.

10. **Regulation and Policy:** Sustainability can only be achieved through effective policies and regulations. Governments can set standards, encourage sustainable practices, and bring polluters to account.

11. **Adaptation and Resilience:** Climate change and other environmental challenges demand adaptation and reinforcement of resilience. It is important for communities and ecosystems to be prepared to withstand and recover from shocks.

12. **Education and Awareness:** It is essential to educate and educate people on sustainability. An informed public has the ability to drive demand for sustainable products, influence policies, and inspire change.

Understanding these realities can help individuals, communities, businesses and governments deal with the complex landscape of sustainable development and work together to build a more resilient, equitable and sustainable future.

5. Sustainability: India's Perspective

India's perspective on sustainability involves addressing the unique challenges and opportunities that the country faces while striving for balanced development that incorporates environmental, social, and economic considerations (Dasgupta and Taneja, 2011; Singh and Debnath, 2012; Kushwaha, 2023). India has a rich cultural heritage, a large and growing population, and a mix of rural and urban communities, making it a diverse nation. From India's perspective, sustainability has some key aspects:

1. **Environmental Challenges:** India faces major environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, deforestation, land degradation and the impacts of climate change. The country's sustainability efforts focus on emissions reduction, water conservation, the promotion of renewable energy and the protection of its diverse ecosystems.

2. **Climate Change:** India is highly susceptible to the effects of climate change, which include rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, and extreme weather events. The country has made a commitment to ambitious renewable energy targets and has taken measures to improve climate resilience through initiatives such as afforestation and disaster preparedness.

3. **Rural-Urban Divide:** The gap between rural and urban areas needs to be bridged in India's sustainability efforts. Despite the challenges of waste management and pollution in cities, rural areas are still struggling with issues related to agriculture, water availability, and access to basic services.

4. **Biodiversity:** The diversity of ecosystems and a wealth of flora and fauna make India one of the world's biodiversity hotspots. The goal of sustainable practices is to protect and conserve this biodiversity while also addressing human needs.

5. **Agriculture and Food Security:** India's economy and livelihoods depend on agriculture as a critical sector. Sustainable agricultural practices, such as organic farming and effective irrigation, contribute to food security while minimizing negative environmental impacts.

6. **Renewable Energy:** India is rapidly increasing its renewable power capacity, including solar and wind. The objective is to decrease the reliance on fossil fuels, reduce air pollution, and contribute to global efforts to combat climate change.

7. **Waste Management:** The rapid urbanization has resulted in an increase in waste generation. The reduction of environmental pollution requires sustainable waste management practices, such as waste segregation, recycling, and waste-to-energy initiatives.

8. **Social Equity:** India's sustainability is dependent on ensuring social equity. Providing equal access to education, healthcare, clean water, and basic services to all citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic background, is what this involves.

9. **Traditional Knowledge:** India has an abundance of traditional knowledge related to sustainable practices, particularly in agriculture and natural resource management. Integrating such practices with modern solutions can improve sustainable development efforts.

10. **Policy and Governance:** Driving sustainability requires effective policies and governance mechanisms. Initiatives and regulations are being worked on by India's national and state governments to promote sustainable practices across sectors.

The G20 summit organised in 2023, Delhi, India created a distinctive parameter that will seed sustainability awareness among all stakeholders. The summit's theme is 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' or

'One Earth One Family One Future', which is one of the foundations of sustainability.

India's sustainability journey is complex and multifaceted, driven by a combination of global commitments, national priorities, and local community efforts. As the country, India continues to evolve and keep integration sustainability into its development strategies. These strategies will become increasingly important to address challenges and build a brighter future for its people and the planet. As per the nations moto of becoming manufacturing leaders; it is important to add sustainability in manufacturing practices (Singh, 2023); so that priority areas can be handled before getting out of control. The developed nations are now focusing on sustainability after creating all the fuss. India and allied countries need to project sustainability through grass roots and to implement policies in a stronger manner. After all sustainability is not responsibility of one country; it needs all the nations to join hand for saving the future.

6. Conclusion

Sustainability is not just a concept, but a way of thinking and living that acknowledges the interdependence of human society, nature, and the global economy. To create a future where people can thrive while respecting the planet's limits, collaboration across sectors, disciplines, and borders is necessary. To achieve sustainability, India should first create awareness at the root level and involve all stakeholders through combined effort. India should take lessons from industrialized countries and not repeat the same mistakes. India needs to prioritize the sectors for the achievement of SDG's. Joining hands for this noble cause is important for our future generations and it requires a collective effort from all the nations.

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