



## Chapter 1:

# SUSTAINABILITY

## | INTRODUCTION

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# What is sustainability?

The United Nations (UN) defines sustainability as:

*Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*

This definition is often referred to as the “Brundtland Definition,” as it was first proposed by the World Commission on Environment and Development in its 1987 report, “Our Common Future.”

This definition emphasizes the importance of balancing economic, social, and environmental considerations in order to achieve a sustainable future. It recognizes that the needs of current generations must be met, but also that these needs should not be met at the expense of the well-being and potential of future generations.

Sustainability is a crucial term, because the Earth’s resources are finite, and we must use them wisely in order to preserve them for future generations. Additionally, the way we currently live is not sustainable in the long term, as it is causing negative environmental impacts such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and depletion of natural resources.

The development of the concept of sustainability has been driven by a variety of factors, including:

- Increasing awareness of the environmental and social impacts of human activities
- The realization that our current way of life is not sustainable in the long term
- The need to find more efficient and effective ways of using resources
- The desire to create a more equitable and prosperous world for all

## Social dimension of sustainability

Sustainability in a social dimension refers to the ways in which human activities impact and are impacted by society. This includes considerations of social equity, justice, and well-being.

In a social context, sustainability means ensuring that all members of society have the opportunity to meet their basic needs and to live fulfilling and healthy lives. It also means promoting social cohesion and inclusivity, and working to eliminate poverty, inequality, and discrimination.

Achieving sustainability in a social dimension requires addressing a range of issues, including:

- Access to education, healthcare, and other essential services
- Fair distribution of resources and opportunities
- Empowerment of marginalized and disadvantaged groups
- Protection of human rights
- Support for strong and healthy communities



There are several theories of sustainability that focus on the social dimension of the concept, or the ways in which human activities impact and are impacted by society. These theories seek to understand the social and cultural factors that influence sustainability and to identify strategies for promoting sustainable development. Some of the main theories of sustainability on a social level include:

- **Sustainable Livelihoods** emphasizes the importance of supporting the livelihoods of individuals and communities in a way that is environmentally and socially sustainable. It focuses on empowering people to find ways to make a living that are compatible with long-term sustainability.
- **Social Capital** underlines the role of social connections, trust, and cooperation in promoting sustainable development. It suggests that strong social networks and social cohesion can facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices and the resilience of communities.
- **Social Learning** focuses on the importance of education and learning in promoting sustainability. It emphasizes the importance of building capacity and encouraging the sharing of knowledge and experience in order to facilitate the adoption of sustainable practices.
- **Community-Based Participatory Research** emphasizes the importance of involving community members in the research and decision-making processes related to sustainability. It suggests that involving communities in the research process can help to build capacity, foster ownership, and ensure that the research addresses the needs and priorities of the community.

# Sustainable lifestyle

A sustainable lifestyle is a way of living that is designed to reduce the impact of human activities on the environment and to promote social and economic justice. It involves making choices that are environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and economically viable.

When thinking about how to create a more sustainable lifestyle, it is important to take into consideration the three pillars of sustainability: the social, the economic, and the environmental.

1. The social pillar considers social and cultural impacts of sustainability practices. This includes issues such as equity, social justice, and the well-being of individuals and communities.
2. The economic pillar refers to the economic impacts of sustainability practices. This includes issues such as resource use, efficiency, and economic growth.
3. The environmental pillar focuses on the environmental impacts of sustainability practices. This includes issues such as natural resource use, pollution, and the impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity.

Sustainability requires a balance between these three pillars, as it is not possible to achieve it in one area without taking into account the other two. It is important to consider the interconnections and trade-offs between the three pillars when making decisions and taking action to promote sustainability.

There are many ways to live sustainably, and the specific practices that make up a sustainable lifestyle may vary depending on an individual's circumstances and priorities. However, common elements of a sustainable lifestyle include:

- Reducing energy consumption and using clean, renewable energy sources
- Reducing water consumption and protecting water resources
- Reducing waste and recycling
- Using sustainable transportation options
- Supporting local and organic agriculture and businesses
- Consuming environmentally friendly products and services
- Protecting natural resources and biodiversity
- Promoting social and economic justice
- Educating oneself and others about sustainability issues and practices

These are just a few examples, and there are many other ways that individuals can adopt sustainable practices in their daily lives. The key is to be conscious of the impact of our actions and to make choices that are good for the environment and for society.

For adults at risk of social exclusion, sustainability may involve finding ways to meet their basic needs in a way that is environmentally, socially, and economically responsible. This can include finding ways to access affordable and sustainable housing, food, and other necessities, as well as finding ways to build social connections and support networks.



## Education for sustainability

Education can play a crucial role in helping individuals and communities understand and address sustainability challenges. By providing knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to sustainability, education can help to build the capacity of individuals and communities to understand and address sustainability issues and to take more action to become change makers, which is especially important in the context of adult education.

There are several ways that education can help to address sustainability challenges:

- **Providing information and knowledge about sustainability:**  
Education can provide individuals with the knowledge and understanding they need to make informed decisions about sustainability. This can include information about environmental, social, and economic issues, as well as about the impacts of different actions and behaviors on the environment and on society.
- **Developing skills and competencies related to sustainability:**  
Education can help to develop the skills and competencies that individuals and communities need to address sustainability challenges. This can include skills related to resource management, environmental protection, and social and economic development.
- **Fostering attitudes and values related to sustainability:**  
One of the roles of education is to promote positive attitudes and values related to sustainability, such as respect for the environment, social responsibility, and a sense of shared ownership of sustainability challenges.

There are many ways to teach about sustainability, and the specific approaches and strategies will depend on the audience, the goals of the education, and the available resources. Some general tips for organizing educational activities on the topic that are addressed to adult learners at risk of exclusion include:

- **Making the the topic relevant and meaningful**  
Connecting the topic of sustainability to the interests and experiences of the audience and providing examples and case studies that illustrate the importance and relevance of sustainability.
- **Using a variety of teaching methods**  
Using a range of teaching methods to engage different learning styles and to keep the audience interested. This can include lectures, discussions, group activities, hands-on learning, and field trips.
- **Encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving**  
Encouraging students to think critically about sustainability issues and to consider different perspectives and approaches to addressing these issues. Encouraging students to develop their own ideas and solutions to sustainability challenges.
- **Emphasizing the importance of action**  
Teaching about the importance of taking action to address sustainability challenges and providing opportunities for adult learners to get involved in sustainability projects or initiatives in their local communities and beyond.
- **Using a variety of resources**  
Designing educational activities devoted to the topic of sustainability that are suitable to needs of different learners and include various materials, such as books, articles, videos, websites, and guest speakers.



The key to teaching about sustainability is to make the topic relevant, engaging, and interactive, and to provide opportunities for adults at risk to learn through experience and action. Teaching about sustainability can help adult learners gain crucial competences (skills, knowledge, attitudes) that can help them become more aware and more engage in the community action. These include:

- **Environmental knowledge**  
Understanding the principles of environmental science, including the impact of human activities on the natural world and the interconnections between different environmental systems.
- **Resource management skills**  
The ability to plan, organize, and manage the use of natural and human resources in a way that is sustainable and efficient.
- **Communication skills**  
The ability to effectively communicate information about sustainability issues and to engage with diverse audiences.
- **Leadership skills**  
The ability to inspire, motivate, and lead others in efforts to address sustainability challenges.
- **Intercultural competencies**  
The ability to understand and respect cultural differences and to work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds in efforts to promote sustainability.
- **Problem-solving skills**  
The ability to identify and analyze sustainability challenges and to develop creative and effective solutions.
- **Collaboration skills**  
The ability to work effectively with others to achieve common goals related to sustainability.



## The role of NGOs

As members of NGOs working with adults at risk of exclusion who would like to promote more sustainable lifestyle among our beneficiaries, our primary role is, of course, providing learners with educational opportunities. However, there are several more ways in which we can get involve in order to promote sustainability in our communities and beyond. Here are some examples:

- Conducting research  
NGOs can conduct research on sustainability issues and use the findings to inform education and training programs, policy development, and advocacy efforts.
- Advocating for policy change  
NGOs can advocate for policy change at the local, national, and international levels in order to promote sustainable development. This can include lobbying for laws and regulations that support sustainability, or working to raise awareness about sustainability issues and the need for action.
- Collaborating with other organizations  
NGOs can collaborate with other organizations, including governments, businesses, and other NGOs, to promote sustainable development through education.



## Task 1: Creating a Sustainable Practice Journal

Your task is to reflect on your own sustainability practices, so that you can become more aware of your own lifestyle and thus be better prepared to support your learners in developing more sustainable practices.

Step by step instructions:

- Create a journal (digital or analog, you can use a notebook or a calendar) where you will be writing down your reflections in the upcoming weeks. *(Please note that you will also be asked to use this journal in the next part of this course)*
- **Week 1:** Observe and write down all the practices related to sustainability you are already implementing in your own life (e.g., reducing energy use, using public transportation, supporting local agriculture).
- **Week 2:** Reflect and write down your thoughts on the social, economic, and environmental impacts of your daily actions, and consider the long-term consequences of your choices related to everyday aspects of your life.
- **Week 3:** Write about any challenges or successes you have experienced in terms of sustainability, and any goals or action steps you would like to take to improve your sustainability practices.
- **Week 4:** Share your findings and reflections with the colleagues from your NGO. What projects and actions could you design in order to make your common work more sustainable?

## Task 2: Sustainable Community

This task is to help you understand the context of your local community and identify the local challenges related to sustainability.

Step by step instructions:

1. Identify the key issues  
Consider the environmental, social, and economic issues that are important in your community. These may include issues such as air and water quality, transportation, waste management, or economic development.
2. Gather data  
Collect data on the key issues you have identified. This may involve reviewing existing data sources, such as government reports or studies, or collecting new data through surveys or focus groups.
3. Engage the community  
Involve members of the community in the process of identifying sustainability challenges. This may involve holding public meetings, conducting focus groups, or engaging in other forms of outreach to gather input and feedback.
4. Analyze the data  
Review the data you have collected and identify patterns and trends that indicate sustainability challenges in the community. Consider the environmental, social, and economic impacts of the issues you have identified.
5. Prioritize the challenges  
Based on the data and input from the community, prioritize the sustainability challenges in your community. Consider the potential impacts and the feasibility of addressing each challenge.

## Task 3: Sustainability Action Plan

Based on the reflection you have done during the two previous exercises, your task is to create a concrete plan as for what steps you can take now to promote sustainability in your community.

An action plan is a detailed plan that outlines the specific steps and resources needed to achieve a particular goal.

Step by step instructions:

1. Identify the goal  
What do you want to achieve in terms of sustainability? Be specific and make sure the goal is achievable and measurable.
2. Identify the current situation  
What are the current practices and conditions related to sustainability that need to be addressed?
3. Identify potential actions  
What are the specific actions that can be taken to achieve the goal? Consider a range of options and be realistic about what can be achieved with the available resources.
4. Evaluate the potential actions  
Consider the potential impact, feasibility, and cost of each action. Choose the actions that are most likely to be effective and that align with the available resources.
5. Develop a plan  
Create a detailed plan that outlines the specific steps and resources needed to implement the chosen actions. Include a timeline and assign specific tasks to individuals or groups.
6. Implement the plan  
Follow the plan and track progress towards the goal. Make adjustments as needed based on the results.
7. Evaluate the results  
After the plan has been implemented, evaluate the results and determine what worked well and what could be improved upon in the future.

# Workshop plan: Introduction to Sustainability

## Learning Objectives:

- understanding the concept of sustainability and the three pillars of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental)
- being able to apply the concepts of sustainability to their own lives and the communities in which they live

## Materials and Resources:

- handouts on the concept of sustainability and the three pillars of sustainability
- case studies on sustainability initiatives in different communities
- questions for sustainability self-assessment

## Step by step instructions:

1. Introduce the goal of the workshop and have an overview of the activities (10 min)
2. Present the key concepts: sustainability and its three pillars – see Handout 1 (20 min)
3. Have a group discussion on the importance of sustainability and how it applies to the learners' own lives and communities (20 min)
4. Divide learners into smaller groups and give each group a short description of a sustainable practice – see Handout 2. Ask them to read it and to think what kind of similar solutions they would like to see in their communities.
5. Summarize the discussion in a big group, focusing on the main challenges participants see in their local community (10 min)
6. Ask participants to reflect on individual sustainable practices – for examples of questions see Handout 3 (30 min)
7. Have a final, summarizing discussion asking participants what they have learned and what are their plans for undertaking more sustainable actions.

# Handout 1: Definitions and concepts

## Sustainability

The United Nations (UN) defines sustainability as:

*“Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”*

## Three pillars of sustainability

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3. The environmental pillar refers to the need to consider the environmental impacts of sustainability practices. This includes issues such as natural resource use, pollution, and the impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity.

Overall, sustainability requires a balance between these three pillars, as it is not possible to achieve sustainability in one area without considering the other two. It is important to consider the interconnections and trade-offs between the three pillars when making decisions and taking action to promote sustainability.

# Handout 2: Sustainable practices

The “green roofs” initiative in Toronto, Canada: This initiative involves the installation of green roofs (rooftops covered with vegetation) on buildings in the city to improve air quality, reduce stormwater runoff, and provide other environmental benefits. The initiative has been successful in reducing energy use, improving air quality, and enhancing the urban environment.

The “solarize” program in Portland, USA: This program is a group purchasing program that helps communities in Portland install solar panels on their homes and businesses. By pooling resources and leveraging bulk purchasing power, the program has been successful in increasing the adoption of solar energy in the city and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The “transition towns” movement in the UK: The transition towns movement is a community-led initiative that seeks to build resilience and reduce reliance on fossil fuels in local communities. The movement involves the development of local initiatives such as community gardens, renewable energy projects, and waste reduction programs. The movement has been successful in promoting sustainability and community engagement in the UK.

The “Eco-Schools” program in the UK: The Eco-Schools program is an international initiative that encourages schools to take a holistic approach to sustainability. The program involves the development of an action plan for sustainability, the implementation of sustainability initiatives in the school, and the engagement of the school community in sustainability issues. The program has been successful in promoting sustainability in schools and engaging young people in sustainability issues.

The “Green Deal” initiative in the Netherlands: The Green Deal initiative is a government-led program that promotes energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy in buildings. The initiative involves the development of partnerships between the government, businesses, and other organizations to promote sustainability in the built environment. The initiative has been successful in increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy in the Netherlands.

The “circular economy” initiative in Finland: The circular economy initiative is a government-led program that promotes the transition to a more sustainable and resource-efficient economy. The initiative involves the development of policies and initiatives that encourage the re-use and recycling of resources, and the reduction of waste and environmental impacts. The initiative has been successful in promoting sustainability and resource efficiency in Finland.

## **Handout 3: Questions for sustainability self-assessment**

There are several ways to assess if your lifestyle is sustainable:

1. Conduct a sustainability audit  
A sustainability audit is a systematic review of your lifestyle to identify areas where you are using resources efficiently and areas where you could make improvements. To conduct a sustainability audit, you can track your resource use (such as energy, water, and materials) and consider the environmental, social, and economic impacts of your lifestyle.
2. Assess your carbon footprint:  
Your carbon footprint is a measure of the greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide) that are emitted as a result of your activities. To assess your carbon footprint, you can use a carbon footprint calculator, which will estimate your emissions based on your consumption patterns.
3. Consider your consumption habits
4. Take a look at the products and services you consume on a regular basis and consider their environmental, social, and economic impacts. Are you using products that are made from sustainable materials, or are they contributing to waste and pollution? Are you supporting local businesses and communities, or are you relying on products and services that have negative impacts elsewhere?
5. Reflect on your values and goals
6. Consider your personal values and goals and how they align with sustainability. Do you want to live a more sustainable lifestyle, or are there other priorities that may be in conflict with sustainability?

