



Introduction to Sustainable Development

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FARN - The Brundtland definition implies a very important shift from an idea of sustainability, as primarily ecological, to a framework that also emphasizes the economic and social context of development. (1998)

Earth Council - There is

Sustainable development means different things to different people, but the most frequently quoted definition is from the report *Our Common Future* (also known as the Brundtland Report): ¹

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable development focuses on improving the quality of life for all of the Earth's citizens without increasing the use of natural resources beyond the capacity of the environment to supply them indefinitely. It requires an understanding that inaction has consequences and that we must find innovative ways to change institutional structures and influence individual behaviour. It is about taking action, **changing policy and practice at all levels, from the individual to the international.**

Sustainable development is not a new idea. Many cultures over the course of human history have recognized the need for harmony between the environment, society and economy. What is new is an articulation of these ideas in the context of a global industrial and information society.

Progress on developing the concepts of sustainable development has been rapid since the 1980s. In 1992 leaders at the Earth Summit built

an urgent need to reach broad consensus, initially at the individual and civil society levels, on a set of basic principles and values that can guide the actions of people and institutions towards sustainable development practices.

[Source](#)

upon the framework of Brundtland Report to create agreements and conventions on critical issues such as climate change, desertification and deforestation. They also drafted a broad action strategy—Agenda 21—as the workplan for environment and development issues for the coming decades. Throughout the rest of the 1990s, regional and sectoral sustainability plans have been developed. A wide variety of groups—ranging from businesses to municipal governments to international organizations such as the World Bank—have adopted the concept and given it their own particular interpretations. These initiatives have increased our understanding of what sustainable development means within many different contexts. Unfortunately, as the Earth Summit +5 review process demonstrated in 1997, **progress on implementing sustainable development plans has been slow.**

- [Timeline of Sustainable Development](#) - Learn more about the institutions, publications, and events that have shaped our understanding of sustainable development from the 1960s to the present.
- [Principles of Sustainable Development](#) - This searchable database provides access to the full text of more than 100 statements of principles of sustainable development articulated over the past decade.
- [Bibliography](#) - Explore a wide variety of concepts and definitions of sustainable development available on the Internet.

1. World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). *Our common future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987 p. 43.

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