

# Extricating Sustainable from Sustainable Development: A Conceptual Framework for a Sustainable Society

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## Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to develop a conceptual framework for a sustainable society. The problem with the current concept of sustainability is that it is inextricably intertwined with the growth model of sustainable development, thus limiting the concept of sustainability to developing countries and not to the OECD industrialized countries. Historically, since the dominant view is that national wealth will solve all problems, the developed countries do not question their own sustainability or unsustainable externalities. This paper traces the unsustainable globalization of self-interested mercantilism, colonialism, and plantation societies that used monopoly and oligopoly power to exploit and enslave several continents as the foundation of today's neoliberal capitalistic exploitation of the natural environment and of human resources. The findings of this paper are that a sustainable society is based on two dimensions of cooperation and equality whereas an unsustainable society is based on power and self-interest. The value of this paradigm is that it challenges the dominant view that self-interested greed is good and that inequality is a pre-requisite to creating a better society. A better society cannot be achieved unless the society is sustainable. Perhaps it is time to question the accepted view that industrialized based on power and self-interest are sustainable.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Society, Sustainable Development, Cooperation, Equality

## การแสวงหาความยั่งยืนจากการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน: กรอบแนวคิดสำหรับสังคมที่ยั่งยืน

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อพัฒนารอบแนวคิดการพัฒนาสังคมอย่างยั่งยืน สืบเนื่องจากปัญหาของแนวคิดการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืนในปัจจุบัน มีความเกี่ยวข้องอย่างไม่สามารถแยกออกจากกันได้ระหว่างแนวคิดการเจริญเติบโตและแนวคิดการพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน กล่าวคือ เมื่อการพัฒนาเป็นเงื่อนไขสัมพัทธ์ต่อถึงความยั่งยืน แนวคิดดังกล่าวจึงถูกจำกัดอยู่เฉพาะในประเทศกำลังพัฒนาเท่านั้น ส่วนประเทศที่พัฒนาแล้วและประเทศอุตสาหกรรมในกลุ่ม OECD กลับไม่ปรากฏแนวคิดดังกล่าว ทั้งที่ประเทศเหล่านี้ก็ควรให้ความสำคัญต่อประเด็นความยั่งยืนด้วยเช่นกัน แต่เนื่องจากประเทศเหล่านี้มีกระบวนการทบทวนหลักว่า หากประเทศของตนมีความมั่งคั่งแล้ว ย่อมสามารถแก้ปัญหาต่างๆ ได้ทั้งหมด และหมายรวมถึงประเด็นความยั่งยืนซึ่งไม่ใช่ประเด็นที่ควรสงสัยโดยอัตโนมัติ บทความนี้เป็นการลำดับเหตุการณ์เชิงประวัติศาสตร์ โดยย้อนทบทวนว่าการที่ประเทศที่พัฒนาแล้วและประเทศอุตสาหกรรมต่างๆ พัฒนามาถึงปัจจุบันนี้ได้ก็เพราะการแสวงหาผลประโยชน์ส่วนตน การมีอาณานิคม การครอบครองพื้นที่อุตสาหกรรมการเกษตร และการตัดทวงผลประโยชน์จากทรัพยากรธรรมชาติและทรัพยากรมนุษย์ของประเทศได้อาณานิคมและประเทศกำลังพัฒนา ซึ่งถือเป็นความไม่ยั่งยืนในยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ ผู้เขียนจึงได้เสนอกระบวนการทบทวนใหม่ว่า สังคมที่ยั่งยืนจะเกิดขึ้นอยู่กับ 2 ปัจจัย ได้แก่ ความร่วมมือและความเสมอภาค ในขณะที่สังคมที่ไม่ยั่งยืนเกิดจากปัจจัยการใช้อำนาจและการยึดผลประโยชน์ของตนเอง คุณค่าของบทความนี้อยู่ที่การทำทนายต่อแนวคิดหลักของชาวโลกตะวันตกกลุ่ม Anglo Saxon อาทิ อังกฤษ สหรัฐฯ แคนาดา ออสเตรเลีย ซึ่งมองว่าความโลภส่วนบุคคลเป็นสิ่งดีงาม และความไม่เท่าเทียมรวมทั้งความเหลื่อมล้ำก็เป็นสิ่งจำเป็นต่อการสร้างสังคมที่ดีกว่า ซึ่งในความเป็นจริงนั้นสังคมที่ดีกว่าอย่างแท้จริงจะเกิดขึ้นไม่ได้หากปราศจากความยั่งยืน จึงอาจถึงเวลาที่ควรตั้งคำถามใหม่ว่า การพัฒนาอุตสาหกรรมที่ตั้งอยู่บนพื้นฐานของอำนาจและผลประโยชน์ส่วนตนนั้น จะสามารถก่อให้เกิดความยั่งยืนอย่างแท้จริงได้หรือไม่

**คำสำคัญ:** สังคมที่ยั่งยืน (Sustainable Society) การพัฒนาที่ยั่งยืน (Sustainable Development) ความร่วมมือ (Cooperation) ความเท่าเทียม (Equality)

## Introduction

The word society originally meant friendly or companion and may be used in that context today as a voluntary association of like-minded individuals, such as the Society for the Study of Social Problems that fosters cooperation among social scientists interested in solving various societal problems. The term society can also be used in the context of a community or nation where people have geographically clumped together and developed an ongoing set of relationships institutionalized through common traditions, identity, habits and norms. The nation of Thailand created a system of institutionalized habits and symbols that are distinctly Thai which provide an identity for the citizens of Thailand. However, the concept of society can be applied to both larger and smaller aggregates of people, such as the mega-city of Bangkok with over ten million inhabitants or the ten nation ASEAN regional association in South East Asia with approximately 530 million members. Each of these societies provides its members with varying degrees of identities and an ever increasing level of complex social relationships. As human relationships and interactions coalesce into a global society, the emerging aggregate society is exponentially more complex than any one state, local community or individual but each is an important element of the global society.

The global community is made up of a complex web of almost seven billion people, 4,360 cities with at least 100,000 citizens, 25 mega cities with at least 10 million residents, 196 countries, 15 multilateral free-trade agreements, 24 proposed multilateral free trade agreements, a 27 nation EU supranational community integrating as one economic and political union, and an international organization, the United Nations with its organs (World Court, World Bank, Security Council), representing 192 states and operating as an international governance organization. In this global community flow approximately 1.4 billion people traveling by airplane per year, 18 trillion dollars each year in world trade, 320 billion dollars in illegal drug trade, and 144 billion emails. The global community annually produces 60,000 million cars, 25 million plastic water bottles, 5.5 billion cigarettes, and 33 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions. Although globalization of trade has brought wealth, approximately 125 trillion (US\$) to households, and reduction of worldwide poverty, global trade has been criticized for its inequality and consumerism. The new Catholic Pope, Pope Francis, commented that capitalism created a tyranny where people were valued only by their ability to consume and where people lacked any real human goal. Consumerism, a by-product of neoliberal capitalism, results in a

society where the materialistic ego is considered the highest form of self-worth; losing sight of other traditional and religious values of serving the poor, loving thy neighbor as thyself and detachment from temporary material objects. However, consumerism only feeds the materialistic ego of the top 10% of the world's population. While global wealth has increased several fold, 10% of the population still owns 85% of the total wealth; 1.4 billion people live in acute poverty (less than US\$1.25 per day) with a high proportion of women, children and ethnic minorities, living in absolute poverty (less than US\$ 0.50 per day). Close to 40% of the worldwide population lives on less than US\$ 2.00 per day. In a global economic community of 7 billion people driven by individual interests, containing and continuing unsustainable levels of inequality, where people are demonstrating and demanding more equality, one has to question the sustainability of such an inequitable and self-interested consumer society.

Along with the critique of capitalism by the new Pope, several recent headlines have challenged the sustainability of modern human society. On May 4, 2013, an article reported that the atmospheric carbon dioxide level reached 400ppm in Hawaii, a level not seen in 3-5 million years, since the Pliocene period when the global temperatures were 3-4 degrees Celsius higher and the sea levels were 40 meters higher. A few days later, a series of articles reported on issues relating to climate change: one article reported that 97% of climatologists support the idea that climate warming is directly related to human activity but 57% of Americans are unaware of the overwhelming consensus because of the oil industry spent \$5.9 million to recruit and train willing scientist to discredit climate change. Another article reported on a claim by a climate change expert, Lord Stern of Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change, that climate change will make hundreds of millions homeless with an expected 5 degrees Celsius global temperature rise. According to this expert, the Earth is close to an inevitable catastrophic rise in global temperature as a result of industrial output, resulting in severe physical consequences for the planet and the dislocation of millions of people worldwide. A third article on the same day reported that 50% of all plants and 33% of all animals are likely to become extinct by 2080 because the warming planet forces species to migrate to cooler climates but many species are unable to do so because of the rapid change in climate and the slow migration of species as well as geographical limitation to specie migration. Perhaps it is time to ask whether the global society that consumes enormous amounts of natural resources and emits such high levels of dangerous greenhouse gases is sustainable.

The question that arises from the critics of a global society built on consumerism is whether a consumer driven society is sustainable. Concern for the environment emerged as an international policy objective as early as the 1960s while concern for economic development emerged after WWII with the success of the Marshall plan in rebuilding Europe and Japan. However in 1987, the United Nations combined the two concerns into a single concept of sustainable development. Sustainable development by definition is normative, limiting problem definition of development for agricultural countries to the blueprint of the industrialized countries. The underdeveloped countries, not yet modern consumer oriented societies, should adopt neoliberal capitalism as the model of development. Unfortunately for future generations, the emerging consumption oriented global society may not be sustainable. This article attempts to extricate the concept of sustainable society from the concept of sustainable development in order to critically evaluate whether a society is sustainable. The plan is to propose a new framework for evaluating whether a local, national or regional society is sustainable.

### ***1. Sustainability of a global society built on 13<sup>th</sup> century globalization and capitalism***

Human societies have emerged over generations in different cooperative forms, such as hunter-gather societies, agricultural societies, industrial societies, knowledge societies and perhaps now emerging, the virtual network society. Within each society develops a pattern of public relationships, a technology of exchange and governance where public life is organized around economic distribution, social interactions and political governance or decision making. Historically, societies have been demarcated by both geography and ethnic culture. Geographical demarcations are often bodies of water, mountains and deserts while cultural and ethnic demarcations are languages, symbols and traditions. However, modern transportation, communication, and commerce have dramatically integrated local and state societies into ever larger and more complex societies.

Globalization has brought both benefits and threats to the human species which must be adequately balanced if the human species is to survive. In the past, cooperation through organized effort provided local community members opportunities for a better life through shared resources and security. Local communities around the globe developed technologies of cooperation for better food gathering and distribution, settlement construction, technology

innovation and knowledge transfer. The most evident global technology of production and distribution today is capitalism. Capitalism emerged out of Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup> century when merchants started buying products from distant locations and reselling the products in their own communities. The early capitalists risked personal wealth in order to accumulate more capital. Products such as woolen cloth were purchased from different parts of Europe and resold in areas where cloth was in short supply. In Florence, Italy, for example, the great banking family of Medici capitalized on their woolen trade in order to become one of the wealthiest families in Europe. The religious institution of Europe, the Calvinists in the Netherlands and the Catholics in Italy considered the accumulation of savings or wealth as a sign of God's favor. Perhaps it was for this reason that the Medici family produced four Popes between 1513 and 1605 and several monarchs from 1547 to 1737, but regardless of the reason, wealth produced power.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, capitalism refined its speculative adventures by developing technologies to spread the risk associated with an ever expanding and expensive global trade by forming chartered monopolies. The monopolies were stock companies that were granted exclusive trading rights between countries. The first charter was granted by Britain in 1555, the Muscovy Company obtained exclusive rights to trade with Russia. Subsequently, other Charter Companies were granted monopolies by Britain: East India Company in 1600, Hudson Bay Company in 1670 and South Sea Company in 1711. These private commercial enterprises were the first multinational companies, owned by the wealthy elites of England, creating global trade in cotton, silk, dye, salt, and opium. The charter to the East India Company permitted EIC to rule India by maintaining a private army between 1757 and 1858 until the government of Britain nationalized EIC's private army. Similar to the East India Company, the merchants in London, not wanting to lose out on the lucrative slave trade obtained a charter for the Royal African Company in 1672 to monopolize the slave in the Americas. The new plantation societies of the Americas were labor intensive, requiring the importation of African slaves to work on the tobacco, sugar and cotton plantations. The plantation societies were the source of British, Spanish, French and Portuguese wealth as well as the industrial development of early North America and Europe. The international trade of sugar, spice, tobacco, silk, opium, slaves, gold and silver were all sourced from exploitation by capitalist entrepreneurs. The early externalities of this global capitalism was the annihilation of the 100 million Native Indians, the destruction of numerous

indigenous societies in the Americas, Africa and Asia as well as the untold horrific dehumanizing conditions of international slavery and colonialism.

The early commercial enterprises supporting colonialism, plantation societies and slave trading, were inherently unsustainable, in that these commercial enterprises were based on exploitation and self-interest. The plantation societies were hierarchical and pathologically narcissistic, with southern ladies viewing themselves as grand dames of elegance and virtue while the slaves were regarded as private property to be worked until death or sold. The Southern plantation society of North America, emphasizing extravagance and elegance of the powerful elite while displaying dehumanizing exploitative behavior towards the workers, is an extreme example of the ego-centric self-interest that is the foundational philosophy of capitalism. The plantation owners who grew sugar, tobacco and cotton, the early global merchants who purchased, transported and sold slaves as commodities, and the industrialist in the north that made products from the cheap products of slavery, where all self-interested capitalists guided by the invisible hand towards the common good of the American society. The common good was building an independent nation based on the freedoms of life, liberty and happiness. Unfortunately, the slave society of the south and the industrial society of the north excluded these freedoms from women and minorities. Although narcissistic self-interest may be the invisible hand guiding society towards wealth, the society it builds is perhaps not sustainable in that social and environmental injustice, unless treated and resolved, festers until it infects the entire society.

## *2. Extricating the concept of sustainable from the sustainable development paradigm*

The problem with considering whether a society is sustainable is the public policy paradigm of sustainable development. The terms “sustainable” and “development” have become inextricably embedded in the vague overarching concept of “sustainable development” and therefore inhibiting the measurement of whether a society is sustainable separate from the current measurement of sustainable development. The indelible linkage between the two words and the subsequent merging into the concept of sustainable development is traced back to the *Our Common Future*, published by the United Nations in October 1987. The directive to the World Commission on Environment and Development was to explore how the emerging concerns of environmental degradation and overpopulation were affecting the human

habitat. As a result of the report, the concept of development (per capita growth) was linked to the concept of sustainability (protection of the human habitat). Unfortunately, the concept of sustainability was not distinct from the concept of development, having its own definition and measureable outcomes. In stating that humanity has the ability to make development sustainable, the Brundtland Report links sustainability to economic development as an attachment to growth; implying that growth should be sustainable. Although the policy issues of poverty, social equity and environmental degradation are clearly integral components of sustainable development, the only apparent accepted solution to unsustainable outcomes or practices is more economic growth. The classical thinking is that more growth will provide a society enough money and technology to eventually fix all problems, whether the problems are economic, social or environmental.

Reinforcing the economic growth paradigm, sustainable development was initially measured and therefore synonymous with gross domestic product (GDP). A country was considered by the industrialized community as developing if it was growing in GDP by attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) to develop large infrastructure and manufacturing projects and industrializing its natural resource. A society was said to be developing if it was in the process of modernization by western standards, specifically: foreign investors gain an acceptable return on investment, public resources are converted to private resources, the economy is deregulated, there are no labor or environmental restrictions on transnational corporate profit and trade barriers are eliminated. For all practical purposes, if a project or practice is profitable, creating wealth for a foreign investor, then it meets the requirements of sustainable development. However, growth in GDP does not in itself solve problems that a consumer society causes for the environment and for society in general. Instead of national wealth being a cure for environmental problems, social inequality and poverty, it is actually an antecedent for those conditions. As wealth becomes globalized so too will environmental degradation, the growing gap between the rich and the poor and the multiple security problems associated with global poverty and inequality.

In reviewing the definitions of the terms “sustainable” and “development”, there is a clear distinction of meaning. Sustain has multiple definitions including: to keep in existence, maintain and to supply with necessity, and to support from below. So a society is sustainable if it is able to continue for a long duration, maintain and supply its members with basic necessities for life, and does not

destroy its foundations such as natural resources and environmental ecological systems. Similarly, development has many definitions, including: the act or process of growing or a fact or event that changes the situation. So a Society is developing if it is in the process of growing or changing. As applied to the neoliberal view of growth, a society is developing if the GDP is growing and it is sustainable if GDP is expected to grow in the future. This neoliberal paradigm of sustainable development dramatically limits the concepts of sustainable and development to the accumulation of capital wealth. As result of the narrow definitions of sustainable and development and the merging of the two concepts, the concept of sustainable development seems to imply or involve a conflict between contradictory goals. In contrast to the accepted ideology, sustainable as a characteristic of society is much more complicated than economic growth. In order for a society to achieve sustainability it must be supported by its environment while it provides for the needs of its members. Sustainability implies some level of homeostasis with nature where nature's services are not overtaxed or depleted and society supplies its members with the support they need in order to enjoy the essential freedoms life, liberty and happiness. But in the sustainable development paradigm, a society must constantly grow, produce and consume more products and services, utilize more energy and natural resources, expand its labor resource by increasing its population, consolidate its manufacturing and financial firms into global monopolies, and drive competition throughout a society in order to improve productivity and decrease the price of consumables, thus creating a consumer society. But the drive for continuous economic development creates an unsustainable consumer society where social and environmental problems thrive.

### ***3. Unsustainable path of the 21<sup>st</sup> century modern society***

The social and environmental problems caused by continuous neoliberal economic development, resulting in integration of markets, unrestricted access to local markets by wealthy multinational global corporations and the emphasis on improving productivity and competition between businesses, eliminates many small and medium size businesses that are the backbone of a society's middle class, the family owned business. Since the middle-class is often the cohesive element or the moderation of extremes for a society, any threat to the middle class is a threat to the stability of a society. The drive for improved productivity and lower prices results in fewer family owned businesses which are unable to compete with the mega-stores like Wal-Mart. Driving out the SMEs

actually reduces real investment and real growth, while at the same time, leaving hollowed-out governments and hollowed-out communities which are even less capable of rebalancing society through government programs and safety-nets. The hollowing out of governments leaves the multinational corporations ever more powerful in deregulated markets to be ever more self-interested and free to do what is best for the corporation with no restriction or responsibilities for employee welfare, environmental damage or community sustainability. The hollowed-out governments and communities, such as Detroit Michigan, where General Motors ruled until it decided to relocate its manufacturing business to non-regulated developing countries where labor was not only cheap but flexible (non-unionized), were left with high unemployment and foreclosure rates as well as a myriad of social and antisocial problems with very little tax base in which to address the economic fall-out. In 1953, the CEO of GM made the infamous remark that what was good for GM was good for America. But he did not say anything about the future of Detroit which in 2013 was declared a dying city with a loss of 26% of the population in the last 10 years, a 25% unemployment rate, home values declining by 70% and very little tax base or federal aid to rehabilitate a devastated city by self-interested powerful multinational corporations. What is good for industry is not necessarily good for society when corporations fail to be responsible citizens, externalizing social and environmental costs of their operations and leaving communities devastated in the wake of capital flight.

Inequity is an inherent problem in a capitalistic society where capital accumulation by industrialists is seen as essential for economic development, leaving low wage expendable workers unable to provide for their families and socially dislocated into mega-cities where industry is located and controlled. Unfortunately, the greater injustice for developing countries is that they will be impacted by climate change the most with the least amount of resources to adapt to the changes. Perhaps the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2011) said the obvious: climate change is a double injustice to the poor both in the developed and developing countries; the haves caused it and the have-nots are the most vulnerable to its impacts. Whether the poor are living within an industrialized country or in the poorest of countries, it is the poor who will be spending more of their subsistence incomes on energy related inflated prices while also being more vulnerable to displacement as the rising sea levels force migration out of low lying coastal areas around the globe. The have-nots neither caused the environmental degradation nor have the means

to adapt to the environmental changes but it is the have-nots who will suffer the most.

Social injustice has always been an issue in societies whether, feudal or democratic. Perhaps historic horrific injustices have justified the accepted view that the transformation of an agricultural society into an industrialized society requires at least a built-in short-term inequity between the owners of industry who are thought to make self-interested investments in capital improvements and the unemployed who can be supported through government safety nets until subsistence income trickles down via the invisible hand. But people who are concerned with distributive justice and inequity might wonder when exactly is a society to become equitable, when do the poor receive their share of the world's resources. Social equity is often an ignored dimension of economic development, left on the backburner until a certain expected level of development, income convergence or equilibrium is achieved. Economists even have a justification for inequity, finding it in the natural laws of evolutionary development, calling it the Kuznets curve, the inverted U or more graphically the frown expressed by the poor, where inequality initially increases with economic development but eventually turning down where the wealth of a nation trickles down to the poorer classes of society. But the Kuznets curve is found not to be the law of evolution but the result of self-interested intentional behavior serving the needs of the wealthy.

Equality requires a policy decision where some of the wealth is transferred to the poor through policy programs and services, requiring employers to pay livable wages and the wealthy pay taxes so that the poor can be included in economic development through access to educational and health services. In measuring inequality using the Gini coefficient, high income inequality is above 0.50 while relatively equal income distribution is below 0.35. Among the upper income countries, the United States has the highest inequality in 2011 at 0.477, steadily rising from 0.386 in 1968. The crooked smile of the graph showing the percentage of income earned by the top 1 %, shows that during the time of the industrial monopolies in 1917 by the Rockefellers and Carnegies, the top 1% earned 18% of the income in the U.S., falling to less than 10% in 1970 and then surging to 23.5% in 2011. In contrast, the richest income per capita country, Norway, earning almost twice the per capita income as the U.S., has the lowest

Gini coefficient of 0.258, while Germany with an income per capita income level similar to the U.S., has a Gini coefficient of 0.283, both within the income equality bracket. The United States is ranked by the CIA as 100<sup>th</sup> out of 140 in income equality. It may be time to ask whether rising income inequality is sustainable when looking at concurrent social and moral issues such as terrorism, criminal behavior, drug and alcohol abuse, violence, and incarcerations.

Although distributive justice is a critical issue of sustainability, it will be harder to reach as the sea levels rise and the natural resources are depleted. It will be the poor who can least afford the future price of water, energy and food. The 1948 Declaration of Human Rights recognize the fundamental rights that people have to at least a subsistence level of human life but the inequities are still evident even after 200 hundred years of industrial revolution, innovation, and technological advances. Social inequities, caused by unrestricted growth of income and wealth without consideration for externalities causing harm, are simply wrong. If society produces harmful externalities the society is not sustainable.

This paper proposes a new paradigm for conceptualizing a sustainable society by extricating sustainability from the concept of sustainable development. The industrialized OECD states are deemed developed but the question remains whether they are sustainable. The literature review is intended to identify historical conceptual frameworks of sustainable development in order to isolate and extricate key dimensions of sustainability from the concept of sustainable development in an effort to develop a new conceptual framework for sustainable society.

## **Historical Frameworks for Sustainable Development**

### ***1. Pressure-State-Response Model***

Conceptual frameworks are used to draw a picture of the relationship between important variables in a theory. In the policy area of sustainable development, there are four primary frameworks used by international organizations: PSR, well-being, issue, and capital-accounting based frameworks. The dominate framework used by many organizations is the pressure-state-response (PSR) framework developed by Canada for environmental statistics. The PSR model was soon adopted by the UNCSD and the OECD.

The PSR model is illustrated by the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) model that was developed using a systems approach to diagram the relationship between the environment and human activity. In Figure 1 below, the model suggests that the environment provides certain human activity inputs in the way of environmental services which are then consumed and discharged as outputs in the form of waste and pollution back into the environment. The model also suggests that the environment impacts on people while human activity encroaches on the environmental ecosystem.

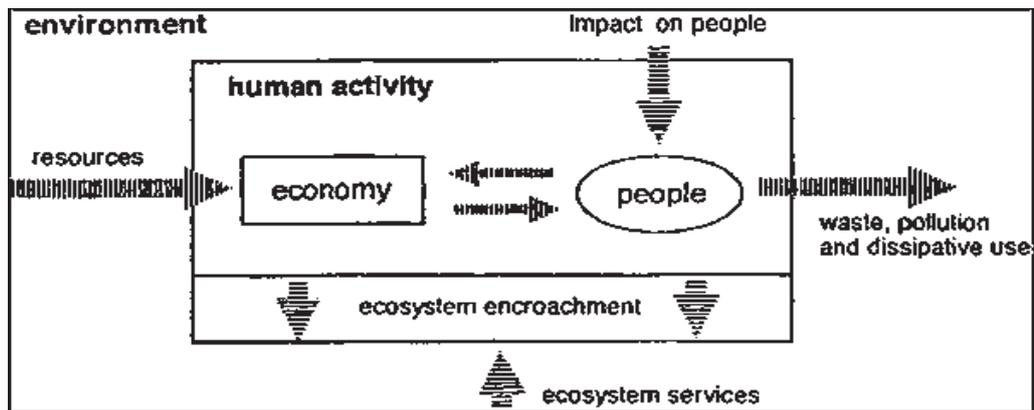


Figure 1 Basic Pressure-State-Response Model

Source: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/W4745E/w4745e00.htm#Contents>

Although the PSR model focuses on the interdependency of the relationship between human activity and the environment, people are not actually separate and distinct from the environment, they are the environment. The environment is not something out there to be observed and impacted; the environment is composed in part of humans and their activities. The disaggregation of people from the environment sets up a false dichotomous relationship of an entity that is composed of the very elements of the environment: oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, as well as some 50 other elements of nature. In addition, human activity cannot be disaggregated into an economy and people; an economy is composed of humans and their social, economic, and cultural relationships which are all part of the environment. Although a model is intended to simplify reality, a simplistic paradigm may result in a false perception of humans being distinct and separate from nature and the economy being somehow separate and distinct from humans as if humans have no responsibility for its working because the economy acts under its own set of laws beyond the control of people. It is people who establish the

transactional relationships that they call the economy. It is also people who by destroying the environment are also destroying themselves.

Based on the above model, OECD developed a PSR framework where the Human Sub-system puts pressure on the Environmental Sub-system and the Environmental Sub-system in return sends feedback to the Human Sub-system. The Human Sub-system in Figure 2 below delineates linkages between the Economic-Sub-system that provides goods and services to the Population-Subsystem which in turn provides labor to the Economic-subsystem. The Human-Sub-system puts pressure by way of pollution and resources depletion on the Environmental Sub-system. The Environmental Sub-system is a state where the environmental components and ecosystem impact each other and seen as being in some form of a steady state. When the Environmental Sub-system state is changed due to the demands from the Human Sub-system, Environmental Sub-system sends a response to the Human Sub-system. Pressure from humans results in a response and feedback from the environment where humans theoretically should learn to adapt their behavior so that the environment can maintain its equilibrium state. If, for example, the pollution emitted from the human activity causes deleterious pressure on the eco-system which in turn results in an increase in worldwide temperatures and a reduction in renewable resources, the environment will change its level of available resources and the human population can adapt by decreasing the pollution pressure on the environment.

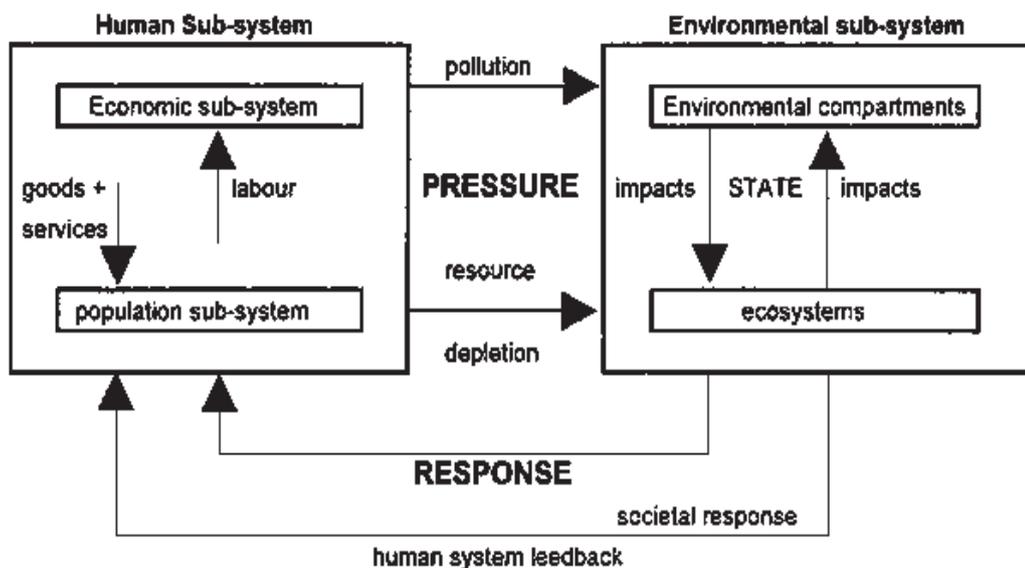


Figure 2 OECD Framework

Source: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/W4745E/w4745e00.htm#Contents>

Although the UN model contains the word “people” the OECD model seems to be devoid of people altogether where the human population serves the economy by providing labor in return for goods and services. The hierarchical relationship with the economic system above the human population is purely transactional, both providing resources to each other and as a consequence to the exchange, the Human sub-system pollutes and depletes the environment. But the model seems to neglect the social dimension, leaving the question of equality or society out of this model. The model is very clean, almost sterile of the social ills and problems of inequality. The triad of sustainable development is now a dyad between human economic activity and environmental equilibrium. The people that make up human activity have been relegated to servicing the economy as a population without acknowledging the distinction among class, status or power. In this model, as long as the labor and product subsystem is not overtaxing the environment everything is in equilibrium; the means justifies the ends, very Machiavellian.

The PSR model is clearly directed at the economic pressures and subsequent environmental impacts with little recognition of the influences of actual people in the process of policy making and the choices that people make that affect the sustainability of society. In order for a society to be sustainable, the complexity of human psycho-social-political linkages must be understood and measured; the subsequent evolution of the sustainable development concept reflects such emphasis, at least in part.

## ***2. Well-Being Model***

The well-being model of sustainable development as shown in Figure 3 below, places the individual in the middle of the sustainable development. The model starts with the person’s own assessment of self well-being (SWB) based on the factors affecting individual well-being: activities, habitat, health, relationships, personal finance, education and skills. The personal assessment of well-being is contextual in that the assessment depends on governance, economy, and natural environment. The Well-Being Framework clearly illuminates the importance of equality and fairness as essential contributors to both SWB and national well-being. National Well-Being (NWB) is unachievable without individual equality in activities, habitat, health, relationships, personal finance, education and skills. In this model, the two essential dimensions are equality/fairness and sustainability. The factors of SWB are a means to an end, not the Machiavellian end into themselves. Wealth of an elite class is not an end into itself or means to achieving an end. The factors of SWB contribute to NWB only

if they are based on equality/fairness and sustainability. Furthermore, SWB is found in the context of governance, economy, and the environment and the context only contributes to NWB if governance, economy and environment are based on equality/fairness and sustainability. If the services offered from any of these sectors are unequal or unsustainable, neither SWB nor NWB will be achieved.

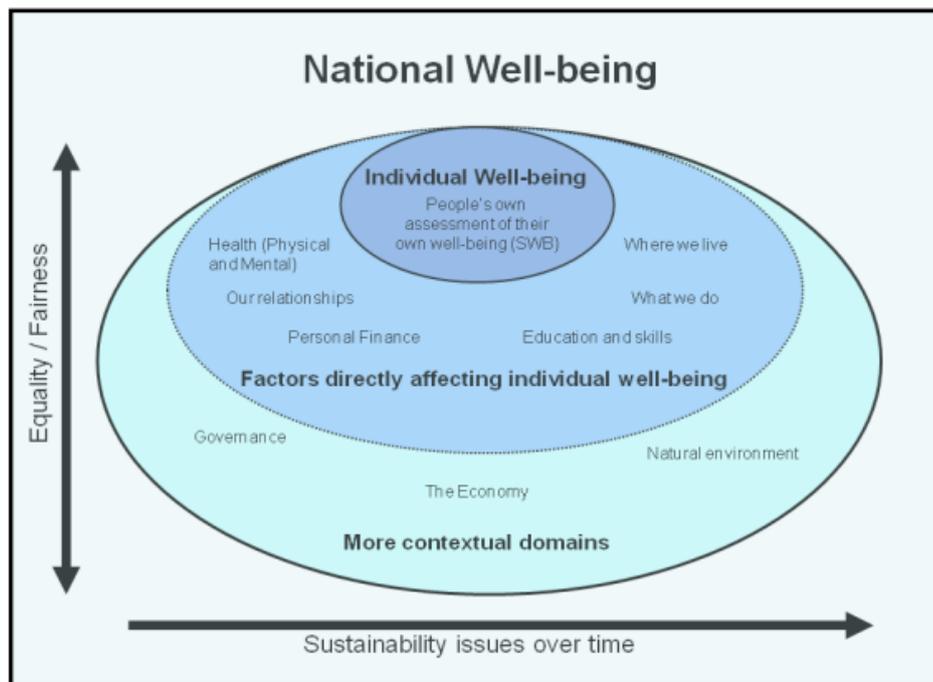


Figure 3 Well-Being Framework

Source <http://wellbeingmeasure.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/the-office-of-national-statistics-turns-its-attention-to-young-peoples-well-being/>

In 2009, the New Economics Foundation published a report entitled *National Accounts of Well-being: Bringing Real Wealth onto the Balance Sheet*. The report uses a national well-being concept to place the well-being of people at the center of national accounts, instead of the traditional GNP. The report divides personal well-being into three categories: personal well-being, social well-being, and well-being at work. Personal well-being is measured by emotional well-being, satisfying life, vitality, resilience, self-esteem and positive functioning. The social dimension of well-being is measured by an assessment of one's supportive relationships and trust and belonging. Although well-being, based on individual perception, is an important indicator of a nation's sustainability, individual perception is susceptible to self-interest which may

have very little to do with how a complex system actually interacts with its environment. According to the well-being model, a society is sustainable as long as its members perceive personal, social and economic well-being. Apparently, this assessment of SWB can be done without considering externalities of personal behavior. A measure of whether a society is sustainable requires multidimensional and multilevel analysis.

### **3. Theme or Objective Based Model**

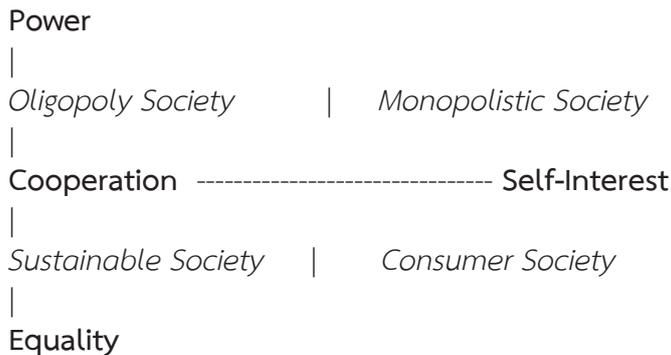
In 1997, the European Union added sustainable development to the Maastricht Treaty as a precondition for new members. The 2006 the environmental and sustainability strategy included six objectives: (1) continual improvement of the quality of life for present and future generations, (2) creating sustainable communities (3) able to manage and use resources efficiently, (4) capitalize on the ecological and social innovation potential in the economy, (5) to ensure environmental protection & ecological prosperity and (6) ensure social cohesion. The objective based framework of sustainability development adds significantly to the concept of sustainability where sustainability includes social inclusion and sustainable consumption and production. By definition, a cooperative social effort is self-destructive if it excludes certain members from full citizenship and participation; exclusive societies are anachronistic. A state that excludes a category of its members from participation has shown to be un-sustainable and subject to numerous series of either antisocial behavior or revolutions. Antisocial behavior in a society is, at least in part, rebelliousness against the societal norms and laws usually by people who feel excluded from the responsibilities and benefits of the society. A society with abundant disharmony suggests the degree of alienation in the society. Extrapolating the level of civil unrest globally indicates the level of alienation on a global scale. The current level of social unrest around the world is suggestive of the level of dissatisfaction among various populations of their exclusion from local, national or global society.

While none of the models above is sufficient in itself to actually portray a workable framework to support policymaking in analyzing and measuring whether a society is on a sustainable path, the models of sustainable development contribute to capturing the essential dimensions of a sustainable society. The key dimensions of a sustainable society are equality and cooperation while the key dimensions of an un-sustainable society are power and self-interest.

## Conceptual Framework for Sustainable Society

Extricating sustainability from sustainable development is an essential step in developing an alternative paradigm of a sustainable society. The dominant paradigm for sustainable development is the three dimensional approach that usually ignores the social dimension of sustainable development while being completely useless in controlling environmental impacts. The current paradigm is dysfunctional because it ignores the primary source of unsustainable human activity located in the industrialized countries. The industrialized countries are categorized as developed so that sustainable development does not apply. Sustainable development is for the developing countries which are not yet modernized consumer societies. Of course it can be argued that growth is important to the developed countries but sustainable growth implies that the developed country is already on a sustainable path. For the OECD countries, the three dimensions of sustainable development are seen as a recipe for the developing countries, not relating to the modern wealthy societies who by neoliberal definition of success are sustainable and have proven to the world that technology and wealth can solve all potential threats to humanity. The challenge posed to the industrialized societies is proving their self-serving and self-reinforcing arguments. The evidence or feedback from the environment is that the natural carbon sinks are full and continued carbon emissions will soon reach a tipping point where long-term climate change will cause mass plant and animal extinction, severe sea level rise, and mass migration leading to food and fresh water shortages, as well as global security problems. Wealthy industrialized nations need to prove that their externalities will not eventually undermine the global society in which they have always exploited for their own benefit. But the wealthy are of course the powerful, the industrialists and financiers which have always exploited society for self-interested gains. Wealth and power have always been self-interested and deleterious to a sustainable society. Wealth can only be built if money is transferred to a few individuals who own the majority of assets of a society, otherwise it is argued that the majority of societal members will not be motivated to work in industries or toil in the service sector. Wealth requires (1) the transfer of money and power from the many to the few, (2) competitive self-interest instead of cooperative associations, (3) inequality and social exclusion of the many by a few powerful individuals, and (4) the consumer-oriented society that restrains prices by externalizing the real costs of production while keeping food prices artificially low. Wealth building is not a sustainable goal for society. The proclaimed expectation of self-interested wealth for a future population of 9-15 billion people is not only unrealistic but

unsustainable, leaving the majority of global citizens eventually dissatisfied with not only their social exclusion but with global society itself. If a society is to be sustainable it must include the dimensions of equality and cooperation. A society that focuses on the dimensions self-interest and power is unsustainable. Figure 5 below is the proposed framework for a sustainable society.



**Figure 5 Conceptual Framework for a Sustainable Society**

The Sustainable Society framework uses two sustainable dimensions of Cooperation and Equality as the foundations for a sustainable society whereas the two unsustainable dimensions of Power and Self-interest either combined or in conjunction with Cooperation or Equality leads to an unsustainable society.

## **1. Dimensions of a Sustainable Society**

### **Equality**

Equality within a society is defined as the state where all members are treated uniformly and possess the same status. Equality is the foundational philosophy behind the basic freedoms guaranteed by state constitutions and found in the United Nations preamble and Declaration of Human Rights but the ideal is seldom achieved due to self-interested behavior by the few or the majority. Since society is a cooperative effort, it is self-evident that members of a cooperative expect to be treated uniformly and possess the same status. If people are asked before birth, without foreknowledge as to their particular status in society, whether they prefer a society based on equality or inequality people would unanimously agree on equality. But it is power of inequality that corrupts the pure souls and minds of mankind. Once a person has power over others, he will likely do whatever is necessary to maintain the power. The PSR models of the UN and OECD are devoid of the social dimension of sustainable development. Although the two other dimensions of environment

and economy are evident, social equality seems to be sitting on the backburner waiting for the Kuznets curve to smile. The Well-being model does include equality as an essential element of sustainability where perception of SWB is critical to national well-being. SWB includes equality but it is not evident that governance, economy and natural environment are significant to equality or the elite's definition of fairness. In the EU theme model, social cohesion is one of the six designated themes but it is a weak substitute for equality. Again, social cohesion can be achieved by singing patriotic songs whereas equality is only achieved through distributive and procedural justice.

### **Cooperation**

Society by definition is a cooperative effort to provide certain benefits to the community. Historically, groups of people have aggregated into larger and larger social units in order to achieve certain social benefits, such as commodity production and distribution, research and development, education, health care, and police protection. Social units, whether small or large, are sustainable only if people are committed to the common objectives of society and agree to cooperate the society. Cooperation or co-operation is the very process of working together to create a sustainable society but cooperation requires equality. Cooperation without equal status and power is unsustainable servitude and exploitation. Self-interested behavior eventually leads to power and exploitation of those who have less power and status. Cooperation as a critical component of sustainable society is self-evident in that cooperation is the foundation of organization; members of a society cooperate in order to provide a better life for all members, not to serve the elite. The traditional frameworks of sustainable development have cooperation as an implicit element. The PSA models suggest that people and the economy cooperate for mutual benefit. In the Well-being model, SWB is impossible without cooperative effort of the society to provide certain factors such as health, education, and relationships. The EU objective framework is also heavily laden with cooperative effort, in that, the Maastricht Treaty mandates cooperative effort to create sustainable communities before new member states are accepted.

## ***2. Dimensions of an Unsustainable Society***

### **Power**

Power is the capacity to produce an effect or the capacity to control others. State sovereignty is an example of ultimate life and death exclusive power over the citizens within a given territory. For Michael Mann, sociologist, the sources

of state power emerges from human beings pursuing their self-interests and includes ideology, economy, military and state. In the geopolitical context, one or more dominant states exert their ideology, economy, military and institutional influence in order to obtain concessions from other states. Although money and military are the obvious manifestations of power, the power of ideology and institutional structure are often more subtle, and in a civil society, more influential. The Washington Consensus of neoliberal capitalism has been the dominant ideology since the Regan-Thatcher Era while the World Bank and IMF have been the dominant institutional structures in global finance. When United Kingdom was the dominant world-power in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English politicians were famous for quotations regarding the ability of power to corrupt absolutely and of power corrupting the minds of the powerful. The more power a country or a group of individuals have over others the less sustainable the relationship. The absolute power that Southern Plantation owners had over slaves was manifestly unsustainable but the plantation society fought to the death to maintain the inequitable power-structure. The PSA models are filled with power symbols of man's authority over the environment. While humans put forceful pressure on the environment, the environment at best provides feedback to humans. The PSA models also have labor and the economic sub-system in a hierarchical relationship, the population serving the economic system. The well-being and objective based frameworks also suggests that the equal distribution of power through social inclusion is critical to a sustainable society.

### **Self-interest**

The dominant free-market ideology is that self-interest is the guiding hand to all that is good in society, including freedom of association to contract, freedom to own and possess property, and freedom to accumulate as much wealth as one desires. Unfortunately, self-interest is not free. Self-interest has a social cost, usually described as an externality. The cost of self-interested consumption is global carbon emissions, global warming, desertification of productive land, rising sea levels, and global alienation and unrest. An ideology of free self-interest in society is not sustainable. All of the traditional models implicitly accept that self-interest is the driver of pressure on the environment but the paradigms do not challenge the inherent dilemma of a society guided by self-

interest to achieve maximum wealth and consumption while also providing catastrophic externalities to the environment. The historical models seem to ignore the elephant in the room, hoping that technology will eventually find a solution to the beast.

### **3. *Unsustainable societies***

#### **Oligopoly Society**

The oligopoly society results in the use of Power and Cooperation where the elite are not in competition with each other but cooperate to control resources and power. The OPEC countries are the standard oligopolies that not only control oil prices and seek artificially high rent for their natural resources but they maintain power within their countries through a cooperative elite class. The oligopoly countries are not sustainable because they exclude the vast majority of citizens from both the decision making process as well as benefits and responsibilities of a sustainable society.

#### **Monopolistic Society**

The Monopolistic Society thrives on Power and Self-interest which dominates all political, economic and social landscape. The OECD countries are the standard for monopolistic societies where bigger is better and fierce competition drives out family owned businesses and the middle class, leaving only a few monopolies, like Wal-Mart or Microsoft, to dictate the prices and wages of workers. The monopoly states include the Washington Consensus states who's Power has served the Self-Interests of the few while disparaging cooperation and collectivism naturally found in any society. The more Power and Self-interest a society acquires, the more inequality the society accumulates with fierce competition seen as the norm for social relationships.

#### **Consumer Society**

The consumer society is perhaps the utopian society of this age where low price and brand name products fill the modern shopping malls that are accessible to everyone equally. Everyone wants unlimited selection and free money to buy the image enhancing products. The utopian concept guarantees low priced consumables for every person in the world when capitalism technology is globalized and the economies converge. But should we not ask if unlimited consumption by 9-15 billion people is sustainable. However ideal the promised outcome may be, a society based on unlimited consumption is inherently unsustainable. Just before the financial crisis of 2007, the United States could

be characterized as a consumer society where everyone was equally indebted through the unrelenting exposure to multiple free credit cards and excessive credit lines. In a consumer society, self-interested consumption is available to all members. Unfortunately, a consumer society is not sustainable since there are not enough natural resources to provide people on this planet with all the consumables they want or enough carbon sinks to contain all the resulting carbon emissions.

#### **4. Sustainable Society**

The only sustainable society in this paradigm is found within the two dimensions of Cooperation and Equality. A society that attempts to cooperate in providing for the well-being of all its members without the self-interest of individual members attempting to accumulate wealth or power will more likely be sustainable. The foundations for a Sustainable Society can be found in the ideals and moral principles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948. The drafters of the declaration represented the states of Lebanon, China, USSR, USA, UK, France, Australia, Chile and Canada considered the certain rights critical to a peaceful world, including the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being, to security in the event of unemployment or sickness, to education, to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, and to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized. But the world leaders were also cognizant that it is the duty to the community where self development and general welfare of the community is achieved. It is clear in the stated principles and purpose of the United Nations that equality and cooperation are essential to a sustainable world and that mass destruction resulting from unrestrained power and self-interest is unsustainable.

#### **Conclusion**

The paradigm of a sustainable society is another viewpoint in the multitude of viewpoints reflecting the global community's desire to find the keys to a better and more sustainable world. Although society seems to have checked off many ideologies as unworkable, very little scientific effort has been done on cooperative economics, leadership, governance and other forms of equality. There is much work to be done before this generation is assured that future generations will not suffer from the self-indulgent externalities of past generations. The sustainable society is a multilevel concept where sustainability

is built from the ground up with cooperative and equal dyads working together for a sustainable future, the nation-states building cooperation and equality through its constitutional and institutional structures, and virtual networks of cooperative effort for achieving a sustainable global society. There are many examples of peoples living together in sustainable communities; communities of cooperation and equality developing new technologies of well-being. Each nation-state and local community is important in building a sustainable web where each local social unit contributes to the sustainability of a global society. Ideologies of power and self-interest are unsustainable; it is only the combination of equality and cooperation that creates a sustainable society.

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