
UNIT 11 SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*

Structure

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11.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Provide a conceptual framework of sustainable development;
- Explain the concept of human development; and
- Give an overview of sustainable human development.

11.1 INTRODUCTION

Sustainable human development is a combination of two components – sustainable development and human development. It is a desirable objective that aims to be socially inclusive, bring about socio-economic prosperity, and inter-generational equity. A working definition of sustainable human development (SHD) refers to “equitable human and social development, maintaining environmental integrity, and ensuring that these conditions also be attainable for future generations” (Rucki, 2014). At the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict, and Complexity (AC4), Columbia University, four propositions have been presented to identify the purpose of SHD. According to this, SHD involves the prevention of deprivation of basic human needs, the promotion of individual development, equity, and the opportunity for people to define and pursue individual values alone and within social groupings and organisations of varying size and scope, the safeguarding of public, social, and environmental goods over time and across locations, and resolving conflicts between competing interests and needs through the creation of cooperative social, political, economic, and environmental institutions (*ibid.*).

Theoretically, it is possible to combine sustainable development and human development. In reality, there remains a wide chasm between environmental sustainability and human development. There have been past attempts to reconcile the two concepts. For example, indices for environmental sustainability such as Environmental Performance Index,

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Environmental Vulnerability Index, and the Environmental Sustainability Index which evaluate the socio-economic and ecological aspects of sustainability. The indices for human development such as Human Development Index, the Global Peace Index, and the World Happiness Report assess the various aspects of human well-being. However, the absence of a unified theoretical framework precluded fool-proof development of the concept of SHD. Beaglehole (2015) noted that fundamental challenges to SHD were mainly inequitable distribution of global wealth, population growth, and environmental depletion. While the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals provided 'what' needed to be achieved, they did not tell 'how' to achieve those goals for the realisation of SHD.

In this Unit, we shall attempt to provide a conceptual framework of development and explain the concept of human development and present a comprehensive framework of sustainable human development.

11.2 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of 'sustainable development' is a combination of two separate terms, 'sustainable' and 'development'. Clubbing the two words, it transforms into a powerful concept which promises development that is sensitive to the state of environment as well as its impact on present and future generations and contributing to its sustenance in the long-run. Prior to the concept of 'sustainable development', environmental concerns were viewed in terms of 'limits to growth' at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Stockholm in 1972. The shift from 'limits to growth' to 'sustainable development' came after a period of 20 years at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or the Earth Summit hosted in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) in 1992. However, the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) had already presented their definition of sustainable development in their report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987. Also known as the Brundtland Report, it spelt out sustainable development as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. As a result, it gave weightage to environmental, economic, and societal dimensions of sustainable development. Furthermore, the Brundtland Report proposed eight objectives of sustainable development: reviving growth; changing the quality of growth; meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water, and sanitation; ensuring a sustainable level of population; conserving and enhancing resource base; reorienting technology and managing risk; merging environment and economics in decision making; and reorienting international economic relations. The actual process of simultaneous realisation of the broad goals proved complicated as well as balancing objectives and judging success or failure proved arduous. Sustainable development attempts at harmonising three inter-connected realities-economic activities, social development and the environmental mechanisms. It is development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations, guaranteeing the balance between economic growth, concern for the environment and social well being.

Sustainable development is enmeshed in the tension between advocating economic growth on one hand, and equitable provision of basic needs, conservation of natural capital, maintenance of integrity of ecosystems and diversity of species on the other hand. Still, sustainable development primarily emphasised upon satisfaction of basic human needs particularly of the poor, of the present and future generations. Since satisfaction of basic human needs relied upon economic growth, it explained revival of growth being the first objective while conservation of environment being the fifth objective

of the Brundtland Report. Globally, since 1992, sustained efforts were on to focus on sustainable development and embark upon suitable national strategies. The UN Summit on sustainable development, formulation of Millennium development goals, later the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are measures in this direction.

The SDGs laid down by United Nations General Assembly in 2016 considered as global goals, are a universal call for action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that people enjoy peace and prosperity. These are 17 goals, about which we have discussed in detail in Unit 5 of this Course. The SDGs, built on the successes of Millennium Development goals (MDGS) include new social and economic development areas such as health, education, water, sanitation, climate change, economic inequality, innovation, peace, social justice and so on.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) Explain the concept of sustainable development.

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2) What are sustainable development goals?

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11.3 UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The concept of human development is based on the idea that expansion of a person’s capability consequently expands his/her choices. While income is considered to be an important component, it is also recognised that development means more than accumulation of income and wealth. Alternatively, realisation of goals of human development requires good governance to provide an enabling environment (Baru, 1998). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) brings out Human Development Reports that indicate the parameters of human well-being examined from various perspectives in different countries of the world. In the first Human Development Report, published in 1990, the novel Human Development approach was introduced which emphasised on enrichment of human life instead of enrichment of economy. Its basic premise was “People are wealth of a nation” The Human Development Report Office (HDRO), UNDP, defines Human Development as “expanding the richness of human life, rather than simply the richness of the economy in which human beings live.

It makes the case for a human development approach where people are able to enjoy greater freedom, opportunities and choices. In other words, this approach promotes people-centric rather than growth-centric ideas along with the creation of an environment of equitable opportunities and choices for everyone “to develop to their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives that they value later”.

During the later half of the 20th century, a perception emerged that Gross Domestic Product or GDP was not the suitable indicator of human well-being. While the 1960s witnessed demand to divest GDP as a measure of well-being, 1970s and 1980s were characterised by arguments for an alternative approach that transcended GDP to include parameters such as fulfilment of basic needs, redistribution with growth and employment. Today, human development approach consists of *two* dimensions:

- 1) Directly enhancing human abilities. This includes:
 - Long and healthy life;
 - Knowledge; and
 - Decent standard of living.
- 2) Creating conditions for human development. This encompasses:
 - Participation in political and community life;
 - Environmental sustainability;
 - Human security and rights; and
 - Gender equality.

The above analysis of human development approach underscored whether people can “be” and “do” things desired in a lifetime.

The practical aspect of the human development approach is expressed as Human Development Index (HDI). HDI evaluates a country’s development based on the criteria of human capabilities instead of economic growth per se. It does so by assessing overall performance of core aspects of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and enjoying a decent standard of living. For example, a long and healthy life is measured by life expectancy at birth; education criteria is measured by mean of years of schooling for adults aged 25 years and more, and expected years of schooling for children of school entering age; and standard of living criteria is measured by gross national income per capita. The HDI is tabulated as the geometric mean of normalised indices for each of the three core aspects of human development.

The concept of human development was pioneered by intellectuals, such as Mahbub Ul Haq and Amartya Sen. According to this, human development is considered as development of the richness of human life and not the wealth of the economy. Mahbub Ul Haq appointed as the special advisor to the UNDP in 1989 initiated the publishing of annual reports by the Human Development Report Office (HDRO), which subsequently published the annual reports. Within less than 50 years of its genesis, it transformed into a powerful agency mobilising governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as triggering innovative thinking in development economics. It steered focus to the ‘human’ aspect of development policy of governments because it recognised “People [as] the real wealth of a nation” and “Human development is the end - economic growth a means”. Particularly, the first human development report stressed upon (1) formation

of human capabilities, for example improved health, knowledge and skills, and (2) use of acquired capabilities, for example leisurely activities, productive purposes, cultural, social and political pursuits.

Human development is considered as a process of expanding the real freedom that people enjoy. It aims at providing better opportunities to people with a view to achieving long and healthy life, access to knowledge and acceptable living standards. It encompasses political, economic and social freedom, creativity, respect for human rights, etc.

Comparing human development between global North and South, wide disparities were observed in the spheres of education, technology and information systems. Haq (1992-2007) found tertiary enrolment rate in the South to be only one-fifth of the North, research and development expenditure to be only 4 per cent, and expenditure on scientific and technical personnel to be only one-ninth. He surmised that the huge gaps in technological progress and limited market opportunities would acutely disturb attainment of human development. Haq believed that strong recommendations forwarded in the 1992 Human Development Report would ensure that “no single human being is ever condemned by the sheer accident of birth but has equitable access to the entire range of national and global opportunities to develop his or her full human potential. This alone will transform the notion of one planet into one humanity and will create a new human order”.

UNDP’s Human Development Reports have relied on Amartya Sen’s capability approach as a conceptual tool to analyse existing developmental challenges. The capability approach defined human development as a process that encompassed not only people’s performance but also capabilities to perform and the scope to do and to be in this life. Simply put, the capability approach articulated human development in terms of enlarging choices. Along with Prof. Sudhir Anand from Oxford University, Amartya Sen developed the methodology to evaluate human development, particularly Human Development Index (HDI) followed by Gender-Related Development Index, Gender Empowerment Measure and Human Poverty Index (HPI).

11.4 SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

The goal of Sustainable Human Development (SHD) emerged decisively at the 1995 World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen. Also known as the Copenhagen Declaration, it promised to make development people-centric. This idea of SHD appeared in the Human Development Reports too as a firm alternative to the current development paradigm. The UNDP (1990-1997) framed it in terms of processes that enlarged people’s capabilities and choices to facilitate fulfilment of their needs. Unlike the development paradigm, it aimed at equitable distribution rather than economic growth only, regeneration of the environment, and promoting empowerment and participation of people especially prioritising the poor. It gave importance to people’s welfare and security instead of income, consumption or productivity only, so that people were both the ‘means’ and ‘ends’ of development. The attainment of the objectives of SHD rested upon sound governance, equity, sincere North-South partnerships, and active involvement and empowerment of the downtrodden (Nicholls, 1996).

The 1990s witnessed immense economic growth as well as increasing disparity between the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. The period was marked by persistent poverty, rising marginalisation, and disappointment with Keynesian principles of central planning and neo-liberal models of market-led growth. After World War II, it was assumed that

poverty could be eradicated in developing countries by pursuing robust economic growth because the fruits of fiscal development would trickle down to the lowest sections of society helping the poor to live to the fullest. However, the trickle-down theory proved to be inadequate because poverty not only persisted but also increased the rich-poor divide marginalising particularly the women. A world-wide perception, therefore, emerged that development ought to be sustainable and human. The support for the convergence of human development and sustainable development rendered creation of the new paradigm called Sustainable Human Development (SHD). This paradigm puts more emphasis on multidimensional aspects of life, changes in economic spheres, political culture, institutional frameworks, and social relationships along with gender relations, and such other conditions which contribute to expansion of capacities and choices for human lives to flourish (Plewis, *et al.*, 1996). The Human Development Report 1994 concluded SHD to be “pro-people, pro-job, pro-nature which gives the highest priority to poverty reduction, productive employment, social integration and environmental regeneration”.

Amartya Sen opined that SHD could be a model for preserving environment, promoting economic and social justice and improving human well-being through strengthening essential freedom to augment human capacities. Sen’s capability approach refuted his earlier conception of well-being as consumption-generated utility. Instead it dwelt upon personal situation viewed with sympathy or concern, that is, a person’s standard of living manifested by the ability to achieve all the objectives that he/she had reasons to choose. Sustainable human development encompasses key concerns such as poverty, security, human rights, gender empowerment, climate change, ecosystem preservation etc. It requires policy measures promoting inclusive growth, expansion of productive employment, microfinance, financial inclusion and pro-poor economic policies. In India, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is in this direction. Globally many schemes have been initiated to promote SHD.

While ‘development’ is not new to humanity, it started garnering attention only in the 1990s marked by the end of the Cold War accompanied by the dismal performance of structural adjustment and stabilisation programmes, and re-search for a holistic definition of development that went beyond economic growth. Inclusion of human rights was one of the means to redefine development. While opinions prevailed that human rights should be mainstreamed into development, there was little clarity on the methods to achieve the same. Initially, the role of rights in the development discourse was perceived in the form of ‘right to development’. The idea was floated in 1972 in the backdrop of debates on the New International Economic Order. The right to development encapsulated both political legitimacy and ethical authority assisting third world countries to justify their combined demand for equitable resource distribution and political and civil human rights. It also became the pivot in the third world countries’ struggle to make the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopt ‘right to development’. When it was finally adopted in 1986, the UNGA resolution read as, “The right to development is an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all people are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised”.

With time, the ‘right to development’ paradigm evolved into ‘rights-based development’ where rights were viewed as “fixed properties or legal certainties...because...its use lies in two things that are both important for development specialists: one about claims, and one about processes – in other words, one about ends and one about means”. This approach constructed the objectives of development in terms of claims, duties, and mechanisms that facilitated awareness about rights and arbitration on violation of rights.

In other words, the rights-based approach made a claim on the State through interrogating State policy and discrimination and emphasising on accountability against violation of claims. However, human-rights claims tend to be inherently political, with its issues constantly shifting over time. It also questions the developmental processes which bypass adherence to the principles of human rights.

Check Your Progress 2

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.
ii) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.

1) What do you understand by human development?

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2) Explain the concept of sustainable human development.

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11.5 CONCLUSION

The concept of sustainable development, as we have discussed in this Unit, expanded its ambit from environmental protection to harmonisation of economic activities, and social development. As explained, human development is very broad encompassing human security, individual freedom and rights to enable people lead a better life. Sustainable human development relies upon ethics and cooperation between government and citizens to resolve persistent problems, particularly relating to poverty and human insecurity. It provides a framework to receive development assistance as well as initiates global endeavours to ensure a decent standard of life to everyone in the present and the future.

Sustainable human development requires active participation of the civil society to ensure government accountability in public interest. Civil society can provide conditions and roadmap for the State and the market. It was felt that poor and marginalised groups might not be able to actively contribute so that power inequalities bedeviled civil societies. Thus, measures should be adopted to enable their participation in decision-making and make their voices heard in public domain. Moreover, establishing linkages with voluntary sector (NGOs), corporate sector, United Nations and the Bretton woods institutions would not only improve accountability and transparency but also streamline objectives within the framework of SHD that would culminate in translation of policies into strategies.

11.6 GLOSSARY

Bretton Woods Institutions: These are the World Bank and International Monetary Fund which were set up at a meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA in July 1944. The objective of this was to help rebuild the shattered post war economy and to promote international economic cooperation.

Gender-related Development Index (GDI): It is an index designed to measure gender equality. The aim of this is to add a gender-sensitive dimension to the Human Development Index (HDI). This index along with Gender Empowerment Measure was introduced in 1995 in the Human Development Report by the United Nations.

Gross Domestic Product: It is the monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced in a period of time, often annually or quarterly. Nominal GDP estimates are commonly used to determine the economic performance of a whole country or region and to make international comparison.

Human Development Index (HDI): It is a statistical index of life expectancy, education and per capita income indicators, which are used to rank countries into four tiers of human development. This was created to emphasise that people and their capabilities should be the ultimate criteria for assessing the development of a country, not economic growth. It was developed by Indian Nobel prize winner Amartya Sen.

Human Poverty Index (HPI): It is an indication of the standard of living in a country developed by the United Nations to complement the HDI. It concentrates on the deprivation in the three essential elements of human life already reflected in the HDI: longevity, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): These were the eight international development goals for the year 2015 that had been established following the millennium summit of the unions in 2000 with the adoption of UN Millennium Declaration. All 191 United Nations Member states at that time and around 12 international organisations committed to help achieve MDGs by 2015. These goals are to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop global partnership for development.

New International Economic Order: It refers to a set of proposals put forth during 1970s by some developing countries through the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development to promote their interests by improving their terms of trade, increasing development assistance, developed country tariff reductions etc. It was meant to be a revision of the international economic system in favour of third world countries.

Structural Adjustment and Stabilisation Programme: This refers to a package of reform measures promoted by Bretton woods Institutions, US Congress Treasury and several think tanks during the 1980s, which aimed to address the economic crisis, especially of Latin American countries. The programme emphasised the need for sound macro-economic and financial policies, trade and financial liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation of domestic markets. It promoted minimal State that refrains from economic intervention and focuses on sound monetary policy by letting the markets work, getting the prices right, privatising etc.

World Happiness Report: It is a landmark survey of global happiness. It is an annual publication of United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network which contains rankings of national happiness and analysis of data from various perspectives.

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11.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Your answer should include the following points:
 - Sustainable development is development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations.
 - It attempts to maintain the balance between economic growth, social development and environmental concerns.

- Sustainable development is holistic, which aims at reviving growth, meeting essential needs for food, water, sanitation, conserving and enhancing resource base, reorienting technology and managing risk and so on.

2) Your answer should include the following points:

- Sustainable development goals have been laid down in 2016 by the United Nations General Assembly.
- There are 17 global goals, the realisation of which calls for action on part of all nations to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that people enjoy peace and prosperity.
- They include social and economic development areas such as health, education, water, sanitation, climate change, people, social justice and so on.

Check Your Progress 2

1) Your answer should include the following points:

- Human development approach emphasises on enrichment of human life instead of environment of economy.
- Human development approach makes a case for people to enjoy greater freedom, opportunities and choices.
- It is people-centric than growth-centric.
- This approach consists of two dimensions: i) directly enhancing human abilities through long and healthy life, knowledge and decent standard of living ii) creation of conditions for human-development through social and political participation, environmental sustainability, human security and rights and gender equality.

2) Your answer should include the following points:

- The concept of sustainable human development (SHD) involves actions and processes that enlarge people's capabilities, and choices to facilitate fulfillment of their needs (SHD), emphasises on development being sustainable and human.
- It is pro-people, pro-nature giving priority to poverty reduction, productive employment, social integration and environmental regeneration.
- Amartya Sen considered SHD as a model for preserving environment, aim-economic and social justice and improving human well-being through strengthening essential freedom to augment human capacities.