

8 - Industrial and societal goals

Sustainable Development

Brundtland report, "Our Common Future", 1987

Original definition of sustainable development in the so-called Brundtland report (ref 1)

- [development that] meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs;
- but sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life.

On the first point, the report reads: «The concept of sustainable development does imply limits—not absolute limits but limitations imposed by the present state of technology and social organization on environmental resources and by the ability of the biosphere to absorb the effects of human activities. But technology and social organization can both be managed and improved to make way for a new era of economic growth.»

On the second point, the report makes clear that poverty eradication is as much part of sustainable development as the environmental part. Even stronger, «A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes.» (p. 8)

One could say that the first point addresses sustainability in time, i.e., intergenerational sustainability, whereas the second point emphasizes the importance of sustainability in space; i.e., more north-south equity and poverty.

Similar concerns on poverty and equity in the context of sustainable development were made by the EU "European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies" (EGE) in their opinion nr 27 (of January 16, 2013) entitled: "An ethical framework for assessing research, production and use of energy" (ref 2) [EGE, 2013]

Likewise, the same idea is behind the Trilemma project of the World Energy Council. (ref 3)

References:

(ref 1) Gro Harlem Brundtland et al., "Our Common Future", The World Commission on Environment and Development, Oxford University Press, Oxford / New York, 1987

(ref 2) The EGE is a team supporting the Bureau of European Policy Advisors (BEPA). See: http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/european-group-ethics/welcome/index_en.htm

and http://ec.europa.eu/bepa/european-group-ethics/docs/publications/opinion_no_27.pdf

(ref 3) See <http://www.worldenergy.org/publications/2013/world-energy-trilemma-2013>

