

# Sustainability Defined

## United Nations

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

## U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

“Sustainability is based on a simple principle: Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on our natural environment. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony, that permit fulfilling the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations. Sustainability is important to making sure that we have and will continue to have, the water, materials, and resources to protect human health and our environment.”

## UMD Office of Sustainability

“Put simply, sustainability is about being responsible with our resources. It is about not using more than our share. It is making sure there is enough, for all, forever.”

## Guideposts for a Sustainable Future Project (M. Nickerson)

Activities are sustainable when they:

1. use materials in continuing cycles
2. use continuously reliable sources of energy
3. come mainly from the potentials of being human, i.e., communication, creativity, coordination, appreciation, and spiritual and intellectual development.

Activities are non-sustainable when they:

1. require continual inputs of non-renewable resources,
2. use renewable resources faster than their rate of renewal
3. cause cumulative degradation of the environment,
4. require resources in quantities that could never be sustainable for all people,
5. lead to the extinction of other life forms.

## Common Goals of Sustainability

Although there are some disagreements among sustainability groups, there are remarkable similarities in their intentions and objectives. These include: concern for the environment, the economy and social equity; understanding of our dependence on the health of natural systems (clean air, clean water, healthy soils and forests, biodiversity) for our survival and well-being;

knowledge of the limits of the Earth's ecosystems and the detrimental impact of unchecked human activities (populations, pollution, economic growth); and a long-term, intergenerational perspective in actions and goals (Edwards, 2005 p.7).

## Sustainability Education

### Sustainable Schools Project

The Sustainable Schools Project defines education for sustainability as “learning that links knowledge, inquiry, and action to help students build a healthy future for their communities and the planet,” (2013).

### UNESCO

“Education for Sustainable Development aims to help people to develop the attitudes, skills, perspectives and knowledge to make informed decisions and act upon them for the benefit of themselves and others, now and in the future. ESD helps the citizens of the world to learn their way to a more sustainable future,” (n.d.).

### References

- Edwards, A. (2005). *The sustainability revolution: Portrait of a paradigm shift*. Gabriola Island, BC: New Society Publishers.
- Sustainable Schools Project (2013). *Education for sustainability*. Retrieved from <http://www.sustainableschoolsproject.org/education>.
- United Nations. (1987). *Report of the world commission on environment and development: Our common future*. Retrieved from <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>.
- University of Minnesota Duluth. (2012). *Sustainability mission statement*. Retrieved from <http://www.d.umn.edu/sustain/>.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (n.d.). *Education for sustainable development*. Retrieved from <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-sustainable-development/education-for-sustainable-development/>
- United States Environmental Protection Agency. (2013). *Sustainability home: Basic information*. Retrieved from <http://www.epa.gov/sustainability/basicinfo.htm>.