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# **An Investigation of Swedish Aid Discourse on Sustainable Development**

A Single Case Study of the Swedish International Development Agency  
with a Focus on (Possible Contradiction between) Economic Growth and  
Environmental Sustainability

Author: Aleksandra Todorov  
Bachelor Thesis: UTVK03, 15 hp  
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Supervisor: Olle Frödin

## **Abstract**

Author: Aleksandra Todorov

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This study begins in the understanding of sustainable development as a complex matter open for interpretation, and continues in the notion that different dimensions of sustainability create different values that have different goals; meaning that they will sometimes unite, and sometimes collide and lead to trade-offs. The aim for this study is to add to the understanding of this matter through an investigation of The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The purpose is to look at policies of economic growth and environmental and climate issues in order to form an interpretation of the agency's discourse on sustainable development. The study continues to an analysis of whether the dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability seem to be in conflict or not. The study concludes that Sida does include a multidimensional approach in its development cooperation for sustainable development as the agency seems to understand that the economic, environmental and socio-cultural systems are dependent on one another. The study also concludes that the answer to the question of whether there are any contradictions between economic sustainability and environmental sustainability is that it depends on the interpretation of the concept of sustainable development. Based on certain theories, contradictions can be identified, based on others they cannot. Finally, the study concludes that Sida's discourse on sustainable development certainly is a matter of compromise as the agency is trying to promote economic development while at the same time supporting the inclusion of the socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Sida, economic sustainability, environmental sustainability, development cooperation, economic growth

## **List of Abbreviations**

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

PGU – Policy for Global Development

Sida – The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

The UN – The United Nations

UD – Utrikesdepartementet [Eng. Ministry for Foreign Affairs]

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction and Background to Research Area

Today, the concept of sustainable development has found its place on the international development agenda. In 1987, the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the Brundtland Commission, released a report called 'Our Common Future' that drew international attention to the complexity and severity of the world's resource and environmental problems. The Brundtland Report called for sustainable development as a solution and gave the concept international spread. The report presented the now most common and well-known definition of sustainable development as "... *development (that) seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future.*" (The UN, 1987:39). The report took on a unique holistic approach to the world's environmental and resource problems by combining the dimensions of socio-cultural, environmental and economic sustainability into one necessary entity. All dimensions were now considered important when it came to bringing about sustainable development (Lui, 2009).

Hopwood et al. (2005) argue that sustainable development as a concept enables an awareness of the connections between environmental and socioeconomic problems. However, the Brundtland Report left the concept in a somewhat unclear and multifaceted manner, thus making it open to interpretation (Hopwood et al., 2005). Hopwood et al. (2005) argue that the positive aspect of this is that it is a concept of vision; a vision that is adaptable to circumstance. The negative aspect, on the other hand, is that the concept is at risk of losing meaning as efforts can be falsely described and angled as sustainable development while it is not.

This study begins in the ambiguousness that seems to be sustainable development, as there are many interpretations of the concept (Hopwood et al., 2005), and continues in the notion that different dimensions of sustainability create different values that have different goals; meaning that they will sometimes unite, and sometimes collide and lead to trade-offs (Ratner, 2004). The debate on sustainable development is trying to figure out how it is to be achieved. One problem is that the concept could be interpreted in a way that does not integrate all its three dimensions of social-cultural, environmental, and economic sustainability. Another problem with this could be that the interpretation of the concept leads to development efforts that in fact cause

contradiction and trade-offs amongst the three dimensions of sustainability; efforts that, in the long run, might not generate sustainable outcomes. The compatibility of the dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability is especially debated as it often comes down to being a discussion about the relationship between nature and society. Various discourses on sustainable development have different takes on this relationship, and present different solutions to the issue of combining economic sustainability and environmental sustainability. E.g. 'environmental modernization theory' is formed after a belief that society will be able to master nature through further modernization and innovation. Economic growth is important here and is very much part of the dimension of economic sustainability (Hannigan, 2006). 'The Deep Green Movement', on the other hand, does not believe that growth is infinite nor that sustainability can be achieved through modernization. Instead, the movement calls for a radical shift towards a system where nature is no longer viewed as an instrument for human needs only (Dobson, 2003).

The problems stated above call for a discussion on how agencies and organizations around the world are interpreting the concept of sustainable development. The aim for this study is to add to the understanding of this matter through an investigation of a single development agency. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) was chosen as the empirical focus of this study. The purpose is to look at policies of economic growth and environmental and climate issues in order to form an interpretation and an understanding of the agency's discourse on sustainable development. Then, the study continues to an analysis of whether the dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability seem to be in conflict or not.

## **1.2 Aim and Research Questions**

Sida has the responsibility to distribute Swedish governmental aid to developing countries through various forms of aid and development cooperation. The aim of this study is to analyze this agency through a discourse analysis in regards to the concept of sustainable development. Thus, the theoretical framework will be based on this concept, and the agency will more specifically be analyzed from the perspectives of economic and environmental sustainability; two different dimensions credited to sustainable development. This research is important because

of the ambiguousness that seems to be sustainable development, and because of the notion that trade-offs between the two might not lead to sustainability. This study will try to answer the following two questions:

*In what ways is the concept of sustainable development evident within Sida in terms of its policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues?*

*Are there any contradictions between the two dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability in Sida's policies?*

When it comes to development and the act of trying to change, improve, or have an impact on other societies and other areas of the world, one is justified to believe that it is important that donor agencies get it right. The aim is to identify the discourse on sustainability through an analysis of policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues. This will hopefully generate results that can contribute to the debate about issues concerning aid and development, and issues concerning the debates about sustainable development. If the results should point toward a contradiction between the economic and environmental dimensions, such problems along with their effects need to be acknowledged and investigated further. More research on this issue could generate greater understanding of Sida's aid policies and, thus, to the consideration of whether the Swedish aid discourse needs to be rethought in this regard or not.

#### **1.4 Delimitations**

This study seeks to investigate how the concept of sustainable development is understood, defined, and dealt with by an aid agency in its development work. Sida, a Swedish governmental aid agency, is the case that is being investigated and the case standing for the empirical foundation of this study. It was chosen for its representativeness of Swedish development work and for its significance in the international development arena. Even though one case is not enough to make any generalizations about how the whole donor community deals with issues of sustainability, the study can attempt to investigate and to identify versions of reality apparent in this one case. It can then be made into an exemplifying case as it is a member of a community

consisting of a broad category of donors (Bryman, 2012). If the purpose were to generalize; to generate external validity, then it would be more appropriate with a larger sample of donor countries. Instead, this study seeks internal validity (Bryman, 2012).

The theoretical framework is limited to the concept of sustainable development and to discourses on various dimensions linked to the concept. The dimensions are discussed through different theoretical perspectives, and the study will mainly draw on the dimensions of economic and environmental sustainability and possible contradictions. Contradictions are not formally measured but discussed in terms of characteristics pointing towards clashes and tradeoffs between the two in regards to the theoretical framework presented below. There is also a third dimension that is not discussed in the same manner as the other two, and this is the dimension social-cultural sustainability. The reason for this is that this dimension is not directly linked to the aim of this study. There is, of course, an identified indirect linkage as the three dimensions are argued to be highly connected to one another (Hopwood et al., 2005) (Lui, 2009). The theoretical framework represents the author's gathered understanding of the concept of sustainable development. This means that the theoretical framework is not a depiction of any single truth about the concept, but an interpretation of what has been stated in previous research. One has to take into account that this could have had an impact on the generated results as the study is carried out through an analysis based on the understanding of this subject. Furthermore, the term economic growth will be limited to Sida's own definition of it as increased production of goods and services resulting in a growing numbers of jobs, a growing capital stock and increased productivity.

This empirical framework is limited to a period of four years between 2010 and 2014. The main material of it is based on policies that the agency has been following during this period. This means that the policies are soon to be updated for the next length of office after the election of this year. The policies come from Sweden's ministry for foreign affairs and are written for Swedish development cooperation. This study does not investigate Sida's presented results of their effort, but is limited to an analysis of the agency's discourse on sustainable development. Results from projects in developing countries were not included as the issue of global representativeness becomes less of an issue without them.



## 1.5 Methodology

This study is a research overview of qualitative design and the research questions posed are answered and discussed with a main use of discourse analysis on a single case. However, the theoretical framework, along with the research questions, has not remained exactly the same from beginning to end. The relationship between theory and social research is deductive in this study as the theoretical framework was chosen prior to the case study. Sida is the development agency used to test or better yet to investigate sustainable development (Bryman, 2012).

Discourse analysis is used in this study through a review of Sida policies related to the study's field of research. This method is used because it is an approach that can be applied in order to analyze forms of communication and language, e.g. text. Then, versions of reality expressed through the investigated discourse can be emphasized and identified. This is what is being done in this study; an identification of a social world or context produced by the communication itself. The orientation of the discourse analysis is the constructionist orientation where emphasis is put on what members of the particular context being investigated are constructing as their versions of reality, i.e. combined becoming a particular discourse. This orientation calls for an action-oriented discourse analysis that tries to determine the strategies being used when members are trying to accomplish different things through their discourse. It leads this study to try to identify effects of the discourse, i.e. patterns in Sida's aid distribution, and to identify a certain world view reflected by Sweden's politics on development work. Here, it is important to remember that the analysis is subjective as it is based on the authors own interpretations of various texts (Bryman, 2012).

The literature review is narrative, meaning that it tells a story or that it provides a description of something. In this case, it is a story about Sida and its development cooperation. A narrative review is a method usually used when the aim is to generate understanding instead of knowledge. A narrative review is very wide-ranging in character and makes it difficult to determine where the researcher will end up. One limitation could be that it is difficult to reproduce, making it less transparent. A systematic review, on the other hand, is more focused as the researcher tries to accumulate knowledge about what prior research has been done within the research area, and then analyses it. This approach has limitations when used in research that does

not focus on the effect of particular variables, or that is more open in character. This is why a narrative review is more suited for this study (Bryman, 2012).

Through source analysis researchers evaluate the meaning of uncovered material related to the research. According to Bryman (2012) this calls for consideration of authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning of the sources being used. An authentic source presents truthful data, a credible source is errorless with no distortion, and a representative source is representative of its kind. If it is not representative, the extent of its unrepresentativeness has to be considered. Furthermore, the meaning of the source needs to be established in the way the evidence is presented. The meaning needs to be understandable and clear (Bryman, 2012). The theoretical framework of this study is mostly based on main theories of sustainability deriving from academic books and articles. On the basis of this, discourse analysis is primarily applied to documental sources limited to policy documents tied to Sida, and to policy documents concerning development and aid in general. These official documents are the primary sources of this study and derive from the Swedish state and from the agency itself as private sources. They are limited to public-domain documents alone, such as policy and strategy documents. Other material used derives from Sida's own webpage. Authenticity and meaningfulness is usually not something that is problematic when it comes to documental sources. However, the representativeness and the credibility could be questioned. The former for the possibility of missing documents, the latter if there is reason to believe that they are biased. Biases can be discovered by looking at who the writer is, for whom it is directed, the purpose of the document, if there are any concealed agendas, etc. (Bryman, 2012).

## **1.6 Disposition of Thesis**

The first chapter of this study is the introductory part where the background to the research area of sustainable development, aim, research questions, delimitations, and methodology are presented.

Following the introduction, the second chapter of this paper consists of the theoretical framework. This framework describes an interpretation of a highly debated subject: the concept of sustainable development. It is a concept that includes three different dimensions: social-cultural, environmental and economic sustainability. The theoretical framework further deepens

the discussion on the two latter dimensions. Various discourses on economic and environmental sustainability are presented, as well as discourses on the relationship between nature and society.

The third chapter of this study consists of the empirical framework which is called a research overview as it is more of a depiction of a certain development discourse than of actual events. First, the context of Sida is described. This includes the agency's history and work in the development arena, development goals and priorities, and various operation methods that are being utilized. Then, the research overview continues with the description of two policies regarding economic growth and environmental and climate issues.

The fourth chapter is the analysis where the research questions are investigated and discussed. Here, the theoretical framework is applied to Sida's two policies in order to analyze the case in regards to the two research questions. First, the discourse on economic sustainability is investigated. Second, the discourse on environmental sustainability is investigated. Finally, possible contradictions, clashes and trade-offs are discussed along with the complexity of the concept of sustainable development.

The final chapter of this study is the conclusion where the study is summarized. Here, the analysis is revisited and the research questions are discussed in a clear manner.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This part of the paper will describe the theoretical framework on sustainable development that will be used to analyze Sida's policies on economic growth, and environmental and climate issues. Below follows descriptions of sustainable development in general terms, as well as deeper descriptions of its economic and environmental dimensions separately.

The Brundtland Report put the concept of sustainable development on the international agenda. Its definition of the concept as development that can meet the needs of both the present and the future, and its unique holistic approach to the world's environmental and resource problems by combining the three dimensions of social-cultural, environmental and economic sustainability were groundbreaking (Lui, 2009) (The UN, 1987). The report highlighted the humanity's addictive relationship to nature as something problematic. Instead of nature being something for people to dominate, it was now seen as being one with human societies (Hopwood et al., 2005). The report presented two main concepts of sustainable development. First, human

needs were described as being socially and culturally constructed. With this perspective on human needs sustainable development has the possibility to benefit from the promotion of sustainable values, e.g. when it comes to consumption patterns. Secondly, the concept of limitations was described, meaning that the environment should be able to meet the needs of both the present and the future. Furthermore, the report broke the belief that the protection of the environment is only possible on the expense of the economic system as it presented a framework on how to integrate environmental policies into development strategies (Baker et al., 1997). The concept of sustainable development certainly is complex and ambiguous, and there are various interpretations of it. Nonetheless, the concept in itself challenges the belief that nature is something separate from people and their societies. For a long time nature was perceived as a tool that could be utilized and exploited without consequence. Problems that arose were only perceived as being local. Sustainable development as a concept enables an awareness of the connections between environmental and socioeconomic problems. Those connections become central as the concept addresses a global perspective on the relationship between people and nature (Hopwood et al., 2005). Lui (2009) argues that the concept of sustainable development is designed in a way that it supports economic development while it also reduces environmental impact. Instead of treating economic development and the protection of the environment as opposing notions, sustainability could be viewed as a compromise between the two.

The discourse on sustainability speaks of the connections between the economic, social-cultural, and environmental dimensions. Lucas (2009) agrees with this notion and argues that economic resources and products cannot be valuable on their own. The creation of economic value does not happen in isolation, but through the connections to the environment and to the social system. Nature provides resources while the social system provides competence for production and transformation. According to Lucas (2009), economic sustainability is dependent on both the social system and the environmental system as they have values in themselves for the creation of economic value. Their incorporation into the economic system is a huge resource as it is argued that sustainable development is required in all three areas. Loorbach et al. (2010) claim that this means that the economic system cannot become sustainable by itself, and needs the rest of society to become sustainable as well. Networks between various actors in societies can contribute to the understanding of social problems and their causes, meaning that economic sustainability requires the integration of various joint forces to attain sustainable development in

all three dimensions. Torége et al. (2007) claim that tight social networks fuel norms that can bring about interaction between actors as high social capital and trust in the system create formal and informal rules on the market. All must follow the system whose rules rest on norms and human choices. Based on this, economic sustainability can be summarized with three notions: (1) The environment is indispensable as it forms conditions for the creation of economic value, (2) the economic system is dependent on human capital and its resources, and (3) social capital creates the 'rules of the game'. The economic system can become sustainable once there is sustainability in the social and environmental systems, provided that the three are linked together. Stitzhal (2011) argues that the responsibility should lie on the producers so that external costs are imbedded into the transaction between the producer and the consumer. Such policies for 'product stewardship' are then believed to create incentives for the producer to make sustainable changes to production cycles. However, Jackson (2012) argues that the consumer's logic of consumption as a bridge into the social world must be altered so that one wants to take responsibility for ones consumption and make good social and environmental choices. Furthermore, Jackson (2012) argues that sustainability requires political measures to be taken through clear resource and environmental limits, and that they need to be integrated into the economy.

The relationship between nature and society is an important aspect to look into since different perceptions will generate different conclusions of what sustainability is. The discourse on environmental sustainability and how it should be accomplished is immense and varied. Some discourses possess an anthropocentric view, meaning that societies are believed to have the ability to master nature for their own benefit. Environmental modernization theory, developed by Mol and Spaargaren, subscribes to anthropocentrism. It is believed that innovation in clean technology, and restructure of production-consumption cycles, will be able to solve and prevent environmental degradation through further modernization and innovation, and thus continue on a sustainable path (Hannigan, 2006). Other discourses are very critical towards anthropocentrism and view humans as part of the environment. Nature holds intrinsic value and should not be seen as a commodity or a means to simply satisfy human objectives. 'The Deep Green Movement' argues that environmental modernization theory is wrong to suppose that economic growth will be infinite, or that technological innovations are flawless. Instead, unsustainable systems need to be altered, and people need to radically change their ways of living as well as their values

(Dobson, 2003). Finally, the ‘treadmill of production’ is a critical theory of the structure of modern industrial society, developed by Schnaiberg (Hannigan, 2006). The theory describes how the carrying capacity of the environment is being exhausted by the current economic system. Through the belief of everlasting economic growth the environment has to take the fall for economic profits through our consumption patterns and unsustainable lifestyles. Political responses to resource shortages are not being dealt with by the promotion of lower consumption patterns but, instead, dealt with by promotion of finding new areas of exploitation. Conflicting voices regarding environmental protection and the ‘treadmill of production’ create clashes between, what is described as, ‘use values’ (the values of preserving the environment) and ‘exchange values’ (the values of industrially using natural resources) (Hannigan, 2006).

Two different models of sustainability related to the relationship between nature and society will now be presented. One of the most common models is a model of three circles overlapping (picture 1, see appendices). It shows how three systems of sustainability (social-cultural, economic and environmental) are separate and interconnected at the same time. Sustainable development requires the consideration of those connections and is found in the area where all systems overlap (Larsson et al., 2011) (Hedenfelt, 2012). However, Hopwood et al. (2005) present a critique against this model as it is believed to imply that the three systems are partly independent from one another. The second model of three nested dependencies (picture 2, see appendices) shows a more holistic picture where societies exist as part of the environment, dependent on its very existence. The economy is also dependent, and only exists because societies do. The belief is that sustainable development requires people to abide to the limits of the environment, and to use the economy as a tool for sustainability (Hedenfelt, 2012).

### **3. Research Overview**

#### **3.1 Sida in the Development Arena**

The context of the development arena and development assistance can look different depending on where one looks and how one understands it. The Swedish development work has naturally been a result of the country’s political climate. Sida was created in the early 1960s with the

purpose of handling Swedish development cooperation. During the agency's first decade, major focus was put on economic growth through increased investments in developing countries. This focus created a debate in the 1970s of whether economic growth was the equivalent to development or not. The fight against poverty became the major global objective for development assistance. Sida had goals concerning resource distribution, economic growth, democracy, and independence. Out of these four, resource distribution and independence were the main ones. Rural and community development projects, along with import support aid and major industrial projects became popular within the agency during the 1970s, a time when it became increasingly important to take into consideration recipients' terms and conditions. The discussion about aid changed in the 1980's when the debt crisis of the developing countries steered the development mainstream away from the fight against poverty towards structural adjustment programs and debt relief in order to stabilize macro economies. As a result, Sida included this trend into its development assistance, while still keeping to the trends of the 1970s. One major change for Sida was the new goal to promote sustainable development through its development assistance, which was a result of the Brundtland Commission's report on the matter. Moving on to the 1990s, the development arena stayed similar however highlighting the importance of democracy, good governance and human rights for the sake of social development. For Sida, a new development goal became gender equality and NGOs gained a bigger role as development agents. During the next decade, the Millennium Development Goals, poverty reduction, and 'pro poor growth' (economic growth targeted at the poor) added to the democracy oriented agenda. The much criticized structural adjustment plans were on the one hand replaced with more extensive debt relief, and on the other with national poverty reduction strategies in order to enable countries to meet the Millennium Development Goals. The Swedish regime became strong proponent of these goals and Sida's funding grew substantially. Good governance, democracy, human rights, poverty reduction strategies and budget support were at the center of attention. Also, the definition of poverty was redefined in a multidimensional manner. In 2003, the Swedish parliament approved a new set of policies that has been governing the Swedish development cooperation ever since. The Policy for Global Development (PGD) states that the goal for Sweden's development cooperation is to contribute to global development that is just and sustainable. The rights-based approach is fundamental here. It is an approach that regards the individual's freedom and rights as most important and takes the individual's reality,

experiences and priorities into great consideration. The PGD also states that different policy areas should be coherent and work together (Odén, 2006).

Moving on to contemporary times, Sida has three political thematic priorities set by the government: democracy and human rights, environment and climate, and gender equality and women's roles in development, while also prioritizing efforts to endorse humanitarian support and economic development. The work is carried out through five focus areas: democracy, equality and human rights, economic development, knowledge, health and social development, sustainable development, and peace and security. Another important priority is the issue of corruption as it is a threat to development processes. Sida works hard to fight it so that cooperations with its partners can be free from it as much as possible (Sida, 2014b). Sida mainly identifies two forms of aid. It is either long-term development cooperation or humanitarian aid. Furthermore, budget support is given to a concentrated number of countries (Sida, 2014a). The most common development cooperation that Sida is involved with is bilateral; however, multilateralism is not something that is foreign to the agency. Sida's assignment is to form strategies and policies, implement them, monitor and evaluate results, and participate as international advocacy work with various actors. Cooperation strategies are formed on the basis of the development strategies implemented by its partner countries. The partners themselves carry the main responsibility for implementation. Cooperation takes place with organizations, agencies, cooperatives, associations and companies. These include Swedish organizations that perform parts of Sida's aid work abroad with local civil society organizations, Swedish government agencies that can contribute with expertise, the private sector, other development agencies in other countries, and international bodies (Sida, 2014b). Sida sees the value in working in many different sectors so that the work becomes effective and strategic. The purpose is to enable vulnerable groups of people in developing countries to change their living conditions for the better (Sida, 2014c) by creating circumstances through economic and political development that make change possible. When income opportunities are created through the buildup of trade and industry, poor countries can develop their economies. Here, removal of trade barriers is important so that countries can gain export incomes and access to the international market. The next step is to strengthen democracy for the benefit of social development. As developing economies lessen the risk of internal conflicts, democratic development can take place. It is believed that long-term sustainable development is dependent



on local ownership. This is why projects and programs are designed in collaboration with the partners that will then implement them. Thus, they are based on local realities (Sida, 2014a).

Below follows summaries of two Sida policies related to economic growth, environmental and climate issues, and sustainable development. Both of the two policies presented are governed by PGD and the goals related to it (Sida, 2014a). It is made clear in both policies summarized below that strategies developed from them must identify possible conflicting aims. They should then be taken into consideration, and the strategies should present propositions of how to best handle any existing conflict (UD, 2010b). Swedish development cooperation is, furthermore, governed by its three main priorities stated above, meaning that all efforts need to be inspired by them, as well as the previously mentioned objective to enable people to change their lives themselves (Sida, 2014a).

### **3.2 Policy for Economic Growth**

The policy for economic growth makes it clear that the Swedish government highly values economic growth as a tool that should be used in anti-poverty programs for development. It is defined as increased production of goods and services resulting in a growing numbers of jobs, a growing capital stock and increased productivity. Without economic growth there can be no lasting decreases in poverty levels. According to the policy, investments in redistribution and a publicly funded welfare state can never do for developing countries what economic growth can. Thus, it can never be replaced. It is also a huge benefactor of improved health and education levels as incomes and living standards increase. Higher state revenue contributes to the possibility of putting more resources on e.g. health care, education and safety systems. A safer and healthier population can in this manner make the system self-sustaining. The point, made out in this policy, is to enable individuals to take responsibility and change the circumstances they are living under. Higher incomes could enable this. However, it is also made clear that anti-poverty programs also need to consider other factors for economic growth to be long-term and sustainable. It needs to be sustainable economically, socio-culturally and environmentally. These factors also need to be fairly equally distributed (UD, 2010a).

Sida's development cooperation for economic growth is carried out in low-income countries through funding, dialogue, and capacity building efforts between states and organizations. Thus, the responsibility does not lie on Sweden but on its partner countries. They

need to make the changes needed to their institutional frameworks in order to enable economic growth. Laws, rules, and organizations should be able to create possibilities for entire populations to contribute to development. The preconditions need to be right. The policy mentions trust, predictability, strong property rights, good health, education, and lack of corruption as being components of such. Together, they enable economic growth and the development of markets and business. Public administration needs to be functional and be based on a productive interaction between the state, civil society and the private sector. According to the policy, the economy also needs to be open, which will then lead to a liberal trade regime, macroeconomic stability, market economy incentives, and a strong private sector as well as it is recognized that the public sector needs to take responsibility for education, health, infrastructure and the environment. The development of the private sector is dependent on the investment climate. If the investment climate is good, it will lead to a well functioning financial system where savings and investments can enable the development of the private sector (UD, 2010a).

The policy's main goal is to *improve conditions in order to facilitate sustainable economic growth processes in developing countries*. This is to be done by the *strengthening of preconditions for poor people to take part in such processes*, and by the *strengthening of preconditions for the development of markets and business*. Inherent to bringing about change and economic growth is the *strengthening of societies' capabilities to adapt to change, possibilities and threats*. Below follows a description of what is described as central when speaking about these three focus areas (UD, 2010a).

Men and women's contribution to, participation in, and profit from economic growth is essential for the achievement of decreased poverty levels. This means that focus should be given to the local financial markets that people living in poverty are most active in. Various private sectors, e.g. agriculture, and the service sector, as well as informal sectors should be paid much attention to. Especially agriculture, as increased productivity in this sector is believed to often be a precondition for a good economic development. The links between the informal and the formal economies need to be strengthened, and calls for the prioritization of formalization of informal business. Finally, the concept of mobility is important as various hindrances may obstruct men and women's ability and possibility to contribute to and participate in economic growth processes. Mobility includes social, geographic and professional dimensions. One example of a hindrance is the common discrimination of women. Gender equality and women's empowerment

is a priority when it comes to the strengthening of preconditions for poor people to take part in economic growth processes. Sweden should strive towards the inclusion of gender equality in the growth strategies of partner countries (UD, 2010a).

Growth strategies will look different depending on what the greatest local hindrances are. However, the policy describes infrastructural development, commercial development, the development of various market institutions, and strengthened production capacities as highly important precondition for the development of markets and business. The infrastructure needs to be able to promote production and trade, to enable access to markets internally, and to enable connection to the international market. Sweden should assist its partner countries with the integration of trade dimensions into their anti-poverty programs as development assistance related to trade is considered central for the development of markets and business (UD, 2010a).

Economic development often goes hand in hand with various types of structural transformations. Sweden's development cooperation with its partner countries should work as a support to those structural transformations, while it should also help to lessen the vulnerabilities of groups especially exposed to them. Increased food security, and the promotion of productive working conditions are ways to counteract groups being left behind in development processes. Furthermore, a healthy and educated population is better prepared to adapt to and handle changes and transformations. This is why it is important to support human development. Finally, in circumstances where environmental issues are increasing and the levels of resources are plummeting, the development cooperation needs to take such issues into consideration and work towards environmental sustainability. Sweden should assist its partner countries to develop tools needed in order to be able to handle such challenges. These contributions are all described as ways to strengthen societies' capabilities to adapt to change, possibilities and threats (UD, 2010a).

### **3.3 Policy for Environmental and Climate Issues**

In Sida's policy for environmental and climate issues it is stated that many developing countries have experienced substantial economic development over the last decades. However, the distributions of wealth and resources have not been equal, neither between nor within countries. People living in poverty and who are located in slum areas or in remote areas are the ones that

are worst affected by environmental impact and climate change, and are also the ones that hold least capacity to fight them. While economic growth is needed to fight poverty, it will only be sustainable if problems of environmental impact, climate change and loss of biodiversity are being considered in the development work. The effects of climate change have massive impact on the ability of people to develop and to support themselves financially. Furthermore, the tools and mechanisms needed to handle environmental problems, climate change and their impacts on developing countries are not considered to be in place on an international level. Neither do many developing countries have the capacity to do so themselves. Environmental sustainable development has the possibility to counteract previously mentioned problems, to improve living conditions, to contribute to women's equality and power, and to strengthen the resilience of people living in poverty. This is why a focus on environmental and climate issues in development work is described as important in this policy (UD, 2010b).

The policy is to be used in Swedish bilateral and multilateral development cooperation, and is to be converted into strategies for cooperation with countries, regions, and multilateral organizations. The importance of making environmental and climate aspects central to all development cooperation is established in the policy. It is also stated that the success of the policy is dependent on active involvement of numerous actors, both governmental and non-governmental, on bilateral, regional and global levels. Such actors could be single states, multilateral organizations, civil society organizations, universities, industry and commerce, media, governments, and other political actors. It is important that environmental development assistance is based on and supports plans, priorities and programs of Sweden's partner countries in order to establish local ownership and responsibility over the efforts. The rights-based approach mentioned above is central here and individual's realities, which will look different in different locations, must be taken into consideration. The implementation of this policy is dependent on Swedish actors' knowledge and understandings of the issues at hand, as well as the correlations between them. Economic growth, environmental impact, the effects of climate change, and correlating risks should all be evaluated and integrated into every stage of every process. Here, it is also important to consider any other relevant policies on other issues in order to make an intertwined evaluation. A gender perspective should be part of the analysis as much as possible (UD, 2010b).

Improved environment, limited climate impact, sustainable usage of natural resources, and a strengthened resilience against environmental impact and climate change in developing countries are the main goals of Swedish environmental development assistance. None of the goals is stated to be more important than the other, and they are to be worked towards especially by focusing Sweden's environmental development assistance on five focus areas. (1) *Strengthened institutional capacity in public administration*; a fundamental focus area that enables long-term development. (2) *Increased access to sustainable energy sources*; a focus area that includes low carbon dioxide emissions and a green economy to counteract and limit climate change. It also includes renewable energy sources to actually reach people living in poverty. (3) *Improved food security and sustainable use of ecosystem services* (i.e. agriculture, forestry, and various water resources); a focus area that will increase the possibilities for economic growth and welfare which could then lead to securities such as social equality, gender equality, good health and peace. This focus area calls for more sustainable, productive and resource-efficient systems. (4) *Improved water resources management, increased access to safe water and basic sanitation*; a focus area that should be handled by a collaborative management style that includes the participation of poor and marginalized groups, and integrates climate aspects into its community planning. (5) *Sustainable urban development*; a relevant focus area as cities in developing countries are growing at rapid pace. Sweden should contribute to sustainable urban development by strengthening the role of cities in economic development, poverty reduction and risk management (UD, 2010b).

### **3.4 Challenges and Obstacles**

Odén and Wohlgemuth (2009) have a positive attitude towards the PGD because of the big interest it has spurred in the development arena and because of its promising features for the future. They do, however, identify some challenges for the objective to create coherence between different policy areas. One main obstacle for this has been identified as the fact that such coherence cannot be measured since there are no defined indicators that can be used to measure the progress. Implementation for the coherence policy is very restricted, e.g. in terms of inadequate staff capacity and resources for implementation, and is in need of independent and autonomous evaluation, although, there are no plans for such a development that would strengthen the policy. Another critique that would also explain the PGD as limited is the fact that

some of the goals related to it are very grand. This means that it is viewed more as a political vision since its goals are difficult to obtain. In a climate where Sida is involved with more various donor actors than ever before there is also a risk that the implementation of the PGD, along with its policy on coherence, works against the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and its call for harmonization and alignment if money become ear-marked for different policy areas instead of the areas being integrated (Odén and Wohlgemuth, 2009).

Odén (2006) highlights some challenging aspects that need to be considered in this context. First, he brings forward the potential lack of significant correlation between development assistance and economic growth related to sector development and macro development. This correlation has been difficult to measure and there is a conflict of opinion amongst researchers. It is even unclear if economic growth in countries that have experienced it substantially is in fact a result of their received development assistance or not. Considering the fact that a big part of Sida's development discourse is related to economic growth, it could be intriguing to imagine its development assistance as not having any positive effect on one of the agency's most important goals. Second, Odén (2006) also discusses the balance between multilateral and bilateral development cooperation saying that multilateralism, on the one hand, can increase international coordination and cooperation and better reach out to the ones in need with the right expertise at hand while bilateralism, on the other hand, can better enable Swedish development goals to be reached and can make the development assistance better coincide with the plans of the recipient countries as it enables greater direct contact. One other problem concerning this is related to the power balance between donors and recipients. Linda Forss (2006) describes Maria Eriksson Bazz's (2001) views on this, and she is saying that Swedish development cooperation, with its focus on bilateral cooperation, is not necessarily partnerships of equal power relations. Instead, the donor country automatically becomes more powerful even though development assistance, in Sida's case, is to be adapted to the needs and plans of the recipient countries. It becomes a fine line between enforcing values and beliefs upon recipient countries, and encouraging, assisting and inspiring them towards those values and beliefs (Odén, 2006).

## **4. Analysis**

The fourth chapter of this study seeks to find out how Sida has interpreted the concept of sustainable development in regards to the dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability, and draws on the first research question about the ways that the concept of sustainable development is evident within Sida in terms of its policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues. Also, the chapter discusses the second research question regarding if there are any contradictions between the two dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability in Sida's policies. Here, a discussion about the general issue stated in the introduction that sustainable development seems to be an ambiguous concept open for interpretation is provided in regards to the policies.

### **4.1 Sida's Discourse on Economic Sustainability**

Sida's policy for economic growth describes it as the most important tool that can be used in anti-poverty programs to achieve development as it is argued that there cannot be any lasting decreases to poverty levels without it. The main goal is connected to the promotion of sustainable economic growth; a process that requires accessibility for people's participation, development of markets and business, and capabilities to adapt to change, possibilities and threats. Much attention is given to market institutions, national and international markets, private and informal sectors, various forms of mobility including infrastructural development, trade and commerce, the strengthening of production capacities. The policy states that strategies should be adapted depending on what the greatest local hindrances are. Also, the policy highlights that economic growth is a benefactor of improved health and education levels as incomes and living standards increase. This notion about Sida's perception of economic growth as this important for poverty reduction becomes problematic since researchers do not agree on development assistance's ability to enable economic growth.

These components are highly connected to production and trade, and are what can be expected from a policy on economic growth. However, it is also a policy that speaks of the connections between the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental dimensions of sustainability. The policy highlights the notion that long-term economic development cannot be achieved without the integration of environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. The efforts

put in these three dimensions also need to be fairly equal. Thus, both the Brundtland Report's holistic approach to achieving sustainable development and the notion by Hopwood et al. (2005) that sustainable development takes on a global perspective is evident in the policy. The socio-cultural dimension is especially integrated into this policy and is viewed as highly valuable to economic sustainability. It describes how economic growth increases living conditions which then spreads to improved health and education levels, creating social capital that can then make the system self-sustaining. Torége et al.'s (2007) notion that the economic system is dependent on human capital and its resources can be found here. Lucas' (2009) view on the connections between the three different dimensions of sustainability and the notion that the economic system is given value through the values of the social system and the environmental system is also apparent in this policy. The policy is especially compatible with the idea that there can be no long-term economic sustainability without social capital and human development. Loorbach et al. (2010) also agrees with Lucas (2009) and argues that the economic system cannot become sustainable by itself. Networks between the systems are necessary. Sida's discourse on economic sustainability includes the need for connections between various actors, both on global and national levels. Development efforts will have greater impact if forces for sustainability join together.

As was stated earlier, economic growth is defined as increased production of goods and services, and is a result of growing numbers of jobs, a growing capital stock and increased productivity. According to Lucas (2009), this is not enough to reach economic sustainability as it needs more than trade and productivity. As stated above, economic sustainability is dependent on both the social system and the environmental system. Even though this understanding is evident in the policy with the promotion of the value of social capital, there is still a lack of consideration for the environmental system. Hopwood et al.'s (2005) understanding of sustainability as a concept that enables an awareness of the connections between environmental and socioeconomic problems is also missing from this policy. Except for the statement that environmental issues need to be taken into consideration in local circumstances where they are increasing and where the levels of resources are plummeting, the connections to the environmental system seem to be disregarded in this policy. The Brundtland Report's criticism of societies' addictive relationship to nature does not seem to have been integrated into this policy. To achieve sustainable development, actors need to consider the environmental system throughout the whole process.



This means that for economic growth and development to be sustainable, i.e. for this policy to be successive, it is not enough to consider environmental issues after they have been identified. One of Torége et al.'s (2007) characteristics of economic sustainability is the realization that the environment is indispensable since it forms conditions for the creation of economic values. This is not something that is being especially considered in this policy. If it were, there would be a greater focus on environmental sustainability prior to the inevitable rise of the issue as the focus mainly lies on increased productivity and trade. The economic values, attached to productivity and trade, are dependent on the environment and this belief is missing from this policy. According to Torége et al. (2007) there can be no sustainable development if the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental systems are not linked together.

#### **4.2 Sida's Discourse on Environmental Sustainability**

Sida's policy for environmental and climate issues states the main goals of Swedish environmental development assistance as improvement of the environment, limited climate impact, sustainable usage of natural resources, and a strengthened resilience against environmental impact and climate change. As described above, these goals call for capacity building in public administration, access to sustainable energy sources, improved water resources management, community planning, sustainable urban development, and sustainable use of ecosystem services, to name a few.

The statement in the policy, that economic growth will only be sustainable in the fight against poverty if problems of environmental impact, climate change and loss of biodiversity are being considered in the development work illustrates a full comprehension of the connections between the dimensions of environmental and economic sustainability spoken of by Lucas (2009) and Hopwood et al. (2005). This was something that was missing from the policy on economic growth. In this policy, however, it is stated that a focus on environmental and climate issues should be integrated into all development cooperation which would then imply that strategies for economic growth need to consider environmental issues. The size of its integration is, however, not specified.

In this policy, as well as in the policy for economic growth, the active involvement of numerous actors on regional and global levels is highlighted as a prerequisite for the success of

the policy. This goes hand in hand with Loorbach et al.'s (2010) view on networks between actors as important for the creation of understanding of problems and their causes. According to Torége et al. (2007) tight social networks, in this case in the form of cooperative involvement, is a method that increases social capital and fuels norms that create the formal and informal 'rules of the game'. Put together with the views of Jackson (2012) and Stitzhal (2011) regarding the need for environmental responsibility to be taken, the 'rules of the game' have the possibility to create sustainable values of responsibility. Stitzhal (2011) argues that responsibility should lie on producers while Jackson (2012) argues that responsibility should lie on consumers. This policy does not specify where responsibility should lie, not more than to state that the main responsibility of the environmental efforts is held by Sida's partner countries. What is important, however, is that sustainable 'rules of the game' develop at some level. It always starts somewhere.

The Brundtland Report's take on sustainability is evident in the policy for environmental and climate issues. It is similar to the policy for economic growth in that it is very friendly towards the dimension of socio-cultural sustainability. Local ownership and responsibility are highly valued in the policy when it comes to environmental sustainability since it is believed to be a key component for the strengthening of institutional capacity. The rights-based approach and the included gender perspective also promote socio-cultural sustainability.

### **4.3 Ambiguity**

The concept of sustainable development has been argued by Hopwood et al. (2005) to have been left open for interpretation in the Brundtland Report. Sida's interpretation of the concept is that no single part of society is independent from any other, and this is an interpretation that is very clear in both of Sida's policies. A closer look at them provides an understanding of that the agency's objective is to integrate all three dimensions of socio-cultural, economical, and environmental sustainability in its development cooperation. However, even though the policies make it clear that different goals and objectives all need to be included together in development strategies in order to make them as effective as possible, there are trade-offs between the three; trade-offs that become even more alarming considering the lack of recourse put into enforcing the PGD to enable coherence between policy areas. The policy for economic growth identifies

productivity and trade as the main answers to poverty issues in developing countries. In the policy for environmental and climate issues it is stated that economic growth, environmental impact, the effects of climate change, and correlating risks should all be evaluated and integrated into every stage of every process in the development cooperation for sustainable development. This policy also highlights the importance of technological innovation and institutional capacity to increase the possibilities for economic growth and welfare. In a way, both describe economic growth as the main tool for development. For some theories and discourses, this is where the contradictions, clashes and trade-offs become visible.

If Sida's discourse on sustainable development is analyzed through the arguments of environmental modernization theory, contradictions and clashes between the two dimensions of economic and environmental sustainability are difficult to identify. Since the two policies combined advocate for productivity, trade, innovation, technology etc. they go hand in hand with this theory. Trade and productivity will lead to economic growth which will lead to the ability to invest in a green economy, a restructure of production-consumption cycles, renewable energy sources, sustainable use of ecosystem services, etc. and then lead to more economic growth and more modernization and technological innovation. This is an anthropocentric view of societies as fully capable of mastering nature. In the light of this theory, Sida's policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues depict a discourse on sustainable development that has great potential for success.

If one looks to Schnaiberg's theory called the 'treadmill of production', the discourse will depict another story. According to this understanding of sustainable development, Sida's promotion of economic growth and productivity clashes with the idea of environmental sustainability as the carrying capacity of the environment is being exhausted by the current economic system. Economic profits through unsustainable consumption patterns and lifestyles are not perceived as characteristics of sustainability. 'Use values' and 'exchange values' are evidently in conflict in the policies in regards to this theory. Strategies created on the basis of these policies will not be complete, meaning that Sida's interpretation of sustainable development needs to be altered (Hannigan, 2006).

According to the 'Deep Green Movement', and other discourses that do not believe that it is right to view societies as anything else than part of nature, anthropocentrism is useless for reaching sustainable development. Sida's discourse to promote economic growth and

technological innovation for the sake of sustainable development is doomed to fail if it is true that economic growth is not infinite and that technological innovations are not flawless. The 'Deep Green Movement' advocates for the importance of people radically changing their ways of living along with their values for the sake of sustainability. Even the Brundtland Report called for a shift towards sustainable values when it came to human needs since there are limits to the natural resources etc. provided by nature. Since values are socially and culturally constructed, there is no reason for why they should not be able to change. However, neither one of the two policies mention this aspect as important. People are believed to contribute to sustainable development if they participate in the development processes, but there is no talk of e.g. education being a tool to influence sustainable ways of living. The consumer does not seem to have to take much responsibility in Sida's discourse on sustainable development (Jackson, 2012). If the 'Deep Green Movement' is right, then Sida's interpretation of sustainable development as being reachable through economic growth, technological innovation etc. will not be enough.

Sida seems to perceive the relationship between societies and nature as anthropocentric in the way economic growth and technology steal the show. The agency's discourse on sustainable development is more similar to the sustainability model of the three overlapping circles (picture 1, see appendices) than to the dependency model (picture 2, see appendices), both described in the theoretical framework. As stated above, there is a clear understanding of that sustainable development is dependent on connections between the three systems, including the economy, the environment and society. Sustainability is reached in the area where all systems overlap which is also evident in Sida's policies. However, Hopwood et al.'s (2005) critique of this model; that it implies that the systems are partly independent from one another, is apparent in Sida's discourse as the policies handle the systems as separate and interconnected at the same time. The economy must grow, the effect will spread to the social system and improve health and education levels, and environmental and climate issues need to be considered and then respected when needed. The dependency model advocated for a more holistic picture than that. According to this model, Sida's discourse on sustainable development needs to abide to the limits of the environment first, then use the economy as a tool for sustainability, which is already happening (Larsson et al., 2011) (Hedenfelt, 2012).

The ambiguousness that seems to be sustainable development clearly creates various discourses on sustainability. According to some, Sida's discourse leads to clashes between

economic sustainability and environmental sustainability. Other discourses would believe the opposite to be true. According to Lui (2009) and the Brundtland Report, sustainable development is a compromise between economic development and the protection of the environment. Clashes and contradictions or not, the compromise is clear as economic development is supported while environmental impact is trying to be reduced.

## **5. Conclusion**

This has been a study of discourses on sustainable development within Sida, as a single donor agency, in regards to its policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues. The study began in the understanding of sustainable development as a complex matter open for interpretation. This understanding posed a concern about the frailty that is sustainable development if actors do not interpret the concept in a sufficient way. This final chapter will now conclude the study and answer its research questions.

*In what ways is the concept of sustainable development evident within Sida in terms of its policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues?* The first research question was discussed through an analysis of the discourse on economic sustainability and environmental sustainability. Exploring the concept of sustainable development as multidimensional suggests that Sida's policies do include the concept by the integration of various dimensions in its development cooperation. Sida's understanding that the economic, environmental and socio-cultural systems are dependent on one another and that efforts in one dimension are not enough to reach sustainability is similar to the take on sustainable development provided in the Brundtland Report. The policy for economic growth highlights the notion that long-term economic development cannot be achieved without the integration of environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. The policy is especially compatible with the idea that there can be no long-term economic sustainability without social capital and human development, but does not give the same attention to the values of the environment. The policy for environmental and climate issues, on the other hand, compensates for this by highlighting solutions for how to integrate environmental awareness into the economy. The statement in the policy, that economic growth will only be sustainable in the fight against poverty if problems of environmental impact, climate change and loss of biodiversity are being considered in the development work illustrates

a full comprehension of the connections between the dimensions of environmental and economic sustainability. In this policy, as well as in the policy for economic growth, the active involvement of numerous actors on regional and global levels that can create networks and social capital is highlighted as a prerequisite for the success of the policy. Both policies are very keen on including the dimension of socio-cultural sustainability.

*Are there any contradictions between the two dimensions of economic sustainability and environmental sustainability in Sida's policies?* The answer to the second research question depends on the way one views the concept of sustainable development. Sida's interpretation of the concept is that all parts of society are dependent on each other. However, the policies do depict an understanding of that the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental systems might be separate. The policy for economic growth identifies productivity and trade as the main answers to poverty issues in developing countries. In the policy for environmental and climate issues it is stated that economic growth, environmental impact, the effects of climate change, and correlating risks are important to consider. This policy highlights the importance of technological innovation and institutional capacity to increase the possibilities for economic growth and welfare. In a way, both describe economic growth as the main tool for development. For some theories and discourses, this is where the contradictions, clashes and trade-offs become visible. The ambiguousness that seems to be sustainable development clearly creates various discourses on sustainability. On the basis of environmental modernization theory there are no contradictions between economic growth and the environment as long as societies invest in innovative green technology and alter production-consumption cycles. This is basically what Sida's policies are advocating for; economic growth and investments in sustainable methods. The 'treadmill of production' theory would identify contradictions as the environment is being exhausted by the current economic system. Sida's promotion of economic growth and productivity contradicts with the idea of environmental sustainability. The 'Deep Green Movement' would argue that Sida's discourse to promote economic growth and technological innovation for the sake of sustainable development is doomed to fail as economic growth is not believed to be infinite and as technological innovations are not believed to be flawless. The answer to the question whether there are any contradictions between economic sustainability and environmental sustainability is that it depends on the interpretation of the concept of sustainable development. Contradiction or not, it is certainly a matter of compromise as the agency is trying to promote economic

development while at the same time supporting the inclusion of the socio-cultural and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. One could also argue that further coherence and less clashes between the two dimensions is dependent on the enforcement and the success of the PGD. The important thing that can be learned from this study is that sustainable development requires an understanding of the contextual issues as well as an incorporation of a multidimensional approach; something that is evident in Sida's policies on economic growth and environmental and climate issues.

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## Pictures

Picture 1: Bob, W., '3 Sustainability Models' [online] [Published 20 July 2010] Available at: <http://sustainabilityadvantage.com/2010/07/20/3-sustainability-models/> [Accessed 5 August 2014]

Picture 2: Bob, W., '3 Sustainability Models' [online] [Published 20 July 2010] Available at: <http://sustainabilityadvantage.com/2010/07/20/3-sustainability-models/> [Accessed 5 August 2014]

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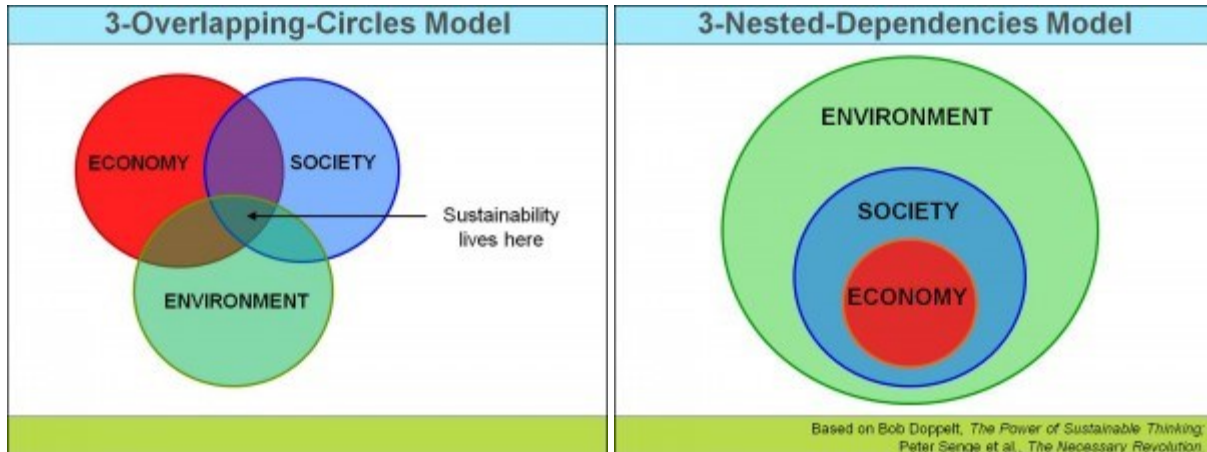
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# Appendices

## Pictures



Picture 1

Picture 2

Source: [www.sustainabilityadvantage.com](http://www.sustainabilityadvantage.com)