

# THE INDISSOCIABLE NATURE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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We are living in a critical moment for our species and for the planet. Never in our history have we been faced with such great challenges as the ones we actually caused, expressed in the changing climate and related disasters. The enormous volume of disposable plastic thrown out into nature, the excessive and unsustainable lifestyle of humanity, our dependence on fossil fuels, and other unsustainable actions have had their toll and are now coming back to haunt us.

However, the impacts of climate change and disasters are not felt evenly around the world. Instead, it is mostly poor and developing nations which feel these impacts first and foremost, whereas rich and developed nations can handle such situations in a significantly less traumatic way. However, even in the midst of such a scenario, some people would prefer to ignore all alerts and maybe hide from climate change and temperature increases by turning on the air conditioner. That is a solution that cannot work.

Furthermore, even in some places where the climate is still not a problem and plentiful resources do exist, uneven access to them promotes inequality and contributes to increasing poverty. In that regard, the Portuguese language has two similar words that illustrate how that situation applies: "cerca", which translates as "fence", and "seca", which translates as "drought". In Brazil, it is usually said that the problem of the semi-arid region of Brazil is "not seca but cerca", "not drought, but the fence", since as long as the fences of large monoculture farms exist and dominate the use of natural resources, including water, smallholder and family farmers will not

have sufficient access to grow their own crops.

So, what can we do to change this scenario of inequality and unsustainability? Is there a map to guide us in the path towards sustainability? There actually is. This map was provided to us by the United Nations 2030 Agenda that established the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

Sustainability refers to the need of using natural resources in such a way that it does not compromise the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In that regard, the UN 2020 Agenda has stated that the eradication of poverty is indispensable for sustainable development, that is, sustainable development requires a continuous effort on three different fronts: economic, social, and environmental. The future cannot be sustainable if the world is filled with poverty, hunger, lack of opportunities, and little cooperation.

In this effort, the cooperation between nations is essential if we wish to succeed. Both the support of rich nations to developing ones, and the leadership of developing nations in the process are of paramount importance. However, developing nations do not simply want to be helped. Instead, developing nations want to be active part of the fight against climate change.

Furthermore, it is imperative that society be encouraged to absorb and practice sustainability as a way of life, with a special attention to tribal and traditional communities, whose ancient knowledge about how to coexist in balance with nature can highlight the way for sustainable development.

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Sustainability is no longer a distant idea restricted to academic discussions: it is now an urgent requirement if we want to save ourselves and our descendants from catastrophe. Each and everyone must be encouraged to take action, either at the individual level, small communities, cities or countries. Cooperation gets things done. Let us, everywhere, cherish this planet for what it really is: a sacred entity. Let us be, in fact, priests of sustainability.

Finally, it is also necessary to remember that progress cannot be achieved by ignoring those who are far from the centers of power. Let us acknowledge and value the contributions that all sectors of society can provide in this joint fight that faces us all. The decisions we make now have the potential to either save us from catastrophe or to consolidate it. The choice is ours. The path the sustainability is simple and requires attention to five major issues: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership.

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