What role should business and governments play in advancing sustainability debate? In your

answer, consider whether governments should make sustainability compulsory, and why?

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*Introduction:*

Extensive social awareness about environmental problems for example global warming, peak oil, natural resources, and loss of biodiversity has amplified pressure to include sustainability as a learning concept in the academic curriculum for ensuring that developing countries may develop sustainably and adopt strategies that will enable them functioning efficiently toward an unsure future. There is changing trend in the development strategies toward sustainability that are responding to the chronological framework of what has been said by former French president Jacques Chirac "the historic threshold of the irreversible"

"The world now faces multifaceted and interacting environmental, resource, and social problems, an inauspicious point of departure for all scenarios. The global trajectory can branch in alternative directions in the coming decades, depending on how bio-physical and cultural stresses manifest themselves and how society responds. The destiny of both people and planet rest ultimately with human choice as we anticipate and respond to crises and seize opportunities for positive transformation. Will our actions be tardy and tepid? Or timely and consequential?" (Raskin, Electris, & Rosen, 2010, p. 2647)

Overtime the sustainable development has become a popular notion and cities in developed world are taking it seriously. Now society has developed a new mind set where everyone has become more obsessed with having more and not taking into account the consequences which they will have to face later on. This mind set has infected the culture from the highest level to the lowest level. This is a huge threat that society face for future generations,

this is the threat of lack of sustainability in any part of the society, whether it is economic, social or political. During recent years the concept of sustainable development has emerged as a significant paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes on the development without compromising the future and without harming the natural environment. (Portney, 2003)

The need for survival and well-being depends, either directly or indirectly, on natural environment: sustainable development is based on this simple principle. Sustainability creates and maintains the conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, allowing the achievement of the social, economic and other requirements of present and future generations. Sustainability is essential to make sure that people have and will continue to have the resources to protect human health and the environment. (Broke and Conroy, 2000)

Governments and businesses have more responsibility towards this sustainable development because governments have the power to contribute to sustainable development by introducing policies and programs for community development. Businesses also hold an impact on natural environment, for example utilization of natural gas for industrial purposes will reduce gas for future generations. Similarly the pollution caused by factories harms natural environment (Wheeler, 2000). Current essay discusses the role of governments and businesses in advancing sustainability and suggests whether governments should make sustainability compulsory or not?

### *The Concept of Sustainability:*

There is no single definition of sustainable development however as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development, "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The subject of sustainable development is interwoven with

several aspects of life, such as globalization, culture, gender issues, law, environment, and many more. It is therefore important to understand that it is a broad subject which cannot be fully discussed and exhausted in this single document. The Sustainable Commission (2011) addressed the often misconstrued idea that sustainable development is all about the environment and states that it is a much broader subject as it also about a strong, healthy and just society.

The literature on sustainability reveals three fundamental aspects that describe sustainability and include; "environmental protection, economic development and social equity" (p.18) yet, the notion of environmental sustainability has gain much attention in empirical literature.
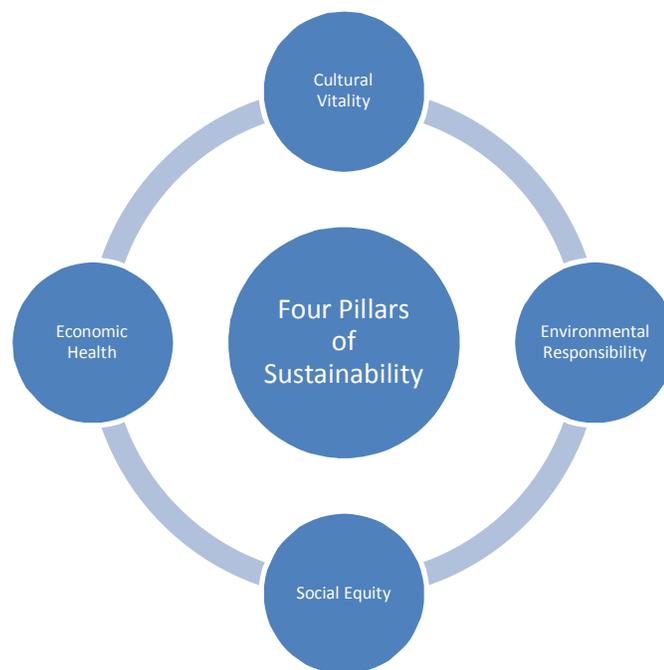


**Figure 1-Four Pillars of Sustainability**

Sustainability is linked to variety of interconnected global issues; it is not only a term used for simple solutions and slogans such as "reduce, reuse, and recycle". For example, the Union of Concerned Scientists (2010), presented a united viewpoint by accepting the fact that

serious global problems – not only global warming, but extinction of species, the susceptibility of the supply of global food, the need for hygienic energy and transportation, and the risk related to nuclear weapons on world security. A highlighting on holistic thinking and its association with environment has long been a major component of the scientific environmental literacy movement and has become a foundation stone of sustainability thinking.

*Role of governments and businesses in advancing sustainability:*

Addressing the challenges and opportunities of sustainability is an imperative that goes beyond national agendas because without sustainability we cannot overcome issues like poverty, inflation and equal distribution of wealth. In this regard businesses and government have very important roles to play in order to recognize the importance of addressing the issue of advancing sustainability. No single government or any other organization cannot simply create economic, ecological and social value through policy changes and innovative practices.

The sustainability initiatives and policies have been developed at government level in developed countries but that are limited to small number of cities while there are many municipalities that did not adopt a comprehensive sustainability plan however sustainability programs have been adopted in some form or other. For example, Broke and Conroy (2000) pointed out that sustainability initiatives taken by governments include mixed use zoning, tax abatement schemes and local entrepreneur grants that do not have an explicit association with sustainability agenda. Coronary and Jepson (2004a) conducted a research focusing on large US cities and concluded that sustainable development is being promoted however there is a need of further planning.

Campbell (1996) and Beatley and Manning (1997) also emphasized the importance of planning arguing that city planners can play an important role in promoting sustainability. Further different ways of planning has been suggested by scholars. For example Beatley and Manning (1997) described the characteristics of a sustainable place stating that sustainable places are created within ecological limits, these are recuperative and regenerative, these are integrative and holistic, have an ethical posture, equitable and just and focus more on the importance of community.

There are many examples showing that involvement and participation of local government has great importance for sustainable community development. For example in Sweden progress was found to be linked to sustainable development initiatives taken by municipalities. The Swedish Government took initiatives to promote sustainable development because of the high rates of unemployment in the country. The government adopted strategies to promote sustainable development by marketing municipalities as "ecological municipalities" and were able to invest investors. Similarly in United States different states took initiatives for sustainable development for example Seattle planning department took a practical approach to promote principles of sustainability with its concept of "urban villages" as well as neighborhood planning. A critical analysis of the sustainability programs in these countries reveals that for a successful sustainability planning there is a need of long-range vision, active citizens, establishment of regional institutions that may provide opportunities for sustainability planning as well as intergovernmental motivation frameworks (Wheeler, 2000)

Similarly in developing countries a fundamental role of governments is to provide public services such as health, education and infrastructure for its citizens. To this end, developing countries devote about a third of their budget to health, education, and infrastructure programs

(World Bank, 2004). Assisting developing countries in providing services that enhance human development (such as education, health, water, and electricity) is a primary responsibility of multi-lateral development agencies, such as the World Bank which spent over 20 billion dollars in development projects in 2004 alone(World Bank, 2005b).

It is important for social scientists to inform policy-makers about the returns to each type of public investment so that money is spent effectively to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth. Our knowledge about the returns to many health and education initiatives are well developed, since it has been possible to design small-scale randomized experiments in order to measure the effectiveness of isolated social interventions, for example, increasing teachers' salaries or paying parents to take children for preventive health checkups. Designing randomized experiments for large-scale infrastructure projects (such as building electricity grids) is beyond researchers' capabilities, which has limited our understanding of the true impacts of such projects.

*Role of Business in advancing sustainability*

There has been a great concern among researchers and policy makers on the role of business for community and sustainability since a long time. It was 1960 that that advocates of corporate social responsibility (CSR) argued and emphasized on the importance on sustainable business practices and its benefits both for businesses, employees and communities. (Banerjee , 2003). As sustainability has become a phenomenon with diverse meaning corporations cannot address this aspect by just complying with environmental regulations.

The concept of sustainability reporting has emerged that requires businesses to internalize and improve their commitment to sustainable business. The concept of corporate sustainability

dates back to 1980 when companies from chemical industry published environmental reports in order to improve their image as sustainable business. Sustainability and CSR reporting has become popular among businesses and mostly business firms produce their annual sustainability reports (Herzig, C, 2006)

Similarly maintaining a sustainable supply chain has also emerged as a new trend. However most of the companies limit sustainability practices towards their own operations and cannot extend it to their suppliers and customers. Recently as there is high demand for eco-friendly products and maintaining sustainability has become costly the businesses have realized the importance of supply chain sustainability as a profitable measure where businesses can adopt sustainable practices in collaboration with supply chain. (Kumar, , 2012)

It is evident that governments simply cannot achieve social and economic changes that sustainability will require all on its own; businesses must be the part of sustainability solutions, and as the largest institution on Earth business and industry can only lead towards sustainability quickly and effectively. Keeping this in mind business must take the lead both domestically and internationally in terms of sustainability in developing countries, the role of government to encourage companies to address the needs of the general population. This way sustainable enterprises can create economic, environmental and social value and at the same time minimizing the damage to economic, social, or natural capital. While at the same time the efforts towards sustainability have sometimes lacked support because of the opinion that a serious commitment to sustainability will affects a country's economic prospects. So the businesses initially saw these obligations as added costs and were very hesitant to fully supporting this cause.

Trends now have been changed toward sustainability as regards approaches toward sustainability. Businesses have to make a serious commitment to sustainability, because if they do not sooner or later they would be in trouble ecologically or socially. As the corporate sustainability study shows that CSR is an important issue from the last two decades and the sustainability is the notion of this issue Aras, G. (2009) and now in many organizations the CSR reports have now been repackaged as sustainability reports. The main reason for this issue is that the organizational problem solving is basically addressed to the current affairs and they rarely consider its long-term consequences Tainter, J. A. (2000). York, J. G. (2009) in his journal proposes a paradigm that enables business and enables the integration of environmental ethics in business decisions, while creating a competitive advantage through the use of an ethical framework of classical American pragmatism. Environmental ethics could be useful as an alternative paradigm for business ethics, by giving them new perspectives and methods to account for the natural environment. An approach to the classic American pragmatism offers a superior business environment by focusing on experimentation and innovation, will drive long-term orientation, and provides valuable clarity. With a pragmatic approach to ethics, the choice for a sustainable course for business and moral reasons can be practiced.  As of in current business world a strong reputation is widely recognized as its most valuable asset of a company, and sustainability has become an important component of corporate reputation. Many stakeholders, the employees of the customer to the investors to purchase reports show that sustainability is an important factor, but there is often a large gap between stakeholder perceptions and company performance Peloza, J. (2012).

*Should Government make sustainability compulsory*

Sustainability is an approach that is being given importance in planning at government level. In many developed countries sustainable development is at the top of the list of issues. The progress towards sustainable development has gained pace and has been substantial but the challenges have also been evolving with the times, developing countries are lagging behind in ensuring sustainable development is archived.

At local government level particularly in USA many programs have been introduced to foster sustainable development. (Devashree Saha, 2009) Governments are offering initiatives to preserve open spaces as well as development of brown fields. Some authors like Beatley (1995), Roseland (1998), Haughton (1999), Middleton and O'Keefe (2001) have also focused to incorporate the component of social justice in sustainability and discussed that in addition to ecological issues human and social sustainability is also important.

While it seems most of the responsibility for advancing sustainability might appear to fall on the shoulders of the Business sector and anticipating the world's demand rising for the sustainable products, systems and services it is a duty and opportunity for government. There is an important role for government in creating a transition phase for an economy which is much more effective, fair and less damaging, and governments that took the first step will be in much more healthier position to set out the plan and initiate advance position for their citizens and its industry. Whereas the countries which fall behind will inevitably faces disadvantages and lose out on this opportunity. If the government is to play a positive role in sustainability, it has to take huge initiatives. As citizens, we can have a sustainable government policy and legislation, and we can choose to put our dollars to businesses that go beyond the current framework. Such companies making innovative progress is not only to be less bad, but to be good. There is a need

of lot of steam to turn the ship around, but it can be done, and it must be done. The regulatory

body is unable to continue considering the reduction and minimization of emissions to air, land

and water pollution to be a viable strategy. Reduction does not stop the depletion and destruction

- it just slows down, so that they take in smaller increments over a longer period. So, new and

strict laws need to be implemented by the government to move businesses more on the

sustainability track.  Some of the policies are obvious, but still obviously right, such as moving

onward on the acceptable pricing of natural resources. Government should commit to

sustainability through devising different strategies. (Devashree Saha, 2009)

Governments and businesses have to agree on some common grounds and try to tackle

this issue together, as equal participation is required from both the parties and this. Business and

government working collectively can achieve a vast deal on different sustainability fronts by re-

engineering, and these efforts can be enlarged many times. While some efforts being practiced

are worth appreciating, but still there is a lot of work to be done and big policies moves are to be

made to shunt the global economy onto a sustainable path.

On the basis of above analysis it is evident that sustainability is important for societies,

communities and nations. It is also clear that governments can play an important role by taking

policy initiatives. From research studies it has been revealed that in UAE, Sweden and other

countries where local governments have taken initiatives for sustainable development have

overcome many problems and are growing rapidly. In conclusion the governments should make

sustainability compulsory in policy making.

*Conclusion*

Current essay discusses the concept of sustainability from the perspectives of businesses

and governments describing the role each can play for sustainable development. The topic of

sustainable development covers many aspects of life such as globalization, culture, gender issues, law, environment, and many more. Yet researchers have agreed upon three fundamental elements of sustainability which include; "environmental protection, economic development and social equity" (p.18)

In many developed courtiers local governments have taken initiatives for sustainable community development and considered it in planning process for cities yet governments alone cannot compete with this challenges businesses must be the part of sustainability solutions, and as the largest institution on Earth business and industry can only lead towards sustainability quickly and effectively. However the number of local governments in developed countries which have taken initiatives to implement sustainability is less. Further, not only there is a need to focus more on inclusion of sustainability in policy making there is also need of effective planning for sustainable community development.

Governments can take initiatives such as implementation of environmental regulation. The literature also stresses on including the sustainability at planning phase. In this regard city staff and elected officials can play an important role.

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