

Social Entrepreneurship as Sustainable Development

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Introducing the Sustainability Lens

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*I dedicate this book to the memory of my father and entrepreneur,
Richard S. Stenn*

PREFACE

This is a book about how anyone can become a social entrepreneur and engage in sustainable development. It introduces the sustainability lens (SL), a practical tool I spent 18 years developing, and shows how it brings into focus the necessary considerations and actions needed to build a more just and sustainable world. I encourage readers to use the lens to build sustainability in their own lives and organizations. This tool is presented for use in the classroom and with businesses worldwide. It functions with high-school students, college students, graduates, start-ups, microenterprises, nonprofit and for-profit organizations, corporations, communities, and teams. We are all entrepreneurs in how we make choices in our production and consumption and through these actions we each have the power to affect change as we wish and build a more just and sustainable world. This book will show you how.

Sustainability can be defined as a long-term balance that is not harmful to others or depletes resources. When paired with development, sustainability becomes a construction maintained over time that does not damage the environment and protects the interests of current and future generations. Overall, sustainable development is an intentional, closed-loop model where inputs and outputs are balanced and materials are transformed and reused in self-perpetuating ways. Sustainability can be understood in the natural world when complex, symbiotic relationships form around the transformation of matter for the benefit and development of all.

For example, an apple tree makes energy through the development of leaves and photosynthesis, creating flowers that bees pollinate and from which fruit forms. The fruit feeds other animals and bears seeds that

propagate the species. The leaves are shed in the fall and become compost which later feeds the tree and communities around it. In addition, flowers provide nectar for butterflies and pollen for bees who use it to make honey. Collectively many different entities benefit from and are dependent upon the tree for their well-being forming either direct or indirect relationships with the tree and each other.

The tree is also dependent upon these often transient or indirect relationships for its own well-being. For example, the tree needs the bee as a pollinator and the bee needs pollen. However, any bee can pollinate any flower and the same bee may never visit the same tree again. For the moment, though, they are supporting each other and that is important. These relationships either fleeting, like that of the bee, or more long term such as that of the colonies of fungi which live among tree roots breaking down debris into minerals that can be absorbed by the tree are essential for the survival of all. Looking at sustainable development from a nature-based perspective creates a systems way of thinking where complex and simple relationships become visible, and new complexities and creativity transform resources in needed ways.

Taking a nature-based view on development is not new. For thousands of years, indigenous people worldwide have used nature systems to shape their way of organizing societies and making decisions. For example, the idea of seven generations was a common measurement native people in the United States used to determine if a new approach was worth pursuing. They imagined the impact of choices made from a perspective of 175 years in the future, if the impact seemed positive then the approach would be adopted, if not, it would be abandoned (Vecsey and Venables 1994). This sentiment is echoed in Native American Chief Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation's writing, "We are looking ahead, as is one of the first mandates given us as chiefs, to make sure and to make every decision that we make relate to the welfare and well-being of the seventh generation to come . . . What about the seventh generation? Where are you taking them? What will they have?" (Vecsey and Venables 1994, pp. 173–174). In today's fast-paced world, it is difficult to even consider the next generation in decision making, little let alone the seventh. However, slowing down and taking the time to think about the long view is key in understanding and building sustainable development.

This book introduces models I have studied, taught, and lived for many years which are relevant to our understanding of sustainable development today. One is the science of permaculture (permanent agriculture) which,

developed in the 1970s, uses nature systems to work with forces such as wind, sun, water, and landscapes to provide food, shelter, and other needs with minimum labor while nourishing the earth. Another is social solidarity economy which since the 1980s has focused on creatively getting needs met collectively through production and distribution using diverse economic approaches such as barter, trade, and worker cooperatives. I also bring in the Andean model of Suma Qamana, which based on pre-Inca indigenous wisdom introduces ancient ways used today to work together and celebrate our shared humanity. And I introduce the model of Circles of Sustainability, a collectively developed method of measurement created in the 1990s which quantifies and defines sustainability in place-based environments. Together, these form the SL which is presented here as a tool to grow social enterprises and build our own sustainable development. The reason why I begin with enterprises is because they are the accessible, have tremendous power, and, as an entrepreneur myself, I know them well.

This book is about social entrepreneurship (SE) as sustainable development but it actually begins with any type of entrepreneurship. As ideas are discovered and implemented through the use of the SL, organizations naturally move toward a state of SE. It is these social entrepreneurs who move toward sustainable development and anyone with the right mind-set can be a social entrepreneur.

J. Greg Dees, the father of SE, defines it as a change-based process that creates social value through bold innovation and creativity (Dees 1998). SE functions alongside non-SE enterprises and is largely understood as a business development option. However, SE is not merely a business development option, rather it is a key component of sustainable development. Recognizing SE as a way of being, rather than a business model, highlights ways which all are engaged in SE through daily interactions and choices as consumers, workers, and creators, thus building an important link between SE and sustainability and giving everyone a role in participating in.

However, social enterprises are not necessarily sustainable. Some may be missing mechanisms and guidelines for growth, management, energy use, regeneration, or community building. Sustainability is about bringing balance and equilibrium to growth and ensuring a viable future. An SE is a good place to start for building sustainability because many of the values and intent needed for sustainability exist in the social enterprise model; however, moving from social to sustainable is both a small and large a step. This is because of the interconnectedness and vastness of

sustainability. In a small step, the SL presented here can help a single social enterprise become more sustainable in its own right simply through informed, educated decisions and practices. Nevertheless, this enterprise can still be left vulnerable and unsustainable by nonaligned enterprises.

As resources become scarce and technology brings the world closer together, it is becoming increasingly evident that unless we all work together in a unified system of sustainability, the human race will be in grave danger. As Eric Cooperström of the Skoll Foundation wrote after the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference, COP21, “We’re in this together as a global community, and everyone—from governments, to business, to civil society and beyond—must do their part to ensure a sustainable future.”

One cannot build sustainability alone. Like concentric circles, livelihoods and interactions overlap. A nonpolluting, thoughtfully functioning, right-sized, sustainable social enterprise is still impacted by the same acid rain, climate change, and contamination as the rest of the world, no matter how green they may personally be. This is the big step. However, a big step is formed by many small ones. The more the SL is shared and used, the more aligned enterprises can become in their sustainability and the smaller that “big step” becomes. Until now, there has not been a comprehensive, systematic approach toward building sustainability. The SL changes this.

Chapter 1 goes deeper into the question of “why sustainability?” It introduces key terms and examines the idea of sustainability from the perspective of a shared global environment where the actions of one affect all. Here the ideas of Suma Qamana and Circles of Sustainability, which form the base of the SL, are more deeply explored.

Chapter 2 explains in detail with case study examples, what each of the four quadrants of the SL are, and how they can be understood and realized in today’s business environment. The four SL quadrants are resources—where things come from; health—impact and engagement; policy—advocacy and influence; and exchange—accessibility and distribution.

Chapter 3 brings new ideas based on economic permaculture and social solidarity economy, to illuminate, inspire, and create practical, innovative approaches in response to needs and challenges identified through the SL.

Chapter 4 introduces the Business Model Canvas (BMC) which is an open-source, design-thinking tool that revolutionizes the way businesses are imagined and communicated. In step-by-step detail, each of the four quadrants of the SL is applied to the nine sections of the BMC, creating an

array of 36 different angles and approaches for imagining and realizing sustainable development. The nine sections are key partners, key activities, key resources, value proposition, customer relationships, channels, customer segments, cost structure, and revenue streams. Together these form a complete business map.

Chapter 5 takes a step back to look at the SL's SE as sustainable development from the perspective of Amartya Sen's *Ideas of Justice* and the capabilities approach.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BMC	Business Model Canvas
CSU	Colorado State University
CC	Creative Commons
DOE	Department of Energy
IK	Indigenous knowledge
LDC	Least developed countries
NCA	National Confectioners Association
PLM	Product life cycle management
SE	Social entrepreneurship
SRI	Socially responsible investing
SSE	Social solidarity economy
SL	Sustainability lens
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

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