

Sustainability Issues in Rural Development in the New Millennium

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The significance of sustainable development (SD) principles for development in the rural-sector can be explained by the necessity to provide required resources and infrastructural facilities needed for furthering living standards (by means of effective utilization of the existing resources for sustainable agricultural development). Considerations of sustainability issues are, therefore, extremely important for rural development. This paper primarily aims to define the role sustainable issues in rural development. It also discusses sustainable rural development Project in Mexico. In terms of methodology, secondary data (largely 'qualitative': collected from research reports, government publications, etc.) have been used. Nature of data analysis is descriptive. The paper concludes that wherever viable rural settlements exist, the government, professional planners, and inhabitants within must focus their energies on the immediate place - they must make the word 'local' mean something if we are ever to be successful in the retention and sustenance of "local community". A rural development doctrine must, if it is to be effective, give deeper and more concentrated thought to the role of local rural place as we seek to find solutions to the ongoing problems of population imbalance and the dissolution of the countryside.

Key Words: Sustainability, Rural Development, New Millennium, International Environmental Cooperation, Eco-village, CSD-8, Quality of Life, & New Paradigm

1. INTRODUCTION:

Sustainability, "a balancing act", envisages meeting sustainable development needs of the present population of the earth without compromising the well-being of future generations. In the present day situation, increasing attention is paid by sustainable development (SD) scientists worldwide to research into issues connected with economic sustainability (and its assessment). If one looks at the sustainability issues from this perspective, one finds that SD indicators are relevant in the context of rural development in the new millennium. The significance of SD principles for development in the rural-sector can be explained by the necessity to provide required resources and infrastructural facilities needed for furthering living standards (by means of effective utilization of the existing resources for sustainable agricultural development). However, it is pertinent to note that not much progress has been made in this direction. It is for this reason that the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), while reviewing rural development at its third session in 1995, noted that even though some progress had been reported, disappointment is widely expressed at the slow progress in moving towards sustainable agriculture and rural development in many countries [United Nations (UN), 2015]. At the same time, it is pertinent to note that sustainable agriculture (SA) was also focal point of discussion and deliberations during five-year review of implementation of Agenda 21 in the year 1997. During this time, all national governments were urged to attach high priority to implementing the commitments agreed at the 1996 World Food Summit. Special emphasis was placed on the target of at least halving the number of undernourished people in the world by the year 2015. Further, this particular goal was reinforced by the Millennium Declaration that was adopted by Heads of State and Government in September 2000. This commitment resolved to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people suffering from hunger. Considerations of sustainability issues are, therefore, extremely important for rural development [Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination 2008].

2. OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY:

In terms of objectives, this paper aims to define the role of sustainability issues in rural development in the context of new millennium which is marked by increasing imbalances between consumption pattern and availability of resources. Also, significant initiatives made (with policy implications at the global level) to ensure sustainability in rural development have been looked into, with appropriate examples. In this particular context, the author of this presentation has elaborated upon contribution of eighth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-8) in the area of sustainability and rural/agricultural development. *Further*, the author has attempted to: (a) discusses sustainable rural development Project in Mexico, as case study; and (b) present eco-village movement for sustainable rural development (SRD), with special emphasis on the Project “Eco-villages for sustainable rural development”, implemented in Vilnius, Lithuania. The observations contained in this presentation apply to most types of rural areas in many different locales. In terms of methodology, secondary data (largely ‘qualitative’: collected from research reports, government publications, etc.) have been used. Nature of data analysis is descriptive, involving “desk-based review” of literature.

3. DEFINING ‘RURAL’:

The term ‘rural’ has several connotations and there are many ways to define it. *However*, if we look back at the history, we find that the general idea of specifically conceptualizing “rural areas” came into use in the 1920s with its basis in sociology (Keller, 2017). In general terms, a “rural area” (also referred to as “countryside” in some parts of the globe) is a geographic area that is located outside towns and cities. But in more accurate or scientific terms, a rural area is identified on the basis of two key parameters: (a) size of the population, and (b) availability of infrastructural facilities. With this consideration, different countries have their own parameters of measuring and assessing rural areas. Almost every social, economic and environmental policy issue has a rural dimension (Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada 2001).

As regards universally accepted meaning of rural areas, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the United Nations (UN) is of the opinion that due national differences in the characteristics that distinguish urban from rural areas, the distinction between the urban and the rural population is not yet amenable to a single definition that would be applicable to all countries or, for the most part, even to the countries within a region. Where there are no regional recommendations on the matter, countries must establish their own definitions in accordance with their own needs. *However*, the traditional distinction between urban and rural areas within a country has been based on the assumption that urban areas, no matter how they are defined, provide a different way of life and usually a higher standard of living than are found in rural areas. In many industrialized countries, this distinction has become blurred and the principal difference between urban and rural areas in terms of the circumstances of living tends to be a matter of the degree of concentration of population. Although the differences between urban and rural ways of life and standards of living remain significant in developing countries, rapid urbanization in these countries has created a great need for information related to different sizes of urban areas. Therefore, although the traditional urban-rural dichotomy is still needed, classification by size of locality can usefully supplement the dichotomy or even replace it where the major concern is with characteristics related only to density along the continuum from the most sparsely settled areas to the most densely built-up localities. Yet, it is important to note that “even where size of the population is not used as a criterion, the locality is the most appropriate unit or classification for national purposes as well as for international comparability”. By and large, rural areas are characterized by ‘farms’, ‘vegetation’, and ‘open spaces’ [Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations (UN), 2017].

4. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT – CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

The concept of “sustainable development” (SD) prevailed in many parts of the globe even before the 1987 Brundtland Report: Our Common Future was published [United Nations (UN) General Assembly, 1987]. In fact, sustainability issues became more prominent as a part of official governmental policy documents in several countries after deliberations that took place in the process of World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission). Prior to this, people in olden days, respected the nature (often referred to as “mother nature” in some countries, including India); they advocated and practiced the principles of “optimum use of resources” which are central to SD considerations (Knowledge and Learning Group, African Region, The World Bank, 2004). *However*, with passage

of time and growing population, human needs for resource utilization grew manifold. Here it is pertinent to note that ever increasing resource use was partially also because of advancement in science and technology, including developments in information and communication technology (ICT). This situation of rampant use of resources (for human survival and industrialization) resulted in people abusing nature and environment. In fact, the world population, in general, ignored the well - established fact that *"the earth has its own carrying capacity"*.

The facts presented above give an insight into the overall context within the framework of which the SD theory came into existence as part of overall developmental strategy the world over. In terms of definition of SD, it can be stated that *"SD is guiding principle which refers to meeting human development goals, without comprising on resource use that will be required for future generation"*. Looked from this point of view, the conceptual framework of SD envisages two distinct aspects:

(a) *'needs'* considerations: It refers to essential needs of human population.

(b) *'limitations'* considerations: It essentially reminds of limited resources which must be taken into account while consuming resources by the world community. It can be noted here that some resources can be renewed with help of technology, but there are considerations of costs involved. This is more prominent in the present day world which is constrained by financial allocations because of several factors, including rising budgetary allocations in sectors, such as: (a) health, (b) education, (c) defense, (e) research and development (RD), and (f) infrastructure development. Increasing global population and economic production puts pressure on the earth's finite resources and ecosystem capacity. Ways should, therefore, be found to meet human needs and at the same time maintain the natural systems [European Commission (EU), 2017].

In the context of *"limitation considerations"* for SD (as outlined above), availability of energy resources, thus, become vital. An energy resource is the first step in the chain that supplies energy services. Energy services are largely ignorant of the particular resource that supplies them; however, often the infrastructures, technologies, and fuels along the delivery chain are highly dependent on a particular type of resource. The availability and costs of bringing energy resources to the market place are key determinants to affordable and accessible energy services (Rogner, 2015). Areas of energy resources fall into two categories: *'non-renewable'* and *'renewable'*. Renewable resources are resources which can be used *'repeatedly'* and *'replaced naturally'* (examples include oxygen, fresh water, solar energy, timber, and biomass). Renewable resources may include goods or commodities such as wood, paper and leather. Some renewable resources have essentially an endless supply, such as solar energy, wind energy and geothermal pressure, while other resources are considered renewable even though some time or effort must go into their renewal, such as wood, oxygen, leather and fish. A renewable resource is different from a non-renewable resource, as once a nonrenewable resource is used, it is depleted and cannot be recovered. As population continues to expand; the demand for renewable resources increases (Nelson, 2015).

What is obvious from the foregoing discussion is that SD considerations are need of the hour for all national governments. Today, the concept of SD is key component of the programs of many governments, business establishments (especially as a part of *"corporate social responsibility"*), educational institutions and non-government organizations around the world (Rural Secretariat, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, 2001).

5. ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT-QUICK LOOK AT GLOBAL EFFORTS MADE:

The path to sustainable agricultural development (SAD) essentially means *"improving the quality of life in rural areas"*, as well as *"ensuring enough food for present and future generations"*. Promoting sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD), which is included in chapter 14 of Agenda 21, is an initiative aimed at *"increasing food production in a sustainable way and enhance food security"*. In order to realize this objective of the SARD, implementation of the initiative will involve three interventions, namely, (a) *"education initiatives"*, (b) *"utilization of economic incentives"* and (c) *"development of appropriate and new technologies"*. All these efforts put together in an integrated manner will lead to a situation that will ensure following three developmental outputs:

- *stable supplies of nutritionally adequate food, access to those supplies by vulnerable groups, and production for markets;*
- *employment and income generation to alleviate poverty; and*

- *natural resource management and environmental protection* [United Nations (UN), 2017].

The inference derived from above discussion is that sustainability and rural development issues have been made part of the chapter 14 of Agenda 21 which many of the governments across the regions of the globe have agreed to implement. In continuation to this, efforts were made to assess sustainable development programs. For this purpose, the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) first reviewed Rural Development at its third session held in the year 1995. The CSD noted with concern that, even though some progress had been reported, disappointment is widely expressed at the slow progress in moving towards sustainable agriculture and rural development in many countries. *Further*, sustainable agriculture (SA) was also considered at the five-year review of implementation of Agenda 21 in 1997. During this time, the national governments were urged to attach high priority to implementing the commitments agreed at the 1996 World Food Summit, especially the call for at least halving the number of undernourished people in the world by the year 2015. This goal was reinforced by the Millennium Declaration adopted by Heads of State and Government in September 2000, which resolved to halve by 2015 the proportion of the world's people who suffer from hunger (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development, 2017).

6. CSD-8:

The eighth session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-8) is significant initiative in the area of sustainability and rural/agricultural development. The CSD-8 met at United Nations (UN) headquarters located in New York on April 30, 1999 and from April 24 to May 5, 2000. It gave special attention to four main issues, (a) *agriculture*, (b) *finance*, (c) *land management*, and (d) *trade*. Here it is pertinent to note that "*agriculture with a rural development perspective*" was a major focus of the CSD-8 in the year 2000. Another area of focus was "*integrated planning and management of land resources*" (as the sectoral theme). In addition, discussions and deliberations that took place at the Commission (the CSD-8) highlighted the linkages between the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable agriculture. The decision 8/4 was adopted which identified 12 priority areas for action. It reaffirmed that the major objectives of sustainable agriculture and rural development (SARD) are to increase food production and enhance food security in an environmentally sound way so as to contribute to sustainable natural resource management. Also, it noted that agriculture has a special and important place in society; it helps to sustain rural life and land (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Sustainable Development, 2017).

7. IMBALANCE IN URBAN – RURAL DEMOGRAPHY:

Since 1950s, the world population has witnessed considerable expansion of urban settlements. According to recent estimates, today, 54% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66% by the year 2050. Projections are indicative of the fact that urbanization combined with the overall growth of the world's population could add another 2.5 billion people to urban populations by the year 2050, with close to 90% of the increase concentrated in Asia and Africa [Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (UN), 2017]. Apart from natural increase in population growth rate, the prime reason of metropolitan growth of population is rural-urban migration (Keller, 2017).

Figures published by the UN DESA's Population Division in the year 2014 suggest that the largest urban growth will take place in India, China and Nigeria. These three countries will account for 37% of the projected growth of the world's urban population between 2014 and 2050. By 2050, India is projected to add 404 million urban dwellers, China 292 million and Nigeria 212 million. The urban population of the world has grown rapidly from 746 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2014. Asia, despite its lower level of urbanization, is home to 53% of the world's urban population, followed by Europe with 14% and Latin America and the Caribbean with 13%. The world's urban population is expected to surpass six billion by 2045. Much of the expected urban growth will take place in countries of the developing regions, particularly Africa. As a result, these countries will face numerous challenges in meeting the needs of their growing urban populations, including needs for housing, infrastructure, transportation, energy and employment, as well as for basic services such as education and health care [Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (UN), 2017].

Presently, there are 400 cities with populations of at least one million, and 20 megacities with populations exceeding 10 million, with a half dozen of them approaching or exceeding the 20 million levels. More than 70% of the world's population will live within the metropolitan framework. In most more developed nations, especially in North America and

Europe, the urban-rural distribution now stands at 75-80% metropolitan to 20-25% rural. One common factor contributing to rural-urban migration is rural unemployment resulting in part from rural areas having higher fertility levels than urban areas. Inadequate availability of technology and other infrastructural facilities in rural areas lead to “out-migration”, resulting in “urban environmental degradation”. This scenario of rural-urban migration has led to shortage of arable land in many communities throughout the developing world. It is pertinent to note that while the urban growth can contribute to economic progress, problems arise with rapid urbanization. This limits governments’ ability to *provide housing, employment, sanitation, public safety, and other necessary basic amenities/services* (Keller, 2017). Urban governance has become one of the most important development challenges of the 21st century.

8. NEED FOR NEW PARADIGM IN SUSTAINABILITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT:

With nearly three billion people (who form majority of the world’s poor) living in rural areas in developing countries, rural development has been focal point of development initiatives. This number will continue to grow until the year 2030. Standard of living of this section of population is worse than their urban counterparts. In addition, they contribute to large-scale migration to urban areas. Their living condition in urban areas is marked by: (a) lack of productive employment opportunities, (b) poor education and infrastructure, and (c) limited access to services. This situation exists despite several innovative rural development approaches, and the global momentum built around the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Without a new framework for rural development in developing countries, it is unlikely that the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be met (Dahlman, 2016).

Importance of such a framework and new approaches becomes more relevant in view of the fact that rural regions in less developed parts of the world today face new challenges and opportunities that developed countries did not face before. Challenges include a more demanding competitive international environment, rapidly growing rural populations, increased pressure on limited environmental resources and climate change. Opportunities, on the other hand, include advances in information and communications, agricultural, energy, and health technologies that can help address some of these challenges. A new paradigm for rural development is, thus, needed to move forward. Most importantly, such a move needs to incorporate the lessons of past experience. Also, it needs to meet the challenges and harness the opportunities of the 21st century, including climate change, demographic shifts, international competition, and fast-moving technological change (Dahlman, 2016).

In the context of new paradigm, environmental sustainability should be integral part of rural development strategies. Such a consideration should address rural populations’ vulnerability to climate change and threats from energy, food and water scarcity. The SDGs are closely linked to addressing the new challenges for rural areas. Relevant environmental sustainability issues, the SDG strategy takes into account, are: (a) demographic pressure, (b) ecological side-effects and climate change, and (c) poor governance. Since the SDGs and rural development are interconnected, investment in both areas will have mutually beneficial impacts. Rural development, therefore, should be put at the heart of national development strategies in all countries at all development stages in order to ensure “*equal, inclusive and sustainable development*” (Dahlman, 2016).

Further, rural development strategies should be multi-sectoral, and should leverage rural-urban linkages. Also, it should: (a) involve all levels of governments; and (b) include all key stakeholders, such as the private sector, international donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and rural communities themselves. Furthermore, in order to keep pace with ongoing challenges, rural development strategies need to envisage (a) climate change, (b) demographic shifts, (c) international competition, and (d) fast-moving technological change [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2017].

9. SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT – EVIDENCES FROM MEXICO:

What follows from the discussion presented above is that the challenge for the world and, therefore, of each country, is to take appropriate actions in order to prevent the advances of climate change. Like many countries, Mexico has implemented an array of strategies to protect its environment (thecatalist, 2010). It has adopted a sound strategy to move towards more sustainable development, and has created a National Consultative Council for Sustainable Development (NCCSD) and four regional councils, with participation by all relevant government entities and all economic sectors. During the 1990s, the country has significantly increased its involvement in international environmental co-operation [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), year of publication not

mentioned].

Mexico does not have a single sustainable development strategy, but does have other mechanisms in place that meet some of the requirements of a sustainable development strategy. The document entitled “2001-2006 National Development Plan” (2001-2006 NDP) represents country’s main planning instrument. The NDP contains not only the Mexico Government’s principles but also its objectives and strategies. It is the central document for the whole federal public administration. The “National Program of the Environment and Natural Resources” (NPENR) promotes six main goals, namely,

- a) integrated ecosystem management,
- b) policy integration,
- c) environmental management,
- d) provision of environmental services,
- e) enforcement of environmental legislation, and
- f) public participation and transparency.

It (the NPENR) proposes action plans, goals and strategies to effectively manage environmental issues. The strategies that guide the country’s sustainable development are largely driven from the country’s planning process. The vision of the NPENR is to promote and maintain active involvement citizens of Mexico in the protection of natural resources and the environment (Stratos Inc., Strategies to Sustainability, 2004).

In terms of sustainable rural development efforts in Mexico, “the Sustainable Rural Development Project” (SDRP) has been found to be quite significant. This Project aims to promote the adoption of environmentally sustainable technologies in agri-businesses. The SDRP has four components description of which is presented below:

- a) The “first component” of the SDRP focuses on investments in environmentally sustainable technologies in agribusinesses. The Project will promote investments in environmentally sustainable technologies in agri-businesses operating at the various stages of the production chain of agricultural products. Though the project will primarily focus on existing agri-businesses, support to new agri-businesses could be considered on a case-by-case basis, mainly for the introduction of solar thermal systems.
- b) The “second component” of the SDRP is the investment and production support services. In order to ensure quality at entry of investment sub-project proposals, this component will partially reimburse beneficiaries for the costs associated with business plan preparation for sub-projects, including the energy diagnostic when necessary. It will also provide beneficiaries with technical assistance for implementation of their proposed business plan, as well as training to integrate technologies promoted through the project in their farms and agri-businesses.
- c) The “third component” of the SDRP is the institutional strengthening. Activities to be financed by the project under this component will include assistance for policy development to address issues related to climate change and the environmental impact of sub-projects, in particular, institutional strengthening of areas within Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Production, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (SAGARPA) that will address the targets outlined within the National Strategy on Climate Change and the President’s Special Program for Climate Change (PECC).
- d) Finally, the “fourth component” is project management, monitoring, and evaluation (World Bank, 2017).

Mexico’s rural sector has experienced substantial reforms over the past 15 years, which have led to a largely liberalized, market-oriented, and private sector-driven rural economy. However, agriculture remains a relatively weak sector of the Mexican economy (Adaptation Learning Mechanism, 2014).

According to figures published by the National Climate Change Strategy (NCCS), agriculture continues to be an important source of carbon emissions (7% of total emissions). In order to address this challenge, and as a means to improve the contribution of the agricultural sector to the overall economy, the Government of Mexico has prioritized increasing the competitiveness and environmental sustainability of agriculture and agri-businesses, in the context of climate change mitigation, through promotion of energy efficiency (including renewable energy) and biomass practices (Adaptation Learning Mechanism, 2014).

In addition to promoting adoption of environmentally sustainable technologies in agri-business, the SDRP also assists to develop policies and regulatory frameworks that strengthen the contribution of the agricultural sector in achieving Mexico's goals under the Kyoto Protocol. In terms of global environment objective, the SDRP aims to contribute to the goals of the National Strategy on Climate Change (NSCC) by reducing carbon dioxide emission through the adoption of emission-reduction technologies and the support to the implementation of the Program for Climate Change (PCC), with special reference to the improved environmental sustainability of small and medium-scale agri-business (Adaptation Learning Mechanism, 2014).

10. ECO-VILLAGES FOR SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT-SELECTED EXPERIMENTS MADE:

The concept of eco-village is closely linked with sustainability issues and rural development. Eco-village initiative aims to

- a) *helps our society get closer to nature, and*
- b) *develop new ways of living together on the land in a more sustainable way.*

Most importantly, eco-village concept is an innovation offering solutions to many of the threats posed by resource use and climate change. Stated differently, the eco-village movement is an initiative looking for a more sustainable ways of living in rural areas. This movement promotes innovations which deals with climate change, environmental pollution, resource shortages, and social problems people face nowadays (Lithuanian Institute of Agrarian Economics, 2017). *Further*, eco-village is a settlement that combines socio-cultural environment with a low-impact way of living. Looked from this point of view, choosing to live in eco-village is choosing an alternative way to individualistic, materialistic and consumer-oriented lifestyle (Ecovillages project, 2011).

Today, several eco-villages initiatives are underway, one such initiative being Project “*Eco-villages for sustainable rural development*”. This Project, based in Vilnius, Lithuania aims at fostering eco-villages development as a more sustainable way of living in rural areas of the Baltic Sea Region. The Project is funded by the EU's Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007–2013, and started in February, 2010. It aims to implement innovative concepts of the “*Eco-village Movement*”. It has approached its end and has delivered a number of significant results. The core Project results include launching of three manuals on:

- eco-settlement practices and environmentally friendly technologies applied in eco-villages;
- socio-cultural aspects of eco-village establishment and governance; and
- green business and entrepreneurship.

By identifying and documenting many inspirational examples and case studies, the above named manuals, incorporating inspirational examples and case studies (based on experiences in program implementation in ground reality situations), aim at contributing to the further development, application and spreading of the sustainable solutions and innovations tailored in eco-villages and regaining the balance between the ecological, socio-cultural and economic dimensions of sustainable living on a broader society level. Manuals have been printed in 6 languages and are available for free download at Project website (Ecovillages project, 2011).

In addition to three manuals, the Project team, as an outcome of program implementation, has formulated set of policy recommendations and delivered it to responsible European Union (EU) institutions. *Further*, it is interesting to note that six key issues (along with potential reforms to tackle these areas) have been identified in the recommendations. These issues are:

1. *energy, land use, planning & building regulation;*
2. *public funding & support;*
3. *alternative business & organizational models;*
4. *education, training, information dissemination & exchange;*
5. *research and development (R&D) focus on eco-living; and*
6. *alternative food production* (Ecovillages project, 2011).

The identified key thrust areas are addressed by the EU institutions and other organizations in the EU region in order to improve the development of eco-villages and to utilize their full potential as sustainable development drivers of rural

areas. Recommendations have already received a positive feedback from the European Commission (EC), considering the requests under the new legal framework for the 2014-2020 programming period (Ecovillages project, 2011).

The Project has been implemented in partnership from: (a) Lithuania (the lead partner), (b) Finland, (c) Latvia, (d) Poland, and (e) Sweden. In addition, it has involved associated partners from Belarus, Finland, Germany, Russia, and Sweden (Ecovillages project, 2011).

In order to gather valuable knowledge accumulated through the eco-village movement and making it accessible to a broader public, as well as to facilitate learning for visitors, and income-generation for eco-villagers, the Project has created "*eco-village road*" website which is a virtual platform for eco-villages, consultants and related eco-initiatives to showcase and offer their knowledge, services and products to the general public in a variety of thematic groups (Ecovillages project, 2011).

On the same eco-village road website, visitors can find a guideline for establishing an internship program in eco-villages. The handbook is intended to assist eco-villages:

- a) *in establishing* internships that have the intention to reach out to the wider society with the sustainable living practices,
- b) *to strengthen* the eco-villages themselves, and
- c) *to provide* the opportunities to get to know eco-villages for the interested audience (Ecovillages project, 2011).

Another project result that is addressed to leaders of established or initiated eco-villages is the "*eco-village sustainability self-evaluation test*". It serves as a tool to:

- *form* a vision of the eco-village,
- *diagnose* the real eco-village situation,
- *assess* the gap between vision and reality, and
- *identify* what aspects of the eco-village governance should be improved (Ecovillages project, 2011).

11. SUMMING UP:

World poverty can be significantly reduced if developing and industrialised countries implement their commitments to sustainable rural development. This is a challenge in the new millennium solution of which lies in implementing programs that favour sustainable growth. Such a vision needs to provide more resources for health, education, gender equality, and environmental sustainability globally (Gasperini, 2000). Wherever viable rural settlements exist, the government, professional planners, and inhabitants within must focus their energies on the immediate place - they must make the word '*local*' mean something if we are ever to be successful in the retention and sustenance of "*local community*". A rural development doctrine must, if it is to be effective, give deeper and more concentrated thought to the role of local rural place as we seek to find solutions to the ongoing problems of population imbalance and the dissolution of the countryside (Ekstedt, 2003).

To sum up, while designing strategies for sustainability in rural development, it is important to remember that what is appropriate at one time and place may become inappropriate in the same place as other changes occur (e.g., as people become more sensitised to their lot in life, as they are able to fulfil certain of their needs, and as they change their view of their world and that of others). It also essentially means that what is appropriate in one place at a given time may be quite inappropriate in another place at the same time (Bryant, and Granjon, 2017). It is in the light of these considerations that country programs should adopt flexible project design and implementation mechanisms responsive to changes in the operating environment. In order to achieve sustainability, it is essential that sustainability projects retain the ability to adapt to changes in the programming context. Overly rigid programme structures leave too little room for community input, cannot effectively incorporate important lessons and are ill-equipped to support vulnerable households and communities in a dynamic risk environment. Over and above, institutional partnering arrangements must be able to evolve over time as opportunities for collaboration with new organizations emerge (Tango International, 2009).

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