

Government Policies and their Impact on Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract: *An overview of the body of research on governments' contributions to sustainable development is given in this study. Using a literature review methodology, the study initially addresses broad concerns related to sustainable development before delving more into the role that governments play in advancing sustainability. The research concludes by evaluating the difficulties faced by governments and suggesting solutions to achieve sustainable objectives. The relationship between sustainability and sustainable development is also emphasized in the study. According to this research, governments have the primary power to establish and effectively advance a sustainable society. However, governments encounter several obstacles while trying to accomplish this objective. Coordination between the many entities involved in the SDGs' implementation is one of the primary obstacles. These challenges are institutional, social, economic, and environmental in character. Governments, nevertheless, are among the primary organizers and motivators of all other accountable elements in the advancement of a sustainable society. Even while sustainability and sustainable development have received a lot of attention in academia, there are currently few studies on the role of governments and the difficulties they face in achieving the SDGs. In this regard, this article outlines the difficulties in accomplishing sustainable objectives and gives a summary of the role that governments play in sustainable development. Lastly, recommendations for potential areas of future investigation are made..*

Keywords: Social Equity, Biodiversity Conservation, Circular Economy

I. INTRODUCTION

For more than ten years, the ideas of sustainability and sustainable development have been the main focus of international development plans and have drawn a lot of attention from the academic community (Ozili, 2022). The concept of corporate social and environmental responsibility, which is used by both businesses and scholars, has also received a lot of attention in the last 10 years (Wong et al., 2014). SMEs' use of CSER is still dispersed, despite the concept's intense discussion in recent decades. Sheel and Vohra (2016) contend that this occurs because businesses still see CSER as a charitable endeavor rather than a strategy to improve a company's competitive edge, or because businesses are either unmotivated or ill-equipped to handle any difficulties that may arise during the implementation of these practices. However, given the advantages of CSER procedures, many academics think that they need to be mandated policies rather than optional (Matten & Moon, 2008). The issues posed by climate change and sustainable development have made the establishment of a system of government rules inevitable. These rules are intended to address important problems that affect society as a whole, not only economically but also socially and environmentally (Salvador & Sancho, 2021). Successful employer-business relationships, higher workplace social standards, less discrimination, more equity, and lower waste and pollution levels have all resulted from government involvement in corporate CSER initiatives (Giving Force, 2021). Governments are not solely in charge of making sure that our future is ecologically sustainable, however. When it comes to constructing a sustainable future, society, ideas, and culture have just as much power as governments. Governments, however, are among the primary organizers and motivators of all other accountable elements in the pursuit of a sustainable system. A better and sustainable society may be achieved via the development and management of policies and initiatives by an effective government (Gittel et al., 2012). The competences for sustainable development and sustainability (Mochizuki & Fadeeva, 2010), models of sustainability (Todorov & Marinova, 2009; Schaltegger et al., 2016), strategies for sustainable development (Bass et al., 1995), mechanisms for promoting sustainability (Xing et al., 2021; Selby et al., 2009), the relationship between sustainable

development and financial performance (Peeters, 2005), and the social and environmental aspects of sustainable development (Dempsey et al., 2011; Strezov et al., 2017) are just a few of the various studies that have been produced to date that look at a variety of issues in the field of sustainability development. Few studies have been conducted on the role of governments in sustainable development and the difficulties they encounter in putting the SDGs into practice, despite the fact that these subjects are very important and have an influence on the body of current research. This paper's objectives are to review the literature on governments' roles in sustainable development and investigate the difficulties in putting sustainable development goals into practice. The goal of this study is achieved by reviewing the literature, which highlights the crucial role that governments play in sustainable development. Additionally, this research adds to the little body of knowledge on the function and influence of governments on sustainable development. Additionally, it helps spread the word about this crucial issue that hasn't received the vital attention it merits. Because it helps prepare for future research on the difficulties faced by governments and their effects on sustainable development, the study is also beneficial to scholars. Therefore, this study's primary research question is: What are the responsibilities and difficulties that governments face in relation to sustainable development? The following is the paper's structure: The literature framework (conceptual section, discussion, and review of various studies on sustainability, sustainable development, CSER, and governments' role, challenges, and actions on SDGs) is presented in the second part of the paper. Future research ideas are presented in the third part, and a conclusion is provided in the fourth part.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sustainability and sustainable development

According to Hector et al. (2014), sustainability is essentially a long-term goal, and sustainable development is a method or procedure that may help achieve this goal. In 1987, a United Nations study named "Our Common Future" provided the first definition of the term "sustainable development" (Ozili, 2022). According to this research, sustainable development is a process that meets societal demands without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own requirements (United Nations, 1987). However, defining sustainability as a concept is not straightforward. According to research already conducted, sustainability is a concept, method, or philosophy that guides and controls the use of current resources in a way that guarantees those resources will be able to meet the needs of both the current and future generations (Grant, 2010). Sustainable development is a goal or target that can be achieved by putting these sustainability rules and principles into practice, whereas sustainability is essentially the strategy or the leading regulations to harmonize all the development areas in order to accomplish a level of sustainable development (Hodge, 1997). (Diesendorf, 2000). Accordingly, the ability to maintain a system, product, or activity across time is referred to as sustainability (Basiago, 1998). Accordingly, partnerships in the urban setting, social capital, and relational capital are all associated with sustainable urban government (Beck & Storopoli, 2021; Beck & Ferasso, 2023a). The goal of sustainable development, on the other hand, is to improve people's quality of life without putting the environment in jeopardy, which might lead to climatic problems (Mensah, 2019). According to this idea, sustainability and SD are different since the former refers to a state, whilst the latter represents the methods by which this state is achieved (Gray 2010). Therefore, ensuring appropriate harmony and alignment between the environment, society, and economic pillars is the ultimate goal of the idea of sustainability (Mensah, 2019).

Corporate social and environmental responsibility

The concept of corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER), which is used by both businesses and scholars, has received a lot of attention in the last 10 years (Wong et al., 2014). As a result, there are several definitions of CSER in the literature. Mueller et al. (2012) state that CSER is a concept that involves businesses voluntarily incorporating social and environmental issues into their policies and communications with their shareholders. It addresses the overall impact that businesses have on society and the environment (European Committee, 2001; Vitiea & Lim, 2019). Persons (2012) asserts that the aforementioned argument arises because of the growing public demand for social and environmental responsibility from businesses, which has helped to elevate CSER to a global concern. Customers are looking for healthy products, society is worried about production safety, workers are speaking out about

equality and working conditions, and there are calls for more government regulations to promote social and environmental well-being (Crişan-Mitra & Borza, 2015). On the other hand, consumers, whose expectations for environmental protection regarding various forms of pollution have risen, have also paid special attention to corporate environment responsibility (CER) (Michael et al., 2010). According to Lozano (2012), corporations must adopt environmentally friendly business strategies and concentrate on green management in order to gain a competitive edge. The use of CSR and CER by SMEs is still dispersed, despite the fact that these concepts have received more attention in recent decades. According to Sheel and Vohra (2016), this occurs because businesses still see CSER as a charitable endeavor rather than a strategy to improve a firm's competitive environment, or they lack the guts or skills to deal with potential obstacles when putting CSER principles into effect. Additionally, some scholars contend that pecuniary measures alone are insufficient to address CSR wrongdoing (Carroll, 1991). Therefore, a lot of academics think that CSER should be a part of a law or mandatory policy rather than being optional (Matten & Moon, 2008).

Sustainable Development Goals

In an effort to promote global prosperity, the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in December 2015, after the World Summit for Social Development in 2005. This all-encompassing strategy includes a number of objectives meant to eradicate poverty, safeguard the environment, and guarantee prosperity for all. The agenda includes 169 linked objectives and 17 sustainable development goals that must be accomplished by 2030. The three facets of sustainable development—economic, social, and environmental—form the foundation of the UN Agenda's well-balanced and integrated framework. (2015, United Nations)

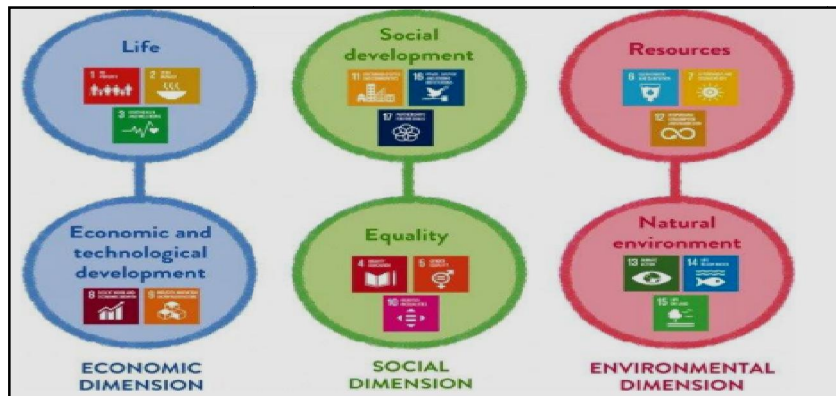


Figure 1. Classification of the SDGs into three dimensions and six perceived human needs. Source: Palomares et al., 2021

The following are the goals of these three dimensions, according Palomares et al. (2021): In addition to acknowledging people's prosperity and well-being, the economic factor's primary goal is sustainable economic growth. This component encompasses two primary elements: (i) living in terms of lowering poverty levels and promoting health and nutrition; and (ii) economic and technical progress in the framework of economic growth and the sustainable revolution. Sustainable development in terms of equality, prosperity, and societal well-being is the main emphasis of the social component. This component encompasses two primary elements: (i) social development within the framework of a sustainable society, integrity, equality, international collaboration, and peace; and (ii) equality with regard to gender, education, employment, and other domains.

The preservation of the environment and the management of sustainable resources are the main concerns of the environmental factor. Resources, sustainable production and consumption, water, and sustainable energy are the two primary components of this element. The second is natural habitat, which emphasizes ecological water, land, and climate. However, there are several barriers among the many stakeholders to the 2030 Agenda's implementation.

According to Fowler and Biekart (2017), an interlocutor is a particular kind of facilitator that is necessary for the SDGs to be implemented. The researchers stress the increasing need for competent hosting of SDG-inspired multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which are anticipated to be more intricate than earlier efforts pertaining to climate change and the

MDGs. The idea of multi-stakeholder partnerships is critically examined by Eweje et al. (2021) in light of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, and a new framework for achieving the SDGs via multi-stakeholder partnerships is suggested. According to studies by Beck and Ferasso (2023b), stakeholder capitalism may support decent employment, economic growth, innovation, infrastructure development, and sustainable industrial practices while also fostering international collaboration and agreement. The paper examines how important Stakeholder Theory concepts—like value creation, corporate social responsibility, stakeholder identity, and stakeholder salience (power, urgency, legitimacy, and proximity)—help achieve the SDGs. A thorough and logical policy-making process that incorporates both public and private actors in decision-making, goal implementation, and monitoring is necessary due to the complexity and interconnection of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Boas et al., 2016; Glass & Newig, 2019).

In order to guarantee that all players take responsibility and resolve the growing trade-offs among the Sustainable Government Goals, the governance of the SDGs must promote an inclusive and integrated environment for all actors (Bowen et al., 2017; Glass & Newig, 2019). Governance is seen as the fourth component of sustainable development in this context. Therefore, it is essential to coordinate efforts at all governmental levels and relevant policies in order to accomplish effective sustainability management and governance. Integrity policies in particular may assist in determining trade-offs between the policies of various sectors, which will result in a more effective implementation of complicated sustainability objectives (Glass & Newig, 2019). To ascertain if policies need to be modified when the environment in concern has also changed, policies used in various sectors should be regularly evaluated for efficacy.

However, each country will have a distinct stage of sustainable development since no two nations are at the same degree of development. According to Golusin and Ivanović (2009), the nations of Southeastern Europe are only beginning their journey towards sustainable development and are in the early stages of developing policies to propel their economies in that direction. Due to inadequate institutional and legal frameworks, political resistance to incorporating the shift from conventional to sustainable development, and an unyielding political agenda, Southeastern European nations are now experiencing a late and sluggish transition to sustainable development (Láng, 2003). However, Western European nations like Norway, Germany, Finland, and Denmark are at a very advanced level towards sustainable development (Golusin & Ivanović, 2009) and are known as the "top winners" and leaders of Europe's sustainable development, whereas Southeastern European nations are in their late and slow phase of progress towards SD. This leads us to the conclusion that the creation of a unified SD in Europe may go more slowly than anticipated, especially in Southeastern Europe, because of the poor political and institutional frameworks that are in place in many of these countries (Ozili, 2022).

III. METHODOLOGY

It is well acknowledged that a literature review is a methodical process of collecting and integrating previous and current research (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). The best strategy or technique to address the research objectives of a certain study may be a literature review (Snyder, 2019). When an author seeks to analyze or evaluate ideas, hypotheses, theories, or evidence in a certain subject, or wants to determine the validity or credibility of a particular theory or perception, they perform literature reviews, according to Tranfield et al. (2003). In order to obtain the answers to the research questions of this article, a systematic literature approach has been done, taking into account the purpose of this study. This strategy combines previous and current research in this topic. As a result, an analysis of the body of existing articles was adopted.

IV. RESULTS

Sustainable Development Goals

By using a variety of sustainability strategies (VSS), businesses have enhanced their CSER practices in recent years. Manufacturers, retailers, and service providers are required to implement strategies pertaining to sustainability measures, including health and safety standards, equality, non-discrimination and human rights measures, environmental impacts of production, land use standards, and more, as outlined in the Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS). Businesses, governments, and non-governmental organizations may all use these measurements

(Lambin & Thorlakson, 2018; Graafland & de Bakker, 2021). Understanding why companies choose to participate in CSER programs is crucial, according to a research by Lynes and Andrachuk (2008). By identifying these drivers, suitable systems may be created to guarantee that CSER is included into a business's decision-making process. The results highlight the need of understanding motives within sectoral and cultural settings rather than examining them in a vacuum. According to the perceptions of non-managerial stakeholders, the main obstacles to CSER practices in developing countries are perceived to be politics and corruption, a lack of coordination, a lack of government initiatives, and inadequate law implementation (Hossain et al., 2016).

There are several interpretations of the duties and functions of governments around the world. But according to Public Finance Theory, each role is described at six levels: distributive (resources, productivity, and service distribution); allocative (integrity, social security); regulatory (law, policy, and rulemaking, conservation, social justice); and stabilizing (monetary, pecuniary, and economic strategies to pursue goals to control unemployment, inflation, etc.). Zhang and Pearse (2011) and van der Walldt (2016). In this sense, whether the nation in question is developed or developing, a strong national government often contributes significantly to sustainability (Gittell et al., 2012). It is generally accepted that governments must act as catalysts for growth and transformation. Access to resources should be guaranteed, advantageous mechanisms for environmental conservation should be established, and governments should encourage and direct the rate of change (van der Walldt, 2016; Bovaird & Loeffler, 2009). Significant differences in CSR practices across nations and regions are shown by the Baughn et al. (2007) research, suggesting that businesses are impacted by the social, political, and economic circumstances of their different locales. The results emphasize how crucial a nation's institutional infrastructure is for encouraging and facilitating CSR activities. The research highlights the need for nations to have robust institutional capabilities to support CSR activities and the part that underlying institutional elements play in influencing CSR behavior.

Governments, in particular, are in charge of establishing laws and policies that all businesses in a nation must abide by. They also have a significant impact on how a company operates, both in terms of profits and expenses. However, as the people and economy develop, so does the demand for the infrastructure and natural resources that are already accessible. In order to effectively handle these increasing demands, governments are therefore continuously attempting to create novel approaches (Fiorino, 2012). In this sense, effective governance should provide a framework for managing and conserving natural resources in addition to facilitating and granting present and future generations' access to them. Furthermore, the availability of environmental expertise, governments' knowledge and comprehension of sustainability, its consistency, and their comprehension of the elements that have a positive and negative impact on the environment all have a significant impact on sustainability regulations (Yencken, 2002).

However, the role that governments play in promoting green consumption and green production is not entirely acknowledged. Governments may indirectly support green manufacturing by urging consumers to make sustainable consumption choices. For instance, by motivating businesses to put in place systems to eliminate social and environmental obstacles, customer attitudes and purchases may influence greener practices. Governments may, however, also have a direct impact on sustainable production by taxing and punishing businesses that violate CSERs. The economic growth, prosperity, and well-being of society—more broadly, socio-economic development—are the primary responsibilities of governments. However, striking a steady balance between environmental preservation and economic growth is the primary challenge facing governments in their role as catalysts of social and economic advancement (Jabareen, 2009).

Just as people cannot enjoy a good quality of life (clean air, water, and soil) without safeguarding the environment, society cannot meet its demands without a robust economy (Payne & Phillips, 2010; van der Walldt, 2016). It is the duty of the government to resolve this conflict and work toward bringing the objectives of sustainable development and economics into harmony. By doing this, they may solve environmental issues without jeopardizing the state of the economy (van der Walldt, 2016; Baeten, 2000).

Governments' challenges towards Sustainability Goals

Making sure that our future is ecologically sustainable is not just the responsibility of governments. When it comes to constructing a sustainable future, society, ideas, and culture have just as much power as governments. To connect and

arrange a number of transformation activities in order to transition to greener systems, a strategic strategy is required. Nonetheless, governments play a key role in coordinating and inspiring all other accountable elements to create a sustainable system. A better and sustainable society may be achieved via the development and management of policies and initiatives by an effective government (Gittell et al., 2012). Customers also function as a driving force as they are prepared to pay more for items that are branded as environmentally friendly and sustainable, in addition to the fact that governments see sustainability as a crucial strategy and duty (Nielsen, 2014). Manufacturers have started to concentrate more on creating sustainable products since customers are more likely to pay extra for products that are ecologically beneficial (Nielsen, 2014). However, businesses still encounter obstacles (costs) when implementing green business practices, even in the face of government backing or green business initiatives. Therefore, while creating sustainable products and activities, producers and sellers work together by splitting these costs among themselves via RJVs (Chen et al., 2019).

In addition to socio-technical changes, managing these innovations and constantly adapting to new circumstances are essential for addressing the issues of SD (Kallis & Norgaard, 2010; Smith et al., 2005). Governments that implement sustainable policy initiatives must continuously invest and advance democratic norms, claim Gittell et al. (2012). To connect and arrange a number of transformation activities in order to transition to greener systems, a strategic strategy is required. Governments gradually create creative plans to shift to more sustainable production in this manner (Bulkeley, 2010; Smedby & Quitzau, 2016).

A society's behaviors must be completely transformed and integrated in order to address today's green concerns (Smedby & Quitzau, 2016). Finding corporate and political responsibility while developing and maintaining responsible programs and policies is one of the largest challenges facing a government. Integrating alternative processes into existing sociotechnical systems is another difficult stage in the sustainable transformation process (Smedby & Quitzau, 2016; Späth & Rohracher, 2012). One facet of these difficulties is the transition to renewable energy.

Additionally, providing appropriate governance, structure, and coordination of important stakeholders inside a government agency is one of the largest challenges a nation confronts while achieving the SDGs (OECD, 2017). Coordination across various governmental levels and departments, including ministries, government centers, and agencies, is crucial to achieving the SDGs (OECD, 2017). According to a 2016 OECD report, the largest issue facing the major governing organizations is coordinating efforts across ministries to establish the SDGs. For these reasons, the difficulties in promoting CSER make progress toward sustainability sluggish and challenging. Failures in corporate and governmental governance have led to recent economic crises, which have brought attention to the global deficiency of CSER in the private sector. But in the last ten years, we've reached a stage when decision-makers are starting to take economic, social, and environmental challenges seriously. Concern regarding the obstacles to sustainability and how to overcome them is growing among governments worldwide. The idea of sustainability has emerged as one of the most significant and talked-about concepts in public discourse in recent years. Global drivers must first align with governments in order for national initiatives to effectively address sustainability issues. Governments will be unable to generate CSER value if global incentive systems operate in the opposite way (Bell, 2002).

Governments' actions towards a more sustainable future

Governments must adjust and enact laws that support and facilitate economic progress while still protecting the environment. Additionally, governments are required to create and abide by international conventions, treaties, and accords (van der Waldt, 2016). Building trust between the community and governments is another crucial idea put out by several academics. Governments should, in particular, make it a practice to be open and straightforward. In order to foster economic progress and resolve political issues, this transparent culture necessitates frequent communication about development initiatives (Beder, 2002). Making sure that their leaders and civilian employees are adequately trained and capable to handle sustainable development concerns is another duty of governments (De Wet & van der Waldt, 2013). To effectively oversee the implementation of laws and policies passed by governments, public officials must be subject-matter experts (van der Waldt, 2016). According to Meadows et al. (1993), governments need to focus more on the following social developments: emancipation and independence, equal financial distribution,

socioeconomic and environmental integrity, equity, and people's dedication and aspirations. Furthermore, it is highly advised that governments create and carry out fundamental programs for sustainable development that connect and take into account social, economic, and environmental factors while creating and implementing sustainability policies (van der Waldt, 2016). Additionally, the author makes the case that governments might provide the following incentives to motivate businesses to efficiently control pollution while furthering their own objectives:

- **Direct Control:** The government may implement this incentive/regulation as a legal limitation on polluting activities, which is a legal restriction on pollution. In particular, these policies may encourage reduced energy usage, fewer greenhouse gas emissions, and conversion to bioenergy. They may also include environmental health research and maintenance.

- **Effluent fees:** Another tool that governments might use to reduce and manage pollution is the imposition of wastewater costs. When polluters release wastewater into the environment, they are required to pay their government an effluent tax. When governments use this control strategy, the idea is that they may change the marginal cost of pollution to companies to match the true marginal cost of disposing of trash.

- **Transferable Emission Permits:** These licenses enable a business to release a certain quantity of pollutants into the atmosphere. To keep overall pollution within the permissible limit, the total number of these licenses may be managed.

In conclusion, van der Waldt (2016) recommends the creation of forums as governments' primary obstacle to SD is organizing and overseeing a fair cooperation amongst the many entities involved in SD. The author recommends frequent coordination and meetings with all ministries in order to successfully execute the SDGs. They also recommend the creation of forums as a means of facilitating communication between the many government entities involved in the execution of the sustainable objectives. These agencies will be able to discuss their practices, issues, and recommendations in this forum.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were drawn from this paper's analysis and evaluation of previous research on the role of governments and the obstacles they face in promoting sustainable development. First off, despite the topic's significance, not much study has been done on governments' difficulties and their involvement in SD. Second, governments are seen to be one of the primary drivers of sustainable development for companies and society at large. Global players must first follow governments' lead if government measures are to effectively address sustainability issues. To integrate and coordinate a number of transformation activities in order to transition to greener systems, a strategic strategy is required. Governments, however, are just one of the primary forces that coordinate and inspire all other accountable elements in the process of creating a sustainable system. A competent government can create and oversee plans and policies for a more prosperous and sustainable community. Governments do, however, face several obstacles in accomplishing this objective, particularly when it comes to coordinating various players from various sectors to facilitate collaboration towards a sustainable future. Third, this review highlights additional research areas, such as the need for studies on various levels of sustainable development in relation to nations with varying levels of development. It also makes recommendations for future research on the difficulties in coordinating and harmonizing the three dimensions of sustainable development.

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