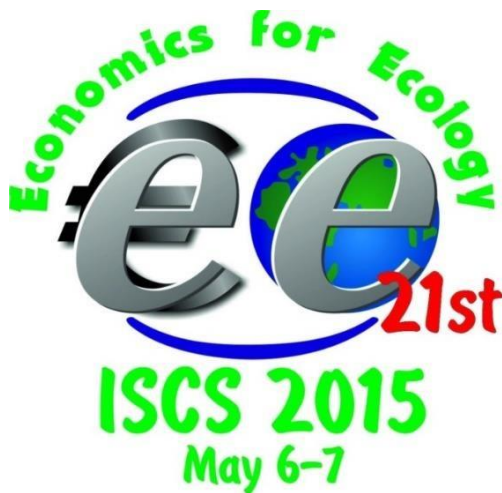


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DECISION MAKING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT¹

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At every stage in life, living beings are faced with the issue of what to go for or which one to choose. Life always presents us with questions of multiple choices wherein we have to choose from very many choices or alternatives put before us. To every case, issue, or problem, there is usually one choice that will perfectly solve or attend to the issue or problem at hand as compared to the other ways available. This can be because it will save time, or human resources or financial resources and sometimes all of them than the other options. The ability to choose among alternatives is *decision making*.

Decision making is the thought process of selecting logical choice from available options. A decision made can either make or mar the reason for making the decision. Therefore effort has to be made to seeing to it that the decision arrived at is an effective one. An effective decision is that decision that produces the desired or intended result at the end of the day.

According to Brundtland Commission Report "Our Common Future", Sustainable Development is a development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their needs [2]. Lack of effective decision making for sustainable development will lead to having unsustainable development. Some of the ways through which Governments and the civil society at large influence decision making for sustainable development are by Constraints (setting limits for every activity on the environment), giving incentives, and creating sustainable development awareness programs.

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Constraints on decision making include regulations that guide and limit development options, such as emissions standards, permitting, land use controls and substance bans. Legislation may also provide incentives towards sustainable development (and dis-incentives away from unsustainable development) by influencing markets with economic instruments and tax breaks for “greener” development options (e.g. wind farms) and goods (e.g. low emission vehicles). Markets may act in favour of sustainable development but, unregulated generally favour unsustainable consumption. Ill- considered legislation and economic instruments can likewise encourage unsustainable natural resource use (that is perverse subsidies).

The availability of alternatives provided by markets, through Government action or by grass roots initiatives may also provide incentives encouraging changes in behavior. For alternatives to be attractive, it must offer opportunities that give equal or better quality of life. For example, a shift by commuters from private cars to public transport may be facilitated by convenient and affordable public transport options. Often times, alternatives can only be implemented if they go hand in hand with restrictions. For example, increased levies on private car use where a convenient and affordable public transport is offered.

Nature imposes its own constraints on development in terms of the availability of natural resources such as minerals, hydrocarbons, timber, air, and water. Natural resources constraints may be strengthened by legislation (e.g. quotas and bans) and amplified through markets, with more scarce resources attracting higher prices.

Awareness can be raised through education and training, providing more targeted information through advertising and campaigns, and having goods and services certified.

Impact assessments are formal, evidence– based procedures that assess the economic, social, and environmental effects of public policy. Impact assessments are also means through which awareness about sustainability (planning and policymaking) can be raised.

The constraints (set limits) still fail to meet up with the desired expectations for which they are set. People still see natural resources as common goods or free services that can be extracted or polluted. Legislation are sometimes poorly drafted, poorly implemented, has weak enforcement, compliance or limited penalties. The incentives are not convenient and affordable. They are most times not anything better off than the former. For example, household energy efficiency measures are often seen as too costly, and as having a long period before return on investment.

There is lack of transparency and accountability in decision making and weak democratic institutions break the link between civil society and policy makers. These shortfall need to be addressed by removing perverse subsidies, promoting education for sustainable development, applying the precautionary principle more readily, and building democratic constitutions and governance.

Conceptualizing sustainable development as a decision-making strategy allows to actually “use” it, thereby moving beyond the rhetoric, and turning sustainability and its “action-guiding” power into an “action-generating” concept. To understand the linkages between sustainability and decision-making, and as such the realization of sustainable development as a decision-making strategy, at least the following three challenges should be considered: [1]

- Interpretation (sustainability should be interpreted considering its organizing principles, applied in a given socio-environmental context);

- Information-structuring (the inherent multi-dimensional complexity of sustainability should be structured into operational information units (for example indicators) and properly communicated in order to feed the decision-making process);

- Influence (sustainability information should exert a real influence on decision-making and on the actual implementation of sustainable development) [3].

Broadly speaking, the strategy for sustainable development is a long-term strategy. It refers to most fundamental and important goals, plans, intentions of economic agents to provide sustainable development on a certain territory. The essence of the strategy for sustainable development can be briefly expressed in terms of two key features: goal setting and perspectives of economic agents; creation of a dynamic model of targeted, systemic human activity that takes into account the influence of external and internal environmental factors. Thus, we consider the *result strategy* and the *process strategy* for sustainable development.

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