

Sustainability

- On how to create lasting and sustainable change

1. WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS

Sustainable development means that changes set in motion must secure a good life for all, including for succeeding generations. Achieving sustainability poses significant challenges. At the same time, we have a range of opportunities to build our society with more social justice and with greater responsibility towards nature and the planet as a whole. Four particularly worrying trends stand out and demand our immediate attention: growing inequality, worsening climate change, loss of biodiversity, and people engaging in patterns of consumption and conduct that harm the planet (UN Global Sustainable Development Report, 2019).

It will take concrete action to eradicate extreme poverty, halt inequality and confront climate challenges. It will also require determination to carry out the necessary, and in some cases comprehensive, adjustments regarding both the global climate and our model of society. By adopting the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the world community has committed itself to sustainable development for both people and planet. According to the sustainability concept of the goals, human development is closely connected to the well-being of the climate and environment. Thus, the sustainability agenda must be pursued focusing both on the individual goals and on the connections between them. The goals often exert positive feedback on one another, so that, for example, the realisation of global partnerships helps achieve other goals. However, it should also be examined whether compliance with one goal may in fact have a negative impact on others, say, by misallocating resources, and whether this should be taken

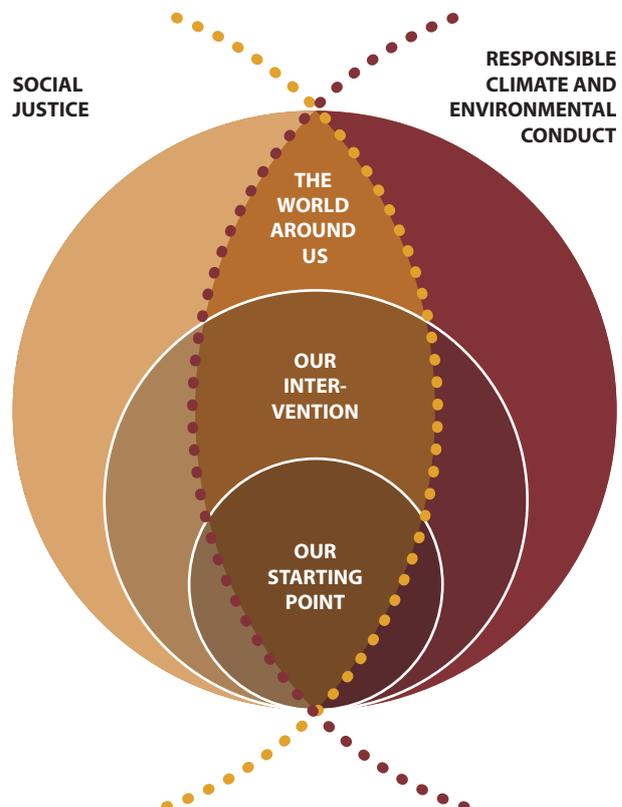
into account.

CISU's vision and the objective of the Civil Society Fund reflect this understanding of sustainability. Both focus on sustainable improvements in poor people's living conditions, participation in society, fulfilment of rights and the securing of equal opportunities. This call for a balanced approach in which the social initiatives that we get behind should also pay attention to promoting a sustainable climate and environment. Conversely, the climate and environmental measures undertaken must also help ensure a decent life for the poorest and most vulnerable groups. In other words, the human and financial resources that we allocate must both contribute to strengthening social responsibility and refrain from overusing the resources of nature.

CISU's sustainability model shows how to strike a balance between the two concerns and work with sustainability in organisations and interventions.

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The UN Sustainable Development Goals consists of 17 goals and 169 targets which are to be reached by 2030. The goals focus on, among other issues, the abolition of poverty and hunger, reduced inequalities, good education and healthcare, decent jobs, sustainable consumption, gender equality and sustainable economic growth. The Sustainable Development Goals highlight that the world is interconnected and that challenges must be overcome in all countries and acting together. This calls for working with individual goals as well as the links between them in pursuit of sustainable development.



2. WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY?

The model above illustrates CISU's approach to sustainability, showing how to pursue sustainability for people and planet, starting from two dimensions at three levels.

Two dimensions of sustainability

The two semicircles represent two dimensions of sustainable development, namely 1) **social justice** and 2) **responsible climate and environmental conduct**. The former is the struggle for fulfilling everybody's rights, lessening inequality and fighting poverty so that resources and benefits are more evenly distributed, and so that peace and just institutions can take root. Responsible climate and environmental conduct implies that the needs of current generations must not be met at the expense of future generations' chances of meeting theirs. And that we live on Planet Earth in a manner that will not harm our children and grandchildren.

The balance between these two dimensions may vary depending on the intervention and the various levels in question. But we should aim for the middle zone, where the struggle for social justice and concern for responsible climate and environmental conduct combine to bring about lasting, sustainable change.

The middle zone

The intersection between these two dimensions, social justice and responsible climate and environmental conduct, can be fraught with tensions and trade-offs. A good example is the dilemma between face-to-face meetings across borders to boost the struggle for social justice and the climate burden of the transport required to this effect. The model does not provide simple answers to these complex questions, but at least encourages reflection on both dimensions at the three levels.

Three levels

The first level in the model is our **starting point** found within our own and any partners' organisation. Sustainability naturally begins at home with our starting point, in this case our organisation's mission and values, and expand outwards from there. This level also covers our own conduct as an organisation.

The next level is our **intervention**, made up of our activities, target groups and strategy, i.e. the actions to be carried out and the people to be addressed. Here sustainability concerns tend to be highly specific. What elements are to be included in an intervention? How should the target group be selected? What stakeholders must be taken into account and how are different concerns prioritised?

The outer level, **the world around us**, which defines our purpose and relevance, refers to the change that we seek to bring about around us both during and after an intervention. This could revolve around specific, lasting improvements for the target group and a general wish to change attitudes and behaviour in our surroundings.

Some resources are necessary

An essential precondition for bringing about lasting and sustainable improvements is the availability of necessary resources. For millions of people currently living in poverty, economic development is crucial. Conversely, in the rich part of the world, a blinkered focus on economic growth may distract from sustainability, if we lose sight of the two sustainability dimensions and of other resources that are also necessary. Knowledge, better organisation and networking are also important resources to bring about sustainable change. Accordingly, it must always be ensured that the resources necessary in the situation at hand are available.

3. SUSTAINABILITY IN PRACTICE

The model has been devised as a specific starting point for developing organisations and interventions. Its aim is not to make everyone work with sustainability in the same manner, but to stimulate some good discussions, inspiring both minor adjustments and major reorientations. This can happen by using the model as a springboard for reflection and conversation on where you are today and where you would like to move to at each of the various levels.

A concrete exercise: Draw the model on a blackboard or large piece of paper. Try to specify where you find yourselves today at the three levels, that is, how you are working with social justice and with responsible climate and environmental conduct. Then indicate with an arrow where you would like to move to.

Use the following questions as inspiration to explore and discuss the model within your organisation and alongside your partner.

Our starting point

Questions for consideration:

- How do our basic values and mission as an organisation relate to sustainability?
- How is this reflected in our day-to-day work within the partnership?

Look, for instance, at the social make-up of volunteers and at how you spend your resources on purchases, transport and communication.

Our intervention

Start from the UN Sustainable Development Goals in order to look at various aspects of sustainability.

- Identify 1-2 goals that are your strongest suits where you expect to make the greatest positive difference.
- Identify 1-2 goals where you are missing out on opportunities or could potentially cause harm. A sustainable intervention should address both bullet points.

Look, for instance, at the selection of the target group, specific planning of activities and optimal use of resources.

The world around us

Questions for consideration:

- What imprints do we wish to leave on the world around us and make our organisation known for?
- What change do we wish to bring about during and after a specific intervention?

Look, for instance, at what subjects you address in your advocacy, and how you ensure that resources continue to be available to bring about lasting change.

4. HOW ORGANISATIONS CAN USE CISU

Funds: Sustainability is an integral concept of the Civil Society Fund, which is run by CISU and can be applied to by Danish civil society organisations.

Capacity building: CISU regularly holds courses and events on sustainability.

Read about them and sign up at [cisu.dk/kurser](https://www.cisu.dk/kurser) (in Danish).

Member organisations can obtain advice on how to work with sustainability in interventions and possibly as part of organisational development.

5. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW AND DO MORE

Read more about sustainability and find good tools to develop sustainability objectives and strategies here: [cisu.dk/begreber](https://www.cisu.dk/begreber) (in Danish).

CISU'S THEMATIC PAPERS

CISU draws up thematic papers setting out our view of how our member organisations may understand, interpret and apply various key concepts in civil society cooperation.

The thematic papers are based on our practice and experience of member organisations' international work, our advisory services and courses, as well as our administration of funds open for applications.

The thematic papers are approved by CISU's Board. They are not carved in stone, but will be revised at appropriate intervals in view of experience gained. Moreover, new thematic papers will be drawn up on other issues.

See the latest version and other thematic papers at: [cisu.dk/temapapirer](https://www.cisu.dk/temapapirer) (in Danish).

