

# Government's Responsibilities And Obstacles In Fostering Sustainable Development

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## ABSTRACT

This study reviews existing research on governments' role in sustainable development. The study conducts a literature analysis on sustainable development, beginning with general themes and progressing to a detailed review of governments' role in fostering sustainability. Finally, the paper evaluates government challenges and suggests solutions to achieve sustainable goals. The study explores the relationship between sustainability and sustainable development. This study identifies governments as the primary actors responsible for promoting a sustainable society. Governments encounter significant hurdles in achieving this goal. Coordination among stakeholders is a major problem in implementing SDGs. The obstacles are environmental, social, economic, and institutional in character. Governments have a crucial role in coordinating and motivating other stakeholders to promote a sustainable society. Despite academic interest in sustainability and development, research on governments' role and obstacles in achieving the SDGs remains minimal. This article presents an outline of governments' involvement in sustainable development and identifies barriers to achieving sustainable goals. Finally, ideas for future research areas are provided.

**KEYWORDS:** Sustainability; Sustainable Development; Sustainable Development Goals; Governments; Challenges; Government's role.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For almost a decade, sustainability and sustainable development have been a top focus in global development policies, gaining significant attention in academic research.<sup>1</sup> The concept of Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility has gained popularity among academics and businesses during the past decade.<sup>2</sup> Despite extensive discussion in recent decades, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) still use CSER inconsistently.

According to Sheel and Vohra<sup>3</sup>, this occurs when organizations view CSER as a charity rather than a policy to improve their competitive advantage. Additionally, companies may lack the motivation or ability to overcome obstacles while implementing these practices. Many academics argue that CSER procedures should be mandatory rather than voluntary, given their benefits.<sup>4</sup> Government laws are important to address the concerns of climate change and sustainable development. These policies aim to address major challenges affecting society at all levels, including economic, social, and environmental.<sup>5</sup>

Government involvement in corporate CSER operations has led to stronger employer-business relationships, higher workplace standards, less discrimination, greater equality, and reduced waste and pollution.<sup>6</sup> Governments, however, are not alone in their responsibility to ensure an environmentally beneficial future. Society, beliefs, and culture are equally influential as governments in building a sustainable future. However, governments are one of the primary driving forces in coordinating and inspiring all other responsible parties to work toward a sustainable system. A good government can develop and implement policies and tactics that improve and sustain society.<sup>7</sup>

Several studies have been conducted to date on a variety of issues related to sustainability development, including competences for sustainable development and sustainability,<sup>8</sup> models of sustainability,<sup>9,10</sup> strategies

for sustainable development,<sup>11</sup> sustainability fostering mechanisms,<sup>12,13</sup> the link between sustainable development and financial performance,<sup>14</sup> and both the social and environmental aspects of sustainable development.<sup>15,16</sup> Even though these subjects are vital and have a significant impact on the current literature, only a few studies have been conducted on governments' roles in sustainable development and the obstacles they confront when implementing SDGs.

The purpose of this study is to review existing research on governments' roles in sustainable development and to investigate the difficulties encountered in achieving sustainable development goals. The purpose of this study is to review existing research that indicates governments' important impact and difficulties related to sustainable development. Furthermore, this study adds to the already limited literature on governments' roles and impacts on sustainable development. Furthermore, it helps to raise awareness of this crucial issue, which has received insufficient attention. The study is also beneficial for scholars because it helps to prepare future studies on government difficulties and their impact on sustainable development. Thus, the main research question of this study is: What are the roles and obstacles that governments face in terms of sustainable development?

The paper's structure is as follows: the second section presents the literature framework (conceptual section, discussion and review of several studies on sustainability, sustainable development, CSER, and governments' responsibilities, obstacles, and actions on Sustainable Development Goal's); the third section presents recommendations for future research; and the fourth section provides a conclusion.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.

#### 2.1 Sustainability and sustainable development

Sustainability is described as a long-term goal, whereas sustainable development is a method or process for achieving that goal.<sup>17</sup> In 1987, the United Nations published a report named "Our Common Future" that defined sustainable development for the first time.<sup>18</sup> In this paper, Sustainable Development was defined as a process that meets current societal requirements without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet their own.<sup>19</sup> Sustainability, however, is a difficult topic to define. Existing research reveals that sustainability is a theory, approach, or philosophy that guides and regulates the use of current resources in such a way that those resources may meet the demands of both the current generation and future generations.<sup>20</sup> Essentially, sustainability refers to the approach or leading regulations that harmonize all development areas in order to achieve a level of sustainable development,<sup>21</sup> whereas sustainable development is an objective/target that can be met by implementing these sustainability regulations and principles.<sup>22</sup> Thus, sustainability refers to the ability to sustain or preserve a system, product, or activity across time.<sup>23</sup> In this aspect, sustainable urban governance is linked to relational capital, social capital, and partnerships in urban settings.<sup>24,25</sup> Sustainable development, on the other hand, is a concept and development model that attempts to improve people's quality of life while neither damaging the environment or causing climate change.<sup>26</sup> According to this idea, the distinction between sustainability and sustainable development is that the former refers to a state, whereas the latter represents the ways to achieve this state.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the ultimate goal of the notion of sustainability is to ensure proper harmony and alignment among the environmental, societal, and economic pillars.<sup>28</sup>

#### 2.2 Corporate social and environmental responsibility

Over the last decade, academics and businesses alike have paid close attention to the concept of corporate social and environmental responsibility (CSER).<sup>29</sup> As a result, the literature contains a variety of definitions for CSER. According to Mueller,<sup>30</sup> CSER addresses the whole influence that corporations have on society and the environment, and it is defined as a concept in which firms incorporate environmental and social issues into their policies and communications with shareholders on a voluntary basis.<sup>31,32</sup> According to Persons<sup>33</sup>, the above argument arose as a result of society's rising demand for social and environmental responsibility from businesses, which has contributed to CSER becoming a global concern. In this setting, employees are increasingly vocal about working conditions and equality, customers want healthy products, society is worried about production safety, and there is a call for additional legislative standards for social and environmental wellbeing.<sup>34</sup> Corporate environmental responsibility (CER), on the other hand, has received a lot of attention, particularly from customers, who have increased their demands for environmental protection against various sorts of pollution.<sup>35</sup> According to Lozano<sup>36</sup>, corporations should use eco-friendly business strategies and focus on green management to gain a competitive advantage. Nevertheless, even if CSR and CER notions have been given closer attention in the past decades, SME's application of CSR and CER is yet scattered. Sheel and Vohra<sup>37</sup> argue that this happens because companies still see CSER as an act of charity rather than a policy to enhance a firm's competitive context, or they lack the courage or capability to address challenges that may be encountered when implementing CSER practices. Also, some researchers argue that CSR misconduct cannot be mitigated solely through financial means.<sup>38</sup> Hence, many researchers believe that CSER should not happen on a voluntary basis, rather it should be part in the form of a regulation or obligatory policy.<sup>39</sup>

#### 2.3 Sustainable Development Goals

Following the World Summit for Social Development in 2005, the United Nations approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in December 2015 to promote global prosperity. This universal plan includes a

set of goals aimed at eradicating poverty, conserving the environment, and providing prosperity for all. The agenda includes 17 sustainable development objectives and 169 related targets to be met by 2030. The UN Agenda is balanced and integrated, with three components of sustainable development: economic, social, and environmental.<sup>40</sup>



**Figure 1. The SDGs are classified into three aspects and six perceived human needs. Source: Palomares et al., 2021**

The objectives of these three aspects as follows:<sup>41</sup> The primary goal of the economic component is to promote long-term economic development while also recognizing people's well-being and prosperity. This factor encompasses two major components: (i) life in terms of poverty reduction and nutrition and health assistance; and (ii) technology and economic progress in the context of a sustainable revolution and economic expansion. The social factor is primarily concerned with long-term growth in terms of economic prosperity, equality, and social well-being. This factor consists of two major components: (i) social growth in the framework of sustainable society, integrity, equality, global partnerships, and peace; and (ii) equality in terms of employment, education, gender, and other areas. The environmental factor focuses on protecting the earth/environment and coordinating sustainable resources. This factor consists of two major components: (i) resources, sustainable production and consumption, water, and sustainable energy; and (ii) natural habitat, which focuses on ecological water, land, and climate.

However, implementation of the 2030 Agenda confronts several challenges from various parties. According to Fowler and Biekart,<sup>42</sup> implementing the SDGs necessitates the use of a certain form of facilitator known as an interlocutor. The experts underline the growing need for skilled hosting of SDG-inspired multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which are likely to be more complicated than earlier efforts addressing climate change and the Millennium Development Goals. Eweje<sup>43</sup> critically explore the concept of multi-stakeholder partnerships in light of the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs) and offer a new framework for implementing the SDGs through multi-stakeholder partnerships. Beck and Ferasso's<sup>44</sup> research demonstrates that Stakeholder Capitalism can foster global collaborations and consensus while also supporting decent work, economic growth, innovation, infrastructure development, and sustainable industrial practices. The study examines how core aspects of Stakeholder Theory, such as stakeholder identity, stakeholder salience (power, urgency, legitimacy, and closeness), corporate social responsibility, and value generation, help to achieve the SDGs.

The complexity and interconnectivity of the 17 SDGs necessitate a comprehensive and logical policy-making process that includes both corporate and public actors in decision-making, goal implementation, and monitoring<sup>45,46</sup>. As a result, SDG governance must build an inclusive and integrated environment for all actors, as well as guarantee that these actors accept responsibility and address growing trade-offs among SDGs<sup>47,48</sup>. In this view, governance is regarded as the fourth component of sustainable development. As a result, in order to accomplish successful sustainability management/governance, all levels of government must coordinate their actions and relevant policies. In example, integrity policies in connection to complicated sustainability goals might help to deduce trade-offs between different sectoral policies, resulting in more successful

implementation of such goals.<sup>49</sup> However, policies implemented in various sectors should be evaluated on a regular basis to determine whether they need to be updated as the environment changes.

Nonetheless, given that not all countries have the same level of development, each country's phase of sustainable development will be unique. Golusin and Ivanović<sup>50</sup> suggest that Southeastern European countries are in the early stages of developing sustainable development plans for their economy. This late and delayed phase of sustainable development in Southeastern European countries is attributable to insufficient legal and institutional structures, unwillingness of the political sector to integrate the move from traditional development to SD, and an inflexible political scheme.<sup>51</sup> While Southeastern Europe is making slow progress towards sustainable development, Western European countries such as Norway, Germany, Finland, and Denmark are considered "top winners" and leaders in this field.<sup>52</sup> As a result, we can conclude that the establishment of a united SD in Europe may take longer than envisaged, particularly in Southeastern European countries.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

A literature review is widely recognized as a systematic strategy to acquiring and synthesizing existing and preceding research.<sup>54</sup> A literature review may be the most effective methodology or method for answering research questions in a certain study.<sup>55</sup> According to Tranfield,<sup>56</sup> literature reviews are used when an author needs to analyze or appraise concepts, hypotheses, theories, or proof in a specific field, or to assess the credibility or validity of a particular theory or viewpoint. Thus, given the purpose of this study, a systematic literature review was undertaken to combine earlier and actual research in this subject to discover answers to the research questions posed in this paper. As a result, a study of the current literature on articles was undertaken.

#### 5. RESULTS

##### 4.1 Sustainable Development Goals

Companies have recently improved their CSER practices using a variety of sustainability strategies (VSS). Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) include strategies that manufacturers, retailers, and service providers must put in place to address sustainability issues such as health and safety standards, equality, non-discrimination, and human rights measures, environmental impacts of production, land use standards, and so on. These indicators are applicable to businesses, governments, and non-governmental organizations<sup>57,58</sup>. The study of Lynes and Andrachuk<sup>59</sup> highlights the relevance of understanding firms' incentives for participating in CSER activities. By identifying these reasons, effective processes can be built to ensure that CSER becomes an essential component of a company's decision-making process. The findings suggest that motivations cannot be studied in isolation, but must be understood within sectoral and cultural settings. Hossain<sup>60</sup> discovered that corruption and politics, lack of coordination, lack of government initiatives, and unsatisfactory law implementation are perceived as major barriers to CSER practices in a developing country context.

Government tasks and roles are understood differently around the world. However, Public Finance Theory categorizes each role into six levels: distributive (e.g., resources, productivity, and service distribution); allocative (e.g., integrity, social security); regulatory (e.g., legislation, policy and rulemaking, conservation, social justice); and stabilizing (e.g., monetary, pecuniary, and economic strategies to control unemployment, inflation, and so on)<sup>61,62</sup>. A good national government plays a significant role in promoting sustainability, regardless of whether the country is developed or developing.<sup>63</sup> In general, it is thought that governments must act as catalysts for growth and change. Governments should encourage and shape the speed of change, establish favorable frameworks for environmental conservation, and secure resource availability<sup>64,65</sup>. The considerable differences are found in CSR practices across countries and regions, demonstrating that enterprises are influenced by their economic, political, and social environments.<sup>66</sup> The findings emphasize the relevance of a country's institutional capabilities for developing and supporting CSR initiatives. The study underlines the importance of underlying institutional variables in driving CSR behaviour and the necessity for governments to build strong institutional capacities to support CSR activities. Governments, in particular, are in charge of establishing policy and legal standards that all companies in a country must adhere to, and they have a significant impact on a company's operations in terms of income and business costs. However, as the population and economy develop, so does the demand on existing infrastructure and natural resources. As a result, governments are continually striving to devise new strategies to meet these increasing needs.<sup>67</sup> In this approach, good governance should not only enable and provide current and future generations the right to exploit natural resources, but also establish a framework for conserving and managing these resources.

Furthermore, sustainability regulations are heavily influenced by the availability of environmental expertise, governments' knowledge and understanding of sustainability, its consistency, and governments' understanding of the factors that positively and negatively impact the environment.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, governments' role in connecting green production and green consumption is not widely recognized. Green production can be indirectly promoted by governments through encouraging consumers to consume sustainably. For example, consumer attitudes and purchases can determine greener practices by encouraging companies to implement mechanisms to remove social and environmental barriers. However, governments can also directly influence sustainable production by imposing taxes and measures on companies that do not comply with CSERs.



Governments' primary job is to promote economic development, prosperity, and welfare in society, as well as socioeconomic development more broadly. However, the primary challenge of governments' role as stimulators of economic and environmental-social growth is to strike a steady balance between economic development and environmental conservation.<sup>69</sup> Society's requirements cannot be addressed without a robust economy, and citizens cannot enjoy a good level of living (clean air, water, and soil) unless the environment is protected. In this regard, it is the government's job to strike a balance and work toward reconciling economic and environmental development goals. This allows them to solve environmental issues while maintaining existing economic progress.<sup>7071</sup>

#### **4.2 Government's Challenges towards Sustainability Goals**

Governments aren't the only ones accountable for securing a sustainable future. Society, beliefs, and culture are equally influential as governments in building a sustainable future. A systematic approach is required to connect and organize a number of transformation processes to transition to greener systems. However, governments are one of the primary driving forces in organizing and inspiring all other responsible parties to develop a sustainable system. A good government can develop and implement policies and strategies for a more prosperous and sustainable society.<sup>72</sup>

Aside from the fact that sustainability is regarded as a crucial approach and responsibility of governments, consumers also serve as a driving force, prepared to pay extra for goods branded as sustainable and beneficial to the environment.<sup>73</sup> Given consumers' willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly items, businesses have begun to focus more on manufacturing sustainable goods.<sup>74</sup> However, regardless of green business activities or government backing, corporations confront hurdles (costs) when implementing such practices. When developing sustainable goods and activities, producers and sellers work together by sharing costs through RJVs.<sup>75</sup>

Addressing SD difficulties necessitates not only socio-technical innovations, but also the ability to manage these innovations and adapt to changing circumstances.<sup>7677</sup> The governments that implement long-term policy objectives must continually invest in and support democratic principles<sup>78</sup>. A systematic approach is required to connect and organize a number of transformation processes to transition to greener systems. In this way, governments gradually develop novel strategies for shifting to more sustainable production.<sup>7980</sup> Addressing current environmental concerns necessitates a fundamental transformation and integration of a society's behaviors.<sup>81</sup> One of the most difficult challenges for a government is to identify corporate and political responsibility when developing and implementing responsible programs and policies. Another difficult stage in sustainable transformation is integrating alternative processes into existing sociotechnical systems.<sup>8283</sup> The transition to clean energy is one of these obstacles.

Furthermore, one of the most significant challenges a country confronts in achieving the SDGs is ensuring good administration and the arrangement and coordination of important players within a government agency.<sup>84</sup> Implementing the SDGs necessitates complex coordination among several government levels and departments, such as ministries, government centers, and agencies.<sup>85</sup> In 2016, the OECD performed a research that found that cooperation between multiple ministries in setting the SDGs is the most difficult problem for the main entities of government.

For these reasons, progress toward sustainability is difficult and gradual due to the challenges of promoting CSER. Recent economic crises have been caused by failures in government and corporate governance, highlighting the global lack of CSER in the private sector. However, over the last decade, policymakers have begun to take economic, social, and environmental issues more seriously. Governments around the world are becoming increasingly concerned about the challenges to sustainability and how to overcome them. In recent years, the notion of sustainability has emerged as one of the most widely discussed and essential topics in public discourse. However, for government policies to be effective in addressing sustainability issues, global drivers must first align with countries. If global reward systems operate in the opposite direction, governments will be unable to generate CSER value.<sup>86</sup>

#### **4.3 Governments' action towards a more sustainable future**

Governments must adapt and develop policies that safeguard the environment while encouraging and supporting economic progress. Governments must also develop and adhere to international treaties, agreements, and conventions.<sup>87</sup> Many researchers argue that trust should be created between the community and governments. Governments, in particular, should cultivate a culture of openness and simplicity. This transparency culture necessitates ongoing communication about development operations in order to foster economic growth and address political crises.<sup>88</sup> Governments must also guarantee that its leaders and civilian staff are appropriately qualified and capable to solve sustainable development concerns. Public leaders must be subject matter experts in order to effectively supervise the implementation of government regulations and policies.<sup>89</sup> Meadows<sup>90</sup> propose that governments focus more on the following social developments: fairness, socioeconomic and environmental integrity, equitable financial distribution, emancipation and freedom, and people's aspirations and dedication. Furthermore, it is strongly advised that governments plan and implement core sustainable development programs that link and take into account environmental, social, and economic factors when developing and implementing sustainability policies.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the author contends that

governments might establish the following incentives to encourage businesses to properly manage pollution while promoting their own interests:

Direct incentive/regulatory is a regulation that the government can enact to limit polluting activities. These policies may involve research and maintenance of environmental health, as well as the promotion of lower energy use, greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and biofuel conversion.

Effluent fees are a second approach that governments might utilize to manage and control pollution. Effluent fines are costs that polluters pay to the government for dumping wastewater. When governments use this control strategy, the idea is that they can alter the marginal cost of pollution for firms to reflect the actual marginal cost of waste disposal.

Transferable emission permits are licenses that allow a corporation to emit a specific number of pollutants. The total number of these licenses can be managed to keep overall pollution within the permissible limit.

Finally, given that governments' primary issue in addressing sustainable development is coordinating and managing a balanced partnership among various parties involved in SD, van der Wal<sup>92</sup> proposes the development of forums. For the successful implementation of the SDGs, the author recommends regular coordination and meetings with all ministries, as well as the creation of forums to connect the many government entities involved in the implementation of the sustainable goals. This forum will allow these organizations to exchange their experiences, practices, problems, and recommendations.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This report examined and analyzed existing research on governments' roles and challenges in sustainable development, and the following findings were identified. To begin, despite the importance of the topic, little study has been conducted on governments' challenges and roles in SD. Second, governments are viewed as one of the most important factors in encouraging enterprises and society as a whole to pursue sustainable development. For government policies to be effective in tackling sustainability issues, global actors must first align with states. A strategic approach is required to connect and organize a succession of transformation processes that will lead to greener systems. Governments, on the other hand, are only one of the primary driving forces behind the organization and motivation of all other relevant variables on the path to a sustainable system. A good government can create and implement policies and tactics that will improve and sustain society. However, governments have numerous problems in accomplishing this goal, particularly when coordinating multiple actors from various sectors to enable collaboration toward a sustainable future. Third, this review identifies additional areas for future research, such as the need for research on different levels of sustainable development in countries with varying levels of development, as well as research recommendations on challenges in coordinating and harmonizing the three dimensions of sustainable development.

## 7. AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should look into different levels of sustainable development for countries at various stages of development.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is advocated for all countries, regardless of development level. Thus, global sustainable development is supposed to be achieved by encouraging all countries, developed or developing, to work toward the same sustainable development goals. However, it may be impossible to realize this proposal because, in the case of underdeveloped countries, the path to SD would be more difficult and could be completed at a slower rate than in industrialized ones. Thus, future research should look into the problems and varied approaches that countries with varying levels of development will take to achieve SD.

Furthermore, the issues of coordinating and balancing the social, economic, and environmental dimensions should be investigated.

Although the findings of this article show that local governments may play an important role in drafting rules to combat climate change and promote sustainability, they face numerous problems when implementing the SDGs. The most pressing task for local governments is to devise a solution for building, implementing, and monitoring frameworks that coordinate or harmonize the three components of sustainable development, namely the economic, social, and environmental aspects. Another area of research that deserves emphasis is the difficulty of coordinating and balancing the social, economic, and environmental components.

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