



Getting from Here to a Sustainable World: Why “Resource Sufficiency Evaluation” is Crucial

> Sustainable Development is Not the Same as Sustainability:

Sustainability, from a natural resource perspective, means that we don't take things from nature faster than nature can replace them. For an ecosystem like a forest, it means that we don't harvest trees faster than the forest can regrow them. Otherwise we will eventually destroy the forest. For an underground aquifer system, it means that we don't pump water out faster than it is naturally replenished. Making development more efficient, and thus more sustainable, is important, but merely making economic activity more sustainable does not guarantee that we are living within nature's means.

> We're Already Consuming Resources at an Unsustainable Rate:

With 7 billion people on the planet and rising levels of affluence, we are already exceeding nature's limits. Every two years, the Global Footprint Network and the World Wildlife Fund publish a “Living Planet” report that looks at humanity's ecological footprint. The latest report, issued in 2010, indicates that humankind is already overusing the renewable resource capacity of Earth's biosphere by 50%. Climate change, peak oil, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and recurring food crises are all signs that humanity is overusing global resources. Leading scientists warn that we are in biological and general resource *overshoot*.

> We're Already in Danger of Breaking Planetary Boundaries:

Thirty leading scientists assembled by the Stockholm Resilience Centre have identified nine “planetary boundaries,” which, if crossed, could cause irreparable harm to the planet and the prospects for future human well-being. According to these scientists, we have already exceeded three of these important boundaries: climate change, nitrogen loadings, and the rate of biodiversity loss. The other six boundaries—ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone, aerosol loadings, freshwater use, land use changes, and chemical pollution—to varying degrees are also approaching a scale; “where abrupt global environmental change can no longer be excluded.”

> The Challenge is Getting Larger, Not Smaller:

The demands that we are placing upon the planet are growing exponentially. According to U.N. projections, world population—currently 7 billion—is likely to grow to 9 billion by 2042 and to over 10 billion by 2085. At the same time, the world's economic output continues to rise at 3-4 percent a year, putting enormous pressures on a fragile ecology and a dwindling resource base.

> “Greening” the Economy is Necessary, but Not Sufficient:

With the world economy on track to quadruple in size over the next half century, any gains we make in producing renewable energy or in conserving resources will not, in all likelihood, be enough to achieve a sustainable world. Indeed, historical data show that technological advances can accelerate the rate at which natural resources are consumed and the environment is impacted. Green technologies may help to de-link resource extraction from economic growth, but—*by themselves*—they will not ensure progress toward sustainability.





> Resource Exploitation has Propelled Human Progress:

In the past 100 years we have made major strides in improving the human condition. Average life spans have more than doubled. Food production has more than quadrupled. Living standards in many countries have increased by a factor of at least ten. Our progress has been propelled by the extraction of fossil fuels and the exploitation of natural resources, but it has taken a terrible toll on the environment, and our resource base is steadily shrinking.

> Our Very Future Depends on Resource Sufficiency:

We cannot maintain the progress we have made in eliminating poverty and eradicating hunger, unless we maintain an adequate resource base. Continued advances in human welfare will require sufficient land, water, minerals, and metals. We will also need healthy ecosystems capable of sustaining a wide range of biological diversity, including human life.

> Sustainability Requires Resource Sufficiency Evaluation:

We will never know if we have enough resources to maintain human development unless we actually evaluate our resource demands and compare them to what is available. No one would think of driving a car or flying a plane without a fuel gauge. By the same token, we cannot plan for our future without knowing whether we have enough resources to meet our projected needs. Every nation, whether its economy is developed or developing, should undertake a resource sufficiency evaluation, and the international community should provide technical support. At the same time, world leaders must undertake an *international* resource sufficiency evaluation to gauge global progress towards a sustainable world.

> Methodologies Already Exist for Doing Resource Sufficiency Evaluations:

Scientifically-based accounting methodologies, such as the ecological footprint, are already available to conduct resource sufficiency evaluations. These methodologies, and the bio-physical 'balance sheets' that are generated, will give policymakers and the public a clearer understanding of sustainability and what is needed to achieve it. *Our future depends on it.*

Resource Sufficiency Evaluation is our Road Map to a Sustainable Future.



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