

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

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## **Protecting the Environment is Our Responsibility: The Why and How**

We recently learned that President Trump is planning to cancel the Paris Agreement, and this has resulted in overreaction. According to the agreement, which was officially signed in November 2016, no signatory can undo the agreement for three years and then it wouldn't take affect for another year which would be November 2020 – at the end of Trump's term. But this doesn't make much difference as the terms of the Paris Agreement are all voluntary. The U.S. has agreed to "try to reduce" carbon dioxide emissions 26 – 28% below 2005 levels by 2025. If we don't achieve this goal, nothing happens except we can say "sorry" to the rest of the world. If our federal government takes this position, it doesn't mean we can't move forward. The state and municipal governments, NGOs, corporations and we as individuals can and must take the position to reduce emissions as much as possible.

Not only must we mitigate climate change, but we must also address three other major environmental issues. One of these issues is the consumption of the earth's natural resources. According to the Global Footprint Network, the world is consuming the natural resources much faster than the earth's regeneration of them. In fact, we are consuming the natural resources 70% faster than their generation. In other words, today we are using 1.7 earths. In order to compensate for the over-consumption of these resources, we must apply sustainability strategies to meet our needs while providing for the needs of the future generations. Some examples of strategies that can be applied are Base of the Pyramid, servicizing (converting a product business to a service), biomimicry, and systems thinking.

Another environmental issue is the quality and quantity of available water. Of all the water on this earth, only 0.01% is available fresh water and of that, 60% is directed for agricultural use, 30% for industry and 10% for human consumption. Unfortunately, this quantity of water is a constant amount while the consumption is continuing to increase as a result of a third major issue, that of population growth which also impacts climate change and resource consumption. Just in the past 80 years, the population has increased by almost six billion people and is continuing to grow at 10 million people every six weeks.

The best way, and perhaps the only way, that governments, NGOs, and corporations can take a positive role in solving these environmental issues is to adopt concepts, methodologies, strategies, whatever you want to call them, that all fall into the category of sustainability. Many organizations have people leading this effort with the title of Chief Sustainability Officer (CSO), Sustainability Director, or similar. However, this is not sufficient for an organization to become truly sustainable. One person or a department focusing on sustainability is a good start to eventually make the company sustainable, but it will take too much time. The only way to make a company, or any other organization, truly sustainable is to have all, or almost all, of the

employees understand the concept of sustainability. It must be imbedded in the culture of the company. In this manner, they can all work together to achieve this goal. And one of the side benefits is that sustainable companies are also more profitable. But how do you get your employees to understand sustainability? Either send them to classes or, better yet, conduct corporate training which is so much more cost effective.

We must also consider another approach to achieving this sustainability, and that is to do a better job in education. There are business school programs in Sustainability Management or something similar, but that is nowhere near enough. Just like businesses that need to imbed sustainability throughout the corporation, schools must do the same thing. Sustainability should not be considered a discipline like marketing, accounting, operations, or finance and have a program focusing on it, but rather it is a concept that should be imbedded in as many courses as appropriate. When teaching a course in marketing, sustainability should be covered so that one can learn the benefits of sustainability marketing. In operations courses, the students will learn the various strategies that can be incorporated in a company's operations to become sustainable. In this manner, all students completing their program in business will understand and be able to apply sustainability wherever they work and with whomever they work. They will then be able to expand the idea wherever they could have any impact.