Introduction: Sustainable Development & Responsibility

"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today" is a well-known quote with regards to responsibility and it is ostensibly attributed to the United States' 16th president, Abraham Lincoln. This statement focuses on the notion of responsibility within a perceived timeframe. According to the (Merriam-Webster, 1828) dictionary, the essential meaning of *responsibility* within the above statement's given context indicates "a duty or task that you are required or expected to do" or "something that you should do because it is morally right, legally required, etc". To fundamentally assess the notion of responsibility with regards to the relative roles of business, governments, and society in general in assuming responsibility for a more sustainable future one ought to consider the following threads of discourse. First, what is sustainability or in other words, what does a sustainable future entails? And second, why is it crucial to demand responsibility from business, governments, and society in general for a more sustainable future?

To begin with, this essay does not attempt to give a description of the historical roots behind the term *sustainability* or *sustainable development*. The use of the term sustainable development is considered as it is generally used. A solid explanation is provided by (The Brundtland Commission Report, 1987) and it establishes that sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The Brundtland Commission Report includes 2 crucial elements within its description of this phrase which are:

> The concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.
>
> (The Brundtland Commission Report, 1987)

Thus, drawing from The Brundtland Commission Report, to achieve a sustainable future there ought to be a collective commitment to acquiring fairness for all especially upcoming generations by way of reallocating already scarce resources towards poorer countries. By doing so this will help boost their development and help empower all citizens to acquire their fundamental needs to live a decent life.

Secondly, it is deemed necessary for business, governments, and society to undertake a more active role in assuming responsibility for a sustainable future because a sustainable society ought to be socially responsible, concentrating on ecological protection and dynamic balance amongst mankind and the natural system. (Du Pisani, 2006) noted that the concept of sustainable development surfaced from the situation of an increasing consciousness of a looming ecological crisis around the close of the 20th century. This ecological concern became more extreme due to a fear that economic growth may indeed result in the perils of the survival of humanity and the planet Earth (Du Pisani). Thus, if harmful practices are maintained for the purpose of economic growth without any changes, it is more than likely that the human environment and the earth's natural resources will be depleted and permanently damaged. This situation poses *societal grand challenges* for humanity. (George, et al., 2016) defines a grand challenges as "specific critical barrier(s) that, if removed, would help solve an important societal problem with a high likelihood of global impact through widespread implementation".

In the end, there are numerous benefits to creating a sustainable future. Not long ago, the United Nations declared the Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) as its primary objective for the successful attainment of a safer and more sustainable future. These sustainable development goals are conceivably the utmost comprehensive and generally accepted synopsis of societal grand challenges. (United Nations Development Programme, 2015) identifies and explains the 17 sustainable development goals that are also described as the "Global Goals" and are regarded as a worldwide call to action to eradicate poverty, help protect the environment and make for a more sustainable world for future generations. Going forward, this essay draws reference to a few of these sustainable development goals to provide perspective and a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of business, governments, and society in general in assuming responsibility for a more sustainable future.

Governments' Role & Responsibilities for a Sustainable Future

This essay will continue hereon focusing on the role of governments in assuming responsibility for a more sustainable future.

While the 1970s and 1980s experienced worldwide economic troubles and instability, sustainable environmental issues were on the rise too. (The Brundtland Commission Report, 1987) raised a fundamental subject by asking, what means are persons in the actual world to be swayed or made to play a role in this common interest? And it provided an answer which rests to a huge extent on providing "education, institutional development and law enforcement". This is where the role of governments is important as they are recognized as playing a critical role in safeguarding the environment using eco-friendly rules, regulations, and programs to help solve ecological shared problems (Mansbridge, 2014). The State ought to develop and employ laws and regulations to help ensure the stop of and discourage any inequalities that may hinder such progress. For example, corporations should not get away with the continuous exhaustion of the Amazon rainforest driven by industrial activities and large-scale agriculture because the native people living there have no real economic or political power over these large contractors and corporations (Nobre, et al., 2016).

Moreover, this notion of responsibility is undoubtedly recognised by the (United Nations Confrence on the Human Environment , 1972), which states that "responsibility for action to protect and enhance the human environment rests primarily with Governments and, in the first instance, can be exercised more effectively at the national and regional levels". It also highlights the ecological challenges in many developing countries. Within these developing, poorer countries countless of individuals and households live below the poverty line and experience a lack of the basic provisions such as food and clothing, housing, education, healthcare, and proper sanitation which are all vital. Thus, governments from these countries must take responsibility to ensure successful action is taken to successfully help their citizens in achieving a sustainable future. (Kulin & Johansson Seva, 2019) also emphasises this point with regards to governments and that they must implement policies that are economically and

environmentally secure while ensuring spending for such has the public's support. Thus, educating citizens about these policies is extremely significant to their success.

Nevertheless, many governments worldwide are making efforts towards a more sustainable future in pursing the United Nations's 17 sustainable development goals. (Rakhmawati, et al., 2020) offers the example of the Chinese government setting rules and regulations for the textile and apparel industry to enhance technology and lower energy and carbon utilization from 2009 to 2011. This rule by the Chinese government involved businesses updating their equipment to lessen resource and energy consumption. This rule meant that the businesses were creating and adding value to their consumer goods. Rakhmawati, identifies further governmental regulations geared towards business organisations being a part of a sustainable future which include but not limited to; waste reduction activities, recycling and reusing waste, green-building practices, green-purchasing, green productions, and green distribution etc. Consequently, these regulations will reflect how much impact a company or industry generate on the environment from all phases of its operations extending from raw resources to completed manufactured goods and waste disposal.

Another government that supports environmental policies and spending is the small island state of Barbados. Its government champions for those truly susceptible to climate change and promotes governments, business, and society in general to take responsibility for creating a more sustainable future (United Nations Environment Programme, 2021). Prime Minister Mia Amor Mottley of Barbados addressed the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA 76) which is the main policy-making body of the United Nations. Her passionate speech turned heads across the globe and at the UN General Assembly, as she criticised those who are to be blamed for the world's climate calamity and jeopardising the future of many countries like Barbados and other Caribbean territories. She received the title of this year's *Champion of the Earth for Policy Leadership* due to her relentless war against climate change, deforestation, and pollution. In her speech she fervently states "Our world knows not what it is gambling with, and if we don't control this fire, it will burn us down" (Mottley, 2021). In addition, the government of Barbados strongly encourages other governments in Latin America and the Caribbean to take responsibility and agree to the action plan for the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. This action plan is a policy that aims at "preventing, halting

and reversing the degradation of ecosystems on every continent and in every ocean" (United Nations Envrionment Programme , 2021). Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, Inger Anderson, has expressed her views about the Barbadian Prime Minister stating that Mia Mottley's policy achievements are a prime example of how other governments should act with regards to urgent action on environmental issues (United Nations Envrionment Programme , 2021).

The State/Government plays a significant role in promoting a sustainable future especially for emerging nations like Barbados. It is crucial for developing nations or poorer nations to create and implement sustainable strategies for economic growth and development that suit the needs of the country, rather than adhere to any specific regulatory model (United Nations Confrence on the Human Environment , 1972).

Businesses' Role & Responsibilities for a Sustainable Future

This essay will continue hereon focusing on the role of businesses in assuming responsibility for a more sustainable future.

To begin with, the focus will be placed on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). According to (Camilleri, 2017) there are many who would like businesses to push beyond "simple transparency, ethical behaviours, and stakeholder engagement" and adopt a more responsible approach in creating innovative, sustainable business models. The literature suggests that corporate social responsibility is utilized by companies because it is perceived to increase profitability and firm value, which is frequently described as "doing well by doing good" (Liang & Renneboog, 2017). It is widely believed that the corporate social responsibility debate is encompassed by an emphasis on profit, performance, and sheer economic principles (Aslaksen, et al., 2021). Corporate social responsibility is deemed an unsatisfactory approach for a sustainable future because its realms are limited to include commercial, ethical, and social responsibility (Singh, 2008) but no mention of environmentally sustainable responsibility. Thus, within the scope of corporate social responsibility there is no hint of assuming responsibility for a more sustainable future. There is only responsibility towards ensuring high quality products, fulfilling their contracts to stakeholders, and ensuring funds are allocated to some extent toward charities including sports and culture and religious etc (Camilleri, 2017).

Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility is a recent concept that has been gaining momentum as the way forward for businesses with regards to incorporating a degree of responsibility for a sustainable future. (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002) indicates that corporate sustainability and responsibility is centred on the principles of; "eco-efficiency, socio-efficiency, eco-effectiveness, sufficiency, and ecological equity". As such, corporate social responsibility is shifting towards more of a value-based method rather than the old belief of merely doing well for others will result in the company doing good financially as well as keeping positive public relations. Nevertheless, the profit motive behind these businesses still holds true but consideration is now being given towards societal and environmental matters

across the world (Camilleri, 2017). It must be noted that the literature with regards to corporate sustainability and responsibility is relatively modern.

The concept of *Social Entrepreneurship* is one more freshly developed and rather "untidy concept" with regards to guiding businesses in the direction of attainment of social purposes (Peredo & Mclean, 2006). Here the secret to a social entrepreneurship is expressed by (Pomerantz, 2003) that says:

> Involves taking a business-like, innovative approach to the mission of delivering community services. Developing new social enterprise business ventures is only one facet of social entrepreneurship. Another facet is maximizing revenue generation from programs by applying principles from for-profit business without neglecting the core mission.
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> (Pomerantz 2003)

Still, businesses are hesitant to include sustainable practices at the core of their business' strategy since they believe the costs of sustainability methods and procedures overshadow their benefits, yet academic studies and business experience points to a rather opposing view (Whelan & Fink, 2016). Today many supply chains are susceptible to natural disasters and civil unrest due to the climate change crisis, water and food scarcity, and inadequate labour conditions based on their geographical locations across the globe. For example, in 2011 Thailand experienced severe flooding which harmed 160 enterprises within the textile trade and stopped roughly 25 percent of Thailand's clothing production. As a result, global prices increased by 28%. In addition, Honda, Toyota, and Nissan carmakers experienced disruption to their production (BBC News , 2011).

At the conference in Rio de Janeiro, world leaders acknowledged the need to change "unsustainable patterns of consumption and production" and agreed that they must all strive to meet clear objectives with regards to developing and enforcing domestic policy frameworks. A 10-year policy framework was commissioned to bring about a shift towards sustainable

consumption and production. Such domestic policy frameworks are to provide for the following activities (United Nations General Assembly on Sustainable Development, 1992): foster better proficiency in the utilisation of energy and resources, reduce wastage, support consumers in making environmentally sound purchasing decisions, exerting leadership by way of government purchasing, shifting towards environmentally sound pricing, and strengthening values that support sustainable consumption.

For sustainable consumption to be possible, first there ought to be sustainable production. Sustainable production is the way forward to a sustainable future and it is founded on a go-green method (Yildirim, 2020). That is, an approach that is based on the protection of the natural world when goods and services are being produced to satisfy the wants and needs of households and individuals (Yildirim, 2020). This ensures that customers are provided with the opportunity to purchase and utilise these environmentally friendly goods and services effortlessly which ultimately enables sustainable consumption. Furthermore, sustainable production and going green ensures waste reduction, inhibits pollution, and promotes instruments for green management to guarantee environmental welfare. This in due course can boost significant resource efficiency and would lower expenditures related to the natural environment (Alam & Islam, 2021).

Businesses that invest in sustainability and accept responsibility for a more sustainable future are effectively managing risk and driving innovation too. For example, the company Nike included sustainability practices into its innovation process and created the Flyknit line which achieved over $30 billion in revenue for the financial year 2015 (Fink, 2016). The Sustainability and Innovation Case Study of the company Nike by Fink evaluated impacts of the Flyknit shoe line and observed that while creating “the most ground-breaking sneaker innovation in over 40 years” the company was able to reduce the number of materials used and lessened waste material by 80%. Therefore, businesses like Nike company, that engage in sustainable production and practices are accepting responsibility for creating a more sustainable future. They are playing an active role in keeping with the 12th sustainable development goal to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns by 2030 (United Nations Development Programme, 2015).

Consumers' Role & Responsibilities

This essay will continue hereon focusing on the role of consumers and/or society in general in assuming responsibility for a more sustainable future.

Sustainable consumption, fashioned by the United Nations during their Rio de Janeiro Conference for Environment and Development, particularly in The Agenda 21 "Changing Consumption Patterns" (United Nations General Assembly on Sustainable Development, 1992). However, (Hertwich & Katzmayr, 2004) offers a practical definition of sustainable consumption patterns as "patterns of consumption that satisfy basic needs, offer humans the freedom to realise themselves, and are replicable across the whole globe without compromising the Earth's carrying capacity". Consumers and society in general need to be mindful with regards to sustainability and the needs of future generations because of the escalating conservation problem to which they destructively contribute towards. Society must alter their consumption and production patterns to succeed at sustainable development and to have a sustainable future and that is precisely the reason why it is regarded as an exceedingly critical change movement (Yildirim, 2020). Yildirim additionally pointed out that these consumption patterns and production practices directly affect the natural environment and result in changes in global warming, loss of biodiversity, and increasing volumes of waste.

(Hertwich & Katzmayr, 2004) mentioned the consumption patterns in both developed countries and developing countries. Hertwich & Katzmayr, indicated that many developed countries are not sustainable for future generations since they require an excessive number of resources, generate a lot of carbon emissions, and create societal shocks in poorer countries that are deplorable. Equally, a lot of these poorer countries have consumption patterns that are not sustainable as well but for quite different reasons in comparison to the developed countries. It was also reported that these consumption patterns in poorer countries are not sustainable for future generations because consumption is centred on misuse of resources which allows for damaging impacts on the environment such as soil erosion and deforestation.

Today, information regarding the progress of the 12th sustainable development goal is limited but the given data already attained does not sit well with achieving this 2030 Agenda. The statistical data offered here were obtained from the United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs. Statistics in 2016 indicates that roughly fourteen percent of food generated worldwide was lost before reaching retail stores. There are disparities in the estimates across regions raging from 20.7 percent in Central and Southern Asia to 5.8 percent in New Zealand and Australia. Emissions and resources use keep rising as data suggests from 2000 to 2017 the global 'material footprint' increased by seventy percent. Statistics show that roughly five trillion onetime-use plastic bags are tossed away each year by consumers and society in general (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). Such statistical information recorded by the UN clearly shows the pressing need for individuals and households to take responsibility and make a change in their consumption patterns.

Moreover, in 2020 an aggregate of seven-hundred policies and programs in efforts to achieve sustainable consumption and production patterns were reported from 83 countries and the European Union (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021). But is this sufficient to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns? Is it adequate for consumers and society in assuming their responsibility for a sustainable future? (The Story of Stuff, 2007) is a short film that is quite noteworthy in describing over-consumption patterns and unsustainable production practices. It highlights environmental and social concerns and calls for society to work together to create a more sustainable future.

In the end, consumers, and society has a critical role to play in combating environmental issues and achieving a sustainable future. Society's habitual over-consumption, materialistic behaviours and wastage patterns are negatively impacting the environment we call our home. Education is vital in this journey to ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns outlined by the UN 2030 agenda goals. Changing consumption patterns in the short-term and long-term requires support from governments, businesses etc. and consumers drive towards being green consumers increases when they become well-informed and educated (Yildirim, 2020).

Conclusion

It is now January 2022; our global society is entering the third year of the Covid-19 Pandemic and this crisis continues to demonstrate cataclysmic impacts on individuals' lives and on their livelihoods by extent. This also impacts the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and therefore, our aim towards a more sustainable future is affected. According to the 2021 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report (United Nations, 2021), decades of progress have been "haltered or reversed" due to the coronavirus pandemic. There are specific areas that need urgent focus and coordinated efforts by business, governments, and society in general will help in the world's rebuilding to achieve the SDGs. Despite the pandemic, the climate change crisis, and environmental concerns continue to ravish the most vulnerable countries like the underdeveloped, poorer countries and Small Island Developing States. The UN 2021 Sustainable Development Goals Report noted that even though the temporary lockdowns, suspended travelling and other Covid-19 response measures were applied, that major greenhouse gases continued to increase. This report indicated that the world is "woefully offtrack" in meeting its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals unless business, governments, and society in general take heed to their actions and the crucial consequences for future generations. "The Sustainable Development Goals are more important now than ever. Now is the time to secure the well-being of people, economies, societies, and our planet," expressed the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres (United Nations, 2021). One thing is for sure, the responsibility for a more sustainable future lies with all of us- individuals, households, companies, governments, regulators, civil societies, and society in general.