

The Psychology of Sustainability: Understanding and Developing a Sustainable Lifestyle

AGBOOLA, Abolade Gloria

Faculty of Arts and Education

Department of Arts and Social Sciences

Lead City University, Ibadan, Nigeria

gloriaagboola2016@gmail.com

+234 8182940368

Abstract

One of the components of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is: “Good Health and Well Being”, which is goal number 3. In a world facing environmental disaster and hazards threatening human and other life forms, urgent collective action is needed to protect the planet and its biodiversity. Sustainable development, in its real terms, entails meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Psychology of Sustainability, therefore, explores what motivates individuals to take sustainable action in their daily lives, as well as, how this action influences their well-being and connection with their environment. This study focuses on the psychology of sustainability and the need for every individual to understand why it is vital to live a sustainable lifestyle and develop the habit of maintaining a sustainable lifestyle. It uses the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model, to explain what actions are successful when it comes to getting more involved with sustainable efforts. This study also identifies two decision making centers that govern our choices, which are the rule based and the associative, and how they both influence making sustainable choices. Furthermore, it explains some of the ways by which sustainable lifestyle can be promoted at the local, national and global levels.

Keywords: Sustainable development, psychology of sustainability, sustainable lifestyle

Introduction

Sustainability is a vital phenomenon when it comes to looking into the necessity of fulfilling the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future generations, while ensuring a balance between economic growth, environmental care and social well-being. There are different categories of sustainability, these include: Economic, Social and Environmental Sustainability.

Economic sustainability refers to the ability of any organisation to manage its resources and responsibly generate profit in its long term. For example, through increasing package recycling, promoting the use of recycled materials and responsible consumption awareness campaign.

Social sustainability has the goal of strengthening the cohesion and stability of specific social groups.

For instance, offering decent housing – through self – building programs and loans with favorable access conditions, especially to those most in need.

Environmental sustainability focuses on the conservation of biodiversity without foregoing economic and social progress. The foundations of environmental sustainability are: safeguarding water, saving energy, reducing waste, using recyclable packaging, limiting or eliminating the use of plastics, using sustainable transport, reusing paper and protecting flora(plants) and fauna (animals).

Psychology of sustainability explores what motivates individuals to take sustainable actions in their daily lives as well as how these actions influence their wellbeing and connection with their environment.

Many of the SDGs can be connected to both the science and profession of psychology- these include ending poverty, working towards zero hunger improving good health and wellbeing, ensuring quality education, improving gender quality, providing decent work opportunities, developing sustainable cities and communities, building peace and strengthening partnerships to achieve the goals.

Sustainable lifestyle, according to Wikipedia, is a form of lifestyle that attempts to reduce the use of Earth's natural resources by an individual or society. It is referred to as “zero wastage living” or “net zero living”.

Agboola (2023) furthermore, describes sustainable lifestyle as a form of lifestyle, that has an answer for the question which states that- *“for every resource one makes use of per time, what portion of it is being restored back and how low or high is the percentage of waste? putting into consideration the future generation.*

As our world continues to face more and more environmental disasters, such as food shortage, drought, famine, flooding, tropical storms, earthquake, pollution to mention but a few, this paper is trying to sensitize everyone that, right there in our own niche, we can start taking worthwhile steps to help save our immediate environment and the world at large, through maintaining a sustainable lifestyle. Under the theory of planned behaviour and understanding the thought process behind a decision, this paper is going to answer the questions of: why the need for every individual to maintain a sustainable lifestyle, how can one develop the habit of maintaining a sustainable lifestyle together with, what drives these motives and decisions and how as an individual, one can influence making sustainable choices.

The Scope of Psychology of Sustainability

The psychology of sustainability often looks at how and why people choose a sustainable lifestyle and what drives these motives and decisions. It deals with how and why people make sustainable choices, while also looking at the impact sustainable decisions have on peoples' mental health and wellbeing (APA, 2011). It analyzes what influences people's decisions when it comes to living sustainably. Included under this umbrella of study, is environmental psychology, conservation psychology, socio-physical psychology and other research that primarily focuses on the relationship between humans and

their environment. A key point to make is the difference between the psychology of sustainability and sustainable development. Sustainable development is the actual act of living sustainably or supporting a sustainable infrastructure through action. These two are often closely studied together and can directly impact one another, but they do have two different goals. Psychology of sustainability examines the motivation to live a sustainable lifestyle while sustainable development's goal is to develop more infrastructures that allow individuals to live a more environmentally friendly and sustainable lifestyle. Another closely related topic is environmental psychology, which looks at how one interacts with their own environment in general. Very often these three topics are closely studied together so it's important to recognize the distinction between the three.

The psychology of sustainability is a relatively new field within psychology and has many components of past fields that heavily influence or play a role in newer discoveries. As I walk through a brief history, you'll recognize other psychological teachings such as behaviorism, environmental psychology, and psychoanalysis. Early psychology of sustainability studies looked at the relationship between us and our environment, and more specifically, how this influenced our behaviors. B. F. Skinner, a behavioural psychologist, was a large contributor to starting the field in the early 80s. Through his research into how the environment impacts our behavior, he found the importance of living more sustainably. He gave a speech in 1982 titled "Why Are We Not Acting to Save the World?" which dived into the importance of changing our behavior to be more sustainable but also, the impact a sustainable lifestyle can have on us (Scott and Kroger, n.d.). Skinner's thoughts on operant conditioning regarding how all of our habits are essentially caused by positive or negative reinforcement play a role in how he believed that leaving a positive impact on the environment encourages more positive decisions as far as sustainability and wellbeing in our overall lives. For example, someone who is going to make a decision to opt-out of plastic bag is going to then feel better about that decision and later that day, when they are given the choice between a plant based or red meat option, they will be more inclined to choose the plant based choice because they remember the feeling that they created for themselves based on their earlier decision.

Another notable past study that has impacted and helped shape the field of the psychology of sustainability is Freud's theory on psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is defined as "a system of psychological theory and therapy which aims to treat mental disorders by investigating the interaction of conscious and unconscious elements in the mind and bringing repressed fears and conflicts into the conscious mind by techniques such as dream interpretation and free association." (Oxford Languages, 2021). As mentioned, the psychology of sustainability often looks at how and why people choose a sustainable lifestyle and what drives these motives and decisions. The psychology of sustainability must ask questions such as: Do we make decisions that are beneficial or detrimental to the environment? Are we consciously making these choices or are there other motives and drives influencing our decision? The concept that our conscious and unconscious can make separate decisions is like Freud's theory of

psychoanalysis. By investigating our unconscious decisions, psychologists can gain a better understanding of what motivates a person to make a decision that is beneficial for the environment. There are studies that have been conducted that look at the influences behind a person's decision to make a sustainable choice, which I will get more into as I progress. Furthermore, a study conducted by Annamarie Di Fabio in 2017, looked at the wellbeing of individuals when they were placed in a space where there is sustainable development (Di Fabio et al, 2017b). In the study, Di Fabio defines wellbeing as “a state of complete physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” and what she found was a positive correlation between people's wellbeing and them being placed in an environment that is focused around sustainable development (Di Fabio et al, 2017b). This demonstrates how there is benefit in being a more inclusive and positive community rather than focusing on the absence of things that are negative and harmful. It creates a space that is both ecologically sustainable as well as creates opportunity for future economic wellbeing. This is also an example of environmental psychology, because it is looking at the impact one's environment has on us.

Another piece of the psychology of sustainability that is important to note is Division 34, also known as The Society for Environmental, Population, and Conservation Psychology (SEPCP). SEPCP was a task force created by the APA (American Psychological Association) to help tackle climate change and other environmental issues (APA,2011). SEPCP was formed by merging two previously made organizations within the APA. Once they merged, they set clear goals they wish to accomplish within psychology that could help create a positive impact on the earth. This organization sorting started around 2008 which is about the time that one could consider the psychology of sustainability a legitimate field of study within psychology. The psychology of sustainability has made several impacts within the world of psychology. Another notable contribution that stemmed from the psychology of sustainability as well as environmental psychology is eco-psychology. Eco-psychology looks at humans' wellbeing, health, and identity when it comes to their relationship with the natural world and physical environment (APA, 2011). This has led the world to gain a better understanding of certain experiences within nature as well as incorporate outdoor activities within counseling and prevent burnout regarding environmental issues. I think it's important to highlight this connection because this is a way the psychology of sustainability has led to something that can directly help and improve mental health. It also provides a direct avenue for people to interact with their natural surroundings while understanding the benefit this could put on themselves as well as the earth around them. While the history of the psychology of sustainability has been relatively new, there has been a lot gained and accomplished in its short time. According to the APA, Division 34 has set out to offer contributions to global climate change and other worldly issues that they may be able to offer some help and assistance (2010). These are the types of contributions the psychology of sustainability makes.

Many countries across the world have already implemented various changes based on findings within the psychology of sustainability. For example, Iceland has reached 100% renewable energy and other countries choosing to ban single use plastic by starting with plastic bags has led to a large decrease

across household's single use plastic usage (Kroposki et al., 2017). I firmly believe that it could be the key to encouraging sustainable actions in our daily lives at a global level.

The Theory of Decision Making

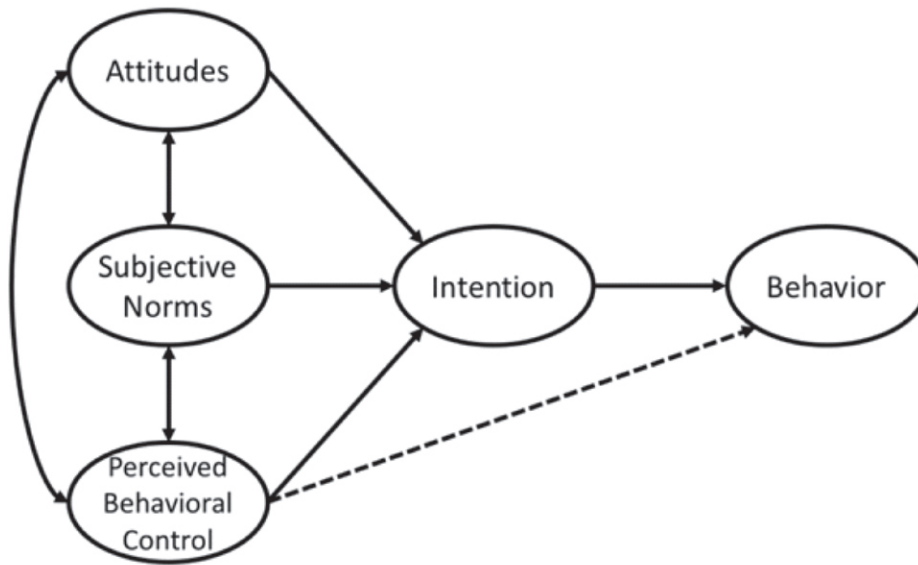
Everyone is given a series of choices every day. From what to wear, what to eat, what route to take, or who to talk to. Free will exists in our everyday lives which is something not enough people recognize. So, what is making these choices, our conscious or subconscious? According to a short book titled *The Psychology of Sustainability* there are two decision making centers that govern our choices: the rule-based and the associative (Manning, 2009). The rule-based looks at a dilemma from many angles, assesses the situation, and forms a logical answer by taking their time to draw a conclusion. Whereas the associative, makes snap decisions based on a gut-feeling or prior notions. Potentially, the key to encouraging a more sustainable lifestyle lies within these centers. If a sustainable choice is laid out in front of you, but the unsustainable option is more appealing to the associative decision maker, then you will likely choose that option. An example of what this looks like is given the choice between biking or driving to work, many people choose driving. Our rule-based center recognizes that biking to work would be beneficial for our body because it would give us a chance to exercise. It also would acknowledge that we would be emitting less CO₂ into the environment and would therefore be good for the environment (Manning, 2009). Finally, our rule-based center could see that biking would avoid traffic, which would avoid stress and offer a more peaceful start to the morning. However, our associative center would have a large role in our final decision because our associative center wouldn't want a longer commute that may come because of biking, it wouldn't want to show up to work sweaty with helmet hair, and it may not be comfortable doing something different than the office norm. This is just one example of ways that the associative and rule-based decision-making centers work to make our day-to-day decisions, but it's vital to mention that some decisions are out of our control. In this example of biking to work, some communities are not equipped with biking trails that could connect one person from their home to their work. Some aspects of our decisions are made for us without us always realizing or acknowledging them. This is discussed more in depth in regard to the theory of planned behavior. If our daily choices could find a way to appeal to both the rule-based and associative, people would be more inclined to exercise their free will in a way that benefits themselves, the environment, and their community. This could look like a community center offering an extra 5 cents back for every plastic bottle you bring in, so you are more inclined to want to properly recycle and maybe even bike over to the community center to drop off your plastic bottles. This choice would appeal to both the associative and rule-based, thereby urging each individual to genuinely want to make that sustainable decision. It is important to point out that even with very present and easily accessible sustainable choices, people may still show no interest in them. Some people do not care about the environment or their exercise levels or even their community. So then the bigger question is how does one invoke a change of mindset and

interest in others? One can't just force what they are passionate about onto another person. Each individual is entitled to their own likes and dislikes. Therefore, a community that works together to create change as a whole would set a new standard for what society is focused on or supposed to look like.

The Theory of Planned Behavior

Another theory that coincides with and further explains how people are influenced on their decisions is the theory of planned behavior (TPB). The TPB explains what influences lead to a person deciding such as social norms, personal attitude towards a behavior, and their perceived control over a situation (LaMorte, 2019). These factors could also play a role in getting people to choose more sustainable options day-to-day. An example of this theory in action can look like this: you want to buy a new phone case because your friend at work has a biodegradable one that you really liked. If the social norm feels like this is what is the most common case to get, you will feel more inclined to make that switch. If you hear about good protection ratings on the case, plus it is comfortable in your hand, you will be more likely to buy it. Finally, if you personally like the look, style, and feel of the case, you will be even more inclined to switch to that case. However, if even one of those factors had a more negative connotation to your thought process on getting the new case, it could very likely hold you back. That is why sustainable products, as they become more available, must appeal to multiple aspects of the consumer to improve their ratings, support, and likelihood of gaining a larger following. This is perhaps one of the areas that the eco-friendly products seem like they are currently failing the consumer. Many people do not want to make the switch to a sustainable option due to the high upfront costs, lack of knowledge of a product, or the uncomfortable feeling of switching to something outside of their comfort zone. Similar to how our decision-making centers work, there is then a better chance of getting more people on board with sustainable products and efforts if the product or effort appeals to social norms, their perceived control, and their personal attitudes or beliefs.

Here is an image of the Theory of Planned Behavior Model



Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The TPB can be applied to how someone could assume a person will behave when it comes to environmental action in their lives. However, there are some drawbacks to this model. While the TPB tracks the influences behind a decision to the person's intention, there is not a clear line to that intention always behind their behavior or action. Decisions usually are not a linear thought process and there are many other outside factors that could affect it such as environmental or economic impacts (LaMorte, 2019). Someone may intend to live a more sustainable lifestyle, but they are unable to due to higher prices that often come with certain sustainable choices. Furthermore, removing the decision all together would fast track this process and leave people with no choice at all. Enacting large policy changes that urge individuals into living a more environmentally sustainable lifestyle has proven to be one of the easiest ways to invoke change. By influencing individuals' choices, it changes the supply and demand of large corporations to be more centered around sustainable and environmental action to better appeal to the consumers. Another finding within the field of the psychology of sustainability described in Manning's book, is that large policy changes have been the best way to affect sustainable change (2009). For example, there are many countries that have set out to achieve sustainable goals years ago and are already meeting these goals. Countries such as Iceland have reached 100% renewable energy and other countries choosing to ban single use plastic by starting with plastic bags has led to a large decrease across household's single use plastic usage (Kroposki et al., 2017). These sort of policy changes essentially remove the decision-making process altogether and leave the consumer with one clear choice that becomes second nature over time and more of an associative or unconscious decision. The argument then is, does this remove free will? As I talk about promoting and supporting a sustainable society rather than avoiding bad behaviors and punishing those who don't do zero waste perfectly, people must still be allowed freedom of choice. The difference is, what if the choices were

both sustainable but one just fits a certain individual's lifestyle better than the other. If sustainability became the new normal, large corporations would be forced to comply with new consumer habits. One way to assess the sort of corporation people want to support would be through a rating or grading system.

An article published in 2018 by Lyon et al. looked at the impact of some of the most major companies globally and their impact on the environment. They created a rating system to assess how well or how poorly a company is doing based on a variety of factors such as “where is their energy coming from” or “how much plastic is used to ship this product” and more environmentally relevant questions and content. This study shows that the rating system they created should be used more internationally and for all companies (Lyon et al., 2018). Essentially what this could mean is, instead of a restaurant receiving just a grade on their quality of meat or cleanliness, they will also receive a mark for their sustainable efforts. While all of this sounds relatively about sustainable development, this is where the psychological piece would play in. Like how people may not want to eat at an unclean restaurant that received poor marks, this sustainable rating system could also help influence both their rule-based, and associative decision-making centers. It could become part of the new norm in decision making. Another influence on our decisions is self-discipline. If everyone can hold themselves accountable to follow through on our intentions, overtime, our actions will naturally follow. Many nutritionists have found that making healthy food choices leads to individuals making healthy lifestyle choices as well. This can look like taking the stairs instead of the elevator or making time to go for a daily walk (Wahl, et al., 2017). This shows how one decision can lead to a series of similar choices. Therefore, this concept could also be applied to making sustainable decisions. If someone decides to switch to using solid shampoo bars as opposed to plastic bottled hair products, they might be more inspired to then also switch to using reusable zip lock bags as opposed to single use ones. The overall notion is this, if a person makes what they consider to be a “good” decision, they won't want to “cancel” that out in their mind with a bad decision. It can lead to multiple actions overtime that create a lifestyle change, but it really begins with just one choice.

The Necessity of Maintaining a Sustainable Lifestyle

Sustainable living plays a lot of roles in helping to protect the environment and reduce wastefulness. When we live sustainably, we are directly or indirectly saving the environment and using our resources efficiently. Some reasons why sustainable living is important are discussed below:

1. Improves our mental health:

World Health Organization (WHO), describes mental health as a state of wellbeing in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make contribution to his or her community.

Sustainable living improves mindfulness. As we examine the environmental impact of our daily

activities, we become more aware of the influence our actions have on our mood and emotions.

(Lister et.al,2021) posit that the natural environment is considered as one of the key concerns of mental health. Also, since mental health can affect mental wellbeing of individuals, either positively or negatively and vice versa, the effects of changing paradigms, including job insecurity, economic uncertainty, volatile and extreme weather patterns, and displacements, are the triggering factors in mental health deterioration. Similarly, having a goal to protect the Earth can boost your confidence and self-worth as one joins the world to achieve an important purpose. Spreading awareness about the environment and adopting sustainable practices will give one a sense of accomplishment. This in turn, makes one to become part of an environmentally conscious community, which provides social support. Furthermore, this gives one a more positive outlook on life and reduces depression symptoms.

Our physical health is also improved upon when we practice sustainable living. For instance, reducing your carbon print by cycling to work or trekking or taking public transport instead of one's personal car can relieve stress, improve one's mood and lead to better sleep quality. Furthermore, when we grow our own food, like practicing farming or gardening in our home environment, we tend to be involved in physical activities such as shoveling, hoeing and weeding. This could help to increase the production of serotonin, which boosts one's mood and it is also a neurotransmitter that is targeted by antidepressants.

When our environment is unsafe, this results to poor mental health and wellbeing. Environmental problems such as: air pollution, for instance, poses a threat to our lungs and heart, but there is a growing link between some air pollutants and mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, dementia and even suicide. According to a recent London- based research, the risk is particularly high among young people in urban areas, with children three to four times more likely to develop depression by age 18 if they were exposed to dirty air at age 12.

A study by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, found a link between high traffic related air pollution and children's anxiety. Lead, a heavy metal, which is also one of the effluents that cause pollution, negatively affects the nervous system. Low levels of lead in the blood may be associated with behavioral difficulties and learning outcomes in children. Eating Sustainably also has a gross effect on our mental health. What we put in our bodies in form of food has a direct effect on how it functions both mentally and physically. Nutritional Psychiatry focuses on one's diet on mental health, and researchers have found out that the more processed a diet is, the more those who consume it are at risk of depression and anxiety and promote cancerous tendencies in the body. Therefore, a sustainable diet is one with less meat and dairy in it. For instance, the Mediterranean diet is not only sustainable, but has been linked to reducing the effects and symptoms of depression. (Shafiei et al.,2019). The diet comprises mainly of fruits, vegetables and grains, with meat and sweets eaten less often. This form of diet has been associated with increased reported happiness and

higher levels of mental health and wellbeing. (Emerson and Carbert, 2019). Deficiency of vitamins e.g vitamin B12, embedded in sources of food such as vegetables and fruits help to combat mental health conditions such as fatigue, lethargy, depression, poor memory is associated with mania and psychosis. (Smith et al.,2018; Tangney et al., 2011).

2. Improves Air Quality

When the people living in a community practice sustainable lifestyle, they help to improve the environmental quality. Through this, the carbon footprint is reduced, thus reducing air pollution. Air pollution is a cause of disease for millions around the world, therefore urgent action is required to tackle the burden of its impact. Hence, the need for sustainable living. The main pollutants are sourced from fossil fuel combustion for transport, industry, agriculture and cooking stoves. The high air pollution that we live with today is another demonstration of how our unsustainable lifestyles are one of the key challenges that needs to be overcome to create a more just and live able world, which is the goal of the SDGs. According to WHO, 91% of the world's population live in locations where pollution levels exceed WHO guidelines. Furthermore, air pollution kills around 6.7 million people per year mainly through respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and this has significant impacts on mental health.

Air pollution can damage crops and trees in a variety of ways. Ground-level ozone can lead to reductions in agricultural crop and commercial forest yields, reduced growth and survivability of tree seedlings, and increased plant susceptibility to disease, pests and other environmental stresses, such as harsh weather conditions. The unabated combustion of coal and oil in power plants, industrial facilities and vehicles is the main cause of the ambient/outdoor pollution linked to around 3 million premature deaths each year. (IEA, 2016; Landrigan et al .,2017).

3. Conserves Natural Resources

The earth has limited resources. Natural resources can be categorized into renewable and non – renewable resources. Every time light is turned on, for instance, something is powering it. Conserving these natural resources is important for helping future generations meet their needs. This also includes our usage of water, trees and food supply. Having sustainable practices for our natural resources will keep them around for our needs and needs of the future. Also, natural resources are important material basis for a stable economy and social development. Conserving this energy is a common way to go green at home. Conserving these natural resources is important for helping future generations meet their needs. This also includes how we use water, trees and our food supply. Having sustainable practices for our natural resources will keep them around for our needs and needs of the future.

4. Improves Community Health

The quality of our environment affects our health. Individuals taking steps for sustainability can help reduce the potential toxicity of the environment. A community taking social action can also help by introducing sustainable policy in government. Simply put, a sustainably conscious community can directly affect the health of a community. Cleaner air, less waste and less pollution will help foster a healthier community.

5. Prepares For Growth

A sustainability minded community is better prepared for growth. This is true for practically any type of community. A business practicing sustainability will save money, helping them to hire more employees and grow. A city practicing sustainability will have cleaner air and more natural resources available for a growing population. They will also have career opportunities in growing natural energy fields. Conserving and sustaining our limited resources helps us prepare for our growing needs as populations rise. Using what we have efficiently, and finding new ways to power our lives will help us be prepared.

6. Maintains Resources For Future Generations

Perhaps the most important reason why sustainable living is important is so the world is made habitable for future generations. Humans are one of the leading factors of climate change. Our plastic production and energy use of fossil fuels are just the tip of the iceberg. Burning through all our fuel, food and water while destroying the environment might be okay, if no one else was coming after us. However, future generations of life ought to be considered. Making sure the air is clean and there are enough resources is our responsibility to future generations. Making a conscious effort to live sustainably helps ensure that there will be enough to meet their needs. That means having a low environmental impact and focusing on sustainable development.

7. Slows down Climate Change

The environmental impact of sustainable living can help slow down climate change. *The scientific community generally agrees that we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050 in order to stay below an average temperature rise of 2°C. Your individual sustainable life choices can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. On a larger scale, your community action can help influence sustainable policy.

8. Assists Economic Development

Sustainable living offers an economic opportunity to communities. If the problem is energy efficiency, there are a number of sustainable ways to solve that. Implementing renewable energy

sources into a community expands the economy, can help lower costs long term, and can offer jobs in the short term.

Finding sustainable solutions to our limited resources often results an improved economy. *For example, if a company decides to come up with a creative solution for their waste management, that could result in a lot of positives. That could create a new position and therefore jobs. They could save money. That could lead to increased wages or lower prices. It could also lead to an improved reputation, which could lead to new customers who value sustainability. If those principles applied to businesses throughout a community, you would find an improved environment and economy.

Some examples of charity organizations in Nigeria that help to promote sustainability include:

- i. Lagos Food Bank Initiative-** It was founded in 2015 by Michael Sunbola to fight hunger, reduce food waste and solve the problem of malnutrition through targeted programs in Nigeria. Today, the charity focuses on making food more sustainable through livestock and crop farming initiatives, alongside their food bank system. They provide low-income communities across Nigeria with basic food and self-care items through their Temporary Food Assistance Program. They also run numerous programs to help individuals find low-skilled jobs and teach them how to start small farms in cities through training initiatives and the provision of essential tools. In addition, they enhance the nutritional intake of pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, and their infants, as well as assisting those with diet-related diseases such as diabetes.
- ii. Amaudo Foundation:** It was founded in 1989 by Rosalind Colwill in response to growing numbers of mentally ill people roaming the streets of southeast Nigeria. In the year 2000, the foundation was later established in the U.K. BY Kate Lumley to support the work of Amaudo Itumbauzo. Together Amaudo work to create affordable, accessible and sustainable solutions for people experiencing mental health problems or learning disabilities in Nigeria.
- iii. TASTE Nigeria** – was founded in the year 2000 by Ben Udejifo to encourage the spread of sustainable technology in Nigeria. Today the charity works to support disadvantaged communities in Nigeria by providing safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. They search for potential water locations, build sanitation systems for communities, and drill boreholes to get clean drinking water. They also visit schools to talk to children about their work and teach them how important it is to follow hygiene rules.

9. Saves Money

Even if some people (rather selfishly) don't care about environmental sustainability, we all surely care about our bank balance. So the good news is that leading a more sustainable lifestyle is good for your wallet as well as for the planet.

Here are some ways in which sustainable habits can save you money.

- a. You'll get permanently lower utility bills when you reduce your energy consumption and water usage.

- b. Or, you could eliminate your bills entirely by using renewable energy sources such as solar panels in your home.
- b. Pay less for groceries when you eliminate food waste and only buy what you need. Shop at local farmers' markets to buy cheaper, healthier food without disposable packaging,
- c. You'll also pay less at the fuel pump by switching to more fuel-efficient or even electric cars, or using public transportation.
- d. The many health benefits of sustainable living will result in lower medical costs for you and your family.

UNEP'S Perspective on Sustainability

According to United Nations Environment Program UN EP, sustainable living means understanding how our lifestyle choices impact the world around us and finding ways for everyone to live better and lighter. Applying a 'people lens' to sustainability is new, timely and opportunities are great. Sustainable living and lifestyles for the first time appear in the Sustainable Development Goals (4 Education and 12.8 Responsible Consumption). UN Environment Program is at the forefront of looking into what sustainable lifestyles are and how decision-making can be better harnessed for sustainability. How can governments and business better support and measure change?

Most people do not wake up with the intention to harm the environment - nor to help it. People get up and live their lives and strive for aspirations. The amount of *stuff* people has in many parts of the world has shot up, while in other areas, many struggle to meet basic needs. Our future now depends on our behavior and how we choose to live, work and play as global consumers – how we run our homes, what food we eat, how we get around, how we relax, what we buy and how we care for our planet.

People do not change behavior based on what they *should do*. They do not respond to *data and statistics*, nor to *negative future scenarios*. People act to fulfill their needs and aspirations. They make decisions based on price, accessibility, effectiveness and additional criteria like well-being or trends. Sustainability is not the defining criteria. Even the people who want to live more sustainably often lack information and access to affordable and desirable products and services. This underscores that beyond people, it is up to governments and business (who are also consumers!) to provide more information and support positive behavior change, and to support and develop new business models to make sustainable living a default option.

Some Ways of Maintaining a Sustainable Lifestyle.

1. Drink tap water/Avoid single-use water bottles

When you choose to drink tap water, you are not only avoiding the plastic waste caused by single-use bottles. You also conserve the energy that would be used to produce plastic, fill the bottles, and

transport them. You can also improve the quality of your tap water by investing in a filtration system (find the right water filter for your needs using this guide.)

2. Reduce your consumption of meat

Factory farmed animal protein has a higher carbon footprint than many other food options; is responsible for the pollution of groundwater, air, and soil; and consumes an extraordinary amount of energy and water. While some people may take this as a sign to remove animal-based products from their diet entirely, it is unrealistic to expect that all North Americans have the ability—or the desire—to do so.

If you're considering plant-based meat substitutes keep in mind that some may end up being more harmful to the environment than you might think. With that all being said, the data supports at least a reduction of land-based meat consumption.

The average American consumes around 274 pounds of meat per year, and Canadians approximately 148 pounds. For Americans, this represents more than twice the recommended daily intake of total protein, so reducing meat consumption is a first step.

3. Choose conscious consumption of other animal-based products

In addition to meat, land animals provide a variety of delicious and nutritious food products including milk, butter, cheese, and eggs. It is important to also consider the impact of these dietary choices and to consume them more consciously. There are many ways to increase the flavor of a meal without having a large environmental impact.

For example, according to a study conducted by Oceana, the carbon emissions from the production of cheese are almost twice as high as wild seafood. Again, our suggestion is not to completely abstain from eating these items; rather, we encourage you to think about ways to reduce the overall carbon footprint of your diet through conscious consumption.

Unless drastic changes are made, our global food system will continue to be responsible for at least a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions.

4. Cook more at home to reduce food waste

During the pandemic, a record number of families began cooking at home more frequently. There are several health benefits to cooking your own meals, but did you know it can also be the eco-friendlier choice? When you cook your own meals, not only can you choose where and how your ingredients were sourced but you can also control things like packaging, plastic waste, and overall reduction of the over 168 million tons of food waste produced in North America annually.

You might even invest in an at-home composting system or choose to use your discarded veggie ends to make a nice broth. When cooking at home, the opportunities for eco-friendly innovation are endless!

5. Bring reusable bags to the store/reduce the amount of plastic while shopping

Worldwide, a trillion single-use plastic bags are used each year, with only a small fraction being recycled and the majority ending up in the landfill or our ocean. A simple way to avoid contributing to this number is to bring your own bags to the store.

If you're someone who likes keeping your produce together, you can use reusable canvas or mesh produce bags, like these options from Net Zero Company. However, don't make the mistake of purchasing an unnecessary amount of canvas bags, as they too have their own carbon footprint.

Your best bet is to invest in a couple of high-quality bags that will meet your average needs and choose paper instead of plastic bags if you ever need additional bags.

6. Buy less, consume less, throw away less

Whether it's food, drinks, clothing, or other items, we could all stand to slow down our purchasing habits. While shopping, ask yourself *“Is this necessary? Does this have a unique purpose in my life? Can I see myself using this item?”* Incredibly, stopping to ask yourself these simple questions before making a purchase can have a huge impact on the pure amount of stuff that you collect.

Are you a recovering shopaholic looking to live an eco-friendlier life? Consider the items that can be mended, repurposed, or recycled that you would otherwise just throw away. When you're considering throwing out an item, remember that you're also throwing away the energy and resources that went into making it originally.

7. Shop seasonally and regionally, when possible

Recent data suggests that incorporating seasonal foods into your diet can support your health and the health of the planet. This may refer to global seasonality—where food is produced in-season but consumed elsewhere in the world—or local seasonality—where the food is harvested and consumed in the same location during the natural growing season.

Not all foods are available regionally, so the decision between “locally” and “globally” seasonal food may be dictated by where you live and your access to seasonal options.

In short, when looking to shop “seasonally”, consider when and where your food is being harvested and how it ends up in your local grocery store.

8. Prioritize alternative methods of consumption

In a Capitalistic society, it can be easy to forget the different methods of exchange that exist in communities all around the world. Don't be afraid to explore alternative options including thrifting, swapping, or bartering. In fact, there are several Facebook groups dedicated to “Buy Nothing” communities in which people can offer and receive items at no cost while also reducing their overall waste. There is also no shortage of Instagram-based sellers covering a wide array of pre-loved items.

As the holiday season approaches, consider gift-giving options: perhaps an experience, something homemade, or a repurposed item that you know they would love!

9. Use more public transportation

It's no big secret that public transportation and other car alternatives help to reduce overall energy consumption and damaging carbon emissions. Get familiar with your local metro, subway, bus, or train system. As technology advances, more single-rider alternatives including bike and electric scooter rentals are becoming available in major cities across North America.

Can't escape the car? Try finding coworkers with whom you can carpool to reduce your overall environmental impact. Finally, don't forget the simple and powerful (and healthy, to boot!) act of incorporating more walking into your commute, if possible.

10. Reduce the amount you fly

Although the energy efficiency of airplanes is getting better, the amount of global air traffic is increasing annually. Regulation of airplane emissions is not standardized globally or even from airline to airline. When possible, replace short-haul flights with train or bus trips. Ask yourself, can this business trip just be a virtual meeting? If you are required to fly for your job, family, or a trip you can't miss, consider exploring carbon offsetting programs to help neutralize your carbon footprint.

11. Grow your own vegetables and fruits

More people than ever have begun dabbling in home gardening, in large part because of the increased interest in small-scale farming! With a little creativity, many can find adequate space and sunlight to start a simple garden of lettuce, tomatoes, peppers.

When embarking on a home gardening project, keep seasonality and regionality in mind. A crop that needs a hot, dry environment may not naturally do well in the Northeast. Find a local farmer's co-op or home improvement store, as they may carry locally relevant seed varieties, as well as the tools necessary to build that mini garden!

12. Upcycling

As we mentioned earlier, we all inevitably produce waste. It is a part of modern living, and you should practice kindness and compassion with yourself for the waste you cannot avoid. However, a little creativity goes a long way in reducing your waste, and we challenge you to explore alternate uses for products that have served their primary purpose. An old mug that you can't use for beverages anymore could make a cute planter for succulents; your old sacks can be used to plant crops and flowers and so on.

Recommendations

For us to make the world a better place for ourselves and for us to live in a more eco-friendly and sustainable environment void of sicknesses, diseases, mental disorders and untimely deaths, the following steps at local, national and global levels are recommended.

1. Homes should consciously devise means of using eco- friendly products and gadgets and the young ones from home should be taught and trained on issues like reducing wastage, reducing, reusing and recycling and also to develop zero tolerance for wastage. For example, the use of energy saving devices and appliances such as energy saving bulbs, giving left-over foods to animals around, composting, use of solar inverters and solar oriented gadgets e.t.c.
2. The school curriculum at various levels must embrace inculcating the practical ways of living sustainably with respect to the modules prepared under them; most especially in the science-based curriculum starting from the preliminary levels of nursery, primary and junior secondary levels. For example, organizing science fairs that focus on how to use materials within our environment with major focus on reducing, reusing and recycling.
3. More manufacturing industries that recycle used products like used papers which are recycled into producing toilet rolls, old tyres for making slippers e.t.c, should be established.
4. Furthermore, industries should endeavor to use eco- friendly materials for the process of production and develop strategies of reducing, reusing and recycling. Some of their end products could be recycled back into the production process. Industries in Ibadan like Sweetco Foods, Dugbe and Proctor and Gamble company, located at Oluyole Industrial Estate are very versatile in these eco - friendly activities. They also carry out the measurement of environmental quality daily to monitor the rate at which they are polluting the environment and find means of ensuring that this is being reduced to the barest minimum.
5. Also at the workplace, we should make frantic effort to use resources sustainably. Not wasting water resources, not leaving lights on, and other electrical appliances, shutting down computers appropriately when not in use and so on are parts of maintaining sustainability at the workplace.
6. In terms of transportation, not driving our personal cars all the time, but rather trekking, if we are going to nearby place or cycling or better still taking train or public transport. In China, one of the ways they are trying to reduce pollution and making the environment more sustainable is by encouraging the use of bicycles rather than the use of cars, due to its immense population density.
7. The automobile industries in collaboration with government of countries where they are located should manufacture eco- friendly cars that will pollute the environment less and make it more sustainable.
8. The use of social media to propagate awareness is very vital. Many people globally have contacts

with social media platforms such as Face book, Twitter, Linked-in, Instagram, Rumble, You tube to mention but a few. All these platforms must be used to create awareness especially by those who value sustainable living, thus enlightening people the more on this.

9. Similarly, entertainment industries, radio and television stations could develop drama skits, soap operas, jingles and advertisements that will tend to promote he reasons why people need to live sustainably and its implications.
10. In terms of agricultural efforts, which will in turn help to boost food supply, everyone at local, national and global levels must be encouraged to be involved in farming, at best organic farming, by planting and farming primarily at subsistence level and then possibly commercial. This will help to sustain food supply and improve the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals or people living in a country. *“If three out of every five homes have a garden where flowers, fruits, vegetable and crops are planted, or animal farm or poultry farm, or plant trees; how sustainable, that would be!”*
11. The government of countries, especially developing countries (e.g. Nigeria), must put in ample effort in the aspect of improving the quality of life for the populace. This includes providing good and quality infrastructures such as good roads and transport network cum sustainable means of transportation. When good transport networks connect the countryside/ rural areas, then more people are encouraged to live in the county side or outskirts of towns and cities where there is more space, and the quality of air is cleaner, and the environment is greener. As a result of this they can easily commute daily to the urban centers i.e towns and inner cities, for the purpose of economic activities.
12. Furthermore, encouraging afforestation schemes and enlightening the people about the need to plant trees around them. This will help to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, and this will in turn improve greatly the environmental air quality, hence a sustainable environment

Conclusion

Sustainable Living is an experience that starts from “You and I”. When we re- organize our mindset and are intentional about living a sustainable lifestyle in our own immediate environment, with everyone playing their part at all levels (family, school, workplace government and all other organizations /institutions); then we will all be able to work towards a life of low wastage and maintain a sustainable lifestyle. This will in turn help in meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

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