What is Sustainability?

Sustainability is a buzz word that gets thrown around a lot these days, and it means different things to different people. In the context of serious climate disruption, developments will be judged against their carbon dioxide or other GHG-emitting potential. However, the world's poorest people, including indigenous people, have a right to economic development as a means of reducing poverty and improving social outcomes for their communities. How do we concieve of sustainable development to ensure it improves the lives of our communities but maintains and improves the integrity of the environment, including the climate?

Model 1:
3 Spheres of Sustainability

This model is most often used by companies and local governments to showcase their perspective on sustainability. The three pillars or 'spheres' of sustainability are treated with equal weight in decision making. Although popular, there is no legal framework that supports this model and often times the economic motive outweights the other two spheres:
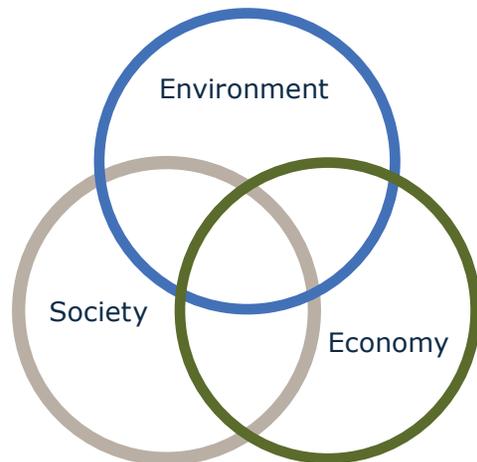
Model 2:
Ecological Sustainability

Ecologists prefer the view that society and the economy are seen as existing within the environment, which must takes priority in terms of development decisions. This view is founded in the science of ecology and is used more as an educational tool. There are few legal frameworks to make this model effective.
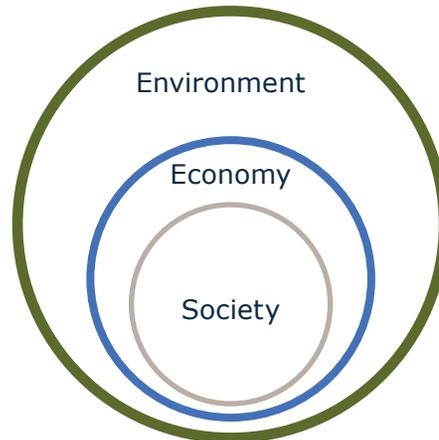
Model 3:
UN Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) as part of their 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The SDG's are founded on the five "P's" - **People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership**. Each goal is interconnected with the rest, and they are specific enough to be meaningful but general enough to apply to everyone. Each goal has targets that countries aim to reach by 2030. Although meant for national actions, the SDG's provide a good window into the important elements to consider in sustainable development decision-making.

Which model best reflects your philosophy around sustainability?