“Sustainability is treating the Earth as if we intended to stay.”

SIR CRISPIN TICKELL, MEMBER
BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE JULIE ANN WRIGLEY
GLOBAL INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY
What is sustainability?

We get that question a lot, and the answer is wondrously complicated. Sustainability can apply to virtually anything you can think of – it’s a powerful word that defies a simple definition. Still, most people agree that sustainability has three fundamental pillars – sometimes called the Three Ps.

First, something that is sustainable is beneficial to ourselves and others in society – People. Second, it is good for the environment – Planet. Third, it makes economic sense – Profit. At the School of Sustainability, students learn to look at problems and solutions systemically, understanding that no solution can be sustainable unless it fulfills all three sustainability pillars.

+ sos.asu.edu/define

“IT’S REALLY NOT ABOUT BEING LESS BAD, IT’S ABOUT BEING MORE GOOD. WE HAVE TO BECOME A CREATIVE FORCE, NOT JUST A LESS DESTRUCTIVE ONE.”

WILLIAM MCDONOUGH, MEMBER BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE JULIE ANN WRIGLEY GLOBAL INSTITUTE OF SUSTAINABILITY

Upholding the three pillars

Just as sustainability defies a simple definition, it also defies a simple diagram. For a basic understanding of sustainability, though, we like this one. The three circles represent the three pillars of sustainability. Where they overlap – where a solution upholds all three pillars – that is sustainability.

Challenge areas

- Biodiversity and ecosystems
- Climate change and adaptation
- Economics and natural capital
- Energy, materials and technology
- Ethical business practices
- Food systems
- Future and systems thinking
- International development
- Policy and governance
- Social and behavioral change
- Urbanization
- Water quality and quantity