

Why sustainability and equity?

The human development approach has enduring relevance for making sense of our world. Last year's *Human Development Report (HDR)* reaffirmed the concept of human development—emphasizing empowerment, equity and sustainability in expanding people's choices. It showed that these key aspects do not always coincide and highlighted challenges in addressing them. And it raised the need to promote empowerment, equity and sustainability so that they are mutually reinforcing.

That report also documented substantial progress over the past four decades. The Human Development Index (HDI) has risen dramatically since 1970—41 percent overall and 61 percent in low HDI countries—reflecting strong advances in health, education and incomes. Significant gains have been made in girls' primary and secondary education, for example. If these rates of progress are sustained, by 2050 more than three-quarters of the world's people will live in countries with an HDI similar to that of very high HDI countries today. There has also been progress in other dimensions: the share of countries that are democracies has risen from less than a third to three-fifths. The 2011 Arab Spring marked another leap forward, appearing to end decades of autocratic rule for some 100 million people.

But we cannot assume that average past rates of progress will continue: progress has been far from uniform across countries and over time. And in two key dimensions of human development, conditions have deteriorated. For environmental sustainability, evidence of devastating current and future impacts is mounting. And income inequality has worsened, while disparities in health and education remain significant.

These are the themes of this Report: the adverse human repercussions of environmental

degradation, which causes disproportionate harm to poor and disadvantaged people, and the need to make greater equity part of the solution. Exploring patterns and implications, the Report sounds a bold call to action. In so doing, it identifies ways to break the pernicious link between environmental degradation and economic growth that has tainted much of the development experience of at least the past half-century and threatens future progress.

This vision aligns with that of international declarations on sustainable development—including those in Stockholm (1972), Rio de Janeiro (1992) and Johannesburg (2002)—which advanced the notion of three pillars of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social.¹ Intragenerational equity is part of the social pillar. Our call for prudence in managing the environment and basic natural resources springs from an emphasis on expanding opportunities for the most disadvantaged and from the need to consider the risks of catastrophic events.

We do not deal at length with broader issues of economic, financial and political sustainability, though we draw on some important lessons from those spheres. We can add more value by concentrating on a well defined set of issues, rather than attempting to cover related fields. The choice of scope is also driven by the urgency of addressing today's grave environmental threats.

In sum, this Report highlights the links between two closely related challenges to show how human development can become both more environmentally sustainable and more equitable.

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This chapter sets the stage by reviewing the notion of limits to human development and two alternate paradigms of sustainability that

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fundamentally affect how we assess some of humanity's most pressing choices. We take a conservative stance because we cannot be certain of always finding technological fixes to the problems we create. Central to this approach is recognizing the inherent uncertainty associated with the future and the need to deal with risks responsibly to meet our obligations to current and future generations.

Are there limits to human development?

Most people around the world have seen major improvements in their lives over the last 40 years. But there are major constraints in our capacity to sustain these trends. If we deal decisively with these challenges, we could be on the cusp of an era of historic opportunities for expanded choices and freedoms. But if we fail to act, future generations may remember the early 21st century as the time when the doors to a better future closed for most of the world's people.

We care about environmental sustainability because of the fundamental injustice of one generation living at the expense of others. People born today should not have a greater claim on Earth's resources than those born a hundred or a thousand years from now. We can do much to ensure that our use of the world's resources does not damage future opportunities—and we should.

Amartya Sen notes that “a fouled environment in which future generations are denied the presence of fresh air ... will remain foul even if future generations are so very rich.”² The fundamental uncertainty about what people will value in the future means that we need to ensure equal freedom of choice, the lynchpin of the capability approach, in part by protecting the availability and diversity of natural resources.³ Such resources are critical in allowing us to lead lives that we value and have reason to value.⁴

The early *HDRs* recognized the centrality of the environment. The first report warned of the continuing increase in environmental hazards, including health risks, from Earth's warming, damage to the ozone layer, industrial pollution and environmental disasters.⁵

The 1994 *HDR* asserted “there is no tension between human development and sustainable development. Both are based in the universalism of life claims.”⁶

The 2010 *HDR* went further, emphasizing sustainability in reaffirming human development:⁷

Human development is the expansion of people's freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development *equitably and sustainably on a shared planet*. People are both the beneficiaries and the drivers of human development, as individuals and in groups.

Sustainable development gained prominence with the 1987 publication of *Our Common Future*, the report of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, headed by former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report produced what became the standard definition of sustainable development: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁸ But the commission's work is relevant for much more. It differed from much subsequent work on sustainability in its emphasis on equity:

Many problems of resource depletion and environmental stress arise from disparities in economic and political power. An industry may get away with unacceptable levels of water pollution because the people who bear the brunt of it are poor and unable to complain effectively. A forest may be destroyed by excessive felling because the people living there have no alternatives or because timber contractors generally have more influence than forest dwellers. Globally, wealthier nations are better placed financially and technologically to cope with the effects of climatic change. *Hence, our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative neglect of economic and social justice within and amongst nations.*

The commission also voiced concerns that the world was reaching its natural limits to growth in economic activity. In 1972 a group of scientists commissioned by the Club of Rome published *The Limits to Growth*, predicting that at current rates of consumption growth, many natural resources would run out in the next century. Economists criticized this thesis for its disregard of price adjustments and technological change that would moderate rising demand for resources.⁹ But the facts seemed to bear out some of their predictions—adjusted for inflation, oil prices rose fivefold between 1970 and 1985.¹⁰

Over the next two decades the perception of scarcity changed. Most commodity prices peaked in the mid-1980s, and by 1990 prices had fallen from their 1980s highs—57 percent for petroleum, 45 percent for coal and 19 percent for copper. Against this backdrop the belief that we were approaching a global resource constraint became less plausible—if resources were becoming scarce, prices should be rising not falling. By 1997 even the United Nations Economic and Social Council was referring to the Club of Rome report’s predictions as “dogmatic,” “unreliable” and “politically counterproductive.”¹¹

Now, the pendulum has swung back again. Concerns differ in some respects from those four decades ago. Today, the problems are more evident in the preservation of *renewable* natural resources, ranging from forests and fisheries to the air we breathe. But the message is clear: our development model is bumping up against concrete limits.

Competing paradigms

The idea that resource scarcity limits the world’s development potential has a long history. In the late 18th century Malthus believed that limited land was an absolute constraint on food consumption and therefore on the population that could inhabit the Earth. Yet 200 years later, the world is home to seven times more people than when Malthus wrote.

In practice, technological improvements and substitution of abundant for scarce resources have allowed living standards to continue to rise over the past two centuries. The

inflation-adjusted price of food is much lower today than it was 200—or even 50—years ago, and known reserves of many minerals are now substantially higher than in 1950.¹² With improved farming techniques, world food production has outstripped population growth. The Green Revolution doubled rice and wheat yields in Asia between the 1960s and 1990s through the introduction of high-yield plant varieties, better irrigation and the use of fertilizers and pesticides.¹³ These increased yields were achieved, however, through means that were not always sustainable. Our concerns for more sustainable agricultural practices go hand in hand with our awareness of the roughly 1 billion people who are undernourished and face serious food insecurity.¹⁴

These observations have led some to posit that as the stock of nonrenewable resources is consumed, technological innovation and price signals will avert shortages that limit future development. As a resource becomes scarcer, rising relative prices mean higher potential profits for innovators and for the owners of assets that can be substituted for the diminished scarce resource. These forces can cut resource use substantially even as consumption grows. The Worldwatch Institute estimates that the production of one unit of output in the United States in 2000 required less than a fifth as much energy as it did in 1800.¹⁵ This leads to a thesis known as *weak sustainability*, which focuses on total capital stock rather than on natural resource depletion.

Disputing this view, advocates of the *strong sustainability* thesis believe that some basic natural assets have no real substitutes and thus must be preserved.¹⁶ These assets are fundamental not only to our capacity to produce goods and services but also to human life. Societies should strive to sustain the flow of services from natural capital over time because the accumulation of physical or other kinds of capital cannot compensate for Earth’s warming, ozone layer depletion and major biodiversity losses.

While advocates of strong sustainability do not disregard the growing efficiency of resource use, they argue that history is not necessarily a good guide to the future. In the past some

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constraints on natural capital may not have been binding, but today some types of natural capital are irreplaceable. No example illustrates this better than Earth's warming. There is overwhelming evidence that we are reaching an upper limit to our capacity to emit greenhouse gases without dire consequences. As one advocate of strong sustainability argues, we are moving from an "empty world" economy, where human-made capital was limiting and natural capital superabundant, to a "full world" economy, where the opposite is true.¹⁷

Beyond these debates, more recent thinking has emphasized the potential congruence of growth and environmental sustainability within the broader paradigm of a green economy.¹⁸ This thinking diverges from the traditional discourse on sustainability by focusing on ways in which economic policies

can engender sustainable production and consumption patterns with inclusive, pro-poor solutions that integrate environmental considerations into everyday economic decisions.¹⁹ Our approach complements and enriches the green economy discourse, emphasizing people, the multiple dimensions of well-being and equity. Our concerns include—but go beyond—growth alone.

The critical role of uncertainty

Differences between strong and weak sustainability approaches go beyond whether financial savings can substitute for natural resource depletion. A key difference lies in the role of uncertainty.

How can we be sure of finding ways to offset the damage caused by current and future production and consumption? The answer is that we cannot be certain. Acknowledging this inherent uncertainty supports the strong sustainability thesis.

Consider biodiversity. Its instrumental benefits for people are well known: greater biodiversity increases the chances of finding cures for illnesses, developing high-yield crops and maintaining ecosystem goods and services such as water quality. We know that ecosystems are resilient—up to a point. Yet defining the threshold at which ecosystems break down is hard. An ecosystem might sustain piecemeal destruction for some time until an unknown threshold is breached such that it unravels.²⁰ These risks and unknown thresholds have led to real concerns about gambling with the planet (box 1.1).

Technological change is uncertain. Productivity growth accelerated after the Second World War, for example, then slowed between the 1970s and 1990s.²¹ We can understand retroactively what drove accelerations and slowdowns, but it is very difficult to predict the future. Even more uncertainty surrounds the types of innovations that will emerge. History is replete with unfulfilled predictions of specific innovations—from all-purpose personal robots to mass-market space travel—and with the failure to anticipate other innovations, such as personal computers, the Internet and mobile communications.²²

BOX 1.1

Environmental risk management—gambling with the planet

We are gambling with our planet through "games" in which private individuals reap the benefits while society bears the costs. A system that allows such outcomes is doomed to mismanage risk. As Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz recently noted, "the bankers that put our economy at risk and the owners of energy companies that put our planet at risk may walk off with a mint. But *on average* and *almost certainly*, we as a society, like gamblers, will lose."

Perverse incentives provide investment banks and energy companies with hidden subsidies, like low liability caps, the prospect of bailouts, and the knowledge that taxpayers will shoulder the costs. Because these companies do not have to bear the full cost of any resulting crises, they may take excessive risks. Consider the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the United States, for example, where the costs well exceeded the \$75 million liability limit. And even where liability is limitless, loopholes exist. In Japan, for instance, the Nuclear Compensation Act excludes cases in which "the damage is caused by a grave natural disaster of exceptional character."

Rare events with huge consequences are of course difficult to predict. But we can no longer afford to turn a blind eye, notwithstanding uncertainties. These events are occurring more frequently. And because most greenhouse gases will remain in the atmosphere for centuries, we cannot wait until all uncertainties are resolved. The sooner we act, the better.

What level of risk will persuade people of the need to change their behaviour? Research in behavioural psychology and experimental economics yields sobering insights. In simulation exercises showing how groups of participants respond when asked to invest collectively in preventing climate change, too many players were free riding, that is, counting on the altruism of others. In scenarios where the probability of disastrous climate change was very low, almost no funds were pledged. But even when the probability was 90 percent, only about half of 30 study groups pledged sufficient funds.

The projected costs of averting climate change pale beside those of allowing change to continue unbridled. But precisely because cooperation is not guaranteed, even under high-probability scenarios, strong political and advocacy efforts are needed to elicit commitments.

As Joseph Stiglitz warns, the risks of inaction are too high: "If there were other planets to which we could move at low cost in the event of the almost certain outcome predicted by scientists, one could argue that this risk is worth taking. But there aren't, so it isn't."

Source: Stiglitz 2011; Milinksi and others 2008; Speth 2008.

Climate change debates have brought into sharp relief the relevance of uncertainty and risk for understanding the future.²³ Scientists have concluded that the probability of a disastrous systemwide collapse is not negligible. And since we cannot place a meaningful upper bound on the catastrophic losses from large temperature changes, we need to cut greenhouse gas emissions not only to mitigate the consequences known to result from their accumulation but also to protect ourselves against uncertain worst-case scenarios.²⁴

It follows that weak and strong sustainability differ, more than anything, in their attitude towards risk. The question is not whether different types of natural and other forms of capital were substitutes in the past, but whether technological and institutional change will proceed at a pace and direction that ensure continuing improvements in human development.

The position we take depends also on the value we put on the well-being of future generations relative to that of current generations—in other words, on how we discount the future. From the perspective of capabilities, there is no justification to assume that the future will provide greater opportunities than the present or to place a lower value on the well-being of the present generation over future ones.²⁵

Given the principles underlying the human development approach, the inclination to give equal weight to the well-being of all generations and the centrality of risk and uncertainty, our position leans towards that of strong sustainability.

Sustainability, equity and human development

Since the Brundtland Report, scholars have offered further definitions of sustainable development. One point of contention was the commission's reference to "needs," often interpreted to mean *basic* needs, which some believe is too narrow.

Economist Robert Solow offered an alternative definition in 1993, arguing that the duty of sustainability was "to bequeath to posterity

not any particular thing but rather to endow them with whatever it takes to achieve a standard of living at least as good as our own and to look after their next generation similarly." Solow added, "We are not to consume humanity's capital, in the broadest sense," which is a succinct statement of the case for weak sustainability. Of course, just what "standard of living" refers to is an open question,²⁶ while what is "good" is also value dependent.

What we mean by sustainability

Most definitions of sustainable development capture the precept that the possibilities open to people tomorrow should not differ from those open today, but generally do not adequately capture sustainable *human* development. They do not refer to the expansion of choice, freedoms and capabilities intrinsic to human development. They do not recognize that some dimensions of well-being are incommensurable. And they do not consider risk.

Human development is the expansion of the freedoms and capabilities people have to lead lives they value and have reason to value. Freedoms and capabilities that enable us to lead meaningful lives go beyond satisfaction of essential needs. In recognizing that many ends are necessary for a good life and that these ends can be intrinsically valuable, freedoms and capabilities are also very different from living standards and consumption.²⁷ We can respect other species, independent of their contribution to our living standards, just as we can value natural beauty, regardless of its direct contribution to our material standard of living.

The human development approach recognizes that people have rights that are not affected by the arbitrariness of when they were born. Further, the rights in question refer not only to the capacity to sustain the same living standards but also to access the same opportunities. This limits the substitution that can occur across dimensions of well-being. Today's generation cannot ask future generations to breathe polluted air in exchange for a greater capacity to produce goods and services. That would restrict the freedom of future generations to choose clean air over more goods and services.

Since we cannot place a meaningful upper bound on the catastrophic losses from large temperature changes, we need to cut greenhouse gas emissions not only to mitigate the known consequences but also to protect against uncertain worst-case scenarios

A central concern of the human development approach is protecting the most disadvantaged groups. The most disadvantaged are not just the generations that are worse off on average. They are also those who would suffer most from the realizations of the adverse risks they face as a result of our activity. Thus, we are concerned not only with what happens on average or in the most likely scenario but also with what happens in less likely but still possible scenarios, particularly those that entail catastrophic risks.

Building on the work of Anand and Sen,²⁸ we define “sustainable human development” as “the expansion of the substantive freedoms of people today while making reasonable efforts to avoid seriously compromising those of future generations.” Like the 1994 *HDR*, this definition emphasizes that the objective of development is to sustain the freedoms and capabilities that allow people to lead meaningful lives. Our definition of sustainable human development is normative: we seek the sustainability not just of any state of events but of those that expand substantive freedoms.

Therefore, inequitable development can never be sustainable human development.

This Report does not propose a unique measure of sustainable human development. Despite recent advances, measuring sustainability remains plagued by major data limitations (box 1.2). A perennial challenge is the disconnect among local, national and global measures—such as the distinction between whether a national economy is sustainable and its contribution to global sustainability. For example, attributing the damage from carbon dioxide to the economy that produces goods that have been exported for consumption ignores both who benefited from consuming the goods and services and the global nature of the damage.

Focusing too much on measurement can obscure some key but unquantifiable issues. These include the risks faced by different people and groups and the role of public deliberation in making policy choices and enabling a society to decide how to avoid seriously compromising future well-being.

What we mean by equity

Early ideas of equity postulated that individuals should be rewarded according to their contribution to society.²⁹ Used interchangeably with fairness, equity has come to refer primarily to distributive justice—that is, unjust inequalities between people.

Contemporary thinking on equity owes much to the work of US philosopher John Rawls, who argued that just outcomes are those that people would agree to under a “veil of ignorance”—that is, if they did not know what status they would occupy in society.³⁰ Rawls’s idea of justice espoused basic liberties and procedural fairness and permitted inequalities only if they could reasonably be expected to be to everyone’s advantage (and if reducing them would make everyone worse off).

The capability approach emerged from thinking about which inequalities are just or unjust. In a set of landmark lectures in 1979, Amartya Sen proposed that we think about equality in terms of capabilities. Equality is neither necessary nor sufficient for equity. Different individual abilities and preferences lead to

BOX 1.2

Measures of sustainability—a conceptual overview

The conceptual paradigm—weak sustainability or strong—has implications for how we measure and assess trends. Given the range of opinions on how to define sustainability, it is not surprising that a broadly acceptable quantitative measure is hard to pin down. Many measures have emerged in the literature. One recent study identified 37—some better known than others. Here we review those that are most in use.

Green national accounting adjusts such measures as gross domestic product or savings for environmental quality and resource depletion. Adjusted net savings, a measure of weak sustainability, adds education spending and subtracts for the depletion of energy, minerals and forests and for damage from carbon dioxide emissions and pollution. It is an aggregate measure of all capital in an economy—financial, physical, human and environmental. It implies that the different kinds of capital are perfect substitutes, so that financial savings can replace a loss of natural resources, for example.

Composite indices aggregate social, economic and environmental indicators into a single index. A great deal of innovative work has pursued this approach. Two examples capturing strong sustainability are the ecological footprint—a measure of the annual stress people put on the biosphere—and the environmental performance index.

None of the aggregate measures is perfect. For instance, some scholars take issue with adjusted net savings’ valuing such nonmarket components as the damage from carbon dioxide emissions, while the ecological footprint has been criticized for neglecting biodiversity.

Informed by ongoing debates about measurement, we refer to the main composite measures alongside a dashboard that presents specific indicators to capture different aspects of sustainability (see statistical tables 6 and 7). The single indicators underline the importance of strong sustainability by exposing poor performance and deterioration on any front.

Source: Jha and Pereira 2011; Dasgupta 2007; Neumayer 2010a, 2010b.

different outcomes, even with identical opportunities and access to resources. Absolute levels of capabilities matter: inequality between millionaires and billionaires is less the focus than inequalities between the poor and the wealthy. And personal characteristics are also important: poor and disadvantaged groups, including people with mental or physical disabilities, need greater access to public goods and services to achieve equality of capabilities.

Despite conceptual differences, inequity and inequality in outcomes are closely linked in practice—because inequalities in outcomes are largely the product of unequal access to capabilities. A Malian can expect to live 32 fewer years on average than a Norwegian because the possibilities for people in Mali are far narrower on average than those for people in Norway. In this case, clearly the inequalities between Mali and Norway are also inequitable. Moreover, we can measure inequality in key outcomes, whereas we cannot readily observe the distribution of capabilities. So, in this Report we use inequality as a proxy for inequity, pointing out the exceptions where the relationship is not straightforward. We also consider inequality in human development—extending beyond income inequality to inequalities in access to health, education and broader political freedoms.

Why centre on equitable sustainability?

This Report concentrates on the links between sustainability and equity. The main issues are the adverse repercussions for human development of the lack of environmental sustainability, especially for those currently disadvantaged, and more positively, the intersections between greater sustainability and equity, as well as the potential for progressive reforms that promote both goals. We will argue that promoting human development entails addressing local, national and global sustainability and that this can—and should—be equitable and empowering.

We ensure that the aspirations of the world's poor for better lives are fully taken into account in moving towards greater environmental sustainability.³¹ Expanding people's

opportunities and choices is a major imperative of the human development approach. There may be trade-offs and difficult choices. But as we discuss below, the existence of these choices also implies a higher order moral imperative to consider how to build positive synergies that keep the present from being at odds with the future.

Concerns with sustainability and equity are similar in one fundamental sense: both are about distributive justice. Inequitable processes are unjust, whether across groups or generations. Inequalities are especially unjust when they systematically disadvantage specific groups of people, whether because of gender, race or birthplace, or when the gap is so great that acute poverty is high. The current generation's destroying the environment for future generations is no different from a present-day group's suppressing the aspirations of other groups for equal opportunities to jobs, health or education.

Anand and Sen made the case for jointly considering sustainability and equity more than a decade ago: "It would be a gross violation of the universalist principle," they argued, "if we were to be obsessed about *intergenerational* equity without at the same time seizing the problem of *intragenerational* equity."³² Yet many theories on sustainability view equity and the plight of the poor as separate and unrelated. Such thinking is incomplete and counterproductive. Thinking about policies to restore sustainability independent of policies to address inequalities between and within countries is equivalent to framing policies to address inequalities between groups (such as rural and urban) while disregarding the interrelationships with equity between other groups (such as poor and rich).

While we argue strongly for the need to consider sustainability and equity jointly, we do not claim that the two are the same. Sustainability is concerned with one type of equity—across people born in different times—as distinct from the distribution of outcomes, opportunities or capabilities *today*. If this were not the case, it would be meaningless to speak about the effect of equity on sustainability.

Promoting human development entails addressing local, national and global sustainability; this can—and should—be equitable and empowering

The reasons to focus on the links between sustainability and equity are normative but also empirical. The empirics help us understand their links—how they reinforce each other in some cases—and the trade-offs that can arise, as we investigate in chapters 2 and 3.

Our focus of inquiry

This Report identifies ways to jointly advance sustainability and equity. Our line of inquiry supports the broader human development agenda, which seeks to understand the actions and strategies people can use to expand their freedoms and capabilities. While we recognize that many factors could impede or enhance the sustainability of human development, we limit our focus to environmental sustainability. We discuss what people, communities, societies and the world can do to ensure that processes respect distributive justice between and across generations while expanding capabilities wherever possible.

Pursuing sustainability and equity jointly does not require that they be mutually reinforcing. In many instances they will not be. But it compels us to identify positive synergies between the two and to give special consideration to the trade-offs.

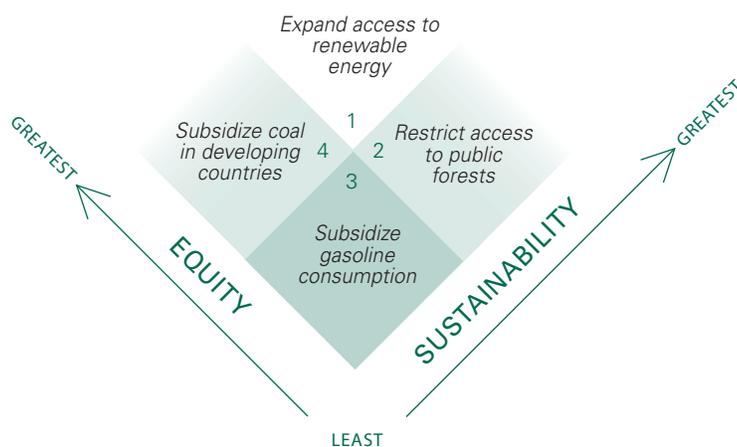
Figure 1.1 illustrates this logic with examples of specific policies that typically improve or worsen sustainability and equity.³³ While we have sought to highlight likely outcomes, the implications are often context-specific, so the figure is not intended to be deterministic. Some examples:

- Expanded access to renewable energy and a global currency transaction tax to finance climate change mitigation and adaptation can advance both sustainability and equity (quadrant 1), as we will explore in chapters 4 and 5.
- Subsidies on gasoline consumption, still common in many countries, may set us back in both dimensions (quadrant 3) by favouring those who can afford a car while generating an incentive for excessive resource depletion. Countless cases of regressive, inequitable subsidies in agriculture, energy and water are also often associated with environmental damage.³⁴
- Some policies may advance one objective but set back the other. Subsidizing coal in developing countries may promote growth but also contribute to higher greenhouse gas emissions. Such a policy could have positive effects on global equity but negative effects on sustainability (quadrant 4).
- The converse can also occur: policies can improve sustainability while worsening inequity (quadrant 2). For example, policies that limit access to common property resources such as forests may enhance sustainability by preserving the natural resource but can deprive poor groups of their primary source of livelihoods, though this is certainly not always the case.

We do not assume a positive empirical association between sustainability and equity. This association may well exist, and it requires investigation. Schematically, it can arise whenever most of the feasible alternatives fall in either quadrant 1 or 3 of figure 1.1. But it is also possible that most feasible alternatives fall in quadrant 2 or 4, which present trade-offs between sustainability and equity. And the pathways may be nonlinear. Such possibilities require explicit and careful consideration.

FIGURE 1.1
An illustration of policy synergies and trade-offs between equity and sustainability

This framework encourages special attention to identifying positive synergies between the two goals and to considering trade-offs.



But we can go further. A trade-off between sustainability and equity is like a trade-off in the well-being of two disadvantaged groups. Because no trade-off is isolated from a society's structural and institutional conditions, as in the case of trade-offs between the claims of different groups, we must address the underlying constraints. So, our policy focus is aimed not only at finding positive synergies but also at identifying ways to build synergies. Our objective is to find solutions that fall in quadrant 1—solutions that are win-win-win (good for the environment while promoting equity and human

development). We should prefer approaches in quadrant 1, whenever available, to those that fall in quadrant 2 or 3 but recognize that options in quadrant 1 may not always be available.³⁵

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The next chapter reviews how resource constraints and environmental thresholds impede human development and equity. We review the cross-national evidence of links among sustainability, equity and human development—and identify the challenges to meeting these goals successfully.