

Sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It is about ensuring a strong, healthy and just society while living within environmental limits. “Sustainable development opens up opportunities to invest in synergistic measures or co benefits that reduce environmental damage promote social justice and narrow health inequalities” (SDC, 2010)

Biodiversity is the variety and abundance of all life plants animals fungi and microbes (UK NEA, 2011).

Ecosystems are the planet’s life support systems for the human species and all other life forms. (WHO 2003) In modern society we need to consider link between biodiversity , economic activity and human well being (TEEB, 2010).

Environment & Health

Health and health inequalities are produced by what are known as health determinants, these include the social, economic, natural and built environment as well as the global ecosystem . “Sustainable development and health equity are complementary and mutually reinforcing.” (SDC, 2010) The Commission presents evidence on the strong links between unsustainable development and health inequalities. The negative effects of changes to our environment has had the most impact on the most disadvantaged. This strengthens the case for health equity to be written into environmental agendas Barton & Grant (Graham, 2010).

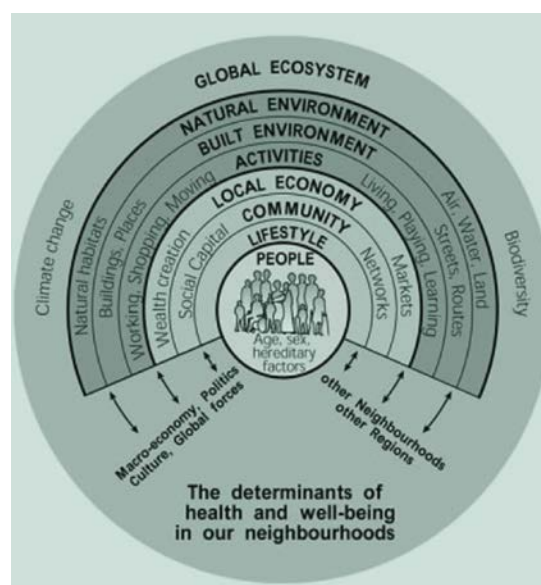
The changes needed will require new political approaches with government proactively coordinating shared responsibility and holistic, preventive action, where everyone is working together creating a better environment and healthier people at the same time.

There has been action taken at international, national, regional and local level to redress the damage caused to the environment and encourage and support sustainable development. A number of recent regional strategies highlight the growing emphasis on sustainability . The Northern Ireland **Regional Development Strategy** aims to “reduce our carbon footprint and facilitate mitigation and adaptation to climate change whilst improving air quality, conserve, protect and, where possible enhance our built heritage and our natural environment and promote development which improves the health and well-being of communities” (DRD, 2012)

Sustainable Development Strategy’s main principles are: living within environmental limits and ensuring a strong, healthy, just and equal society

The Biodiversity Strategy seeks to promote cross departmental and integrated approach to working. This interagency, cross departmental approach is advocated by those seeking to reduce health inequalities as seen in documents such as Closing the Gap in a Generation and Fair Society Healthy Lives.

Barton and Grant 2006



Communities

Communities can become involved in shaping and influencing how we manage our environment through community planning and or through local biodiversity action plans. Community planning is "the process through which public sector organisations work together and with local communities and the voluntary sector, to identify and solve local problems, improve services and share resources". (CP, 2012) Local biodiversity action plans are created at council level and require partnerships. There are 12 biodiversity officers located in councils throughout NI. This is a good starting point for C&V organisations' who are interested in this area of work. <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/biodiversity>

Why Biodiversity matters?

Our health and lives depend on biodiversity and the biological richness of the living world. Decisions humans make that influence biodiversity affect the well being of themselves and others.

All changes to the environment – be it from pollution, deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions, or other causes – ultimately affect the living world. Once we lose a gene, species, or an ecosystem, it is gone forever. It has been said that by 2050, climate change alone is expected to threaten 25% or more of all species on land, with extinction.

A Harvard Professor Edward O. Wilson once said about ants “We need them to survive, but they don’t need us at all.”

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment highlights the benefit the natural environment provides to society and to economic prosperity. The natural world is critical to our wellbeing and our economy but it is often undervalued..... (UK NEA 2011).

As we understand better our links with biodiversity, ecosystems and the services they provide it becomes a matter of social justice to ensure that our living patterns are sustainable and sensitive to the limitations of the world around us and that we enact our responsibility to future generations. Sustainability requires that we “meet the needs of present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (UN, 1987)

Community Development & Sustainability

CDHN believe that social justice and environmental justice are inextricably linked and that one can not be achieved without the other.

“Community work is located in the changing relationships between community, state and social movements engaged in challenging the dehumanising tendencies of the market and its economic logic in the conditions of production— the social and physical environment. With the advantages of occupying such a strategic position, it may have much to offer in the struggle for environmental justice” (Scandrett, 2010)

Goney Honey

Since 2007 Knocknagoney Parish Church have been keeping bees. The local primary school regularly visits to learn about keeping bees and how they are an important part of the environment. The pupils also have their own club where they make hives. The children have also created a small woodland on the church grounds and planted flowers nearby that will attract the bees. Not only is all this educational but the bees produce honey that everyone enjoys.

Examples of sustainability programmes in NI...

Renaissance of Atlantic Foods Authenticity & Economic Links (RAFAEL) food procurement programme – A PHA funded initiative successful public sector food procurement programme which increases the proportion of fresh, local and sustainable food going into health sector Outdoor Gym –outdoor gym equipment is being purchased for use in a disadvantaged part of Belfast. Green Gym Run by CVNI offers marginalised groups/individuals opportunity to partake in physical activity while undertaking horticultural and/or conservation work.

Ecosystems - what communities need to know

4 ecosystem services:

The ecosystem provides us with four services. These are the basis for health and well-being. They provide the build blocks for life and health by ensuring security (e.g.: safety from flooding) materials for shelter, sense of wellbeing, access to clean water

Supporting - Nutrient cycling, soil formation, primary production

Provisioning - Food, water, fuel.

Regulating - Climate regulation, flood regulation, water purification

Cultural - Aesthetic, cultural, educational, recreational

Changes in the ecosystem has a ripple effect throughout the planet causing widespread food insecurity resulting from severe climate change, institutional failure and increasingly damaged soils. Eco- systems and health has been promoted within the HSE with the appointment of an eco health promotion officer. This approach recognises the relationship and influence between environment, economy and community on health. For more information: annmarie.crosse@hse.ie

References

- Barton, H. and Grant, M. (2006) A health map for the local human habitat. The Journal for the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health, 126 (6). pp. 252-253.
- Community Places (2012) *Community Planning Information Pack* <http://www.communityplaces.info/sites/default/files/CPinfopack%28UpdateFeb2012%29.pdf>
- Department of Environment Local Biodiversity Action Plans http://www.doeni.gov.uk/nea/biodiversity/local_biodiversity_action/lbaps.htm
- Department of Regional Development (2012) *Regional Development Strategy 2035*, DRDNI
- Graham (2010) *Where is the future in Public Health?* The Milbank Quarterly Vol 88, 2
- OFMDFM (2010). *Everyone’s Involved Sustainable Development Strategy* OFMDFM
- Scandrett in Emejulu & Shaw (eds) (2010) *The Glasgow Papers Community Development Journal*
- Sustainable Development Commission (2010). *Sustainable Development: The key to tackling health inequalities*
- TEEB (2010) *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity : the Economics of Nature: A synthesis of the approach, the conclusions and recommendation of TEEB*
- UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011)
- UN World Commission on Environmental and Development (1987) *Our Common Future* Brundtland Commission Oxford University Press