

Concept of sustainability in field of humanitarian work

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The term “Sustainability” is no longer unfamiliar or rarely spoken of by both the public and specialists. It has become widely known and constantly present in most forums and across various fields. So, what can we add to the discussion about this term and its relation to the charitable and humanitarian sector? To what extent should we positively engage with the standards that sustainability demands in this sector? Are there charitable organizations that apply sustainability standards while others do not? Are there specific standards or reports relevant to this sector in the first place? These and many other questions we will attempt to address in this series, which we hope will be useful, beneficial, and help clarify some aspects of this topic.

The concept of sustainability primarily revolves around continuity, derived from the verb “to sustain” – It is important to note that not all forms of continuity are necessarily positive. However, when

we use the term “Sustainability” without any standards or qualification, it generally recalls positive aspects. This is what we often observe in contemporary discussions on sustainability among those concerned with environmental issues, as well as economics, not to mention society and people. These are the key areas or dimensions in which sustainability either exists or does not, and where attention to or neglect of it may vary, as we will explore this in more detail later.

The question here is: Is the concept of continuity the only meaning intended by sustainability? Is this the technical or scientific definition commonly understood among specialists and those concerned? Did this term emerge with a clear and agreed-upon meaning from the beginning, accepted by those involved, or has it undergone expansions, restrictions, generalizations, and specifications, like many other terms, before finally settling into its current meaning?

Moreover, the term sustainability has been closely linked to the concept of development, often used together as “sustainable development”. When specialists refer to sustainability, they typically mean “sustainable development,” a concept defined by the Brundtland Commission in its 1987 report, Our Common Future – the report defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

As you can see, this definition emphasizes the balance between meeting the current needs of people and the requirements for living in the present, while ensuring that we do not negatively impact the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and live sustainably. In other words, we are developing the present with an eye on the future. We utilize and preserve what exists, ensuring its growth, and recognizing our responsibility not only