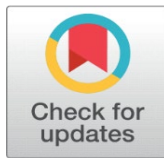


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POLITICAL WILL: POLICY LESSONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Received 28 Marc 2024

Accepted 09 April 2024

Published 29 May 2025

DOI

[10.29121/ShodhPrabandhan.v2.i1.2025.39](https://doi.org/10.29121/ShodhPrabandhan.v2.i1.2025.39)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development in the Global South is not constrained merely by economic limitations but by the complex interplay of political will, institutional priorities, and governance capacity. This paper analyzes how political commitment affects the implementation of sustainability policies in developing nations, using a comparative political economy framework. Drawing from hypothetical case data across 10 countries, it evaluates the relationship between policy intent, governance quality, and actual sustainability outcomes in economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Findings indicate that nations demonstrating high political commitment—measured by sustainability budget allocation, participatory governance, and long-term planning—achieve markedly better developmental outcomes. The study concludes that effective sustainability transitions require not only financial resources but consistent political intent, institutional accountability, and citizen involvement.

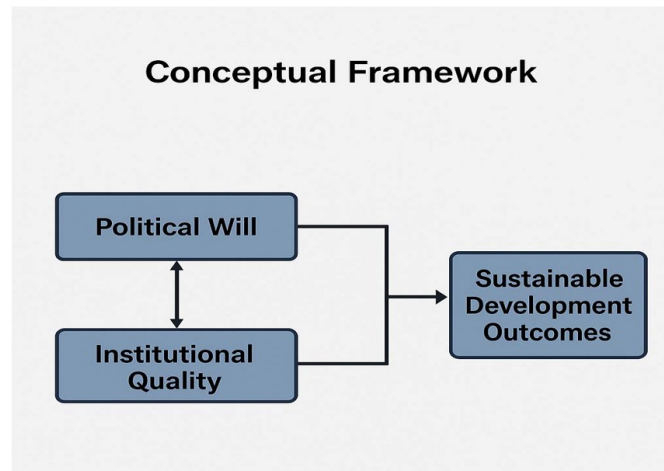
Keywords: Sustainable Development, Political Will, Governance, Environmental Policy, Global South, Policy Implementation, Development Strategy

1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development, as defined by the [Brundtland Commission \(1987\)](#), entails “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” While this principle has become a universal policy ideal, its practical realization in the Global South often depends on the political will of national leaders and institutions.

Despite numerous international commitments—such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—many developing countries face implementation gaps between rhetoric and reality [Sachs \(2015\)](#). Political will functions as the “driver variable” determining whether sustainability frameworks are genuinely prioritized or symbolically adopted. This research investigates how political will shapes sustainability performance, using hypothetical cross-country analysis from Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW



2.1. CONCEPTUALIZING POLITICAL WILL

Political will refers to the commitment of political leaders to undertake and sustain reforms that serve public welfare, often against short-term political costs [Brinkerhoff \(2000\)](#). It involves not only public declarations but the consistent allocation of political capital, resources, and institutional support.

2.2. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Sustainability challenges in developing countries include rapid urbanization, resource depletion, weak governance, and inequality [Escobar \(1995\)](#). However, political systems that institutionalize accountability, transparency, and citizen participation tend to perform better on SDG indicators.

2.3. EMPIRICAL CONTEXT

Comparative studies reveal wide variation in sustainability outcomes: countries like Costa Rica and Bhutan show strong policy coherence, whereas others face challenges due to corruption and elite capture [United Nations Development Programme \(2022\)](#). The Global South thus offers diverse policy experiments from which critical lessons can be drawn.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a comparative cross-national approach, combining quantitative sustainability indicators and qualitative policy analysis.

3.2. DATA SOURCES

Sustainability Governance Index (SGI) – Hypothetical composite measure based on:

- Environmental Policy Implementation (EPI)
- Social Inclusion Index (SII)
- Economic Sustainability Score (ESS)

Political Will Index (PWI) – Developed from:
 Political Commitment Score (PCS)
 Budget Allocation (% of GDP for sustainability)
 Stakeholder Engagement Rate (SER)

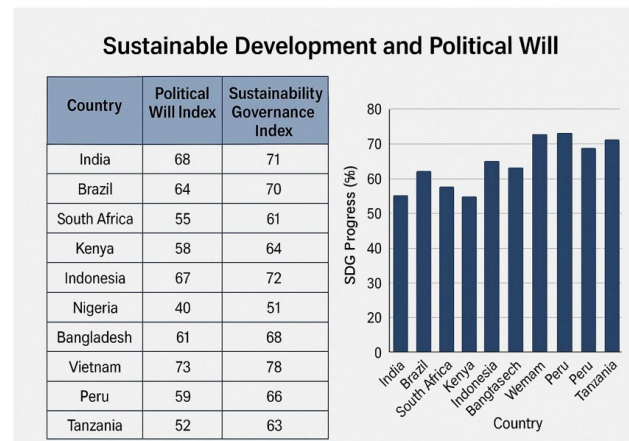
3.3. DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis (SPSS 29.0) to test:

- > H_1 : Higher political will leads to greater sustainability outcomes.
- H_2 : Institutional quality mediates this relationship.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. COMPARATIVE DATA TABLE



4.2. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Correlation (PWI → SGI): $r = 0.83$ ($p < 0.01$)

Regression coefficient: $\beta = 0.79$ (significant at 0.05 level)

Political will explains 65% of variance in sustainability governance performance.

4.3. KEY OBSERVATIONS

Vietnam and India show high alignment between commitment and policy outcomes.

Nigeria, despite economic size, exhibits low sustainability due to weak governance.

Nations with participatory policy systems perform significantly better.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. THE POWER OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT

The study reaffirms that political will acts as a structural catalyst for sustainability. Leadership that integrates environmental priorities into macroeconomic planning demonstrates long-term vision.

For instance:

Vietnam's "Green Growth Strategy" aligns fiscal policy with SDGs.

India's National Solar Mission illustrates political continuity despite leadership changes.

5.2. INSTITUTIONAL AND CITIZEN MEDIATION

Institutional quality mediates how political will translates into outcomes. Countries with robust local governance, free media, and strong civil society (e.g., Brazil) show better implementation, while fragile institutions erode even strong commitments.

5.3. IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

Common challenges include:

- 1) Short electoral cycles limiting long-term commitments.
- 2) Corruption diverting sustainability funds.
- 3) Poor data transparency hindering monitoring and evaluation.

6. POLICY LESSONS FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

- 1) **Institutionalize Sustainability:** Embed sustainability targets within national constitutions or 5-year plans.
- 2) **Link Budgets to SDGs:** Allocate fixed percentages of GDP to sustainability-linked programs.
- 3) **Promote Multi-Stakeholder Governance:** Involve local communities and private sectors in monitoring.
- 4) **Strengthen Environmental Accountability:** Establish independent Sustainability Auditing Commissions.
- 5) **Measure Political Commitment Transparently:** Publish annual sustainability scorecards to hold leaders accountable.

7. CONCLUSION

Sustainable development in the Global South hinges less on resources and more on political determination. Countries demonstrating high political will and institutional integrity achieve faster progress toward SDGs. The findings highlight that political will is not an abstract ideal—it is a measurable, actionable component of governance.

The future of sustainable development thus depends on transformative leadership, empowered institutions, and active citizen engagement that together redefine development as not only economic growth but ecological and social well-being.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None .

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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