

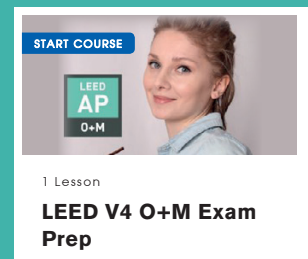
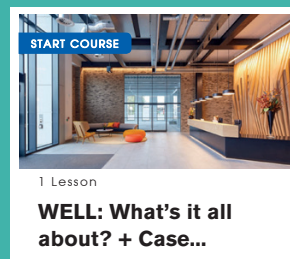
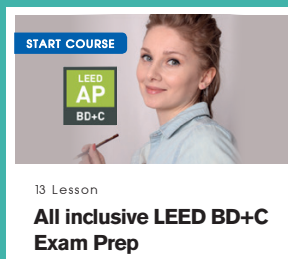
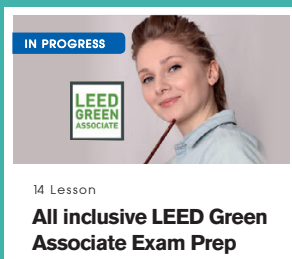
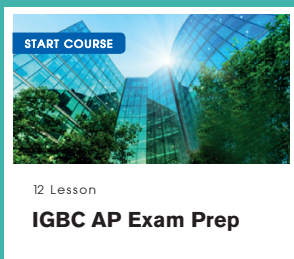
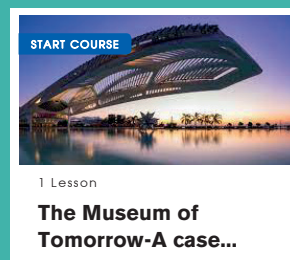
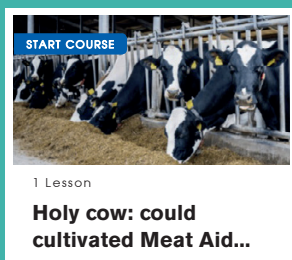
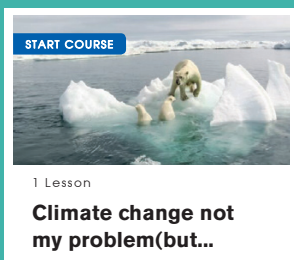
# Welcome To GBRI Community

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# **SUSTAINABILITY**

**AROUND THE WORLD:  
IS THE WORLD  
BECOMING FLATTER?**





## Background:

Over the years, the concept of sustainability has gained immense prominence, driven by the growing global awareness of environmental challenges, climate change, and social inequalities. As a result, the definition of sustainability has evolved, encompassing broader considerations like social equity, ethical practices, and cultural preservation.

In our previous course, 'From Blueprint to Greenprint: Fundamentals of Sustainability & Green Buildings,' hosted on this platform, we delved into essential topics. We explored sustainability principles, the triple bottom line concept, and the significance of systems thinking in addressing global challenges. Additionally, we analyzed the profound impact of buildings on climate change and resource consumption, underlining the urgency for sustainable building practices. We defined green buildings, highlighting their characteristics and contributions to sustainable development, including environmental, social, and economic benefits. The differentiation between traditional and whole building design processes revealed how an integrative approach elevates building performance and energy efficiency. Lastly, we examined a real-world green building case study to witness sustainable design principles in action and their positive impact on various aspects of life.

Now, in this article course, 'Sustainability Around the World: Is the World Becoming Flatter?' we take a deeper dive into regional and country-specific sustainability initiatives from across the globe. We aim to understand how local factors influence sustainable building practices, contributing to broader global sustainability goals.







Source: [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

*Changes in one part of the world can create ripple effects that reverberate across the entire planet. This interconnectedness becomes even more evident when considering the impact of climate change and its ripple effect, further flattening the world.*

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## The World Is Becoming Flatter!

In his influential book, “The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century,” Thomas L. Friedman introduces the concept that the competitive landscape between industrial and emerging market countries is leveling. He argues that individual entrepreneurs and companies, regardless of their size, are now interconnected in a vast global supply chain that spans across continents and oceans.

When we view the world through the lens of systems thinking, as we did in our first course, we begin to see the intricate interactions and interdependencies between various countries and regions within the global system. Changes in one part of the world can create ripple effects that reverberate across the entire planet. This interconnectedness becomes even more evident when considering the impact of climate change and its ripple effect, further flattening the world.

Understanding regional and country-specific sustainability initiatives, and how local factors influence sustainable building practices, becomes crucial in comprehending sustainability on a global scale. These initiatives play a pivotal role in addressing the challenges posed by the increasingly flattened world, where actions taken in one region can significantly impact others, shaping the trajectory of global sustainability efforts.



## Regional and Country-Specific Sustainability Initiatives:

Sustainability initiatives can vary significantly from one region or country to another, depending on factors like geography, climate, culture, and socio-economic conditions. Each region may have unique challenges and priorities when it comes to sustainability. Some common examples of regional and country-specific sustainability initiatives include:

1. **Renewable Energy Targets:** Many countries have set specific targets to increase their use of renewable energy sources like solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal power. These targets are tailored based on each country's natural resources and energy needs.
2. **Carbon Reduction Commitments:** Some regions have made commitments to reduce their carbon emissions by specific percentages over time to combat climate change. These commitments may involve regulations for manufacturing, waste management, enhancing vehicle efficiency, and promoting alternative fuels.
3. **Green Building Codes and Regulations:** Different countries and regions have established their own green building standards and regulations to promote sustainable construction practices and minimize the environmental impact of buildings.
4. **Water Conservation Programs:** Countries facing water scarcity issues may implement water conservation programs and policies to ensure responsible water use.
5. **Reforestation and Conservation Efforts:** Regions with significant forest cover may have initiatives to protect and restore forests, as they play a crucial role in carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

*It's essential to note that this list is not exhaustive. Are there any other regional and country-specific sustainability initiatives that come to your mind? Share your thoughts in the comments section on the course page and let's engage in an insightful dialogue.*





# Local Factors Influencing Sustainable Building Practices:

Local factors can have a profound impact on sustainable building practices in a particular region or country. These factors can include:

1. **Climate and Weather Conditions:** The local climate determines a building's energy needs for heating, cooling, and lighting. Sustainable buildings in colder regions may focus on insulation and energy-efficient heating systems, while those in warmer climates may prioritize passive cooling strategies.
2. **Available Resources:** The availability of local materials, skilled labor, and renewable energy sources can influence the design and construction of sustainable buildings.
3. **Cultural and Social Norms:** Cultural values and social norms may affect building design and features. For example, buildings in some cultures may prioritize natural ventilation and communal spaces over airconditioned buildings.
4. **Government Policies and Incentives:** Supportive government policies, incentives, and financial schemes can encourage developers and building owners to adopt sustainable practices.
5. **Economic Factors:** Economic considerations, such as construction costs and return on investment, can influence the level of sustainability implemented in a building project.

Overall, understanding regional and country-specific sustainability initiatives and local factors is essential for creating effective and contextually appropriate sustainable building practices that align with global sustainability goals. As the world continues to become flatter, by tailoring sustainability strategies to local conditions, we can work towards a more sustainable future that addresses both local and global challenges.



Source: [www.completecommunitiesde.org](http://www.completecommunitiesde.org)



# International Sustainability Initiatives

There are numerous sustainability initiatives taken by nations worldwide, and here are some of the top international sustainability initiatives that countries commonly partake in:



**United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The SDGs are a set of 17 global goals adopted by all United Nations Member States to address various social, economic, and environmental challenges. These goals aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all by 2030.



**The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):** This international treaty aims to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere to prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system. The annual Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings facilitate international climate negotiations and promote global cooperation on climate action.



**Paris Agreement on Climate Change:** The Paris Agreement is an international legally binding treaty adopted by 196 Parties at the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) in Paris in 2015. The agreement focuses on reducing greenhouse gas emissions to combat climate change, aiming to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius.



**The Kyoto Protocol:** This international treaty sets binding obligations for industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It commits participating nations to specific emission reduction targets during specific commitment periods.



**The Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI):** The GGGI is a treaty-based international inter-governmental organization that supports and promotes green growth in developing and emerging economies. It assists countries in developing green growth strategies, implementing sustainable projects, and advancing policies for low-carbon, resource-efficient development.



**The World Green Building Council (WorldGBC):** This global network of green building councils from around the world works to drive the transformation of the building and construction industry towards sustainability. The WorldGBC advocates for green building policies, supports research, and facilitates knowledge sharing among member countries.



**The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI):** GRI provides a framework for sustainability reporting that helps organizations worldwide measure and communicate their environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance. Governments and businesses use GRI guidelines to disclose their sustainability impacts and progress.



**The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC):** The IPCC is a United Nations body that assesses scientific information related to climate change, its impacts, and adaptation and mitigation options. It plays a crucial role in providing evidence-based recommendations for global climate policies.





**European Green Deal:** The European Green Deal is a comprehensive plan adopted by the European Union to make the region climate-neutral by 2050. It aims to transform Europe's economy and society towards sustainability, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable transport, and biodiversity protection.



**United Nations Industrial Development Organization's (UNIDO) Global Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production (RECP) program:**

The UNIDO RECP program is a global initiative aimed at promoting sustainable and resource-efficient production practices in industries. The program works with industries, governments, and other stakeholders to identify and implement measures that increase efficiency, reduce waste, and minimize the environmental impact of industrial processes. It emphasizes the adoption of cleaner technologies, resource optimization, and the integration of sustainable practices into production systems.

These initiatives represent significant international efforts to address sustainability challenges, tackle climate change, and promote responsible and resilient development worldwide. Countries and organizations participate in these initiatives to collaborate, share knowledge, and work towards a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

## Circular Economy

The circular economy is a transformative sustainability initiative that seeks to shift away from the traditional linear economic model of "take, make, dispose." Instead, it embraces a regenerative and restorative approach, focusing on reducing waste, reusing materials, and recycling products to extend the lifespan of resources.

At the forefront of promoting the circular economy is the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, actively collaborating with businesses, governments, and academia to accelerate the transition towards circularity.

Governments worldwide have recognized the importance of adopting circular practices and have launched various projects and policies to promote sustainable production and consumption.

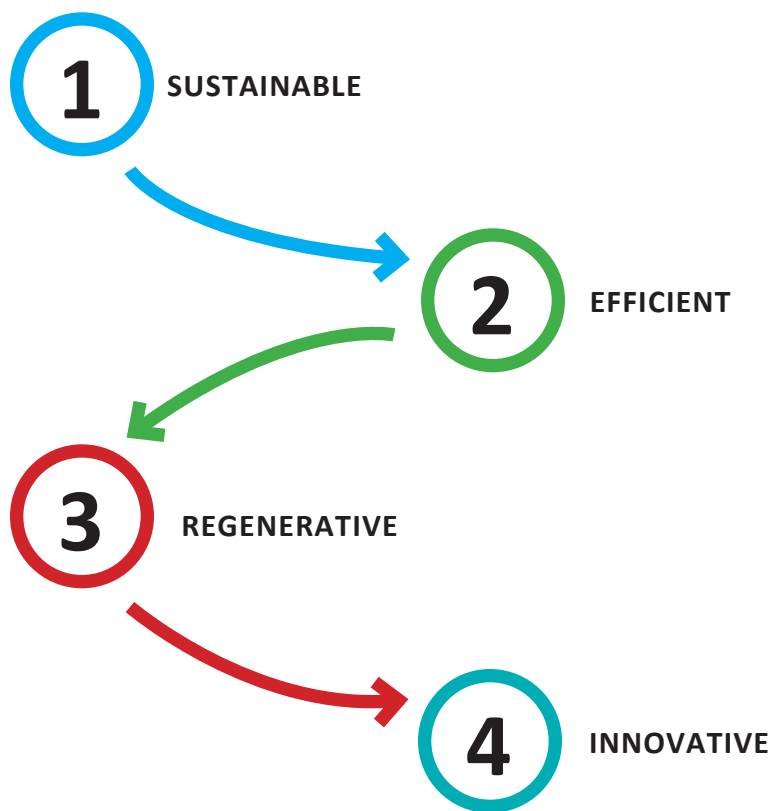


Image source - <https://www.zerowastescotland.org.uk/topics/circular-economy>

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*The circular economy is a transformative sustainability initiative that seeks to shift away from the traditional linear economic model of "take, make, dispose." Instead, it embraces a regenerative and restorative approach, focusing on reducing waste, reusing materials, and recycling products to extend the lifespan of resources.*

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Some notable examples include:

1. **European Green Deal:** This ambitious initiative by the European Commission aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. It includes a Circular Economy Action Plan, focusing on sectors like electronics, plastics, and textiles. The plan outlines measures for sustainable product design, improved recycling infrastructure, and waste reduction.
2. **China's Circular Economy Pilot Projects:** China has introduced pilot projects across the country to reduce waste, increase resource efficiency, and foster circular business models.
3. **Japan's 3R Initiative:** Japan pioneers the "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle" approach in its circular economy strategy, promoting waste reduction and recycling while supporting industries embracing circular practices.
4. **Scotland's Circular Economy Strategy:** Scotland's strategy envisions a more circular economy by 2045, emphasizing maximizing resource value, minimizing waste, and encouraging sustainable production and consumption patterns.
5. **The Netherlands' Circular Economy Policy:** The Netherlands has outlined a National Circular Economy Program to achieve a fully circular economy by 2050. Key areas of focus include circular procurement, sustainable design, and circular business models.
6. **India's "Circular Economy Mission":** Launched in 2021, India's mission aims to adopt circular economy principles across sectors like agriculture, mobility, energy, and waste management. It targets waste reduction, resource efficiency, and sustainable production and consumption practices.

According to research conducted by the European Environmental Agency, adopting a circular economy approach could lead to a remarkable 48% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in Europe by 2030.

These examples represent only a fraction of the global efforts to promote circular economy principles. Governments play a pivotal role in driving the transition to a more circular and sustainable economy, fostering a better future for both people and the planet.



Source: [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org)

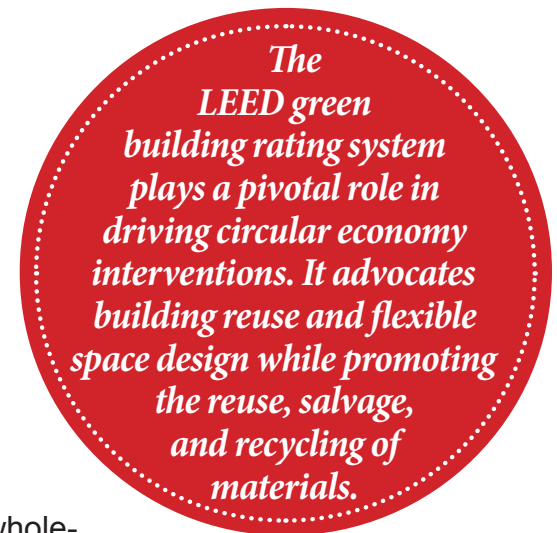


# LEED & Circular Economy: Paving the Way to a Circular Built Environment

Let's first understand the circular economy in the context of the built environment. In a linear economy, buildings follow a take, make, and dispose trajectory. They predominantly use virgin materials with limited durability, leading to a cycle of demolishing structures and recycling only a portion of the materials. However, envisioning a circular built environment brings a transformative shift. This circular approach reduces reliance on virgin resources, embracing reused, salvaged, biobased, and recycled materials in construction. Moreover, it prioritizes the longevity and intense utilization of buildings, designed for renovation and upgrading rather than demolition. At the end of a building's life, salvaging and reusing everything becomes standard practice, significantly reducing landfill waste.

The LEED green building rating system plays a pivotal role in driving circular economy interventions. It advocates building reuse and flexible space design while promoting the reuse, salvage, and recycling of materials. The Materials and Resources (MR) credit category within LEED focuses on advancing circular economy principles. Projects are rewarded for minimizing and optimizing the use of building products and materials throughout their life cycle, ranging from construction and demolition waste management to sustainable product selection and ongoing purchasing practices.

With the introduction of LEED v4, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) incorporated groundbreaking concepts like whole-building life cycle assessment and material ingredient reporting and optimization. These additions compelled project teams to assess the impact of material use on human and ecological health, complementing previous LEED criteria for construction waste management and responsible material sourcing.



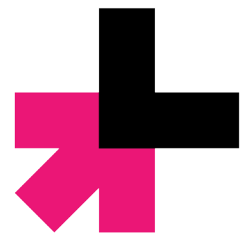
## International Sustainability Initiatives with a focus on social equity



Social initiatives are a crucial aspect of sustainability, focusing on addressing social equity, inclusivity, and community well-being. Here are some examples of social sustainability initiatives:

### Gender Equality and Women Empowerment:

Gender equality is a central focus of the SDGs, and international treaties and government initiatives aim to promote equal opportunities, access to education, and empowerment for women and girls worldwide. The HeForShe campaign



**HeForShe**  
UN Women Solidarity Movement  
for Gender Equality

**The HeForShe campaign initiated by UN Women encourages men and boys to take a stand for gender equality and work alongside women to achieve equal opportunities.** UN Women is the UN organization delivering programs, policies and standards that uphold women's human rights and ensure that every woman and girl lives up to her full potential.

**Social Impact Investing:** Social impact investing involves investing in projects or businesses that aim to generate both financial returns and positive social or environmental impacts. International organizations and governments may support social impact investment initiatives to address pressing social issues. The Impact Investment Exchange (IIX) in Asia is a pioneering example of a social stock exchange that facilitates investments in social enterprises to address social and environmental challenges while generating financial returns.

**Fair Trade:** Fair trade initiatives, backed by international agreements, aim to create more equitable trading relationships between producers in developing countries and consumers in developed countries. By paying fair prices and providing better trading conditions, fair trade empowers marginalized producers and promotes sustainable livelihoods. The Fairtrade International organization works with governments and cooperatives worldwide to ensure fair prices and better trading conditions for small-scale farmers and workers in developing countries.

**Affordable and Inclusive Housing:** International efforts, supported by governments, aim to ensure access to affordable and safe housing for all members of society, including marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Singapore boasts one of the highest rates of home ownership globally, made possible by the Singaporean government's Housing Development Board (HDB), which offers affordable public housing to citizens across income levels.

Despite having a significant concentration of millionaires and an expensive housing market, with luxury penthouses fetching up to S\$74 million (\$54 million), Singapore ensures that even newlywed young couples can afford a home.

The success of this approach traces back to a decision taken over fifty years ago, which granted every Singaporean, regardless of wealth, a direct stake in the country's prosperity. This decision fostered a nation with one of the world's highest rates of home ownership, where over 80% of the population resides in government-built flats. This unique model exemplifies how Singapore's citizens, irrespective of economic backgrounds, have been provided with accessible and affordable housing options, contributing to a strong sense of ownership and social equity in the country's growth and development.

**Access to Education:** Universal access to quality education is a global goal, and international organizations and governments work to improve educational opportunities for underprivileged communities worldwide.

#### Access to Education: The Kerala Model

One notable example of a successful social initiative in the context of sustainability around the world is the Kerala Model, which focuses on providing access to education.

The state of Kerala, located in the southwestern part of India, has long been known for its emphasis on education and social development, making it a standout in the country and even globally.

Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India at 94%, consistently surpassing the national average. This achievement can be attributed to the state's strong emphasis on education and widespread access to schooling.





The Kerala Model also highlights the importance of gender equality in education. The state has achieved impressive progress in bridging the gender gap in literacy and educational opportunities. The sex ratio in Kerala favors females, with around 1084 females for every 1000 males, indicating a more balanced and equitable access to education.



Source: www.scroll.in

Developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living. Kerala's focus on human development, social welfare, and public education infrastructure has also positively impacted its Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI of Kerala has consistently been higher than the national average often comparable to developed economies, reflecting better health outcomes, higher education levels, and improved living standards for its residents.

The success of the Kerala Model in providing access to education and fostering human development serves as an inspiring example for other regions and countries. By prioritizing education and investing in social welfare programs, Kerala has demonstrated that proactive policies can lead to significant advancements in literacy, gender equality in education, and overall human development. This not only benefits individuals but also contributes to the sustainable development of the entire society, enabling people to lead more fulfilled and productive lives.

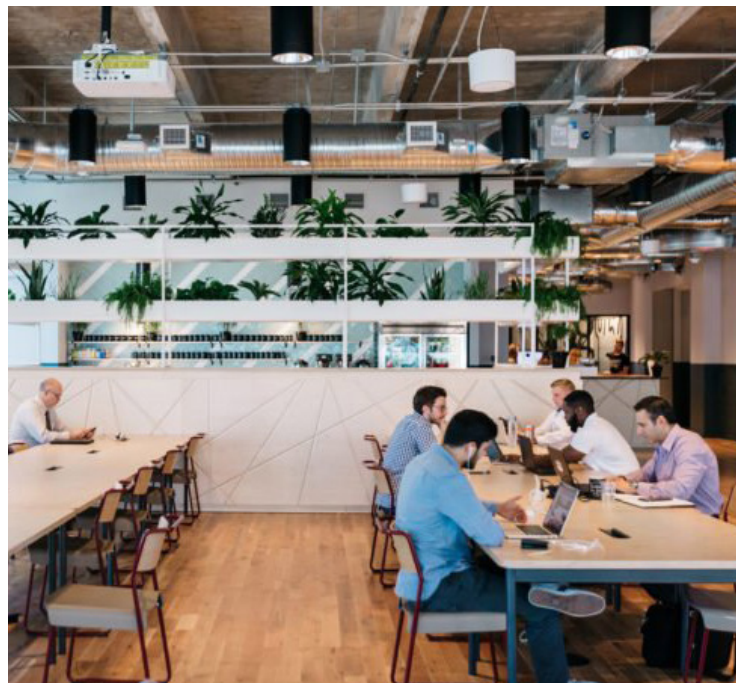
**Health and Well-being Initiatives:** Ensuring the health and well-being of populations worldwide is a critical component of sustainability efforts. International organizations and governments actively promote public health through a range of initiatives aimed at improving access to healthcare services, disease prevention, and mental health support.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is a prominent global organization that collaborates with governments to address various health challenges. Its initiatives include immunization programs to protect against infectious diseases, disease eradication campaigns, and strengthening health systems to provide essential care to communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emerged as a global leader in its efforts to combat the virus. The CDC played a vital role in guiding public health responses, disseminating critical information, and coordinating efforts to control the spread of the virus.

In the realm of sustainable building practices, the WELL Building Standard is gaining prominence as a leading framework that prioritizes occupant health and well-being. Buildings certified under the WELL standard prioritize features that contribute to a healthy indoor environment, such as enhanced air and water quality, proper lighting, and ergonomic design.

Moreover, the WELL Safety rating specifically addresses health and safety protocols within buildings, ensuring compliance with the highest standards of safety and hygiene. This is particularly important in the context of public health emergencies, as it enables buildings to respond effectively to crisis situations and safeguard occupants' well-being.



Source: [www.biofilico.com](http://www.biofilico.com)

**Indigenous Rights and Cultural Preservation:** International treaties and government initiatives support the rights, culture, and traditions of indigenous communities, recognizing their contributions to global diversity and sustainability.

Canada is a leading example of efforts to uphold indigenous rights and cultural preservation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) addressed historical injustices and promoted healing between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians. Canada adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2016, committing to indigenous self-determination, land rights, and cultural preservation.



Source: [www.echoesofcanada.com](http://www.echoesofcanada.com)

Through land claims and self-government agreements, Canada recognizes indigenous autonomy in decision-making. It invests in indigenous language revitalization to preserve native languages. Cultural heritage protection initiatives safeguard sacred sites and artifacts with the collaboration of indigenous communities.

These initiatives demonstrate how international organizations and governments are working together to create a more equitable and sustainable world, where social well-being is prioritized alongside environmental and economic considerations.





## Social Equity within the Built Environment: LEEDing the Way

Social equity plays a pivotal role in ensuring sustainability in the built environment, encompassing multiple dimensions that prioritize fairness, inclusivity, and well-being. Beyond the physical structures, it extends to our communities, project teams, and supply chains, fostering an equitable and responsible approach to construction and development.

To achieve social equity within communities, established frameworks like the SEED Evaluator offer a structured approach to assess social, economic, and environmental impacts, driving equitable and sustainable outcomes. Projects seeking certification through the SEED Evaluator demonstrate their commitment to community-driven development and social equity.

Within project teams, social equity thrives by embracing diversity and inclusion, providing equal opportunities for participation, representation, and advancement. Valuing every team member’s voice regardless of individual characteristics cultivates a supportive and innovative work environment, leading to improved project outcomes and overall well-being.

In supply chains, social equity involves sourcing materials and services from suppliers who uphold ethical labor practices, fair wages, and safe working conditions. Prioritizing suppliers committed to promoting human rights, worker well-being, and community development reinforces the built environment’s positive impact on local communities and contributes to a more equitable society.

LEED rating system, explicitly promotes socially responsible practices through its Social Equity Pilot Credits. Developed by the LEED Social Equity Working Group, these pilot credits address social equity from the perspective of all individuals touched or impacted by a building.

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*Social equity plays a pivotal role in ensuring sustainability in the built environment, encompassing multiple dimensions that prioritize fairness, inclusivity, and well-being. Beyond the physical structures, it extends to our communities, project teams, and supply chains, fostering an equitable and responsible approach to construction and development.*

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## Final Thoughts:

As we explore the fascinating world of sustainability around the globe, we discover that governments, organizations, and individuals are coming together to address pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges. From the ambitious United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to local grassroots initiatives, sustainability is at the forefront of a worldwide movement for positive change.

Within the context of the built environment, initiatives like LEED and WELL have been instrumental in pushing the boundaries of sustainability. These green building rating systems exemplify the commitment to advancing a circular economy and promoting the health and well-being of occupants. Our article course “The World of Green Building Rating Systems: LEED, WELL & Beyond” delves into how we can measure and verify if a building is green, and explores some of the most impactful green building rating systems around the world.

In a world grappling with numerous challenges, from climate change and mass migration to poverty and health disparities, it is crucial to recognize that these issues also present opportunities for collective action and positive change. As individuals and communities, we are interconnected components within the larger system of our planet, and by working together, we can drive transformation and create a more sustainable future for all.

So, whether you are a student, a professional, a concerned citizen, or simply curious about sustainability, I hope this course offers an opportunity to deepen your understanding and actively engage in the pursuit of a more sustainable and equitable world.

Your input matters too! We invite you to share any other initiatives that resonate with you in the comments section on the course page. Let's foster an engaging dialogue and inspire each other to drive positive change together.





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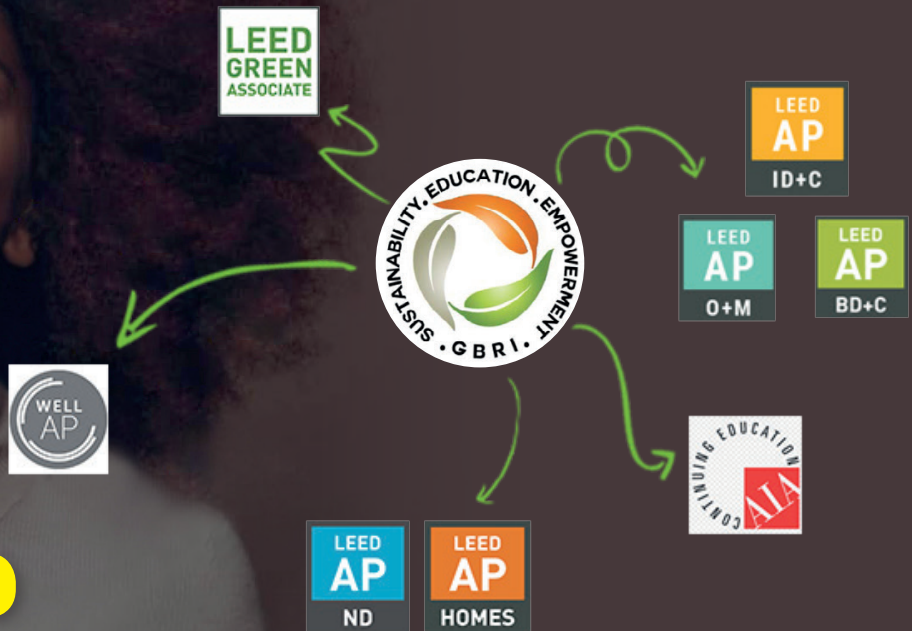
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