

Pathways to Sustainability: Integrating Environment, Growth and Indigenous Wisdom

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The Paradox of Progress: An Overview

The contemporary global landscape is characterized by an unfortunate contradiction of an unprecedented level of technological development and economic power, but with an increasing ecological crisis, growing socio-economic disparities and continued fragility of informal sectors (Mor, 2018a). The world is facing the catastrophic erosion of biodiversity, the limitations of traditional development approaches, and the increasing effects of climate change, making the future paths less and less linear (Mor, 2022a). The previous industrial models that were based on unlimited extraction of the resources and lacked an economic-ecological link are proving inadequate in guaranteeing a resilient future (Mor *et al.*, 2023a). Moreover, the systemic issues that are currently affecting the world, from trade tensions between countries and macroeconomic policies to extreme climate events, highlight the need to rethink the concept of development (Mor & Das, 2023).

This book, *Pathways to Sustainability: Integrating Environment, Growth, and Indigenous Wisdom*, confronts this paradox by calling for a holistic convergence of modern scientific innovation, economic inclusiveness, and traditional wisdom that has been passed down over thousands of years (Mor, 2022b). The central argument of this volume is that the way to a resilient future is neither one-size-fits-all solutions (high tech) nor preservationist nostalgia (low tech). Instead, it calls for a multi-faceted integration where advanced technologies meet and are, at times, rooted in Indigenous knowledge systems, reverse innovations, and regenerative practices.

This book is organized to help the reader navigate this complexity. It spans the physical realities of a warming planet and the changing nature of agricultural systems to the behavioural economics of microfinance and sustainable finance, and finally, the legal and governance frameworks needed to safeguard the wisdom and livelihoods of those who have farmed the land for thousands of years (Singh, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2018). The text connects the various strands together in order to show how sustainability is a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral effort.

Climate, Environment and Sustainable Urban Futures

The global climate crisis demands systemic shifts in governance, energy transitions, and international cooperation. A crucial aspect of this transformation is the shift from static international requirements to flexible, voluntary requirements that fit local development realities (Mor *et al.*, 2023b). Multilateral platforms are an important tool for guiding policy toward the long-term ecological balance at the international level. At the same time, the world is facing economic tensions in trade and geopolitical tensions that underscore the dangers of economic fragility to a coordinated environmental effort (Mor, 2018b).

Climatic variations within the country adversely impact agricultural stability and economic security (Madan & Mor, 2025). Yield volatility is directly linked to severe weather patterns and vulnerable people and small business operators in the informal sector face increased precarity. The key challenge is that higher education institutions and municipal governments must take an active role in promoting research, adaptation and environmental stewardship (Mor *et al.*, 2023c), in order to build resilient urban and rural environments.

Sustainable Agriculture, Circular Economy and Rural Transformation

Connecting cutting-edge technologies with on-the-ground operational productivity is imperative. Beyond the agricultural sector, attaining technical efficiency and minimizing transaction costs is vital for sustainability in the informal sector (Singh, 2017a).

Institutional support systems that facilitate ongoing learning and experimentation are needed to address agricultural vulnerability. However, innovation is shifting from a purely top-down approach and instead indigenous and exogenous reverse innovations are delivering scalable solutions that are specific to context, allowing for improvements in circular economic models and rural adaptability (Mor & Ashta, 2022). Embedding contemporary technological innovations in local agricultural practices can establish mechanisms for sustainable use of resources and food security, without sacrificing economic strength.

Inclusive Growth, Gender, Finance and Institutional Sustainability

Social inclusion, economic access, and gender empowerment are intrinsic to achieving sustainable development. Women's entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial activities in rural areas are important contributors to local economic resilience but are often facing structural barriers (Singh *et al.*, 2018). Microfinance and social entrepreneurship are important tools to promote wellbeing, social change and provide safety nets in times of acute economic crisis (Ashta & Mor, 2017).

In the organizational and institutional levels, the embedding of sustainability involves creating a culture, where adaptation, financial inclusion and social accountability are accepted as values and norms (Mor *et al.*, 2023c). Higher education institutions, non-governmental and microfinance networks are key centres of values transmission in communities.

The Pathways to Sustainability: Integrating Environment, Growth, and Indigenous Wisdom provides a comprehensive map of the Anthropocene's challenges. It is a fusion of the physical realities of climate change and biodiversity loss with innovative solutions ranging from technological innovations, such as hydroponics, to local communities' emphasis on regenerative soil practices (Singh, 2017b). It considers these physical solutions from the perspective of economic constraints of microfinance, behavioural economics and gender integration, and ultimately, legal and governance structures of indigenous wisdom (Singh *et al.*, 2018).

This volume is a testament to the belief that sustainability is best achieved through the synergy of modern growth strategies and the richness of indigenous and local wisdom—a grassroots treasure trove often ignored by mainstream discourse. This volume offers a multidisciplinary toolkit for policy makers, researchers and practitioners (Mor, 2018c), covering the systemic risks of climate change, the dual requirements of high-tech and ecological agriculture, the psychological and operational barriers to sustainable finance, as well as the legal obligation to safeguard Traditional Knowledge (TK). It suggests that the way forward is not about a trade-off between environment and growth, but about a relationship where they are united and connected in a purposeful, participatory, and responsive governance.

SECTION 1: CLIMATE, ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN FUTURES

The story starts with a thought-provoking examination of the physical and economic truths of a warmer world. The climate emergency has become a reality, rather than a prediction, especially in the most vulnerable areas such as South Asia. Climate change has gone from being an environmental cost to a systemic development risk that will impact the bases of economic stability and human well-being.

Dr. Nikita provides a detailed overview of these impacts in Chapter 2, which makes climate change a threat multiplier. The chapter brings out the recent trends in the climatic variability of the country as documented by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), including the highest mean temperature for the year 2024 in the national instrumental climatic record. The data shows that the temperature is 0.65°C above the normal average (IMD, 2026). This warming isn't just a meteorological figure: it is a real economic jolt.

Dr. Nikita reviews the economic literature and concludes that temperature shocks have a significant impact on economic performance, especially in less developed economies, and that there is a non-linear relationship between temperature and productivity (Burke *et al.*, 2015; Dell *et al.*, 2012). This non-linearity implies that the adverse effects on labour and output grow faster as temperatures increase. Agriculture, which sustains millions of livelihoods, is under critical threat in the Indian context. Extreme heat causes wheat yields to decline by increasing crop senescence, and affecting labour productivity, especially in the outdoor sectors such as construction and agriculture (Lobell *et al.*, 2012; Somnath *et al.*, 2021).

Moreover, Nikita's analysis highlights that the choice between development and mitigation is not the best climate strategy for India. Rather, it calls for an integrated development approach that is climate resilient. This is an integrated approach that integrates adaptation measures, low carbon growth pathways and social protection. The chapter highlights the complementary nature of mitigation and adaptation, which is crucial to maintain macroeconomic stability and minimise inequalities in the impacts of climate change (IPCC, 2023).

The catastrophic loss of biodiversity, occurring alongside the climate crisis, threatens the very biological basis of life on Earth. Titiksha Kamal discusses 'biodiversity at a crossroads' in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the researchers warn that if the current trend continues, about one million species will become extinct, according to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019). Biodiversity loss has the potential to compromise the integrity of ecosystems as well as ecosystem services critical for human well-being, including pollination, nutrient cycling, water regulation, and disease control (Cardinale *et al.*, 2012; Díaz *et al.*, 2018).

Habitat loss, pollution and invasive species are among the main reasons for this decline, and Kamal argues that it is time to go beyond documentation and find real solutions for conservation. The chapter emphasizes the need for scientific research to be used in conjunction with traditional ecological knowledge. It offers a holistic conservation strategy spanning ecosystem restoration, Protected Areas expansion and use of new technologies such as GIS and DNA Barcoding. In addition, the paper highlights the importance of the use of indigenous knowledge and citizen science for the improvement of conservation

efforts. Finally, the chapter supports the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD, 2022), not only as an environmental responsibility, but also as a prerequisite for sustainable development and human resilience.

SECTION II: SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE, CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND RURAL TRANSFORMATION

As indicated in Section I, the environmental challenges require a paradigm shift in our production systems, as much as in agriculture. Section II “Sustainable agriculture, Circular economy and rural transformation” highlights the importance of reviving the agrarian economy in the context of increasing climate risks, resources shortages and soil degradation. In this section, two complementary yet different food security pathways are introduced: controlled environments for technological innovation; regenerative practices for ecological restoration.

With the land degradation and water scarcity also leading to food insecurity all over the world, the book delves into the potential of Controlled Environment Agriculture (CEA). Dr. Pankaj Kumar in Chapter 13 reviews relevant literature indexed in Scopus to assess hydroponic farming as an alternative to soil-based farming in the context of sustainability. The review underscores the fact that highly efficient hydroponic production systems, from Deep Water Culture (DWC) to Nutrient Film Technique (NFT), can boost resource-use efficiency. Vertical stacking and nutrient optimized systems are able to utilize 90-95% less water and land, while achieving greater agricultural production (Hasan *et al.*, 2026).

One of the highlights of this chapter is how digital technologies are being integrated. Dr. Kumar explains the Internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how they transform hydroponics into a data-driven scientific that relies on data. Automated systems can optimize delivery of nutrients and regulation of microclimate. For example, empirical results show that the application of Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks can yield up to 19.3% increase in yield and substantial nutrient reduction (Devaraju *et al.*, 2026). But the study also evaluates the issues associated with adoption such as capital intensity, dependence on energy sources and technical skill. Based on studies reviewed, Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) shows that hydroponics is the most efficient in its water use, but its sustainability is highly dependent on the energy sources and system design (Paturu & Varadarajan, 2024). The chapter concludes that hydroponics is not a panacea for all soil farming but an important alternative system in urban areas, if appropriate policy measures are implemented to overcome financial and infrastructural challenges.

Prof. Kumari Veena’s chapter (Chapter 14) on indigenous and regenerative agriculture, is a call for the revival of these practices, as opposed to the high-tech approach of hydroponics. The study focusses on the Bihar state where 91% of the farmers are small farmers, and assesses the possibility of Regenerative Agriculture (RA) as a tool for soil health and

livelihood. Veena believes that the traditional farming methods employed over the past few decades have affected the quality of soil and that practices like zero tillage, multi-crop farming and adoption of bio-inputs such as Jeevamrit, can help build soil organic carbon and lessen the need to use expensive synthetic fertilizers.

Specific regeneration methods that are suitable for different agro-climatic zones in Bihar are explained, such as green manure crops (legumes) like *Sesbania* (Dhaincha) which can fix nitrogen in the soil and enhance soil structure. Veena notes that the biophysical effects of RA include increasing the capacity of the soil to hold water which provides a “natural insurance policy” against floods and droughts. The author notes, however, that there are key structural constraints that impede scaling up of these practices, such as the Bataidari (tenant farming) system in which land insecurity prevents long-term investment in soil health. The study is based on secondary data drawn from institutions such as ICAR and BAU, and promotes the policy frameworks that encourage regenerative transitions. This chapter argues that RA is more than a sustainable practice, but a structural way to achieve economic revitalisation through traditional knowledge (Rhods, 2017).

SECTION III: INCLUSIVE GROWTH, GENDER, FINANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

Without strong economies and inclusive growth, environmental objectives will not be met. The economic and financial aspects of sustainability are explored in Section III, highlighting the need for navigating complex human behaviours and deep-seated socio-economic inequities in order to achieve the transition to green economy. It bridges the fields of behavioural finance and gender, examining the role of cognitive biases in making sustainable capital allocation more difficult and how the workplace affects the financial decisions of working women.

In Chapter 20, Apeksha Sharma discusses the disconnect between the rising interest in sustainable investing and its actual practice by individual investors. The market for sustainable investment assets has grown, but decisions are often influenced by cognitive bias. The systematic literature review by Sharma reveals 13 different biases that affect choices of sustainable investments, including availability, overconfidence, herding, source preference, and moral loss aversion (Chew & Li, 2026; Abhijith *et al.*, 2025).

The chapter suggests a three-layered relationship between investor psychology (antecedents) and distorted judgment and decision-making outcomes. One of the results is that risk tolerance is a common mediator for various biases. The chapter prescribes a number of “nudge” interventions that are linked to bias categories in order to reduce these distortions. Examples of these include simplification and layered disclosure of ESG, as well as impact quantification and anti-greenwashing verification cues for moral biases (Hutchings, 2025). It is found that targeted behavioural interventions, like defaults and digital advising, play a key role in shaping investors’ behaviour in a way that is consistent with sustainable goals (Gajewski *et al.*, 2022).

In addition to the financial behavioural approach, there is an in-depth examination of gender inclusivity. Disha Sirohi and Sanjeev Kumar explore the investment pattern of 300 working women from ten different professions of Indore City in Chapter 21. The authors use a descriptive and comparative quantitative design with primary data to analyse the multidimensional aspects of investment behaviour (preparedness, discipline, and information exposure).

The results indicate that the most prevalent form of investing is self-directed via online platforms, but profession significantly influences financial sophistication. There was considerable disparity in financial knowledge, literacy program participation, emergency fund maintenance and diversification strategies by profession. On the other hand, the awareness of the compounding and the length of time invested were similar for all groups. The chapter emphasizes that the percentage of women in formal investments such as mutual funds has increased (1 in 4 investors) but financial education is still an important constraint (AMFI, 2025; NCFE, 2020-21). This is because financial education that is tailored to specific professions is essential, as financial relationships and peer networks within occupational ecosystems significantly influence investment decisions (Agarwalla *et al.*, 2015). This section collectively maintains that a psychologically sensitive to biases and structurally inclusive financial system is required for sustainable growth, as women are an important change agent.

SECTION IV: INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE, CULTURE, EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

Lastly, the book concludes with a focus on Indigenous Wisdom as the foundation of sustainable governance, tying up the thread of the narrative. It questions the supremacy of “scientific forestry” and also of statutory law which often ignores traditional knowledge. Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, Education and Sustainable Futures” (Section IV) advocates for incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into the mainstream policy and legal approaches. The chapters examine the three-way nexus of gender, law and community management to shed light on the historical ecological balance that has been achieved by circular practices and collective decision-making in tribal communities in India.

Dr. Tanwi Shams makes a strong indictment of the legal invisibility of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) of tribal women in Chapter 27, focusing on the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities in the Northeast. The selective harvesting, rotational harvesting, and low waste processing are some of the circular economy principles that Shams suggests these women apply to support forest-based livelihoods. The study, however, shows that there is a huge gap between the practices and the Indian laws.

Access to resources is addressed in the Forest Rights Act (FRA); however, it does not address women's collective innovations, and the Biological Diversity Act and intellectual property laws such as the Patent Act and Geographical Indications (GI) Act do not adequately protect women's collective innovations (Berkes, 2012; Agarwal, 2001). The chapter critically examines the legal incoherence between forest governance, IP law, and livelihood schemes, utilizing a doctrinal analysis. It emphasizes that although the Niyamgiri judgement recognized the rights of communities, many of the subsequent judgments emphasized the importance of "scientific forestry" over community stewardship of forests (see *Wildlife First v. Ministry of Environment*, 2019). In addition, the policy documents such as those from the NITI Aayog emphasize industrial circularity and neglect forest-based systems (Kirchherr *et al.*, 2017). Shams contends that women are further marginalized through the exclusion of gendered individuals within customary institutions (e.g., Dorbar Shnong) and statutory bodies (e.g., Gram Sabhas). The chapter suggests specific measures for improvement, such as the recognition of TEK as a collective legal interest, gender sensitive GI registration processes and aligning the FRA with livelihood schemes to support circular enterprises led by women.

The book concludes by examining the larger idea of Indigenous Governance in Chapter 28 in relation to the Indian Knowledge System (IKS). Vikash Kumar and Aprajita Kumari argue that existing environmental governance approaches have failed in reducing biodiversity loss as it is not always inclusive of the communities relying on these resources. The study suggests that IKS of collective decision-making and a close bond with nature provide a valid and alternative approach to environmental management.

The chapter builds the case for the tribal governance model as a strong alternative to state-led management, as it is geared towards conservation for future generations. It states that the incorporation of IKS in the Sustainable Development policy process is vital for achieving several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 16 (Peace and Justice). The authors propose that the acknowledgment of Indigenous governance not only helps to conserve biodiversity, but also helps to create resilient ecosystems and socially just institutions. Through looking at traditional practices, the paper calls for a whole-of-society approach, with IKS being a key component IKN being a key component of the sustainability planning process, thus reinforcing the book's main argument that IKN is not a thing of the past but a living tool for future resilience.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Environment, Growth, and Indigenous Knowledge provides a comprehensive map of the Anthropocene. It brings together the frightening physical facts of climate change and biodiversity depletion with creative solutions from the hydroponic

applications of technology to the soil regeneration. It puts these physical solutions into perspective with the economic realities of behavioural finance and gender inclusiveness, and, finally, connects them to the legal and governance frameworks of indigenous wisdom.

Overall, the book is a testament to the belief that sustainability is best achieved through a combination of innovative growth strategies and the wisdom of indigenous communities, which is often overlooked and underutilized. The unprecedented challenges of high-tech and ecological agriculture, the psychological obstacles to sustainable finance, and the legal mandate to safeguard traditional knowledge all require a multi-disciplinary toolkit for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners navigating the dual challenges of climate change. It is not a matter of choosing between environment and growth, it is a matter of integrating environment and growth through wisdom that has been gained from people living in harmony with the land for generations.

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SECTION I

Climate, Environment and Sustainable Urban Futures

