



SESYNC Feedbacks

News from the National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center



ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY | Approaches & Opportunities

Since becoming a major buzzword, **sustainability** has come to mean different things to different people in different contexts. But most experts agree that achieving sustainability means finding a positive balance between the natural environment, social equity, and economic prosperity.

Sustainability is often the general goal of solving socio-environmental problems. But what that means and how to get there is incredibly complicated and nuanced. So, this month, we're exploring some different avenues to achieving a more sustainable world. Whether it be increasing resilience in the face of natural disasters; reducing gender inequality; improving systems related to food production, distribution, and consumption; or integrating different methodologies—sustainability takes many forms and involves a wide range of approaches and considerations. We hope you'll explore more below.

Introduction

These introductory lessons give learners a sense of how to think about sustainability in the context of socio-environmental systems.

Lesson – Introduction to Socio-Environmental Systems: A Lens to Examine Sustainability with a Food Insecurity Exercise

This lesson introduces socio-environmental systems—often called socio-ecological systems—for learners who are new to the concept. After an initial discussion of the topic, the lesson uses a systems-thinking approach to challenge learners to draw and label the components and interactions of an socio-environmental system related to a problem with food insecurity.



Lesson – Introduction to Resilience and Sustainability: Ecological, Social, Socio-Environmental

This lesson first challenges learners to deconstruct the term resilience—how it is used as a concept and applied as an analytical tool by ecologists, social scientists, and those who study socio-environmental systems and their problems. **Bringing together ecological and social viewpoints,**

this lesson then introduces the concept of socio-environmental (S-E) resilience.

Here, learners explore all dimensions of risk in the context of resilience: hazard, exposure, and vulnerability.

Sustainable Development Goals

This three-part series of lessons focuses on various sustainable development goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations. Each lesson focuses on different goals and topics, including food systems, gender equality, and consumer behavior.

Lesson – Advancing Sustainable Development Goals: Urban Agrobiodiversity

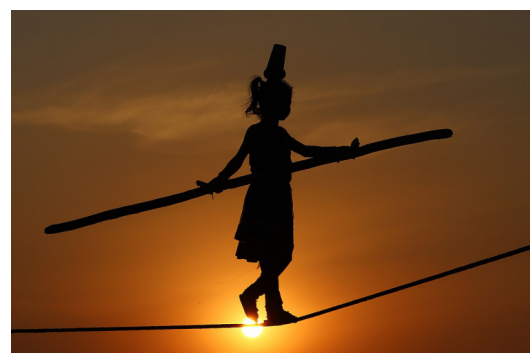
This lesson delves into the theory and science around urban agrobiodiversity: the variety and quality of food products made available to city dwellers across the globe. It explores how better food production, distribution, and diversity not only increase nutrition standards but also make progress

toward other related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) like sustainable cities, reduced inequality, and decent work and economic opportunities. **In this lesson, learners will research and propose creative intersections among the UN SDGs to envision more equitable and sustainable urban agrobiodiversity outcomes by the mid 21st century.**



Lesson – Advancing Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Equality and Environmental Health

This lesson explores how the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal #5, Gender Equality, aims to empower women and girls through education, access to family planning resources, reduced domestic violence, and increased political representation. **In this lesson, learners investigate how these**



issues resonate with more sustainable environmental outcomes. Learners will examine the challenges to sustainable development in the sectors of agriculture, fishing and aquaculture, and forestry and will develop innovative initiatives with gendered needs in mind.

Lesson – Advancing Sustainable Development Goals: Systemic Change to Reduce Consumer Impact

This lesson takes a look at the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal #12 of Sustainable Consumption and Production. Here, learners consider several advised systemic interventions—such as paid labor, good quality public services, support for cooperatives, worker-owned companies, community ownership, etc.—and then design a local strategy for engaging participation in one such intervention.



Qualitative Approaches

This three-part series of lessons illustrates different ways of incorporating qualitative methods into the study of socio-environmental problems with the aim of finding more sustainable solutions.



Lesson – Marine Spatial Planning for Sustainability: An Example of a Semi-Qualitative Synthesis Approach

This lesson illustrates the use of a semi-qualitative synthesis approach. It uses an illustrative study that combines a modified systematic review, expert opinion, and a critical interpretation of literature, focusing on Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)—a

process for allocating access to marine resources. The study used in this lesson presents a framework to help stakeholders and natural resource managers evaluate and improve MSPs for equitable and sustainable socio-environmental outcomes.



Lesson – Qualitative Methods for Actionable Sustainability: Appreciative Inquiries and Learning Journeys

Two approaches for identifying solutions for enacting change are the qualitative methods of appreciative inquiry and learning journeys. These methods involve learning from conversations about individuals' observations, sustainability

aspirations, and considerations of what is vs. what is possible. These interactions can lead to positive new ways of thinking that can ultimately inspire change. **In this lesson, participants use appreciative inquiry and a learning journey to document positive actions on their campus and in their community.** This exercise will culminate in sharing a “good seed”—an idea or plan to move forward sustainability initiatives.

Lesson – Qualitative Methods for Actionable Sustainability: Narrative and Identity in Climate Beliefs



Qualitative methods can trace how individuals and groups form their identities, as well as how they make sense of and value their socio-environmental situations, and these methods can reveal submerged power relations. One can apply qualitative measurement across local, regional, or global scales, revealing retrospective patterns and prospective possibilities. **This lesson develops students' ability to apply qualitative methods to navigate complex**

socio-environmental dynamics in climate change knowledge and enrich their work with a diversity of human perspectives.

Sustainable Agriculture

This four-part series of lessons focuses on sustainability in relation to food systems. Each lesson focuses on a different sector, including large-scale farming and small-scale community gardens, as well as food loss and waste and aquaculture.

Lesson – Sustainable Agriculture: Resistance, Resilience, or Transformational Farming

This lesson focuses on analyzing techniques for improving soil health, ecosystem resilience, and ecosystem services, while providing diverse and nutritious food for the public. **In this lesson, learners will review an array of potential strategies and apply them to specific farming geographies.** They will then analyze ways to integrate multiple benefits and implement their strategies more broadly.



Lesson – Sustainable Agriculture: Strategic Reductions in Food Waste

This lesson engages with recent food loss and waste (FLW) research and online resources to enable learners to analyze the causes of and chart potential solutions to FLW. Learners will role-play as particular food-service sector actors to advise both incremental and systematic corrections that address FLW. These critical efforts respond to the UN mandate to bring our food system toward sustainable practices in this era of increasing need for low-carbon and nutritious food pathways.



Sustainable Agriculture Lesson: Aquaculture

In this lesson, learners will work together to embody the roles of diverse and novice aquaculturists. Their first charge will be to research entrepreneurial essentials such as technology and product. Building from there, they must consider the goals and constraints of their particular persona as they choose from four aquaculture economic-development scenarios as presented by Gephart et al. (2020). They will then articulate a development pathway that integrates economic, nutrition, and environmental goals by 2030.



Sustainable Agriculture Lesson: Community Gardens – Justice, Safety, and Climate Solutions

This lesson synthesizes the socio-environmental challenges and benefits of community gardens. It explores the call for cities to designate more community garden space in planning for climate change, resilience, food security and sovereignty, and community integration. The lesson takes the form of a town hall meeting with city officials and residents weighing in on policy choices that will affect the gardens and the city's climate resilience.



www.sesync.org



SESYNC | 1 Park Place Suite 300 | Annapolis, MD 21401 US

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