# Rationality, Responsibility, and Sustainability: When Can Human Behavior Have a Chance To Be Sustainable?

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## INTRODUCTION

Recently, traditional economic development practices have been under fire for assuming, on purpose or not, that the social and environmental externalities associated with economic growth were either marginal or minimal or non-existent. This is the view that I call the golden word view where only the economy counts. The evidence left behind through time appears to indicate that traditional thinkers have been wrong. It is fair to say, based on the above, that traditional development practices were environmentally soulless for a long time. Surprisingly, the golden worldview provides the basis to the rational economic man theory.

Today, social and environmental responsibility issues are forcing the inclusion of social and environmental concerns within traditional economic ways of thinking, leading to a new movement based on development friendliness. This is the view that I call the non-golden view, where development can take place even in the absence of money. The non-golden view is based on a sort of theory, which I call the responsible man theory, whether at the local or global level. Notice that two specific forms of the non-golden view are the green worldview (the environment matters) and the social worldview (society matters). Both use direct participation and direct benefits as the key drivers of development. The

natural conflict between traditional economic agents and development friendliness agents has given way to a movement of team work, based on the attractive characteristics of the partnership concept. In general terms, this partnership movement can be thought as teaming the rational man (golden world view) with the responsible man (non-golden world view) to produce economic benefits that are consistent with social and environmental goals.

## METHOD

The goal of this paper is to point out the sustainability gaps between the rational man and the responsible man that need to be eliminated to achieve sustainable human behavior

A simple behavioral model is used to derive the three possible types of interactions that may exist between the rational man and the responsible man. Then characteristics relevant to their internal
structure are used to assess behavior and sustainability. At the end, some conclusions are provided. The simple qualitative terminology of this model includes the following:

H = Human behavior h = Non-human behavior
A = Rational man a = Irrational man
B = Responsible man b = Irresponsible man

## THE HUMAN BEHAVIOR MODEL

If we assume that there are only two types of humans, those that follow the rational economic man theory (golden worldview) and those who hold the responsible man theory (non-golden world view), the following behavioral model can be used to trace their sustainability roles:

$$H = A + B$$

The above human behavior model (H) states that the sustainability of human behavior depends on whether or not development choices are control by the dominance of the rational man (A) or by the dominance of the responsible man (B) or by their conjunctural interactions.

### BEHAVIOR OF THE RATIONAL MAN (H1 = Ab):

When the rational man is the master of the world, he does not have to meet responsibility requirements (social and environmental) as no negative impacts are assumed or expected from rational actions. This is possible mainly because rationality assumes that humans can be
governed by rules, and that human behavior can be predicted and is homogenous. If everybody is rational, the thought goes, they will behave as told

by rules and as expected from their behavior. However, when governance is unconnected to direct involvement and when prediction is unconnected to direct benefits, those assumptions may not hold true. This is because people usually resist taking responsibility for actions outside their involvement. Then behavior predictability may decrease when direct benefits are not included or considered. Hence, the two gaps, rational governance-direct involvement and rational prediction-direct benefits, contribute to unsustainable behavior. These missing sustainability links appear to work well for rational agents (e.g. rational corporations) as no clear links imply no clear responsibility to social and environmental agents.

BEHAVIOR OF THE RESPONSIBLE MAN (H2 = aB):
When the responsible man takes control of the world, he does not have to fulfil economic rationality requirements as non-economic goals are paramount. This is possible principally because responsibility assumes that humans when directly involved and directed toward getting benefits from their actions, will abandon economic self-interest behavior and endorse group action and goals at a specific level. If everybody is responsible, they will act based on their direct involvement and benefits. However, again when direct involvement at a specific level is uncoupled from rational governance, and when direct benefits at a specific level are uncoupled from rational predictability, again those assumptions may not hold true. This is because responsible direct actions takes place within an environment where self-interest is still a strong force and where direct benefits can not be extrapolated using rational predictability. Hence, again the two gaps, direct involvement-rational governance and direct benefits-rational prediction, add to unsustainable behavior. These missing sustainability links appear to work well for socio-ecological agents (e.g. responsible NGOs) as no clear links imply no clear responsibility to rational agents.

BEHAVIOR OF THE RATIONAL RESPONSIBLE MAN (H3 = AB):
When the two characteristics, rationality and responsibility, are found in the same man, then a rational responsible man is created: a man capable of displaying sustainable behavior. In other words, sustainable behavior requires the interaction of both the rational man (A) and the responsible man (B) to create a unique agent where involvement-governance gaps and prediction-direct benefit gaps do not exist. As this takes place, a holistic view is created, where the
actions of the responsible man are constrained by the actions of the rational man, and vise versa. And this process creates the basis for the creation of sustainability teams.

Notice that if different men within the rational man's camp are teamed up to achieve the common goal of economic based development only, we have an economic team. If different men from the responsible man's camp are teamed up to achieve social and environmentally friendly development, we have socio-

ecological teams. When members of the rational camp (H1 = Ab) and members of the responsible camp (H2 = aB) are paired without eliminating the sustainability gaps mentioned above (H1 + H2 = Ab + aB), an economic and socio-ecological team still bound by friction is created.

## CONCLUSIONS

The existence of governance-direct involvement sustainability gaps and predictability-direct benefit sustainability gaps underlies the unsustainability of the rational man's and of the responsible man's worldviews. Hence, behavior sustainability can be found only at the point where humans are both rational and responsible at the same time since then there are not sustainability gaps. In other words, human behavior has a chance to be sustainable only when it is rule governed and predictable because of the presence of direct involvement and direct benefits at the same time.