

Article

The Three E's Revisited: How Do Community-Based Organizations Define Sustainable Communities and Their Role in Pursuit of?

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Abstract: A sustainable community seeks to protect and enhance the environment, meet social needs, and promote economic success. On average, local governments lack meaningfully connecting their environmental and economic sustainability efforts to equity and social justice. Community-based organizations (CBOs) have emerged as local leaders with a growing capacity for pursuing community sustainability. Based on data from a national survey National Community Action Partnership member organizations, this study explores (1) how CBO leaders define sustainable communities; (2) how important each of the three pillars of sustainability are to their mission; and (3) with what organizations do CBOs collaborate in their pursuit of sustainable communities. A content analysis of responses to an open-ended query to define sustainable communities revealed a significant focus on the social equity pillar of sustainability which is closely linked to economic sustainability. Similarly, CBO leaders ranked social equity and economic sustainability as the highest priority for their core mission. Lastly, CBO leaders heavily engaged in local collaboration in their sustainable community efforts. Therefore, serious pursuit of sustainable cities and communities must shift from a go-at-it-alone, centralized government approach to more inclusive, collaborative efforts that take advantage of the economic-social equity sustainability focus of CBOs in both planning and implementation.

Keywords: social equity; social sustainability; sustainable development goals; nonprofits; nongovernmental organizations; local government



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1. Introduction

Sustainable development remains a dominant policy paradigm. The climate crisis requires governments develop and implement plans to ensure cities are environmentally, economically, and socially prepared to adapt in conjunction with technological advances to mitigate impending climate impacts. Thus, it is not surprising that many local governments across the world have policies in place that attempt to reduce their environmental footprint and assure quality of life for their residents [1–3]. With the adoption of Agenda 2030 by the United Nations' (UN) member states in September 2015, a new global agenda emerged centered on sustainability. The introduction of the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) bridged early conceptualizations of sustainable development with the urgency of necessary climate action. Moreover, SDG 11 calls for sustainable cities and communities. The goal of SDG 11 is to: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable" [4]. SDG 11 has 10 targets and 15 indicators that strongly link potential urban transformations to sustainability. The challenge is how to translate global sustainability goals to national and subnational levels, and implement them at the local level. An effective understanding of what is happening at the local level along with who and how community stakeholders engage in sustainable community pursuits are paramount.

A central, transformative promise of Agenda 2030 and its SDGs is the principle of leave no one behind (LNOB). The LNOB principle “represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole [5].” National governments, at all income levels, have a responsibility to ensure that no subnational jurisdiction is left behind in their national SDG processes, including in their voluntary national reviews. Fortunately, a growing number of cities of varying income levels are undertaking “voluntary local reviews (VLRs)” to demonstrate their strategies and progress toward advancing SDGs. Many local leaders are pioneering the most innovative approaches to SDG implementation. Local governments across the globe are commonly finding it most useful to boil the 17 SDGs down to their three-part essence of integrating economic, social, and environmental problem-solving [6]. Moreover, a sustainable community seeks to protect and enhance the environment, meet social needs, and promote economic success [7].

Frameworks to assess how well governments are achieving the SDGs offer mixed results. For instance, the OECD Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets Study assesses where member nations stand and identifies the areas where additional effort is required to achieve SDGs. The 2019 Study found “that OECD countries are, on average, closest to achieving targets such as access to basic amenities (e.g., energy, information and communication technologies, and modern education facilities); maternal, infant and neonatal mortality rates; statistical capacity; public access to information; and conservation of coastal areas [8].” However, OECD nations were “furthest away from several targets related to inequalities (e.g., relative income poverty, disparities in education, women’s participation, and leadership); healthy behaviors (tobacco use and malnutrition); certain educational and employment outcomes (secondary education; adult numeracy skills; share of youth not education, employment, or training); and violence and safety (e.g., violence against women; feelings of safety) [8].” These findings showcase the importance of fully integrating the social component of sustainability into national and subnational planning for evidence-based evaluation processes and sustainable community implementation.

This article explores sustainable community pursuits in the United States (U.S.). In contrast to other OECD nations, the U.S. was not included in the Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets Study. Since the VLRs hold no official status, only three major U.S. cities, Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, and New York City, have submitted reports [9]. However, the U.S. offers an interesting context for sustainability pursuit analysis as most sustainability planning and implementation occur at the subnational level as an artifact of federalism. By embracing an internationally sanctioned policy agenda, the localization of SDGs in cities has a local convening power and signals global ambitions and progressive identities [10]. The Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC), an international nongovernmental organization whose mission is to help communities around the world address environmental, economic, and social challenges, declares a “sustainable community takes into account, and addresses, multiple human needs, not just one at the exclusion of all others” (<https://sustain.org/about/what-is-a-sustainable-community/>, accessed on 6 August 2021).

Portney, in the early 2000s, sought to understand if U.S. cities were taking sustainability seriously, by exploring economic development, the environment, and quality of life in American cities [11]. It became clear that the concepts of sustainable cities and communities were abstract, broad, and subject to a variety of understandings and meanings [12]. In theory, the sustainable community idea evolved “as mechanisms that can be used to redress the often negative or deleterious environmental and social effects of adherence to mainstream approaches to economic development” [11]. However, in contemporary applications of the sustainable community concept, it was found that key elements of the original vision were often “omitted, overlooked, or substantially modified” [11]. An analysis five years later, in 2008, also discovered that cities were adopting sustainability

as piecemeal, ad-hoc initiatives rather than as a standardized development framework or concept [13].

Environmental protection, in large part, has remained the focal point of local pursuits of sustainable communities. Cities in serious pursuit of sustainable communities typically engage in a host of activities that attempt to directly protect or improve the environment. These efforts often include energy efficiency measures, pollution prevention and reduction measures, open space and natural resource protection measures, and transportation planning measures [11,13–15]. Sustainable economic development efforts often include smart growth measures and measures promoting local employment and industries [11,13–15]. In many countries, sustainable economic development is often also a function of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as microfinance, capacity building, and self-reliance, particularly international organizations operating in developing countries or in low-wealth communities within country [16].

Equity and social justice-related sustainability efforts often include housing affordability initiatives, efforts to support access jobs and higher wages, food and energy security, and support woman/minority-owned businesses [13,15]. Little evidence demonstrates that cities have meaningfully connected their environmental and economic sustainability efforts to equity and social justice [17]. Portney found that equity issues did not appear to be integral parts of cities' definition of sustainability [11]. Reviews of local sustainability plans and reports from major U.S. cities found while there had been evidence of growth in environmental justice incorporation in local government efforts since the early 2000s, the conceptualizations and implementations of social sustainability remained highly constrained [18]. In fact, environmental justice appeared to be losing public debate traction to macro-scale sustainability concerns such as climate change and environmental amenities (e.g., parks) [18]. The relationship between sustainability and justice depends on the typology of sustainability being described, the principles of justice being identified, and the economic theories one supports [7]. If equity issues are linked to sustainability merely by assumption or as a social construct, then it may be reasonable to assume equity will not be an explicit or important element for creating a sustainable community [11]. Some have even called social equity the "missing pillar" of sustainability in both theory and praxis [19].

Therefore, if the social equity pillar of sustainability is not carried out by government, then by whom shall it be pursued in efforts to create more sustainable communities? Community-based organizations (CBOs), a type of NGO providing services or other assistance to economically or socially disadvantaged persons within its designated community, have emerged as local leaders with growing capacity for pursuing projects that support community sustainability [20,21]. CBOs are critical to the effectiveness of creating community sustainability [20]. A city's commitment to sustainability is strongly linked to the advocacy of CBOs in the policy making process [21]. Often less professional, more volunteer-based organizations gravitate toward environmental stewardship activities, while more professional organizations focus on more structural outcomes [21]. The importance of CBOs in setting and meeting community sustainability goals is evident from growing efforts that shift from a go-at-it-alone, centralized, government approach to more inclusive, collaborative efforts that take advantage of the flexible, less rule-bound nature of CBOs.

CBOs often serve disadvantaged populations and communities, often segregated by race, ethnicity, and income, suffering both under- and dis-investment by government and private enterprise. These communities are most in need of targeted investments aligned with creating communities that are more environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable. Unlike many other nonprofits, CBOs are the largest federally funded nongovernmental entities in the U.S., charged with addressing issues of systemic social and economic distress [20]. Local-based CBOs are ever-more present in local social sustainability efforts across the globe, rather than large international NGOs that led sustainability efforts in previous decades. Clear examples can be found from China to Ethiopia [22]. Yet, there remains limited scholarship that explicitly asks CBOs to define their role in

creating sustainable communities. Therefore, to fully realize the overarching visual representation of the widely used Venn diagram illustrating the interdependent pillars of sustainability—environmental protection, social equity, and economic growth—requires a deeper understanding of how each stakeholder critical to the quest for more sustainable communities defines the pillars and connects it to their work.

This research begins to fill this void by exploring three research questions. First, simply, how do CBOs define sustainable communities? Second, how important are each of the three pillars of sustainability to CBOs' mission priorities? Third, with what organizations do CBOs collaborate to pursue sustainable community efforts?

2. Materials and Methods

Data for this study were obtained from an online, national survey of National Community Action Partnership member organizations. According to its website, "Community Action Partnership is a national, 501(c)3 nonprofit membership organization that provides technical assistance, training, and other resources to Community Action Agencies, nonprofit and public groups funded by the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), a federal program that allocates funding to states to connect Americans to greater opportunity (visit <https://communityactionpartnership.com/about-us/>, accessed on 6 August 2021)." Community Action Partnership membership organizations provide support to more than 34.5 million Americans and cover 96% of all U.S. counties.

Data were obtained via a nine-part, web-based survey targeting organizations' executive directors or other senior leaders. The survey was designed in accordance with Dillman's Tailored Design Method and administered using Qualtrics online survey software [23]. The survey was pre-tested with a group of experts and community-based nonprofit organization representatives, to ensure that survey questions are properly adapted for the target audience. Survey recipients received initial emails with the survey link and were encouraged to complete the online questionnaire through additional follow-up reminder emails. Of the 726-survey links emailed, 257 were returned with varying levels of completeness, resulting in a response rate of 35%. For this analysis, 3 of the 33 survey questions were used, described in more detail below.

2.1. Defining Sustainable Communities

Survey respondents were given the following simple, open-ended prompt: please tell us your definition of a sustainable community. There were 128 respondents who completed this survey question and included in our analysis. Firstly, to establish a baseline of sustainable community priorities voiced by the survey respondents, responses were broken down into individual keywords, using R Statistical Analysis Software. R has a built-in character vector known as stop-words which corresponds to a list of commonly used words in the English language such as articles, pronouns, and conjunctions. Removing these words, which often accord no consequence to the primary intent of a given survey response, is a critical step ahead of codifying the survey responses into discrete words. After the stop-words were eliminated, text analysis was performed which ranked discrete keywords contained in the survey responses, by the number of times the word in question was found repeated across all responses. This first stage analysis was performed to obtain high-level information as to the general descriptions of the three pillars of sustainability contained in the survey responses.

Secondly, as a subsequent step, the keywords were analyzed and ranked in order of the number of individual (or unique) survey responses that contained said keywords. This additional step was carried out to eliminate the possibility of frequently used keywords belonging to only a small number of responses such as repeated with an individual response, whereby the mere number of times these words were used across responses would not be representative of a wider priority.

Thirdly, the context in which keywords were used was analyzed. The terms analyzed include frequently repeated keywords—both by overall count and count by responses—that

could differ in meaning based on the context in which they are used. Examples of such words from the survey responses include “health”, which could pertain to economic or environmental considerations, or “opportunity” which could pertain to social or economic considerations. To perform such a contextual analysis, the text analysis tool Voyant was employed. Voyant is an open-source web application that can be used to discretize survey responses by keyword. Using Voyant, the preceding and succeeding contextual associations for each keyword can be obtained across multiple responses. The text analysis on Voyant was used to understand the average context in which different keywords were used, as it relates to the three pillars of sustainability.

Finally, to obtain a robust categorization of the survey responses, topic modelling was employed. Topic modelling refers to the unsupervised classification of textual data into natural groups or “topics”. Topic modelling for textual data is very similar to numerical data clustering typically used in data mining. Topic modelling works on the principle of Latent Dirichlet Association (LDA). The LDA model works on the assumption that a document of textual information is comprised of multiple naturally occurring topics and that each of these topics is further comprised of several keywords. This model is very well-suited for the purposes of this analysis which seeks to identify the naturally occurring sustainable community characteristics (or topics) contained within the survey responses. The data analysis tool R allows users to fit topic models against textual data through the “topicmodels” package. This package contains the function “LDA” which refers to the Latent Dirichlet Association model. Users can, through the LDA function, input the number of topics to discretize the data into and other variables such as the number of iterative runs of the model depending on the level of granularity sought. In this analysis, the LDA model was run over 100,000 iterations to classify keywords into three naturally occurring topics (user-defined topics to reflect the three pillars of sustainability). The model yields as results, the top five representative terms of each naturally occurring topic and the probability of each term belonging to that topic. This analysis is specifically useful for discerning key themes contained in very large textual datasets without physically sorting through the actual data.

The above analyses were performed in chronological order to assess how community-based organization leaders define the key elements of sustainable communities.

2.2. Understanding Mission and Collaboration

There was one question each administered to understand the relationship between sustainability and CBO missions, and collaboration in CBOs’ sustainable community pursuits. Respondents were asked to rank the level of priority of each of the three sustainability pillars to their organization’s core mission along a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 = Not a Priority, 2 = Low Priority, 3 = Medium Priority, 4 = High Priority, and 5 = Essential. Respondents were also asked to select from a list of types of organizations the ones with which their organization collaborates in its sustainable community endeavors. Respondents were asked to select the type of organizations with which their organization collaborates in its sustainability efforts (checking all that apply): local government, county/regional governments, state government, federal government, local non-profits, national non-profits, school districts, private businesses. Prior research found that CBO leaders reporting greater local collaboration, in particular county/regional governments, perceived higher levels of effectiveness in their sustainable community pursuits [20].

3. Results

The sections that follow present results for (1) how CBO leaders defined sustainable communities; (2) how important each of the three pillars of sustainability were to their core organizational missions; and (3) the organizations with which they collaborated in their sustainable community pursuits.

3.1. How CBO Leaders Defined Sustainable Communities

In the sections below, findings from the four methods to analyze how CBO leaders defined sustainable communities are detailed. First the 11 most frequently used words are presented. Next are the most common words used by multiple respondents. Thirdly, the context within which common words were used is presented. Lastly, the top three topics of most common terms used by CBO leaders in their definition of a sustainable community are detailed.

3.1.1. Most Frequently Used Words

Figure 1 illustrates the top 10 most used words to define sustainable communities. The top five words by frequency were: opportunity ($n = 47$), health ($n = 46$), economic ($n = 41$), resources ($n = 35$), and services ($n = 32$). The top five words were more associated with the economic and social equity pillars of sustainability, rather than the environment pillar. The same was evident for the next five words, and more so the social equity pillar: housing, quality, residents, access, local, and affordable.

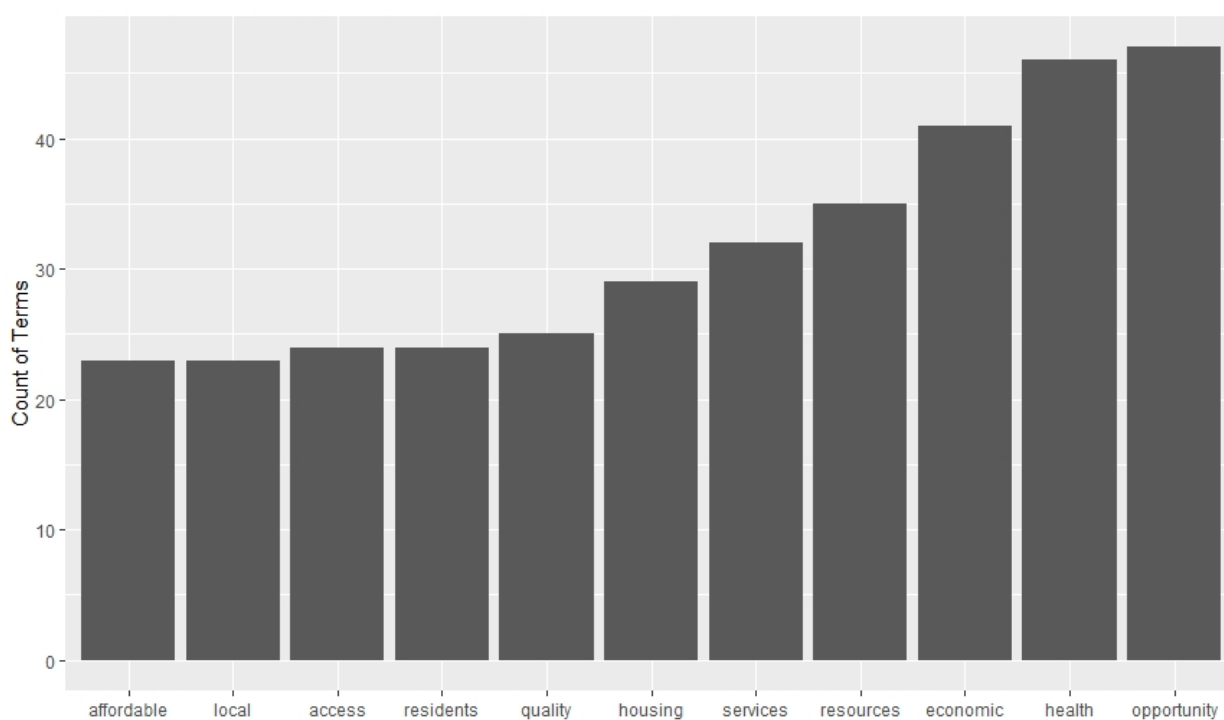


Figure 1. Top 11 words by frequency.

3.1.2. Words Used the Most Respondents

Figure 2 presents the most common words used to define sustainable communities by multiple respondents. We explored the top 10 words used most frequently by the most respondents. Again, opportunity was the top used word, with nearly 30% of the respondents using the term in their sustainable community definition. Health and economic also have the same frequency positioning, coming in as the second ($n = 36$) and third ($n = 35$), respectively, most frequently used words amongst multiple respondents. Rounding out the top five words used by multiple respondents were housing ($n = 30$) and resources ($n = 29$). The remaining five words (affordable, services, quality, local, and care) are more closely aligned with the social equity pillar of sustainability than with the environment or economic pillars.

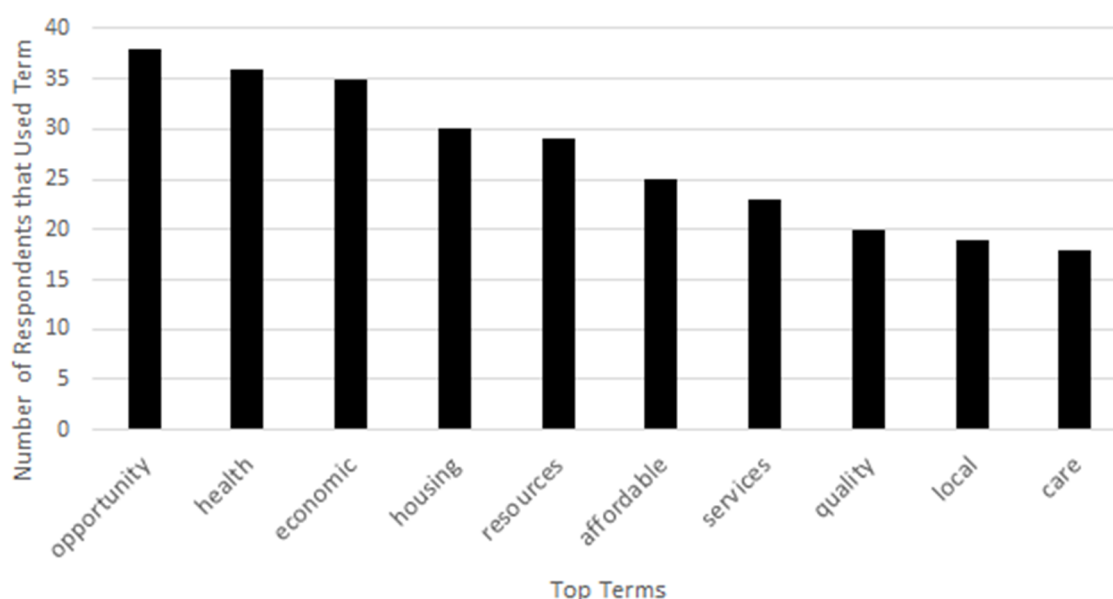


Figure 2. Top 10 words by number of respondents using.

3.1.3. Context Analysis

Table 1 presents key terms (middle column) in context with preceding words on the left and succeeding words on the right. We chose key terms based on top terms in Figures 1 and 2: opportunity, health, quality, resources, local, and services. We also included the term environment, to assess the context within which respondents used the term most often associated with local sustainability efforts. Opportunity and health were used primarily in the context of both economic and social equity pillars of sustainability. The terms quality and services were used within the context of all three pillars. Resources was used primarily in the context of the social equity pillar. The presence of and access to resources were key to how leaders defined sustainable communities. Specifically, increasing services for vulnerable communities. It was also clear from the context analysis that the term environment has a broader conceptualization for community-based organization leaders than the natural environment to include the economic and social environments within communities.

Table 1. Key terms in context with preceding and succeeding words.

Preceding Context of Usage	Key Terms	Succeeding Context of Usage
“empowering the people with equitable” “medical care, social and economic” “adequate employment” “accessible facilities like recreation”	Opportunity	“to succeed” - “which offer sufficient wages” “libraries and cultural exposure”
“strong economic” “jobs with” “public transport and affordable” -	Health/ Healthy	“and inclusive well-educated communities” “and welfare benefits for employees” “care for all ages” “ecosystems”
“enhancing the” “affordable housing and” “diverse” “living wages and”	Quality	“of the environment through pollution prevention . . . ” “of life attractions” “of education at all levels” “healthcare provisions”
“adequate transportation” “access to goods, services and support” “utilize existing”	Resources	“and continuous innovation” “for community members” “to assist the most vulnerable communities”

Table 1. Cont.

Preceding Context of Usage	Key Terms	Succeeding Context of Usage
“Viable economic” “positive and self-contained” “cultivate a natural” “low violence” -	Environment	“and access to local foods” “where families thrive” “for residents and future generations” “and clear educational signals upto college” “conservation”
“reliant on and values strong” “targeted services to meet” “good schools and a supportive” “Environmental Protection and enhancement of”	Local	“businesses” “needs” “government that supports economic growth” “and regional ecosystems”
“affordable housing and supportive” “growth of targeted” “development infrastructure and”	Services	“for residents who might need help getting back on their feet” “that meet local needs” “that strengthen local economy”

3.1.4. Topic Model

Figure 3 displays the top three topics for the most common terms used by CBO leaders in their definition of a sustainable community. We find that all three topics were more associated with the social and economic pillars of sustainability, rather than the environmental pillar. The first topic was associated with defining sustainable communities by the quality of its education, economics, and health. We see a similar pattern in the second topic, which focused on communities that offer families jobs, resources, and supportive services. The third topic illustrated that a common definition of sustainable communities included one that provides residents with access to affordable housing opportunities.

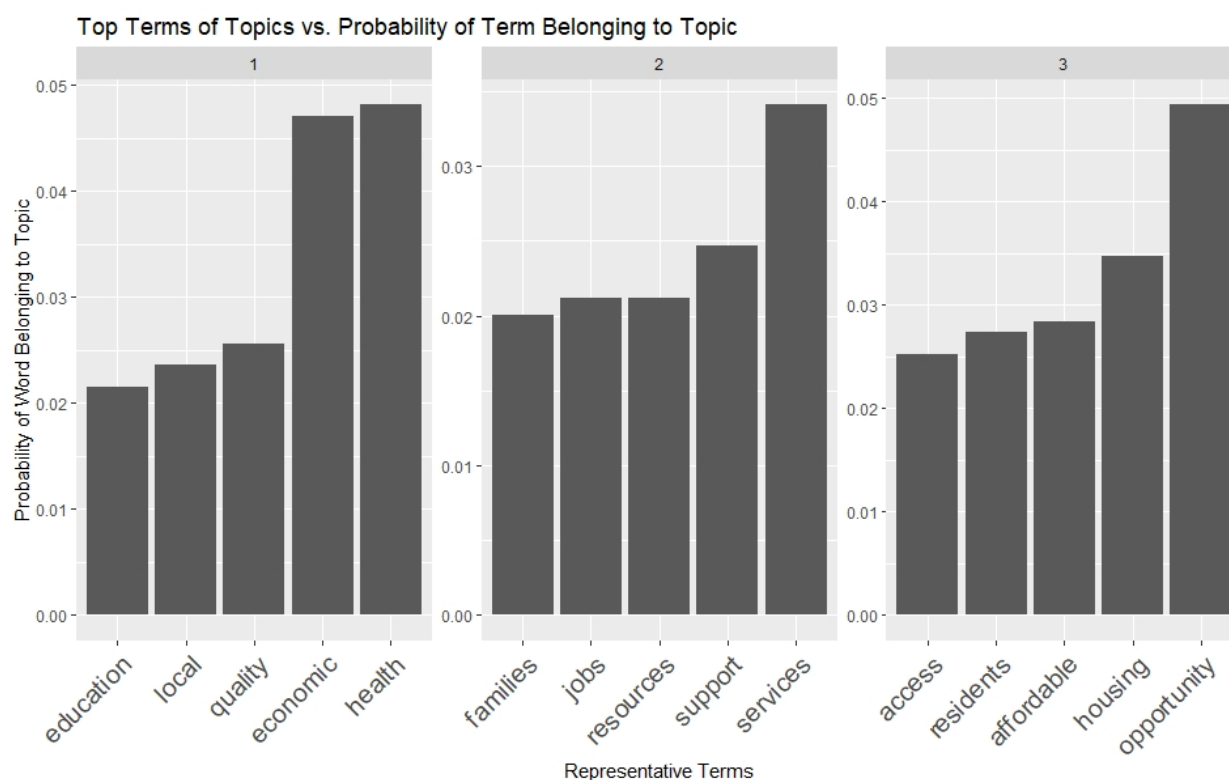


Figure 3. Topic modelling results.

3.2. The 3 E's and Mission Priorities

On a 5-point Likert scale, the mean prioritization of the three pillars of sustainability to community-based organizations' mission was 2.5 for the environmental pillar, and 4.0 for both the economic and equity pillars. Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of mission priority associated with each of the three pillars of sustainability. Nearly three-fourths of CBO leaders ranked the economic and equity pillars of sustainability as high priority or essential to their core mission, 74% ($n = 156$) and 72% ($n = 157$), respectively. Only a small proportion of CBO leaders ranked the environmental pillar as high priority or essential to their core mission, 19% ($n = 154$).

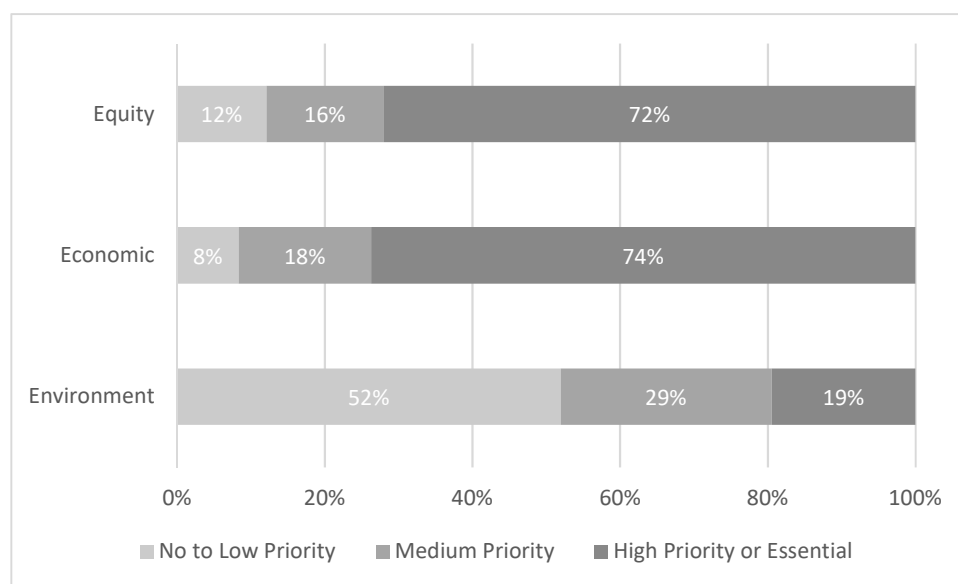


Figure 4. The extent to which the three pillars of sustainability are a priority to organizations' core mission.

3.3. Sustainable Community Collaboration

CBO leaders overwhelmingly reported collaborating with multi-sector stakeholders in their sustainable community endeavors (Figure 5, $n = 146$). CBO leaders expressed extremely high collaboration at the local level. For instance, 95% of CBO leaders collaborated with local governments, while 93% collaborated with other local nonprofits in their sustainable community endeavors. County/regional and state government collaboration was reported by 90% of CBO leaders. Three-quarters of the CBO leaders reported they collaborated with private businesses and the federal government. Local school districts were also a common partner in sustainability efforts (71%). However, it appeared that national nonprofits, who are often viewed as sustainability leaders, were less commonly collaborators on local sustainability efforts.

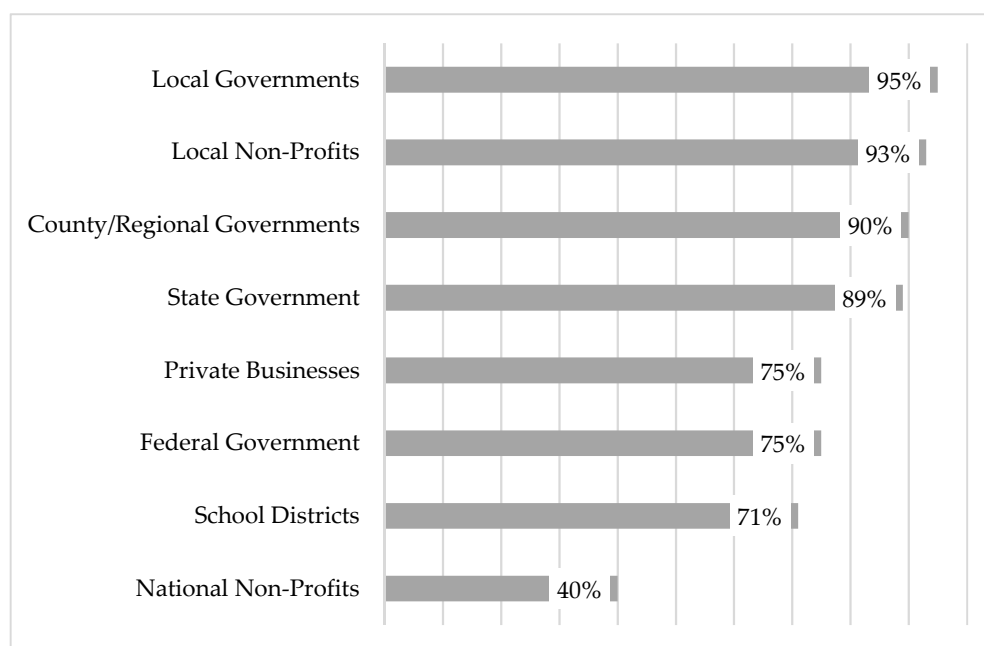


Figure 5. The percent of survey respondents and type of organizations they collaborate with in their sustainable community endeavors.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This research offers insights into how leaders of CBOs (1) define sustainable communities; (2) describe how important each of the three pillars of sustainability are to their organization's mission; and (3) identify what organizations they collaborate with to pursue sustainable communities. CBOs and other NGOs are emerging as local leaders in sustainable community efforts and understating their conceptualizations of the term is an important step to more fully engaging CBOs in sustainability planning and implementation processes. Based on open-ended response from 128 US-based CBO leaders, it was revealed that CBOs tended to focus more on the social equity and economic development pillars of sustainable communities. To the authors' knowledge this is one of the only studies to directly ask CBO leaders to define sustainable communities in their own words. This focus presents a clear role for CBOs to fill the social equity sustainability gap often identified in current local government efforts as well as an opportunity to bridge complementary efforts by CBOs and local governments on sustainable economic development.

The way CBO leaders in this study defined sustainable communities closely aligned with the focus of international NGOs working solely on sustainable community pursuits. With over three decades of experience and over 100 projects in 30 countries, including China, Bangladesh, and India, the ISC has concluded that climate change, income inequality, and social injustice are the biggest threats to building sustainable communities. The ISC has focused on following four elements as essential to sustainable communities: leadership, civic engagement, and responsibility; ecological integrity; economic security; and social well-being. Three of the four essential elements of sustainable communities are in the purview of local CBOs to implement in their communities, often with guidance from international NGOs. It is very necessary that NGOs, as outsiders, do not disregard the local context issues and needs of the local affected communities [24]. For instance, in a study in disaster recovery study in Bangladesh, researchers found that NGOs did not fully engage CBOs but found if they did it would lead to better program efficiency and effectiveness [24]. This makes conducting studies to better understand how CBOs define sustainable communities and their role in pursuit of great import.

The distinct nature with which the social equity and economic development pillars of sustainability resonated with CBO leaders is expected given the nature of their organiza-

tions' mission and work. A United Kingdom Sustainable Communities Plan described a vision with eight key components: housing and built environment, governance, transport and connectivity, services, environmental, equity, economy, social and cultural [25]. Many of these components mirror the key terms highlighted by the CBO leaders. Many of the CBOs in this study were founded in the early 1960s under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 which mobilized human and financial resources to combat poverty in the U.S. (Pub.L. 88–452). Thus, a long-standing linkage between social and economic sustainability, and less explicit or inherent connection to environmental sustainability. According to Boström, “the division between ‘environmental’ and ‘social’ reflects a historical dualism that has been institutionalized in administration and management [19].” The environmental sector includes activities of natural protection and preservation, while the social sector includes welfare and the social safety net [19].

While CBO leaders appeared to focus less on the environmental pillar of sustainability, housing was a key focus in their conceptualization of sustainable communities, showing up as both a frequently used word as well as one of the top words used by the most respondents. Across the globe, housing is a key issue in delivering sustainable communities [26]. Moreover, sustainable housing efforts decisively bridge the three pillars of sustainability. Maliene and Malys characterized sustainable housing as available (sufficient offer and information on such offers), quality (from the technical and provision point of view), economical (greater number of households have opportunities to purchase it and cover the exploitation expenses), ecological (energy saving, etc.), comfortable and cozy (from the social–psychological point of view) [26].

The primary finding of this study is that no one sector (government, nonprofit, or business) in a local community has total responsibility for sustainable community pursuits. Partnerships and collaborations have a significant role in creating a more deliberative and inclusive framework for sustainable community pursuits [20,27–29]. An examination of U.S. Federal Government's Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant, an effort to promote regional planning that incorporated social equity into sustainability, while regional equity planning remained lacking, determined that some organizations were making headway, particularly those that considered economic and racial segregation, clearly defined policy work toward addressing specific underserved communities, and discussed strategies to engage multiple jurisdictions and stakeholders [30]. As Agyeman and Evans wrote, “if enough examples of sustainability and environmental justice initiatives can be created and networked, then perhaps this can galvanize a movement to reinvent the definition of progress [31].” For a holistic approach to sustainability, sectors must collaborate. As mentioned previously, Saha and Patterson studied local governments and presented their empirical reinterpretation of the commonly used sustainability Venn diagram based on their survey of local government efforts [13]. However, in Figure 6, we propose that there is an addition to their interpretation with a reinterpretation based on our survey of CBO leaders and suggest that this reinterpretation begins to get us closer to the three equal circles of the sustainability Venn diagram.

While this study is limited to the U.S., we believe the field of sustainability would benefit if similar studies are undertaken in other countries. By specifically focusing on organizational leaders, this study sheds some new light on how CBO leaders perceive the elements that contribute to greater sustainable community creation. Future research would also benefit from understanding sustainable community definitions and perceptions from private business leaders and their roles in local efforts environment and equity goals beyond a focus on their own business or economic development sustainability. A greater understanding of sustainable community definitions and perceptions from leaders in government, nonprofits, and business is necessary for a more holistic approach to theory and praxis of the 3 E's of sustainability.

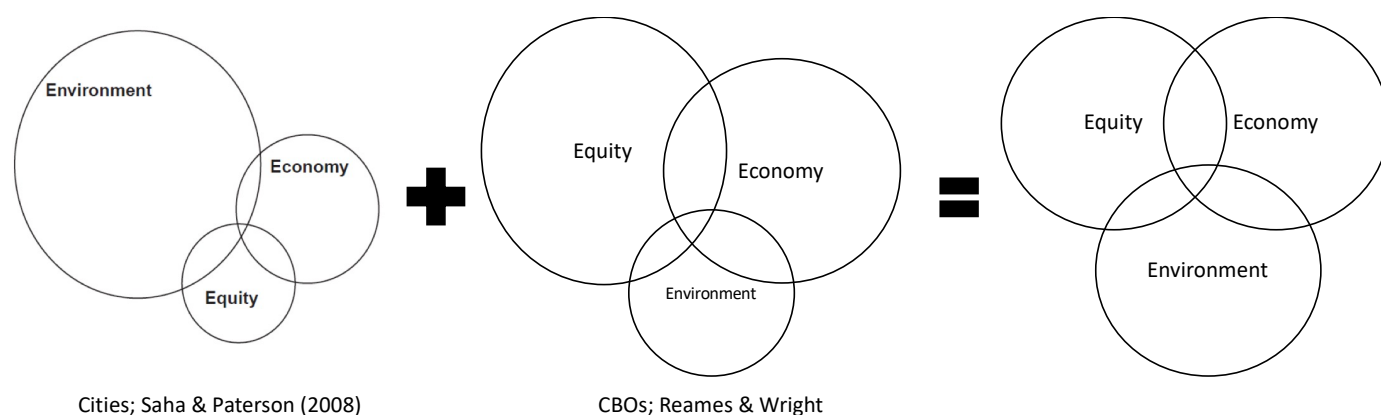


Figure 6. Sustainability collaboration between local governments and CBOs.

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