

From Scarcity to Sustainability: Integrating SDGs and Universal Human Values for Resource Governance

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Abstract

Humanity faces the urgent task of ensuring prosperity with the finite limits of natural and social resources. The scarcity principle, a cornerstone of economic theory, highlights the tension between limited supply and unlimited demand, shaping both markets and human behavior. While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for addressing scarcity through equitable and sustainable practices, their effectiveness is constrained when reduced to purely technical or policy-driven approaches. This paper suggests that Universal Human Values (UHV)- including compassion, justice, responsibility and harmony with nature- are indispensable for bridging the gap between efficiency and ethics. Drawing on conceptual analysis, secondary data and India as a case study, the paper examines how the integration of scarcity economics, SDG frameworks and UHV creates a holistic model for sustainable development. Findings suggest that policies grounded in UHV enhance equity, facilitate mindful consumption and ensure that sustainability initiatives remain human-centered. By demonstrating examples such as India's Midday Meal Scheme, renewable energy transition and afforestation programs, the study underscores the transformative potential of embedding values within development strategies. The integration of economic rationality, policy commitments and ethical imperatives offers a robust pathway for achieving a just, inclusive and sustainable future.

Keywords: Scarcity principle, Sustainable Development Goals, Universal Human Values, Sustainability, India, Ethical Development

Introduction

Human societies face the dual challenge of ensuring prosperity while operating within the limits of finite resources. The scarcity principle highlights the imbalance between limited supply and growing demand, often resulting in competition, rising prices and inequitable access. As Robbins noted, "Economics is the science which studies human behavior as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses" [6]. The SDGs, adopted by the United Nations [7], offer a blueprint for tackling these challenges. However, economic and developmental approaches must be complemented by a values-based perspective. Universal Human Values emphasize coexistence, responsibility toward others and

recognition of the interconnectedness of humanity and nature [1,4]. Together, these three frameworks- scarcity principle, SDGs and UHV- provide a holistic basis for sustainable and ethical development.

Literature Review

The Scarcity Principle in Economics

Scarcity is the foundation of economics. Robbins emphasized that scarcity necessitates choices because “if means were unlimited, there would be no economic goods, no economic problems and no economics” [6]. The World Bank further observed that “resource scarcity remains a critical determinant of market volatility and social vulnerability” [9].

Scarcity in Social Psychology

Scarcity also shapes human perception and behavior. Cialdini observed that “opportunities seem more valuable to us when their availability is limited” [2]. Marketers leverage this principle by creating artificial scarcity through “limited-time offers.” While this drives consumption, it can foster greed and short-termism, contradicting human values of fairness and responsibility.

Scarcity, Sustainable Development and Universal Human Values

Scarcity is central to debates on sustainability. The UNDP stressed that “environmental degradation and climate change are intensifying scarcities that threaten holistic human development” [8]. The SDGs aim to ensure equitable resource allocation, but their effectiveness increases when coupled with Universal Human Values such as responsible consumption, compassion and justice [1,3]. UHV bridge the gap between technical solutions and ethical considerations, guiding human beings toward decisions that prioritize collective well-being [3].

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative approach based on conceptual analysis and secondary data review. Three strands of inquiry are integrated:

- Economic Theory: Analysis of scarcity as framed by Robbins [6].
- Policy Frameworks: Review of policies and their alignment with SDGs [7].
- Ethical View: Incorporation of Universal Human Values (UHV) such as compassion, justice, harmony and coexistence, drawn from educational frameworks [1,3]. India is applied as a case study to illustrate the intersection of scarcity, SDG implementation and UHV in practice.

Analysis and Discussion

The Economic Dimension of Scarcity

Scarcity determines price, allocation and competition. The World Bank notes that “food price shocks disproportionately affect low-income households, amplifying the social impact of scarcity” [9]. While economic mechanisms address efficiency, UHV highlight fairness: food should not be withheld from the hungry due to market pricing.

The Psychological Dimension of Scarcity

Cialdini emphasized that scarcity increases desirability because “the fear of losing freedoms makes them more attractive” [2]. While businesses exploit this, UHV principles propose right utilization of resources and non-exploitation of nature.

Scarcity and the SDGs through the View of UHV

The SDGs address scarcity in practical terms, but UHV provides the ethical imperative. For example:

- Goal 2 (Zero Hunger): compassion and relationship [7].
- Goal 6 (Clean Water): respect for nature [7].
- Goal 7 (Clean Energy): responsibility for future generations [7].
- Goal 12 (Responsible Consumption): mindfulness and self-regulation [7].

Universal Human Values Framework in India

Universal Human Values (UHV) provide the ethical foundation for addressing global challenges by guiding human action toward harmony within the self, society and nature. These values complement the scarcity principle and SDGs by ensuring that solutions are not only efficient but also fair, compassionate, and sustainable. As Gaur, Sangal & Bagaria explain, values such as truth, love, compassion and justice are not abstract ideals but “necessary principles for human survival, mutual trust and long-term sustainability” [4].

Table 1. Universal Human Values, SDGs and Practical Applications in India’s Policies

Universal Human Value	Outcomes	Relevant SDGs	Practical Examples
Truth (Satya)	Encourages transparency in governance and markets, ensuring accurate data sharing on resource availability	SDG 16: Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions	Open Government Data in India ensures transparency in resource allocation.
Love (Prema)	Promotes empathy and care for all beings, motivating policies that prioritize vulnerable populations	SDG 3: Good Health & Well-being	Community health workers in rural India providing maternal care with empathy.
Compassion (Karuna)	Recognizes the suffering caused by scarcity and inspires humanitarian responses	SDG 2: Zero Hunger	India’s Midday Meal Scheme ensuring children receive nutritious meals.
Justice (Nyaya)	Ensures fair distribution of resources	SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	The Public Distribution System (PDS) offering subsidized food grains to marginalized groups.
Responsibility (Kartavya)	Calls on individuals and nations to act with accountability toward future generations	SDG 12: Responsible Consumption & Production; SDG 13: Climate Action	International Solar Alliance led by India promoting clean energy transition.
Harmony with Nature (Prakriti Samman)	Recognizes human-ecosystem interdependence	SDG 14: Life Below Water; SDG 15: Life on Land	National Mission for a Green India: large-scale afforestation and biodiversity protection.

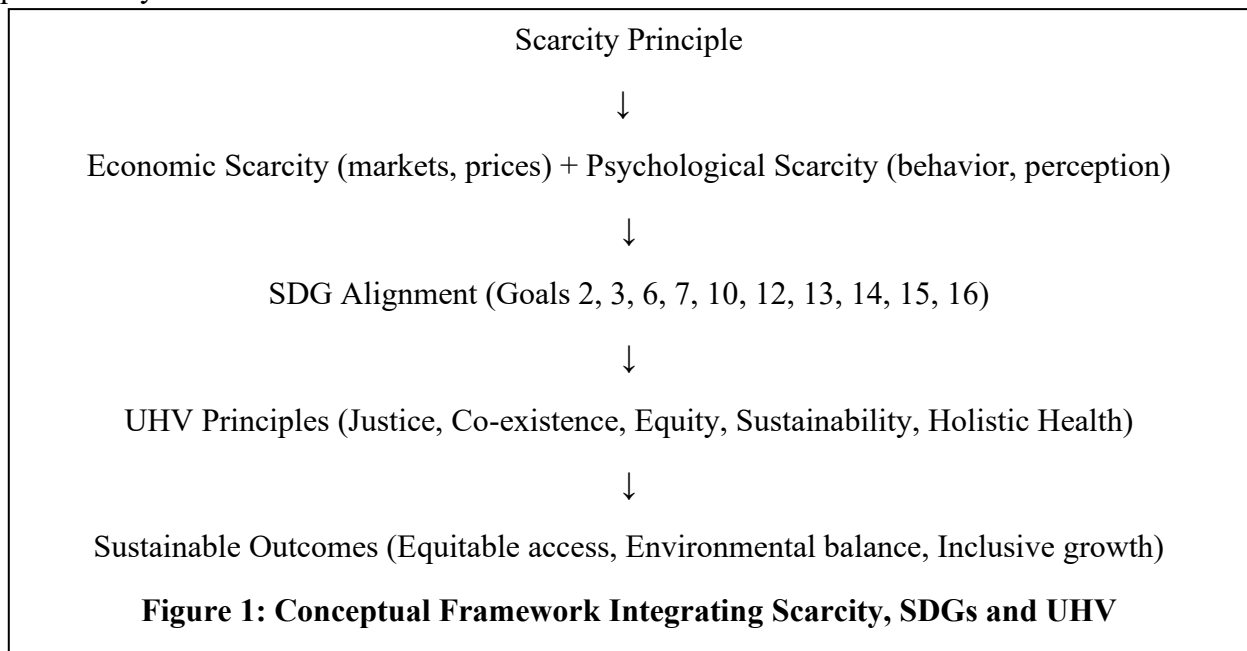
Table 2: Economic vs Psychological Dimensions of Scarcity

Dimension	Focus Area	Example in Practice	UHV Perspective
Economic Scarcity	Limited supply vs. high demand	Food grain shortages driving up prices	Justice in distribution; right utilization
Psychological Scarcity	Perceived value when availability is low	“Limited-time offers” or hoarding during crises	Self-regulation; mindful consumption

India illustrates the combined importance of scarcity, SDGs and UHV. Progress includes:

- 44% of installed capacity now from non-fossil fuels [5].
- 410 million people lifted out of poverty between 2005–2021 [8].

Yet, challenges remain in equitable access to water, food, and healthcare. Integrating UHV into policy- such as prioritizing the poorest and ensuring dignity- can enhance SDG outcomes. Programs like the Midday Meal Scheme embody values of compassion and justice, ensuring that no child goes hungry despite scarcity.



Conclusion

The scarcity principle highlights the inevitability of limited resources, the SDGs provide a global framework to address these challenges and Universal Human Values ensure that the approach remains ethical, inclusive and human-centered. The integration of these three perspectives- economic, policy and ethics- is essential to address today’s global crises and better resource governance. As India’s case illustrates, progress is possible when policies balance efficiency with values. Ultimately, only by embedding Universal Human Values into scarcity management and SDG implementation, humanity can achieve a just, equitable and sustainable future by 2030.

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