Study Sustainability Hub

SusTerm Dictionary

Sustainability terminologies made simple

© 2025 Study Sustainability Hub

First published online September 2025.

By Study Sustainability Hub *https://www.studysustainabilityhub.com/home* and *https://www.studysustainabilityhub.org/home* and by Leaps and Heights Services Limited, UK and Leaps and Heights Foundation, Ghana.

SusTerm Dictionary © 2025 by Study Sustainability Hub is licensed under Creative Commons AttributionNonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International. To view a copy of this license, visit *https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/*

The right of Study Sustainability Hub to be identified as the author of the material has been sserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988.

No part of this book may be used or reproduced by any means, graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, or by any information storage retrieval system, without the written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Trademark notices: product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Typeset in Adobe Monserat
By MS Word

Why the Dictionary?

This Sustainability Dictionary was born out of a single, powerful idea: sustainability can and should be explained in simple terms and understood by everyone, not just specialists. We live in a time when climate change, environmental responsibility, and sustainable development are no longer optional discussions, but everyday tête-à-têtes that are crucial across all conversations. Yet too often, the language around them is wrapped in technical jargon, leaving the very people who need to act the most, often out of the conversation. This dictionary is here to change that.

What makes this Dictionary good for you?

• Written in Simple Language: Every term is explained in clear, everyday language minimizing complicated phrases as much as possible. If you can read, you can understand it.

• Text Examples: We don't just give you a definition; we give you real-life examples of how that term is used in sustainability conversations. This means you can see the word in action and understand its practical meaning.

• Visual Examples: Since some concepts are better explained and understood with pictures rather than text, this dictionary includes illustrations, diagrams and images that shed more light on the terminologies. These visuals transform abstract ideas into relatable and memorable knowledge.

Why you must read this Dictionary

• Add Climate Proficiency to your skill set: The world is rapidly moving toward sustainability/climate-conscious decision-making. This dictionary equips you to confidently join those conversations and cement your impact.

• De-technicalise sustainability conversations: It strips away the jargon, so you can engage with sustainability topics in a way that is practical, relatable, and meaningful.

The Workbook

How do you deepen your engagement with this Dictionary?

To deepen your learning and engagement with this dictionary, we have created a workbook, available through a direct link in this dictionary. It is designed to:

• Enhance personal understanding and learning engagement, allowing individuals to reflect, practice, and apply terminologies and concepts at their own learning pace.

• Support team and classroom activities, to encourage discussions, debates, and collaborative problem-solving

The workbook is divided into five modules: each packed with over 1,000+ thought-provoking yet friendly questions and puzzles. Whether you are studying alone, teaching a class, conducting training, overseeing a team exercise, or leading a community group, this workbook turns definitions into dialogue, and concepts into action.

Why You Should Donate

Your support helps us go further to:

• Translate this dictionary into 17 other languages, making sustainability knowledge accessible worldwide.

• Fund our Junior High School sustainability quiz competitions across Africa. Your support funds this project that has the high potential of sparking climate knowledge curiosity, build confidence, and create a ripple effect of eco-conscious action in schools and communities across the continent.

• Support global youth advocacy projects, to empower the next generation of climate leaders

This dictionary is a bridge between understanding and action, between curiosity and change. Read it, use it, share it and let's build a more sustainable world together.

Acknowledgements

This dictionary is the result of collective effort, and we are filled with utmost gratitude to everyone who made it possible, most especially the team at Leaps and Heights Foundation. To the editorial and research team led by Evans Gyakye, thank you for your dedication to carefully defining terms in their simplest forms and ensuring accuracy. Your rapt attention to details has transformed what was once thought to be a complex field into a clear and accessible resource.

We are equally very grateful to the subject-matter experts, educators, and practitioners who shared their insights, experiences and feedback. Your unwavering interest and contributions have enriched the content and ensured that it reflects scientific and academic rigour, and practical relevance.

Special thanks go to our Creatives and Communications team, led by Ibrahim Lukman (SaBali), whose creativity brought this work to life and made it engaging for a wider audience. Thank you to our Language Assessment and Literature Consultant, Abena Gyaawa Ofori, for proofreading and determining the language fitness for this dictionary. Our appreciation goes to Enoch Gyakye for designing the cover page of this dictionary.

Above all, we thank the many mentors, partners, colleagues, and supporters whose encouragement and belief in this project motivated us from start to finish. This work belongs to all of us.

Foreword

It is with great honour to introduce SusTerm Bank, your Sustainability Terminologies Bank. This dictionary is a guide carefully curated and designed to support and encourage students professionals, life-long learners and everyday citizens to engage with the language of sustainability with clarity and confidence.

Sustainability is often filled with technical terms, acronyms, and concepts that can feel complex and overwhelming. Yet behind every word lies an idea that shapes how we live, how we work, how we interact with people and nature, and most importantly, how we protect our planet for future generations without compromising the needs of the present. This dictionary was created to make those ideas accessible to everyone, so that no voice is left out of the conversation, and citizens are empowered to participate fully in shaping a more sustainable future. Simply put, this dictionary aims to de-technicalise sustainability terminologies and language. So, whether you are reading about “renewable energy,”, “climate governance” “biophilic design,”, “wellbeing” or “just transition,” you will find text and visual definitions that are clear, practical, and grounded in real-world action.

The excitement about this work is that it is not meant to be a book you read once and set aside. As sustainability is dynamic, so must our understanding of it be. Simply think of this dictionary as a living companion, something to consult, to question, and to build upon as new challenges and innovations emerge. I am deeply grateful to the team of contributors, subject-matter experts, educators, and practitioners who brought their expertise and passion to this project. Their efforts reflect the collaboration and inclusivity that sustainability itself demands.

While you explore these pages, I encourage you to not only read and learn the terms, but to use them to start conversations, advocate for change, lead with knowledge and influence with action. Words such as these, after all, are the starting point of continuous action.

Enoch Opare Mintah, PhD-C.
Founder/Sustainability Lead
Study Sustainability Hub

Contents

A 16

AA1000 Series of Standards

Adaptation

Adaptive Capacity

Additionality

Agenda 2030

Air Pollution

Alternative Energy

Aquaculture

Audit (Sustainability Audit / Environmental Audit)

Authenticity

B 43

Balance of Nature

Basel Convention

Best Available Techniques (BAT)

Best Environmental Practices (BEP)

Best Value (Public Sector)

Biodiversity

Biodiversity Offsetting

Bioeconomy

Bioenergy

Biofuels

Biogas

Biodegradable

Biophilic Design

Blue Water / Bluewater

Building Efficiency

Business Resilience

Business Sustainability

Business Transformation

Business Travel Emissions (Scope 3 Category 6)

C 77

Capital Goods Emissions (Scope 3 Category 2)

Carbon

Carbon Accounting

Carbon Bank

Carbon Balancing

Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Carbon Budget

Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS)

Carbon Credit

Carbon Cycle

Carbon Dioxide (CO_2)

Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (CO_2e)

Carbon Emissions

Carbon Footprint

Carbon Footprint Verification (CFV)

Carbon Insetting

Carbon Intensity

Carbon Labelling

Carbon Leakage

Carbon Management

Carbon Market

Carbon Negative

Carbon Neutral / Carbon Neutrality

Carbon Offsetting

Carbon Positive

Carbon Pricing

Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC)

Carbon Registry

Carbon Reporting

Carbon Sequestration

Carbon Sink

Carbon Source
Carbon Tax
Carbon Token
Carbon Trading
Carbon Trust Standard
Carbon Value-at-Risk (VaR)
Carbon Zero
CDP (Carbon Disclosure Project)
Chemicals and Waste
Circular Economy
Citizenship
Civilisation and Climate Vulnerability
Clean Air
Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)
Clean Energy
Clean Tech / Cleantech
Cleaner Production Assessment (CPA)
Climate
Climate Action
Climate Action 100+
Climate Adaptation
Climate Change
Climate Change Adaptation
Climate Change Mitigation
Climate Governance
Climate Impact
Climate Justice
Climate Mitigation
Climate Neutral
Climate Refugee
Climate Resilience
Climate Risk
Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA)

C 77

Climate Scenario Analysis
Climate Shadow
Climate Vulnerability
Climate-Related Opportunities
Climate-Related Physical Risks
Climate-Related Risks
Climate-Related Transition Risks
Closed Loop / Closed-Loop Economy
Collective Impact
Combined Heat and Power (CHP)
Communication + Engagement
Compostable
Composting
Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)
Conference of the Parties (COP)
Conscious Capitalism
Conscious Consumerism
Conservation
Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)
Corporate Carbon Footprint (CCF)
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence
Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)
Cradle to Cradle (C2C)
Cradle to Gate
Cradle to Grave
Cultural Diversity
Cultural Heritage
Cumulative Energy Requirements Analysis

D 168

Decarbonisation

Decentralised Energy

Decentralised Water Systems

Decolonisation

Deep Retrofit

Defacement

Degradation

Degrowth

Desertification

Digital Carbon Footprint

Digital Sobriety

Digital Sustainability

Direct Air Capture

Direct Emissions

Disaster Resilience

Disaster Risk Reduction

Disclosure / Disclosing

Diversity and Inclusion

Doha Amendment

Double Materiality Assessment

Doughnut Economics

Downcycling

Downstream Leased Assets Emissions (Scope 3 Category 13)

Downstream Transportation and Distribution Emissions (Scope 3 Category 9)

Drawdown

Drought

Decarbonisation

Decentralised Energy

Decentralised Water Systems

Decolonisation

Deep Retrofit

Defacement

Degradation

Degrowth

Desertification

Digital Carbon Footprint

Digital Sobriety

Digital Sustainability

Direct Air Capture

Direct Emissions

Disaster Resilience

Disaster Risk Reduction

Disclosure / Disclosing

Diversity and Inclusion

Doha Amendment

Double Materiality Assessment

Doughnut Economics

Downcycling

Downstream Leased Assets Emissions (Scope 3 Category 13)

Downstream Transportation and Distribution Emissions (Scope 3 Category 9)

Drawdown

Drought

E 194

Eco-Anxiety

Eco-Conscious

Eco-Districts

Eco-Efficiency Analysis

Eco-Footprint

Eco-Friendly

Ecolabels

Ecological Crisis

Ecological Footprint

E 194

Ecological or Nature Regeneration

Ecological or Nature Restoration

Ecological Restoration

Ecology

Ecosystem

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

Electric Vehicle (EV)

Electronic Waste / E-Waste

Embedded Carbon

Embodied Carbon

Embedded Water / Virtual Water

Embodied Water / Shadow Water

Embodied Energy

Emission Removals

Emission Scoping

Emissions

Emissions to Air

Emissions Trading / Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) / Cap-and-Trade

Employee Commuting Emissions (Scope 3 Category 7)

End-of-Life Scenario

End-of-Life Treatment of Sold Products (Scope 3 Category 12)

Energy Efficiency

Energy Management

Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

Environmental Justice

Environmental Law

Environmental Management System (EMS)

Environmental Monitoring

Environmental Performance

Environmental Product Declaration (EPD)

Environmental Sociology

Environmental Claim

Environmental Sustainability

Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)

ESG Certification

ESG Frameworks

ESG Fund Ratings

ESG Indices

ESG Integration

ESG Investing

Environmentally Preferable Products

Equity / Equity and Gender / Equity and Justice

EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)

EU Green Claims Directive

EU Taxonomy

European Green Deal

European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS)

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR)

Externalities

Extreme Weather Event

F 256

Fairtrade

Feed-in Tariff

Financial Inclusion

F 256

Food Miles

Food Security

Forest Risk Commodity

Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

Fossil Fuels

Franchises Emissions (Scope 3 Category 14)

Fuel and Energy-Related Activities (Scope 3 Category 3)

G 266

Gender Equality

Gender Inequality

Gender Pay Gap

Geothermal Energy

Green Bond

Green Economy

Green Finance

Green Growth

Greenhouse Gas (GHG)

Greenhouse Gas Protocol (GHGP)

Greenwashing

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

Gross National Happiness (GNH)

Gross National Income (GNI)

Groundwater

H 305

Habitat

Habitat Banking

Human Capital

Human Development Index (HDI)

Human Rights Due Diligence (HRDD)

Human Well-Being

Hybrid Renewable Energy Systems (HRES)

I 315

Impact Investing

Inclusive Growth

Indigenous Knowledge

Industrial Ecology

Industrial Symbiosis

Inequality

Informal Economy

Infrastructure Resilience

Integrated Reporting

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)

Internal Carbon Pricing

International Standard on Assurance Engagements 3000 (ISAE 3000)

Investment Emissions (Scope 3 Category 15)

ISO 14001 – Environmental Management Systems

ISO 14019 Series – Validate and Verify Sustainability Information

ISO 14064

ISO 14064-1 – Quantify and Report GHG Emissions and Removals

ISO 14067 – Carbon Footprint of Products

ISO 14068-1 – Climate Change Management, Transition to Net Zero (Part 1: Carbon Neutrality)

J 338

Just Transition

K 339

Kyoto Protocol

L 340

Land Degradation

Landfill

Landfill-Free

Leadership and Sustainable Change

LEED Certification

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)

Life Cycle Costing

Linear Economy

Long-Term Science-Based Targets

Loss and Damage

Low-Carbon Economy

Low-Impact Development (LID)

M 352

Material Circularity Indicator (MCI)

Materiality Assessment

Mental Health and Climate Change

Methane (CH_4)

Microgeneration / Microenergy

Microplastics

Mitigation

Mitigation Hierarchy

Mobility Management

Modern Slavery

N 362

Naked Packaging

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

Natural

Natural Capital

Natural Capital Accounting

Natural Resources

Natural Resources Management

Naturalistic Fallacy

Nature Positive

Nature Reporting

Nature-Based Solutions

Nature-Related Opportunities

Nature-Related Physical Risks

Nature-Related Risks

Nature-Related Systemic Risk

Nature-Related Transition Risk

Near-Term Science-Based Targets

Negative Screening

Net Positive

Net Zero

Net Zero Asset Managers (NZAM)

Net Zero Energy Building

Net-Zero Carbon Emissions

Net-Zero Emissions

Net-Zero Water

O 393

Offsetting (Carbon Offsetting, Nature Offsetting)

Off-Grid Energy

Open-Loop Recycling

Overconsumption

P 399

Paris Agreement

Participatory Governance

Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)

Permaculture

Planetary Boundaries

Plastic Pollution

Pollution Prevention

Precautionary Principle

Producer Responsibility

R 419

Recyclability

Recycling

Regenerative Agriculture

Regenerative Design

Renewable Energy

Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS)

Resilience

Resource Efficiency

Resource Intensity

Responsible Consumption and Production

Restorative Economy

Risks

Risk Assessment

Risk Management

S 445

Sanitation

Science-Based Targets Initiative (SBTi)

Scope 1 Emissions

Scope 2 Emissions

Scope 3 Emissions

Scope 4 Emissions

Scopes of Emission

Secondary Recovered Fuel

Secure Shelter

Shared Value

Shareholder Activism

Sharing Economy

Sin Stocks

Single Materiality Assessment

Single-Use

Smart Grid

Smart Growth

Social Bonds

Social Capital

Social Enterprise

Social Factors

Social Financial Instruments

Social Impact

Social Licence to Operate

Social Responsibility

Socially Responsible Investing (SRI)

Solar Energy / Solar Panels

Spatial Perspectives

Stakeholder Capitalism

Sustainable Behaviours

Sustainable Business

Sustainable Cities

Sustainable Communities

Sustainable Construction

Sustainable Consumption

Sustainable Design

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
Sustainable Estates
Sustainable Fibers
Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR)
Sustainable Organisations
Sustainable Packaging
Sustainable Procurement
Sustainable Supply Chain
Sustainable Transport
Systems Thinking

T 492

Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)
Task Force on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)
Thematic Investing
Third Party Certified or Verified
Tipping Point / Climate Tipping Point
Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD)
Task Force on Nature-Related Financial Disclosures (TNFD)
Thematic Investing
Third Party Certified or Verified
Tipping Point / Climate Tipping Point
Transition Plan
Transition Risk
Tree Washing
Triple Bottom Line (TBL)
Two-Degree Limit / Two-Degree Target

U 502

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
UN Global Compact
UN Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI)
UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
Upcycling
Upstream Leased Assets Emissions (Scope 3 Category 8)
Upstream Transportation and Distribution Emissions (Scope 3 Category 4)
Use of Sold Products Emissions (Scope 3 Category 11)

V 510

Value Chain Emissions
Value Proposition
Vegan / Veganism
Verification
Vertical Farming
Vested Rights
Virtue Signalling
Voluntary Carbon Market (VCM)

W

Waste Avoidance

Waste Hierarchy

Waste Management

Waste-to-Energy (WTE)

Water Conservation

Water Efficiency

Water Neutral

Water Pollution

Water Positive

Water Scarcity

Water Stewardship

Water Stress

Watershed

Weather

Whole Systems Thinking

Wildlife Corridor

Wildlife Crime

Wildlife Friendly

Workforce Diversity

Workforce Inclusion

Workplace Wellbeing

1.5 DEGREES

The "1.5 degrees" goal refers to an international target to limit the average increase in Earth's temperature to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above the temperatures that existed before the industrial revolution (which was around 1850).

Scientists agree that if we go above 1.5°C of warming, the world will face much worse problems like stronger hurricanes, more deadly heatwaves, higher sea levels, and more damage to wildlife and food systems.

Keeping warming to 1.5°C will reduce these risks and help protect people, ecosystems, and economies. This goal was a major part of the 2015 Paris Agreement, where almost all countries promised to cut pollution and take climate action to avoid dangerous levels of warming.

Example:
At the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21), over 190 countries agreed to work together to keep global warming "well below 2°C", and to make efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.

For instance, countries like Germany and Costa Rica made plans to stop using coal power and move toward 100% renewable energy as part of achieving this goal.

AA1000 ASSURANCE STANDARD

The AA1000 Assurance Standard is a set of international rules that help check if a company's sustainability information (like reports on their climate actions, social programs, etc.) is true, clear, and trustworthy.

Example:
A major company like Coca-Cola might publish a sustainability report saying it reduced its water usage by 30%.

An assurance provider can use the AA1000 Assurance Standard to check the data and processes, making sure the information is accurate and not misleading before the public sees it.

ABATEMENT

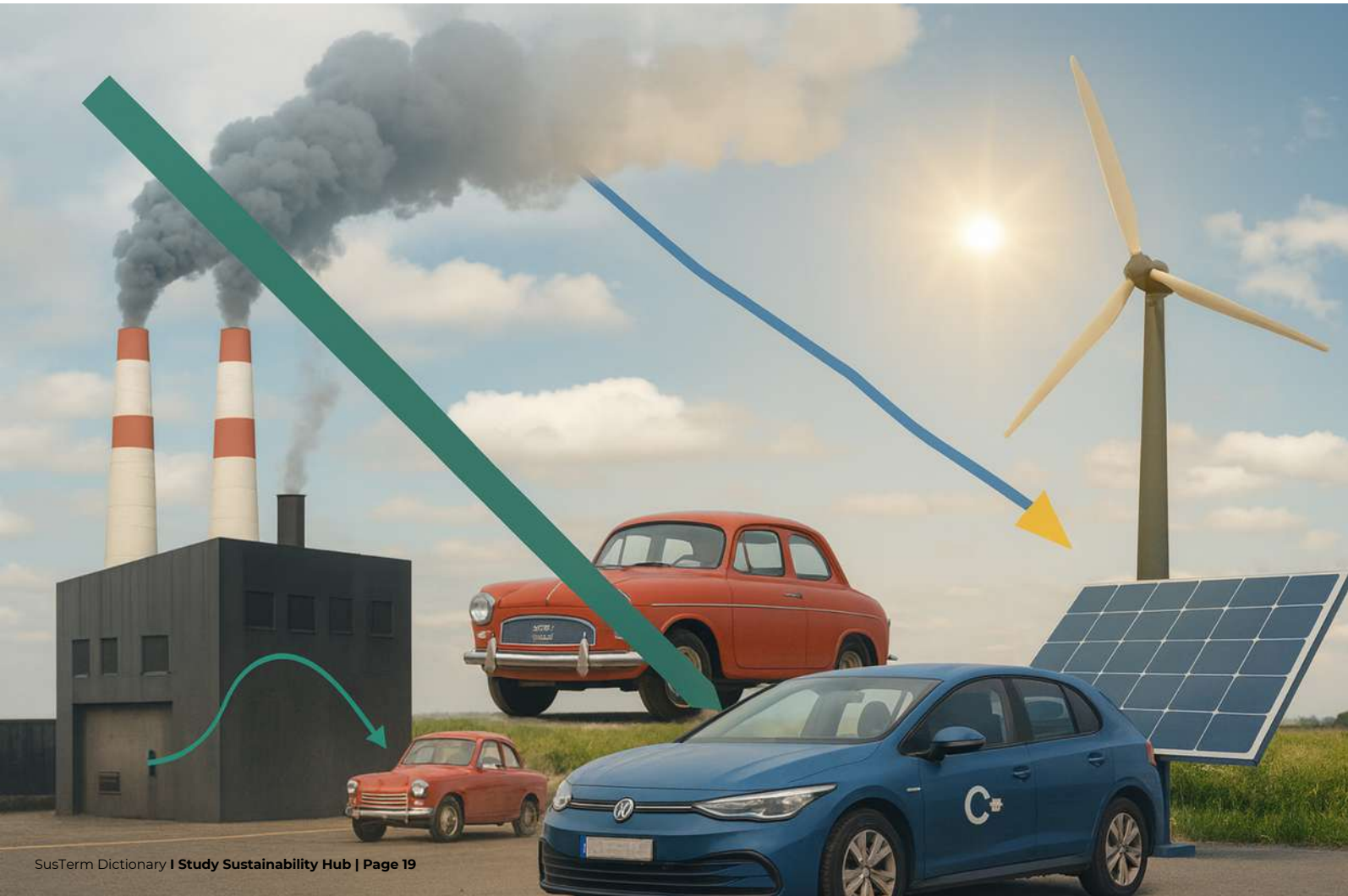
Abatement means taking action to reduce or remove harmful pollution, especially greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, from the atmosphere.

Example:
A power plant that switches from burning coal to using solar panels is performing abatement because it lowers the amount of carbon dioxide it releases into the air.

ABSOLUTE CONTRACTION

Absolute contraction is when a country, business, or organization must reduce its total greenhouse gas emissions by a specific, real amount — not just slow down how fast it grows.

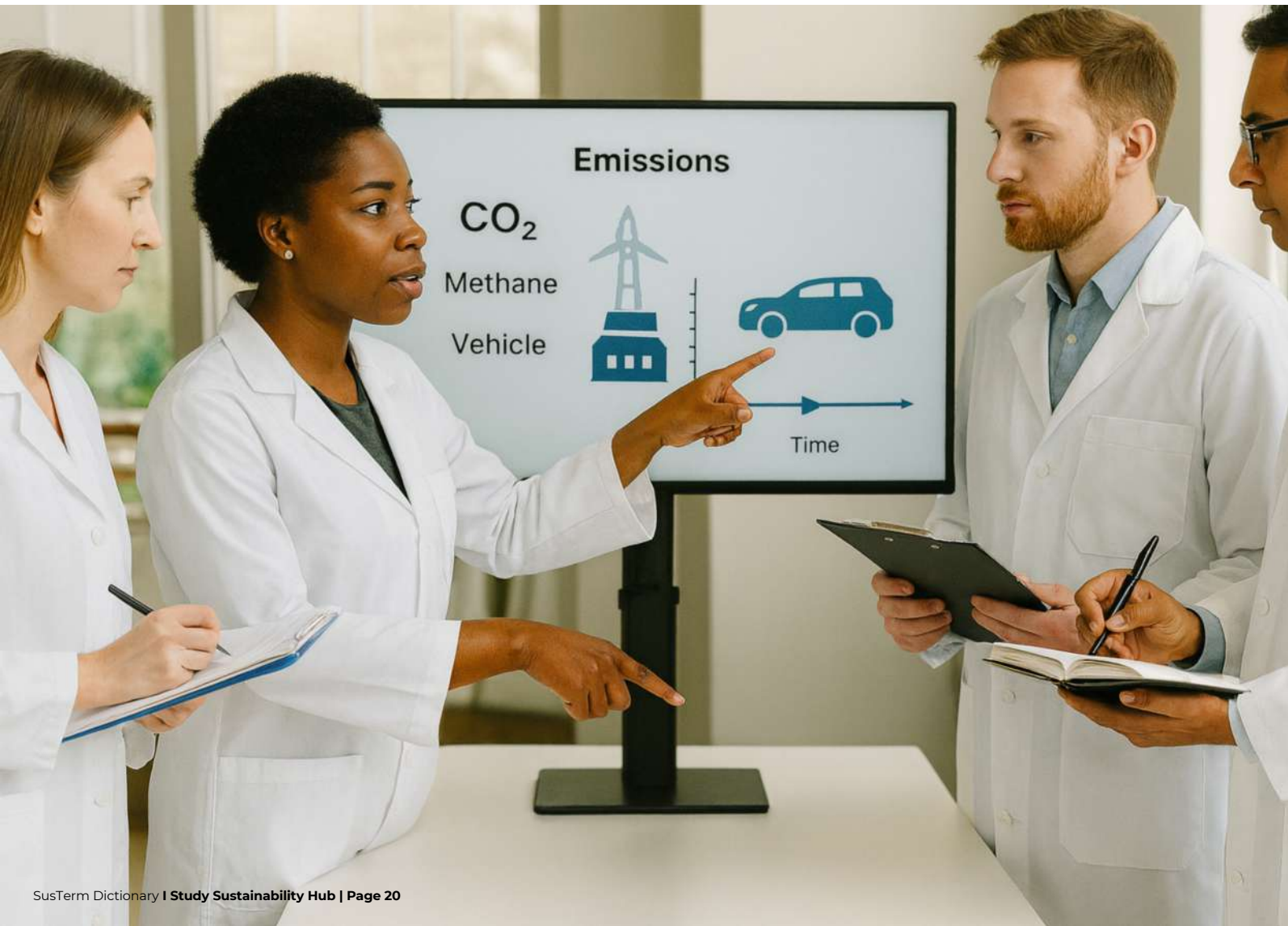
Example:
If a city emitted 2 million tons of CO_2 in 2020, absolute contraction would mean that by 2030, it must reduce emissions to something like 1 million tons, even if its population or economy grows during that time.



ABSOLUTE REDUCTIONS

Absolute reductions mean lowering the total quantity of emissions (not relative to business size, production levels, or profits).

Example:
A factory produced 10,000 tons of emissions in 2020 and cuts it down to 7,000 tons in 2025.



ABSOLUTE TARGET

An absolute target is a fixed goal to reduce total greenhouse gas emissions by a specific number or percentage, within a certain timeframe.

Example:
A company like Apple might say:
"We aim to cut our total carbon emissions by 60% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels."

This is an absolute target because it is a fixed goal, no matter how much the company grows.

ACTIVE OWNERSHIP

Active ownership means that investors (like shareholders) use their rights to influence the companies they invest in — pushing them to act in a more sustainable and responsible way.

Example:
An investment fund that owns shares in an oil company might pressure the company to invest in renewable energy and cut emissions by speaking out at shareholder meetings and voting for better policies.

ACTIVE TRANSPORT

Active transport is moving from place to place using your own physical energy, like walking, biking, running, or even skating, instead of using motorized transport like cars or buses.

Example:
Instead of driving 2 kilometers to work, a person rides a bicycle every day. That is active transport, it improves health and cuts pollution!

ADAPTATION

Adaptation means changing our behaviour, environment, or systems to deal with the current or expected effects of climate change. Instead of stopping climate change (mitigation), adaptation is about getting ready for it and reducing the harm it can cause.

Example:
Farmers planting drought-resistant crops because rainfall patterns are changing is a good example of adaptation to climate change.

Credit: Successful Farming, 2021

ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

Adaptation strategies are plans or actions that communities, governments, and businesses create to adjust to the impacts of climate change.

Example:
A coastal city like Miami building stronger sea walls and raising roads to protect against sea-level rise is using adaptation strategies.

ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

Adaptive capacity is the ability of people, communities, businesses, or countries to adjust to the effects of climate change and deal with damage.

Example:
A rich country with strong healthcare, emergency services, and infrastructure (like Japan) has a high adaptive capacity to respond quickly after a typhoon, while a poor country might struggle more.

Credit: Jessie F. Delos Reyes, 2011

AFRICA AGENDA 2063

Agenda 2063 is the African Union's long-term vision for a transformed, prosperous, and united Africa, built on seven aspirations such as a prosperous and integrated continent, good governance, peace, and a stronger role in the world.

Example:
Goal 8 - A United Africa (Federal or Confederate).

AFFORESTATION

Afforestation is the planting of new forests in places where there were no forests before. It is done to absorb carbon dioxide, restore ecosystems, and fight climate change.

Example:
In China, the "Great Green Wall" project is planting millions of trees in dry areas to stop desert expansion and absorb more carbon from the atmosphere.

AGFLATION

Agflation means the rising prices of food and agricultural products because of problems like bad weather, droughts, or climate change. When crops fail, food becomes more expensive for everyone.

Example:
In 2022, bad droughts in Africa and Europe caused shortages of wheat, leading to higher prices for bread; a clear case of agflation.

Credit: Carlos Barria/Reuters, 2022

AGRICHAR

Agrichar is a type of charcoal made from plant materials like crops, leaves, and wood, through a special process called pyrolysis (heating without oxygen). It can be added to soil to improve farming and store carbon for a long time, helping to fight climate change.

Example:
Farmers in Australia use agrichar to make their soils more fertile and lock carbon into the ground instead of letting it go into the air.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the practice of growing crops and raising animals to produce food, fiber, and other products we need.

Example:
Planting rice, growing maize, raising cows for milk — these are all forms of agriculture.

AIR POLLUTION

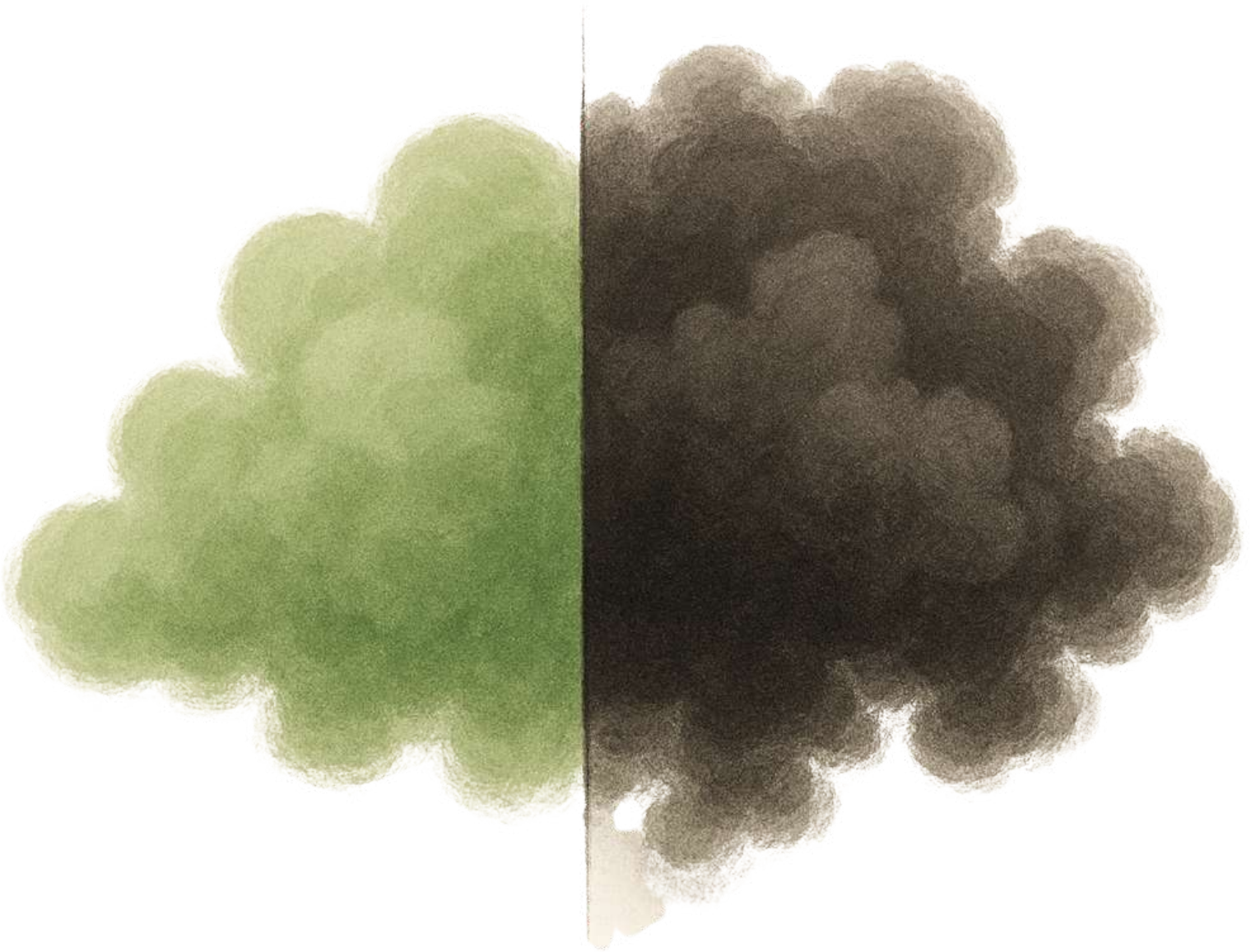
Air pollution happens when harmful gases, dust, or chemicals are released into the air, making it dirty and unsafe to breathe.

Example:
When factories release smoke, and cars emit exhaust gases into the atmosphere, they create air pollution that can cause asthma and other diseases.

AIR QUALITY

Air quality refers to how clean or dirty the air is. Good air quality means the air is safe and healthy to breathe. Poor air quality means the air has high levels of pollutants that can harm health and the environment.

Example:
After heavy rains in a city, the dust settles, and air quality improves because the air becomes cleaner and fresher.

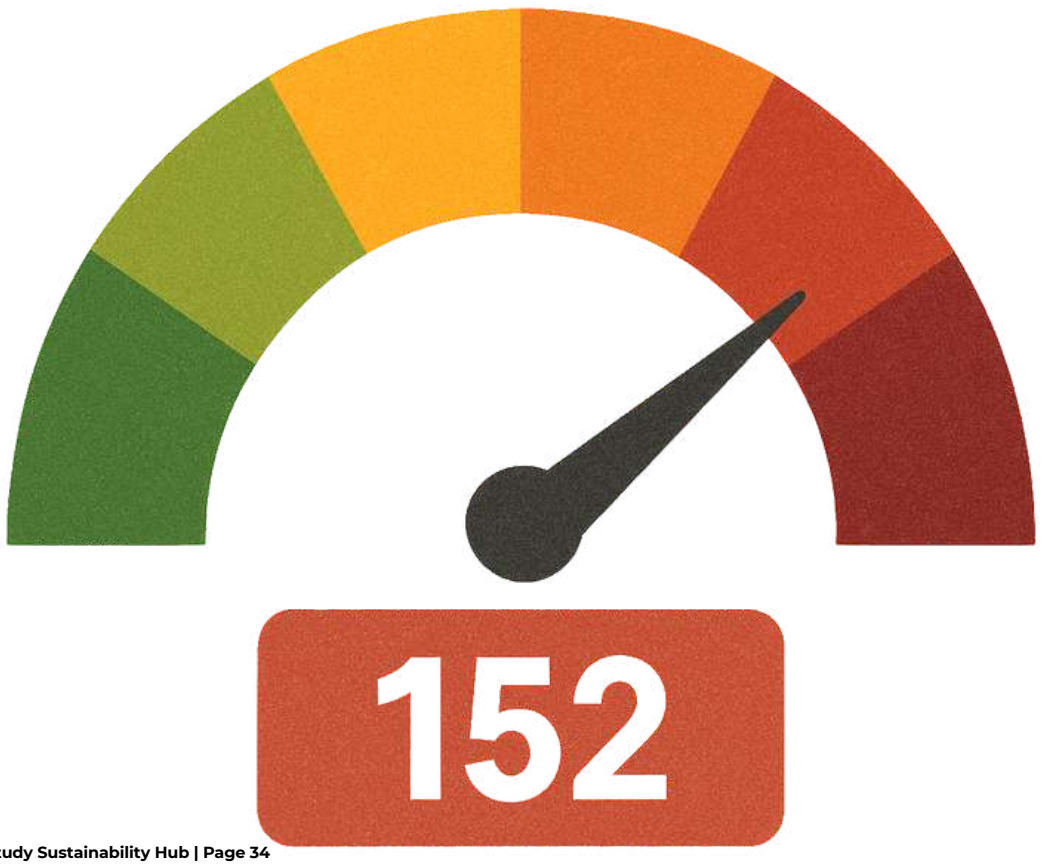


AIR QUALITY INDEX (AQI)

The Air Quality Index (AQI) is a scale that shows how polluted or clean the air is.

Example:
An AQI of 50 means good air quality. An AQI of 200 means the air is very unhealthy, and people should stay indoors.

Cities like Delhi often report very high AQI levels during winter due to smog.



ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

Alternative energy is energy produced from sources other than fossil fuels (like coal, oil, or gas).

Example:
Solar panels, wind turbines, and hydropower dams are examples of alternative energy systems that provide electricity without burning fossil fuels.

ALTERNATIVE FUTURES

Alternative futures are different possible versions of what the future could look like, depending on the choices we make today about the environment, society, and technology.

Example:
One alternative future shows a world powered by renewable energy with clean cities, while another shows a future with extreme heat and food shortages because no action was taken against climate change.

ANTHROPOGENIC CLIMATE CHANGE

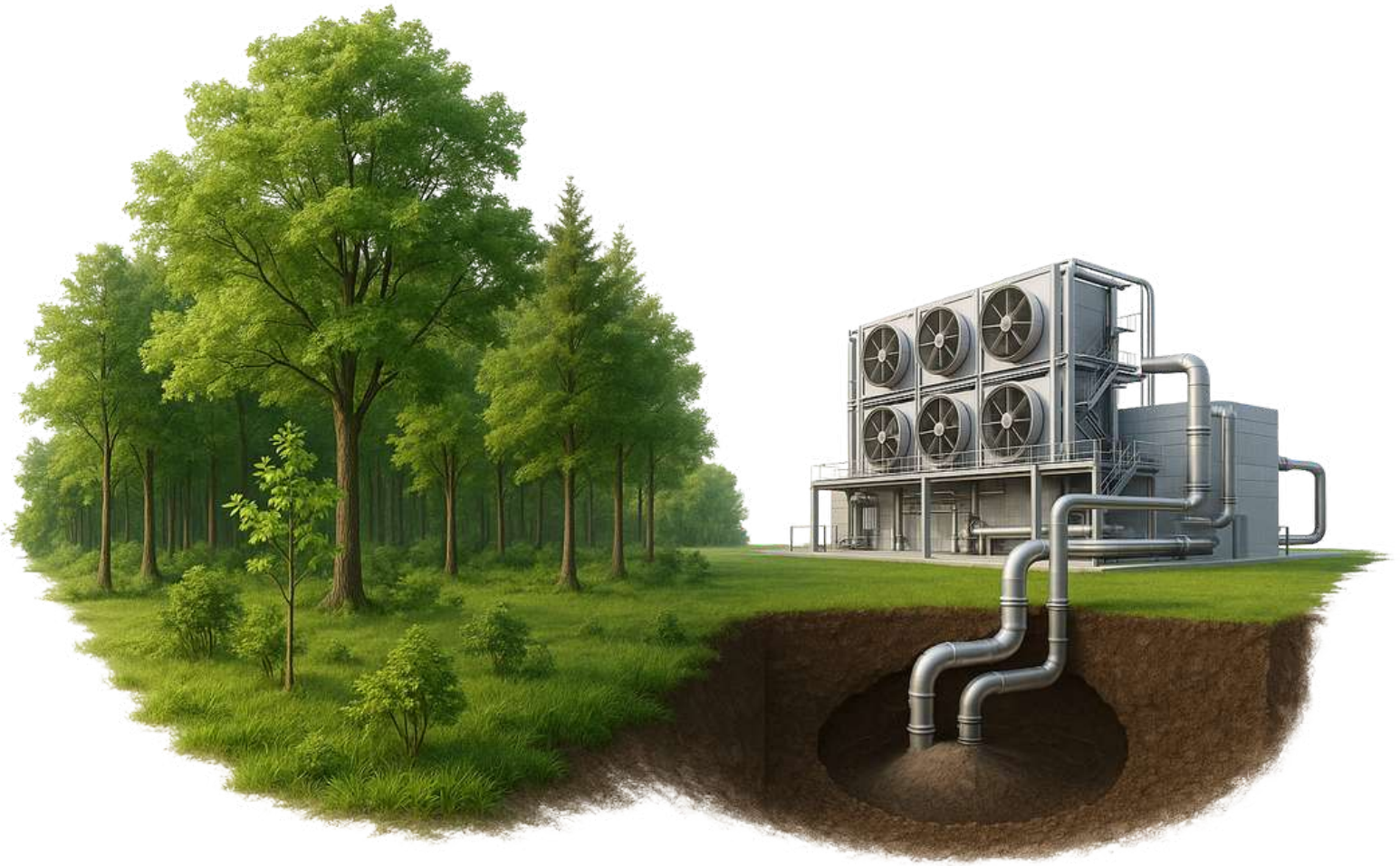
Anthropogenic climate change refers to the changes in the Earth's climate that are caused by human activities, such as burning fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas), cutting down forests, and farming.

Example:
The use of cars, factories, and airplanes has increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, leading to anthropogenic climate change.

ANTHROPOGENIC REMOVALS

Anthropogenic removals are actions taken by humans to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. This includes techniques like planting trees, which absorb carbon dioxide, or using technologies like carbon capture and storage to directly remove gases from the air.

Example:
A company that installs machines to suck carbon dioxide from the air and store it underground is contributing to anthropogenic removals.



ANTI-RACISM

Anti-racism means actively opposing racism by identifying, challenging, and changing the values, structures, policies, and behaviors that allow racism to continue.

Example:
A school that updates its curriculum to include diverse histories and cultures as part of promoting anti-racism is taking an active stand against discrimination.

ATMOSPHERE / AIR

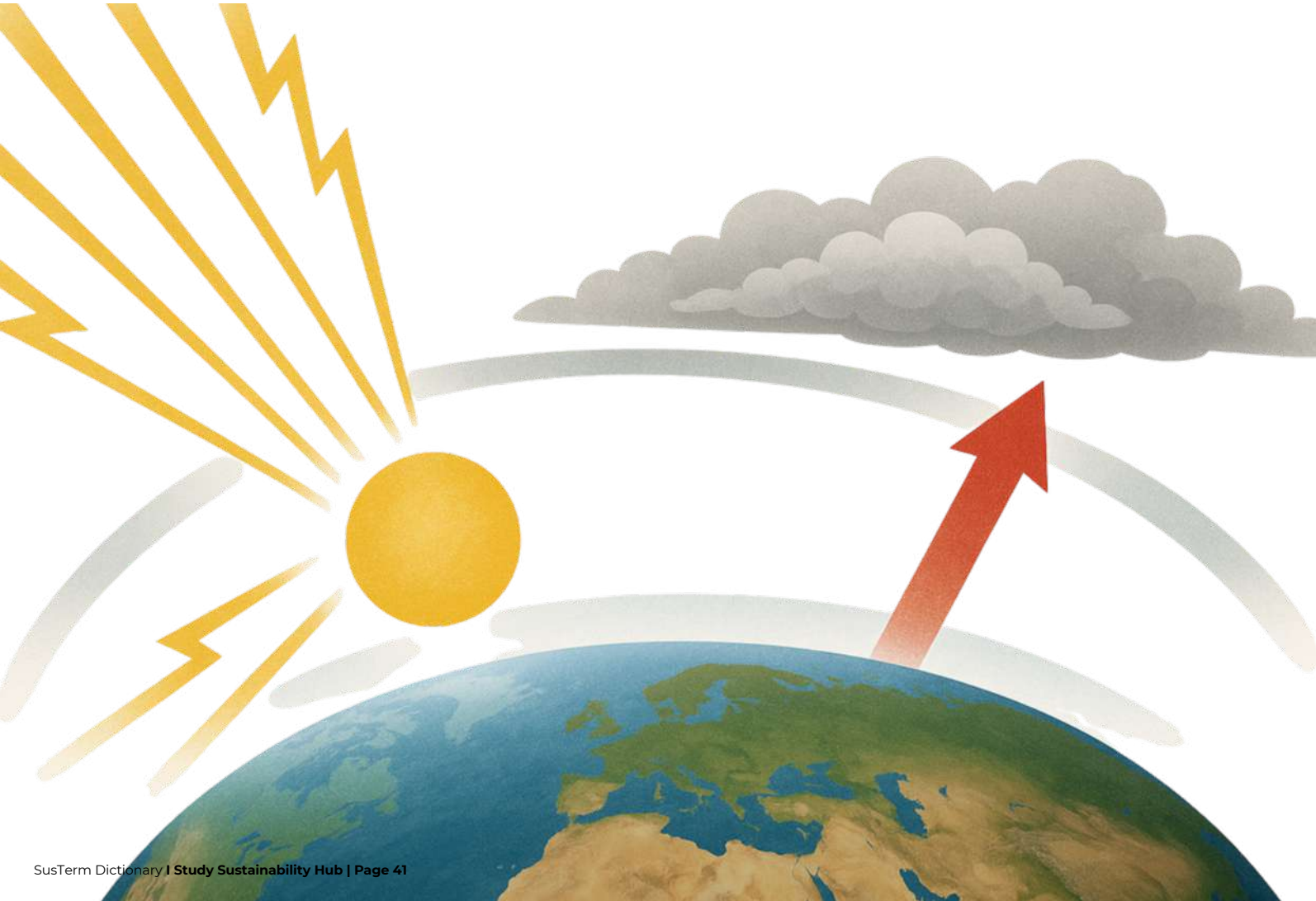
The atmosphere is the layer of gases that surrounds the Earth, providing oxygen for living things to breathe and protecting the planet from harmful radiation from the sun.

Example:
When we breathe, we are taking in oxygen from the atmosphere that helps our bodies function.

ATMOSPHERIC RADIATIVE FORCING

Atmospheric radiative forcing is the change in the balance between incoming energy from the sun and the outgoing energy back into space caused by greenhouse gases or other factors. Positive forcing leads to warming, while negative forcing leads to cooling.

Example:
An increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere creates positive radiative forcing, which warms the Earth.



AVOIDED EMISSIONS

Avoided emissions are the amount of greenhouse gases that are not released into the atmosphere because a cleaner, more sustainable option was chosen.

Example:
By installing solar panels instead of using coal-fired electricity, a city avoids emissions that would have contributed to climate change.

B CORPORATION

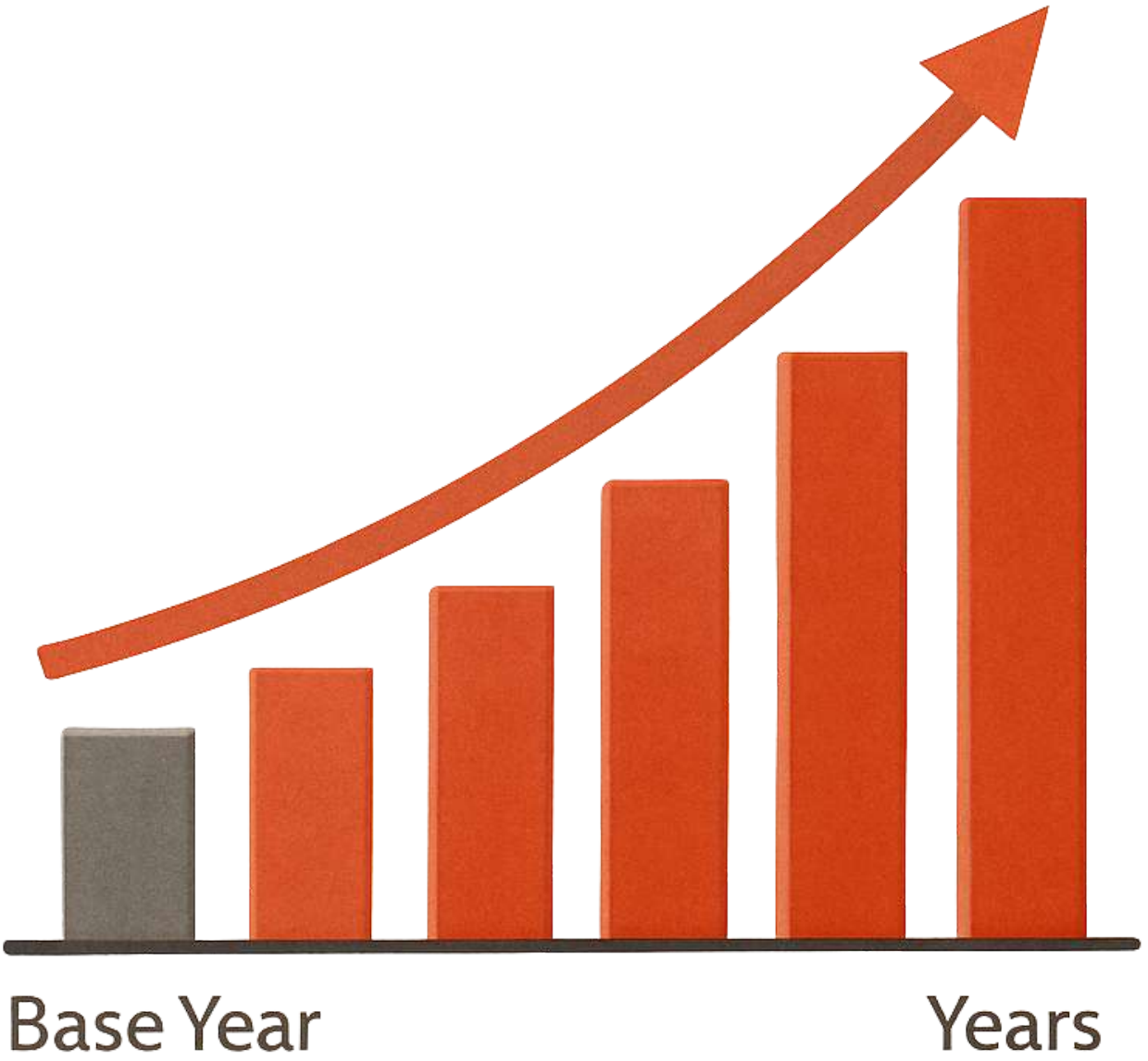
A B Corporation (or B Corp) is a type of company that meets high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency.

Example:
Ben & Jerry's, a popular ice cream company, is a certified B Corporation that focuses on environmental sustainability and fair trade practices.

BASE YEAR

A base year is a starting point year that organizations or governments choose to measure changes over time, such as emissions reductions, growth in renewable energy use, or other goals.

Example:
A company may choose 2015 as its base year to track progress in reducing its carbon footprint by 2030.



BASE YEAR EMISSIONS

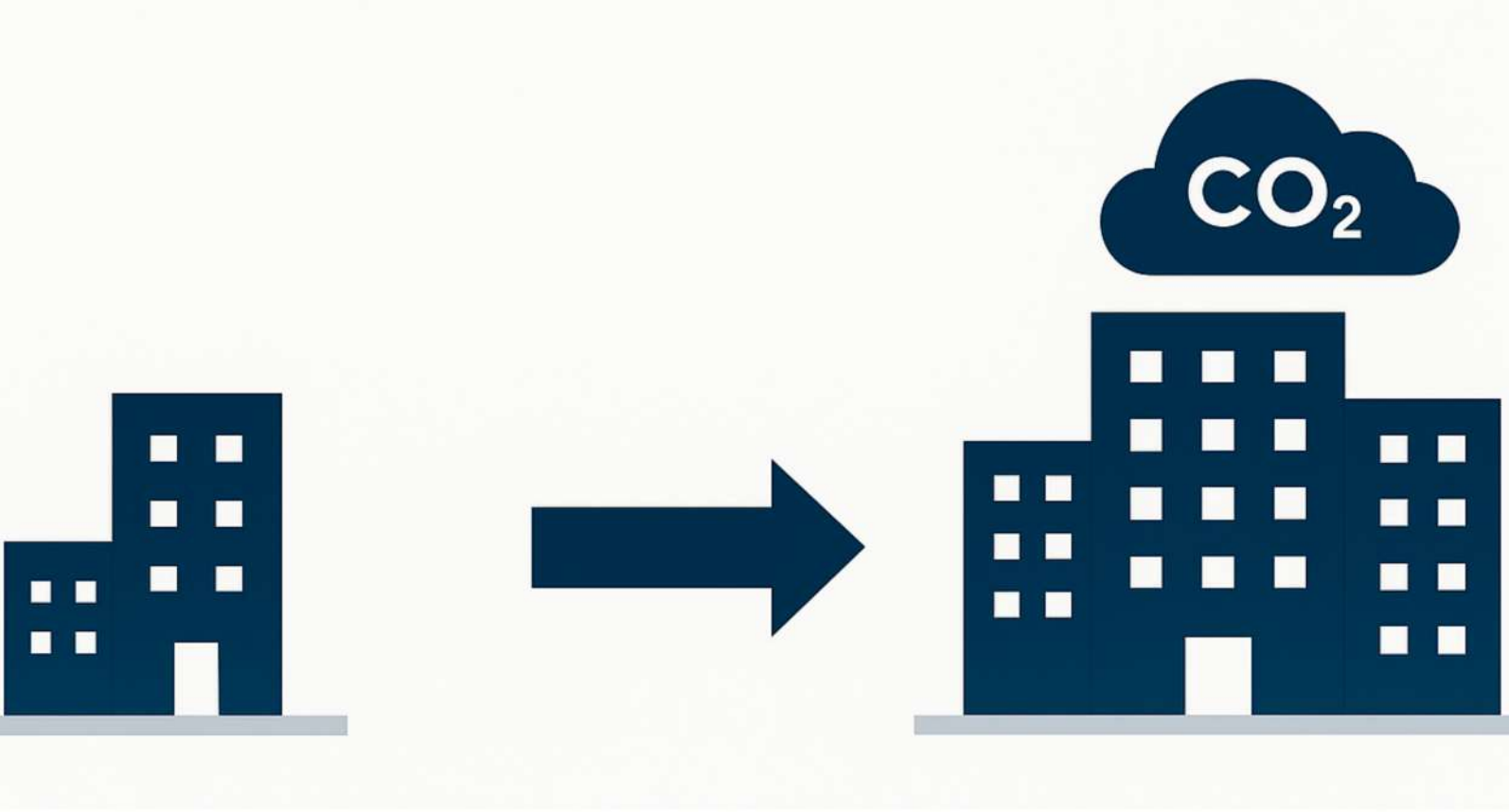
Base year emissions are the total greenhouse gas emissions that an organization or country recorded during its selected base year. These emissions serve as a reference point for setting and measuring future climate goals.

Example:
If a factory produced 5,000 tons of CO_2 emissions in its base year, it will compare future emissions reductions to this 5,000-ton starting point.

BASE YEAR EMISSIONS RECALCULATION

Base year emissions recalculation happens when there are significant changes, like mergers, acquisitions, or better measurement techniques, that affect an organization's size or emissions.

Example:
If a company buys another large company, it may need to recalculate its original base year emissions to include the new company's emissions.



BEYOND VALUE

Beyond value refers to actions taken by organizations that go further than simply maximizing financial returns. It includes delivering social, environmental, and governance benefits that improve society and the planet, not just their bottom line.

Example:

A clothing brand switching to eco-friendly fabrics to protect the environment, even if it costs more, is acting beyond value.

BEYOND VALUE CHAIN MITIGATION

Beyond value chain mitigation involves companies taking actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions outside of their direct operations and supply chains.

Example:
A smartphone company investing in rainforest conservation projects, even though it doesn't buy materials from rainforests, is an example of beyond value chain mitigation.

BIODEGRADABLE

Biodegradable means that a substance can break down naturally by bacteria, fungi, or other living organisms into harmless parts without causing damage to the environment.

Example:
A cardboard box left outdoors will eventually rot and return to the soil because it is biodegradable.

BIODEGRADABLE MUNICIPAL WASTE (BMW)

BMW refers to the part of city or town waste that can naturally break down and rot. This includes food waste, paper, garden clippings, and other organic materials collected from homes, businesses, and public areas.

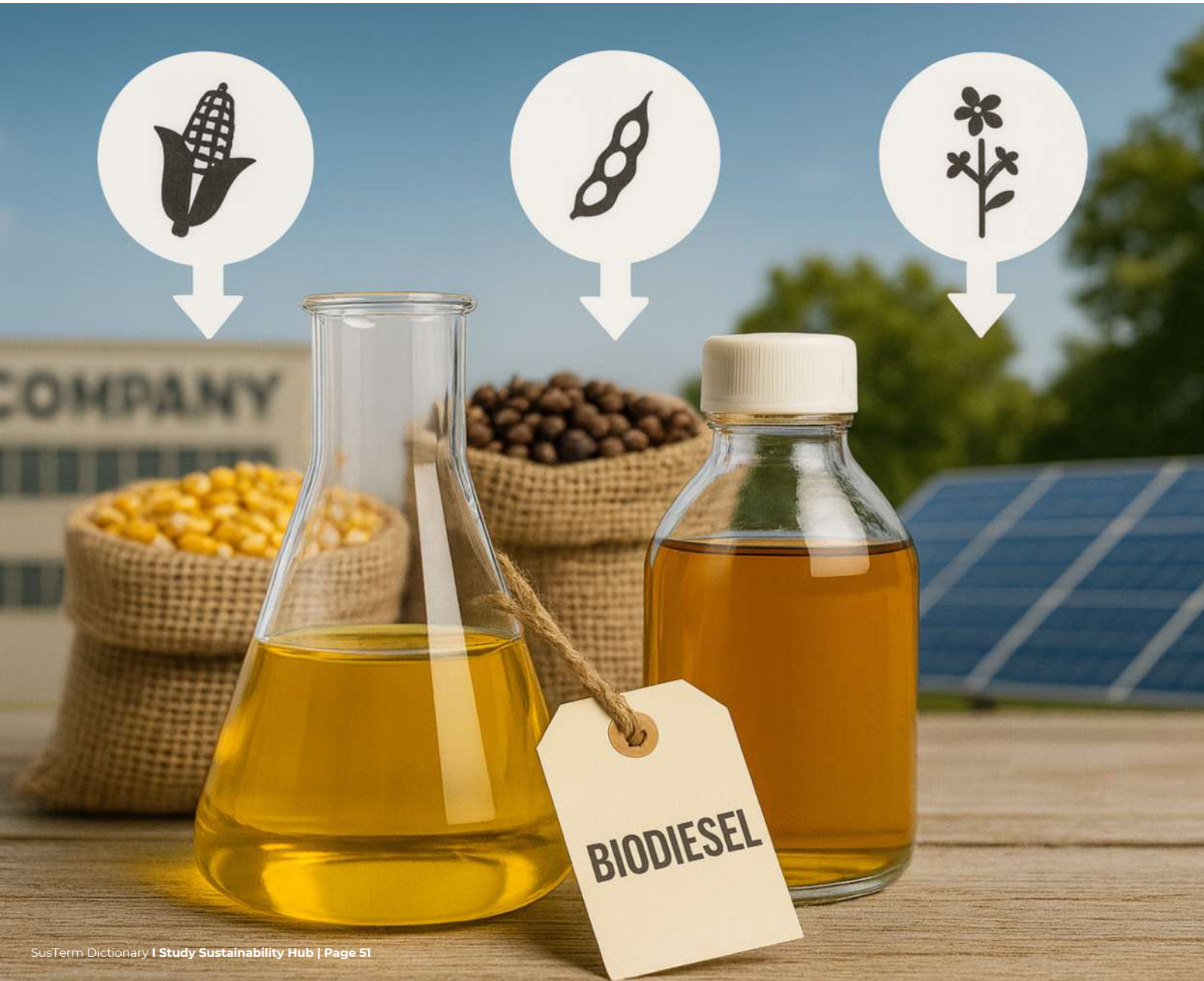
Example:

Food scraps and grass clippings collected during waste pickup are considered biodegradable municipal waste.

BIODIESEL

Biodiesel is a clean-burning alternative fuel made from renewable sources like vegetable oils, animal fats, or recycled restaurant grease.

Example:
City buses that run on biodiesel produce less air pollution than those running on traditional diesel.



BIODIVERSITY

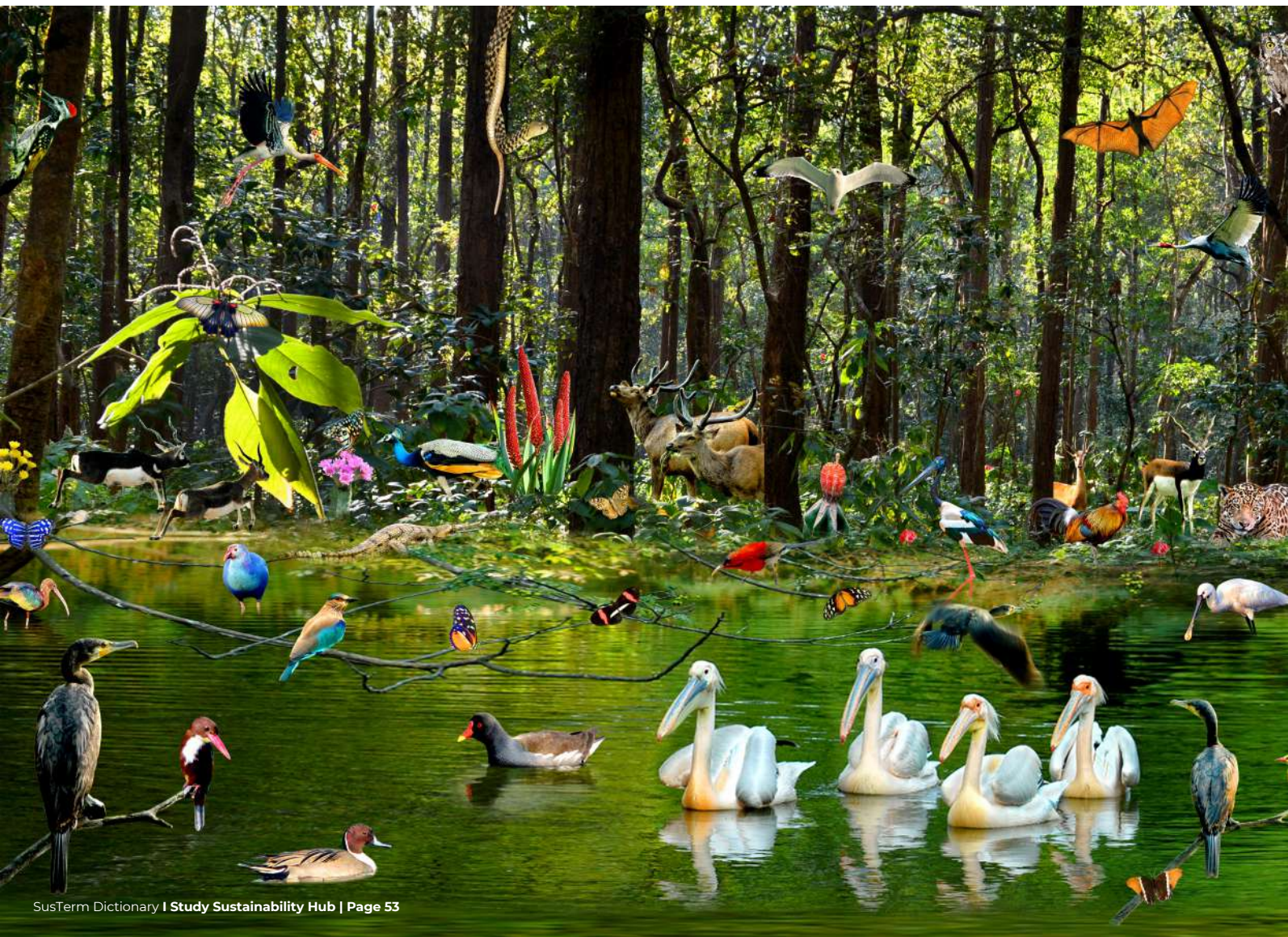
Biodiversity is the variety of living organisms on Earth, including plants, animals, bacteria, and fungi. It covers the differences within species, between species, and across ecosystems, and is essential for a healthy, functioning planet.

Example:
The Great Barrier Reef is home to thousands of species of fish, corals, and marine life, showcasing rich biodiversity.

BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEMS

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life forms, while ecosystems are communities of organisms interacting with each other and with their physical environment.

Example:
A forest ecosystem with a mix of trees, birds, insects, and mammals relies on biodiversity to maintain its balance and productivity.



BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING

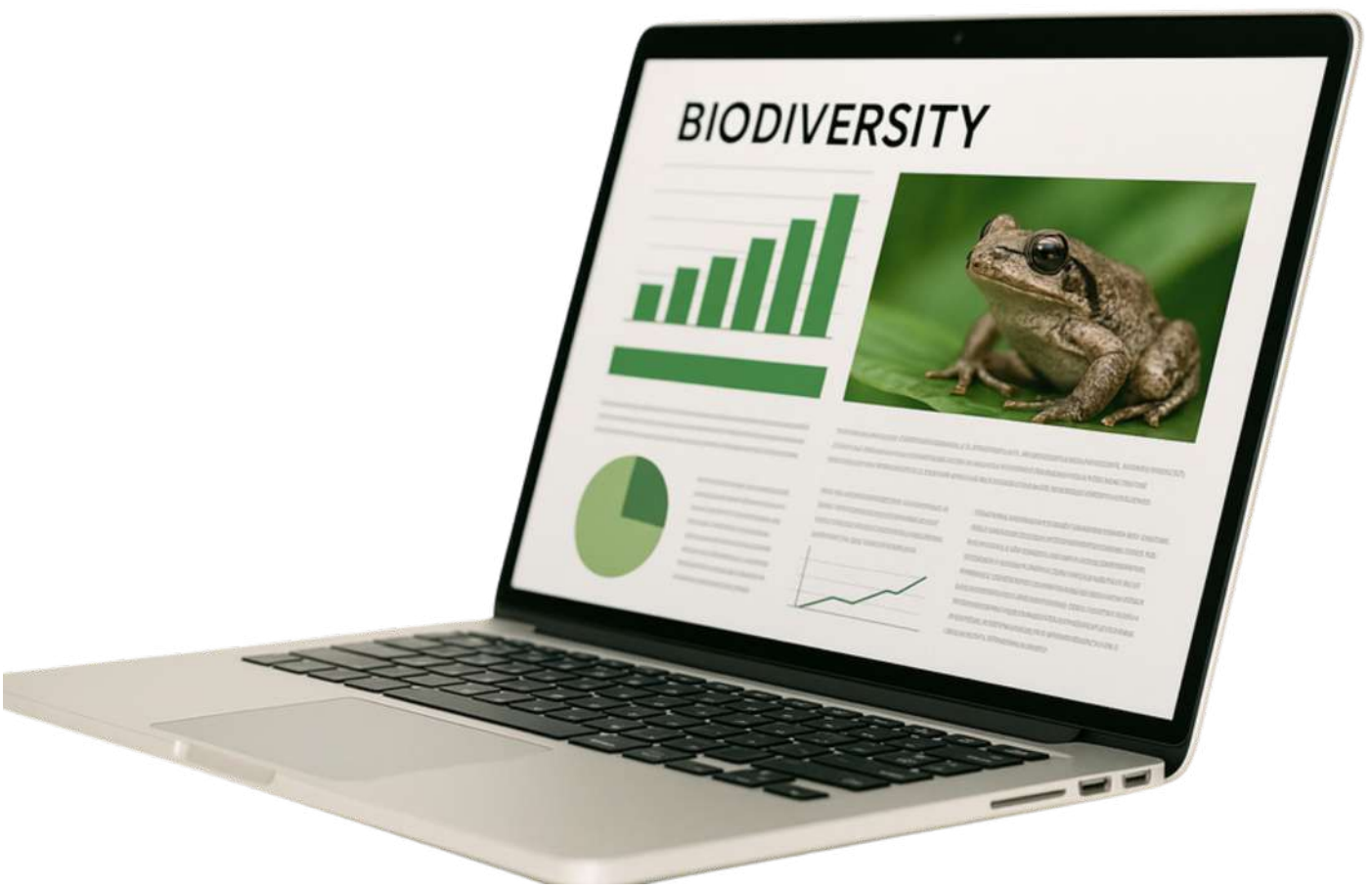
Biodiversity offsetting is a conservation practice where environmental harm caused by development is compensated for by creating or restoring biodiversity elsewhere, aiming for "no net loss" or a net gain in biodiversity.

Examples:
A mining company restores a nearby wetland after destroying part of a forest.

BIODIVERSITY REPORTING

Biodiversity reporting is when organizations publicly share information about how their activities affect biodiversity and ecosystems.

Example:
A mining company publishing a report on how it protects nearby wildlife habitats is practicing biodiversity reporting.



BIOECONOMY

The bioeconomy is an economy where biological resources like plants, animals, and microbes are used to produce food, materials, and energy sustainably.

Example:
Producing bio-based plastics from corn or sugarcane instead of oil is part of the growing bioeconomy.

BIOENERGY

Bioenergy is renewable energy produced from biological sources such as plants, agricultural waste, wood, and animal manure. It can be used to generate electricity, produce heat, or fuel vehicles. Unlike fossil fuels, bioenergy sources can be replenished over time.

Example:
A power plant that burns wood chips from forestry residues to produce electricity is using bioenergy.

BIOFUEL

Biofuel refers to liquid, gas, or solid fuels derived from biomass, including plant and animal materials. It serves as an alternative to fossil fuels and is commonly used in transportation and energy generation. Types include biodiesel, bioethanol, and biogas.

Example:
Buses in some cities use biodiesel made from used cooking oil as a cleaner fuel alternative.

BIOGENIC CARBON EMISSIONS

These are carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions originating from natural, organic sources such as plants and animals, rather than fossil fuels.

Example:
Burning wood logs in a fireplace releases biogenic carbon, which was initially absorbed by the tree during its growth.

BIOMASS

Biomass refers to any organic material derived from plants, animals, or microorganisms that can be used as a source of energy.

Example:
A community heating system that burns wood pellets to provide warmth to homes is using biomass energy.

BIOGAS

Biogas is a mixture of methane and carbon dioxide produced by the breakdown of organic matter (like food waste or animal manure) in the absence of oxygen, usually in a digester. It can be used for cooking, heating, or electricity.

Example:
A small farm installs a biogas digester to process cow manure and generate gas for cooking and lighting.

BIOMIMICRY

Biomimicry is an approach to innovation that seeks solutions by emulating nature's designs and processes.It helps create sustainable and efficient technologies by learning from biological systems.

Example:

Velcro was inspired by how burrs stick to animal fur, showing how nature can guide practical invention.

BIOPHILIA

Biophilia is the idea that humans have an innate connection to nature and a desire to be close to natural environments.

Example:
People often feel more relaxed and focused when they spend time in green spaces like parks or forests, due to biophilia.

BIOPHILIC DESIGN

Biophilic design involves incorporating natural elements such as plants, natural light, water features, and organic materials into buildings and workspaces to improve occupant well-being and productivity.

Example:
An office that includes indoor gardens, large windows for natural sunlight, and flowing water features uses biophilic design.

BIOPLASTICS

Bioplastics are plastics made from renewable sources like corn starch, sugarcane, or potato starch.

Example:
Some supermarkets use bioplastic bags that break down more easily in the environment than conventional plastic bags.

BLACKWATER

Blackwater is wastewater that contains human waste, typically from toilets.

Example:
In a building with separate plumbing systems, blackwater from toilets is sent to a treatment facility, while greywater from showers is reused for irrigation.

BLUE CARBON

Blue carbon refers to carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes. These ecosystems absorb and store significant amounts of CO_2, helping to mitigate climate change.

Example:
Protecting mangrove forests in Indonesia helps trap blue carbon and prevents the release of large amounts of CO_2 into the atmosphere.

BLUE ECONOMY

The blue economy promotes the sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and ocean ecosystem health.

Example:
A coastal community investing in eco-friendly marine tourism and sustainable fish farming is part of the blue economy.

BLUE FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

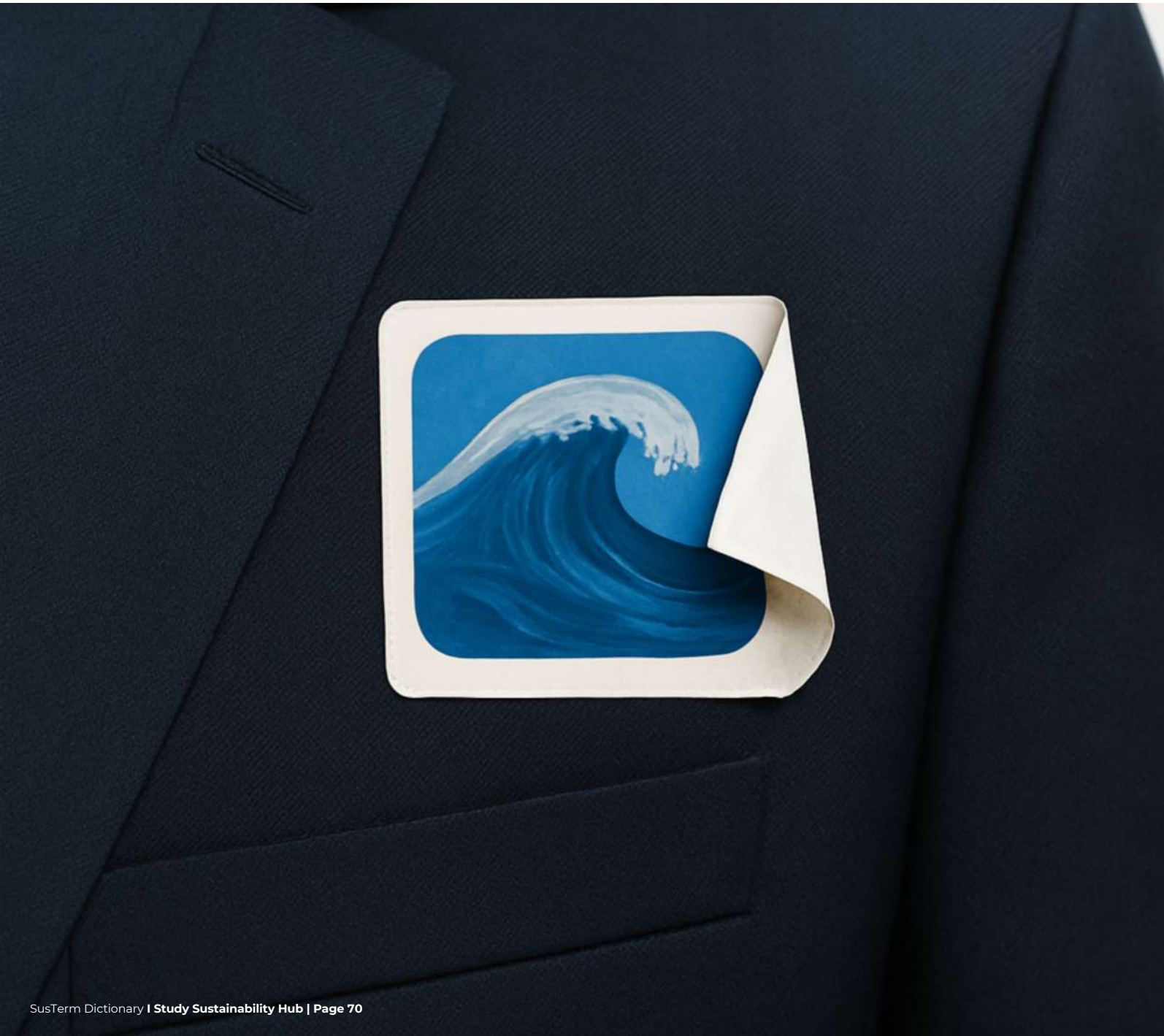
These are financial products like blue bonds or blue loans designed to fund sustainable marine and ocean-related projects.

Example:
A government issues blue bonds to finance coral reef protection and sustainable fisheries in its coastal regions.

BLUEWASHING

Bluewashing refers to companies or organizations making exaggerated or false claims about their ocean-friendly or marine conservation efforts to appear environmentally responsible.

Example:
A seafood brand markets its products as "sustainably caught" without having any certification, engaging in bluewashing.



BLUEWATER / BLUE WATER

Blue water is the freshwater found in lakes, rivers, and aquifers that is used for irrigation, industrial processes, and drinking.

Example:
Blue water is used to irrigate crops during dry seasons when rainfall is not sufficient.

BUILDING EFFICIENCY

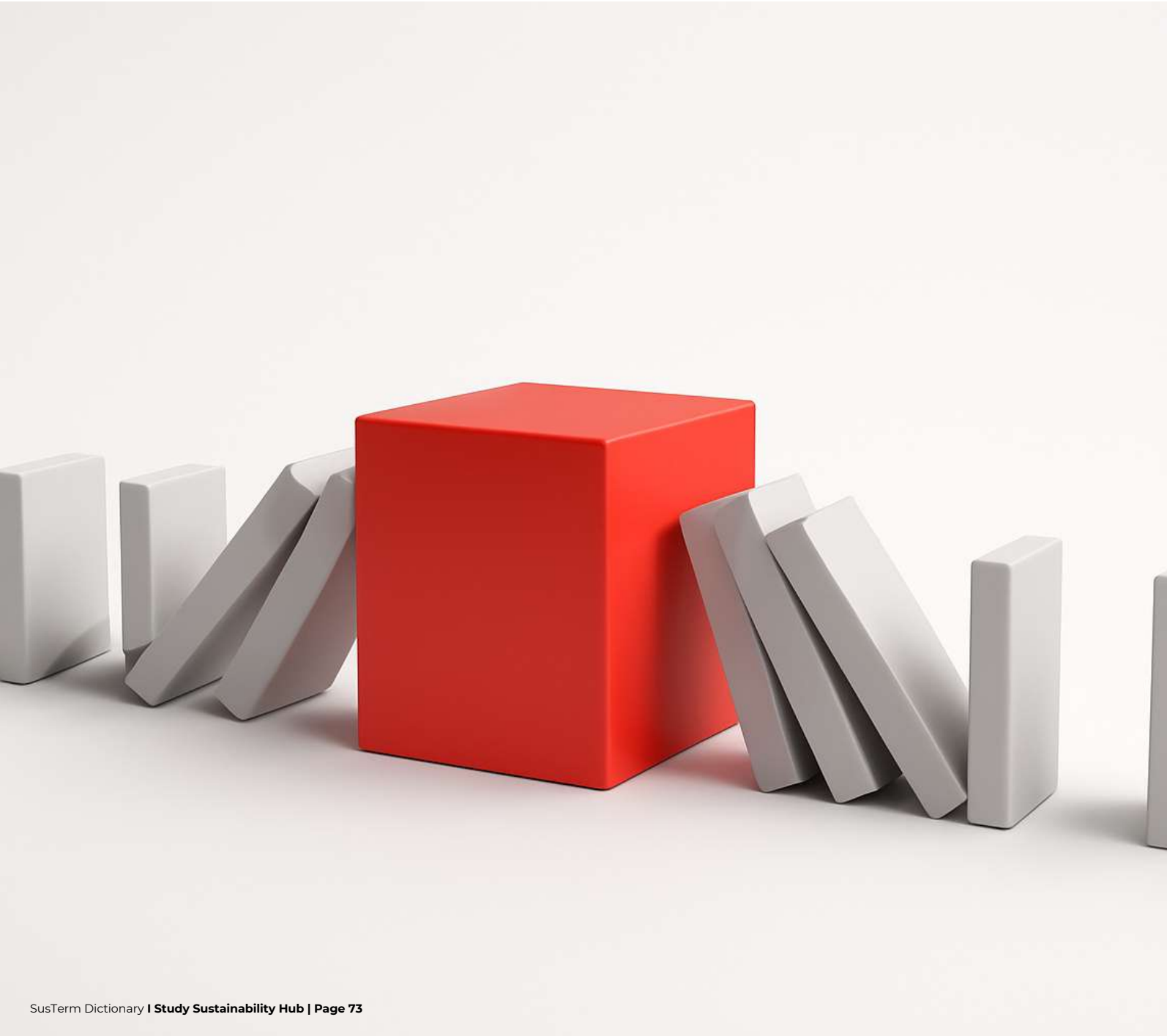
Building efficiency refers to designing or retrofitting buildings to use less energy, water, and materials while maintaining comfort and functionality.

Example:
A building that uses solar panels, LED lighting, and efficient HVAC systems is considered highly energy efficient.

BUSINESS RESILIENCE

Business resilience is the ability of a company to adapt quickly to disruptions, such as economic shocks, climate change, or pandemics, and continue operations while minimizing damage.

Example:
A company that quickly shifted to remote work and digital sales during the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated strong business resilience.



BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

Business sustainability involves running a business in a way that balances economic success with social responsibility and environmental stewardship. It aims for long-term value creation.

Example:
A clothing brand that uses recycled materials, pays fair wages, and reduces water usage in production practices sustainable business.

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Business transformation is a deep, strategic change in how a company operates, often in response to environmental, technological, or social trends.

It helps companies remain competitive and sustainable.

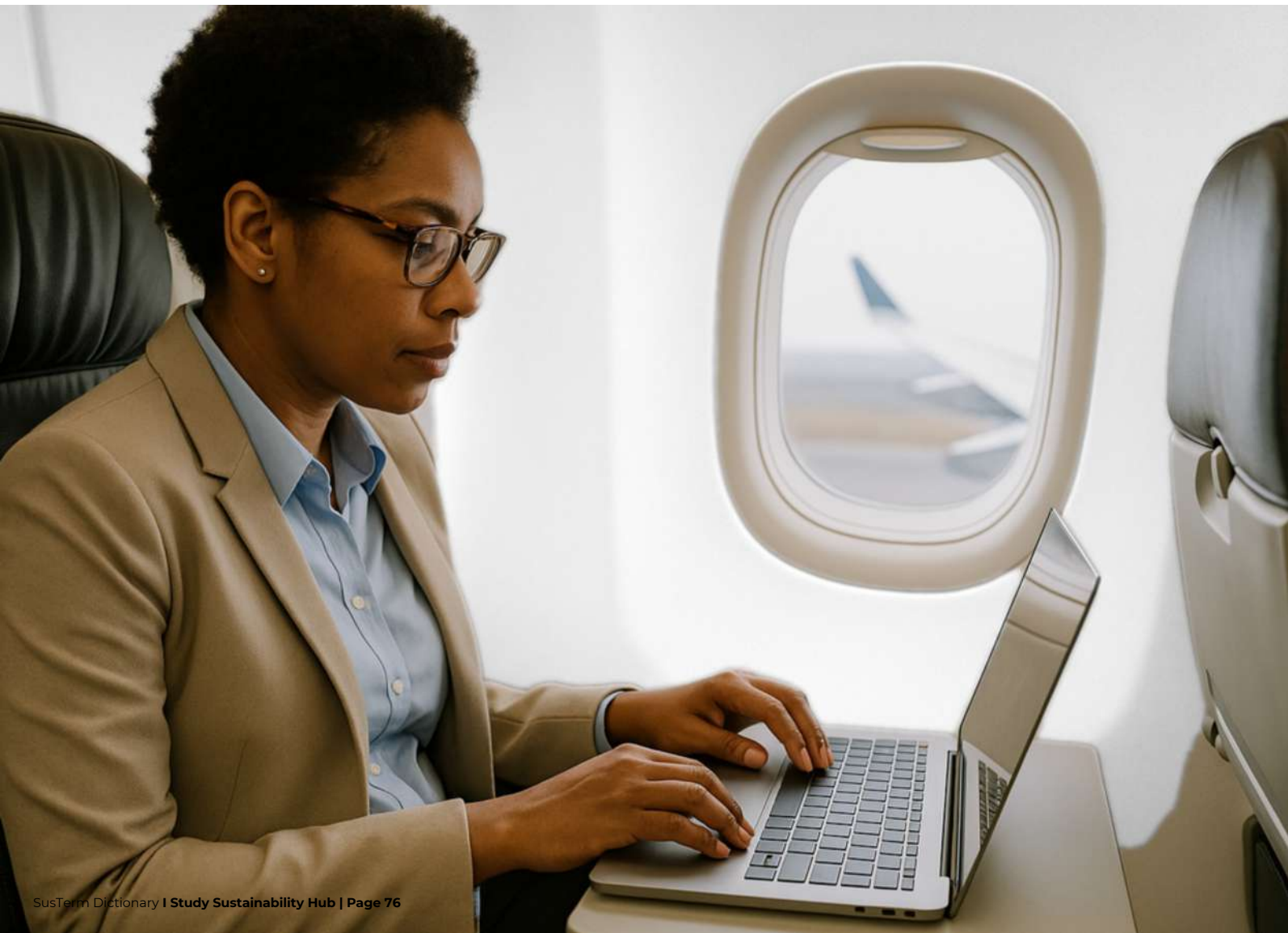
Example:
A car manufacturer transitioning its entire fleet from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles is undergoing a major business transformation

Credit: Laguna Niguel, 2023

BUSINESS TRAVEL EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 6)

These are emissions caused by employees' travel for work using vehicles or airlines not owned by the company.

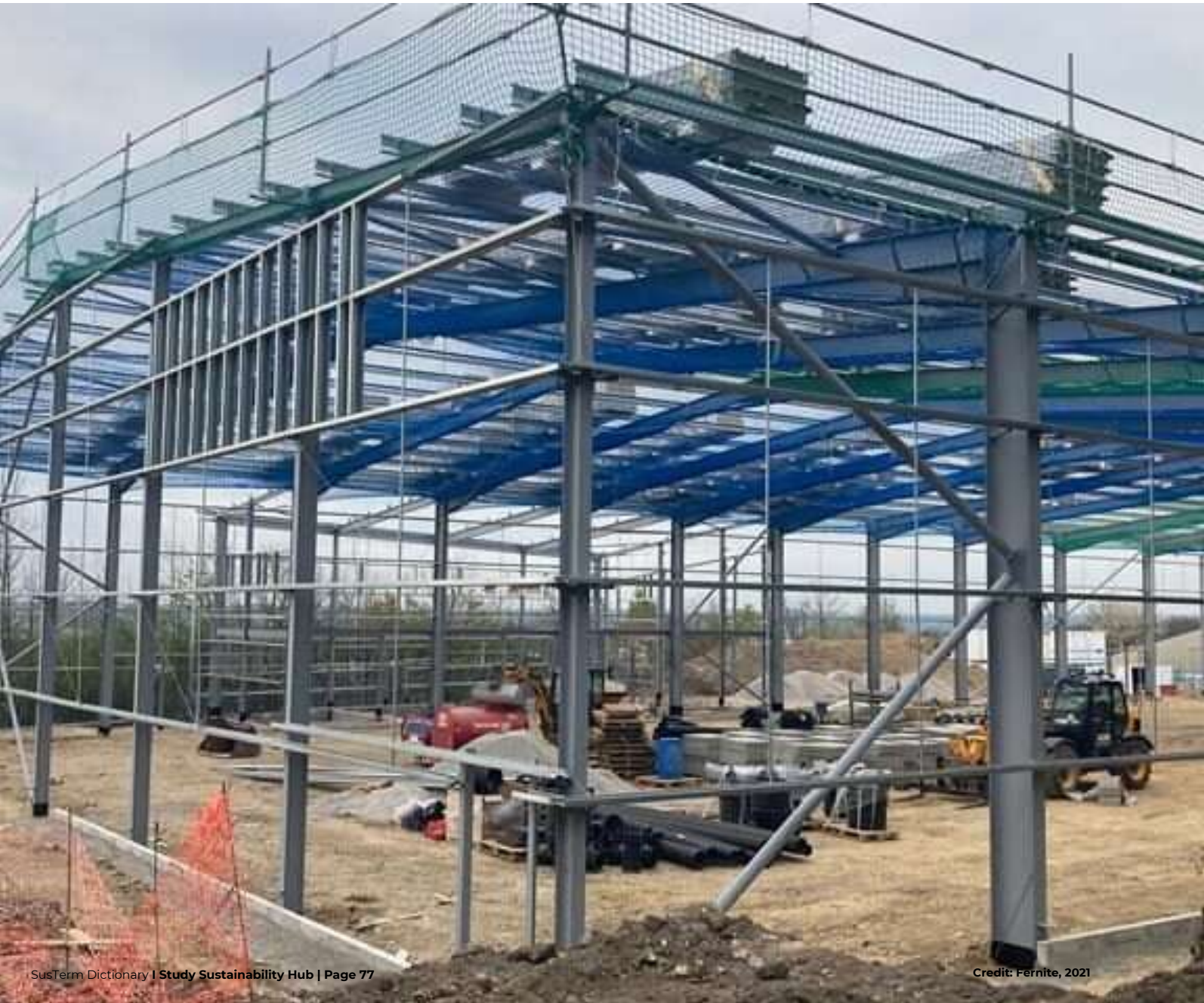
Example:
Flights taken by staff to attend international conferences contribute to business travel emissions.



CAPITAL GOODS EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 2)

These emissions are generated during the production of capital goods (like buildings, machinery, and equipment) that a company purchases for long-term use.

Example:
Emissions from building a new factory or buying industrial machines are included in capital goods emissions.

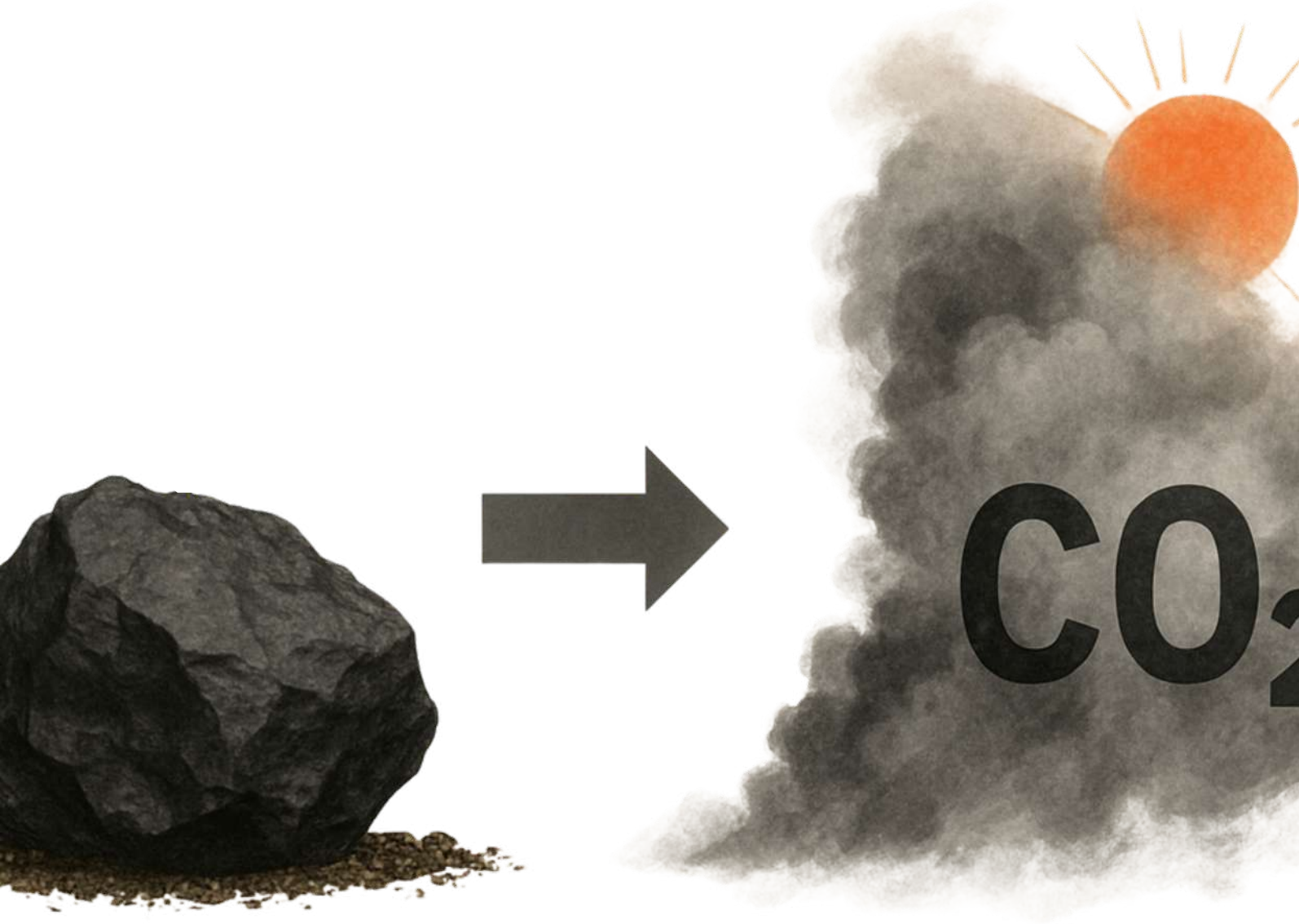


Credit: Fernite, 2021

CARBON

Carbon is a natural element found in all living things. It becomes a major climate issue when released as carbon dioxide (CO_2) through burning fossil fuels or deforestation, contributing to global warming.

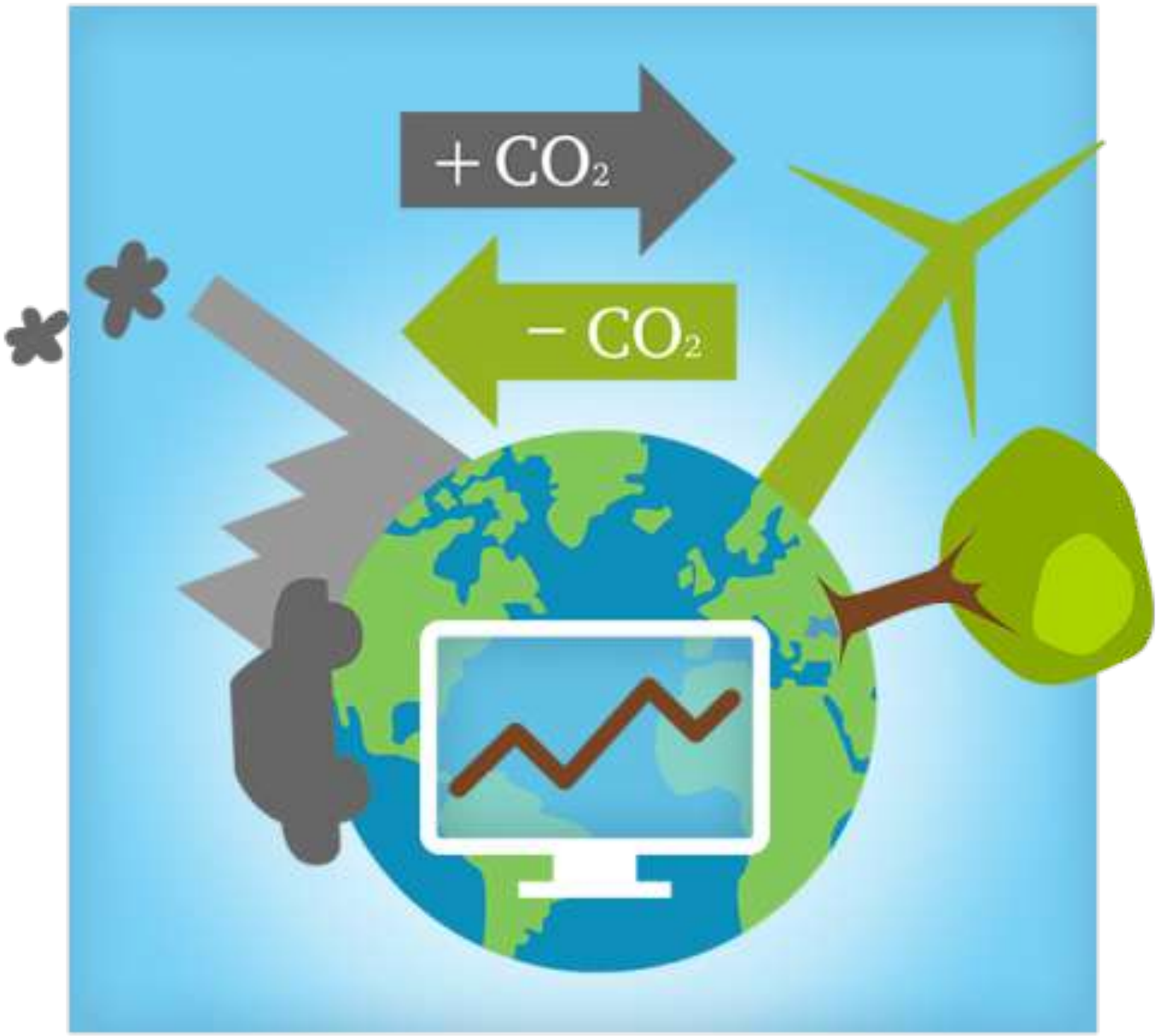
Example:
When coal is burned in power plants, the carbon in it becomes CO_2 in the atmosphere.



CARBON ACCOUNTING

Carbon accounting is the process of measuring and tracking greenhouse gas emissions from a company, project, or country to understand and reduce its carbon footprint.

Example:
A company calculates the emissions from its factories, vehicles, and electricity use to report its carbon footprint.



Credit: Circuit Meter, 2017

CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM)

CBAM is a proposed tariff on imports based on their carbon emissions. It is designed to level the playing field between countries with strong climate laws and those with weaker ones.

Example:
The EU plans to charge extra for imported steel from countries without strict emission rules under CBAM.

CARBON BANK

A carbon bank is a system, platform, or mechanism where carbon credits are stored, traded, or managed.

These banks act as intermediaries, enabling organizations, governments, or individuals to deposit, hold, or invest in carbon credits, which represent the reduction or removal of greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere. Carbon banks help streamline the carbon credit market by providing transparency, standardization, and trust, ensuring that credits are verified and accounted for properly. They also support long-term carbon offset strategies by allowing entities to plan for future carbon neutrality goals.

Example:
A company participates in a carbon bank by purchasing and depositing certified carbon credits from reforestation projects, which it can later use to offset its emissions or trade in voluntary carbon markets

CARBON BUDGET

A carbon budget is the total amount of CO_2 that can be emitted globally to keep global warming within a specific temperature limit (e.g., 1.5°C).

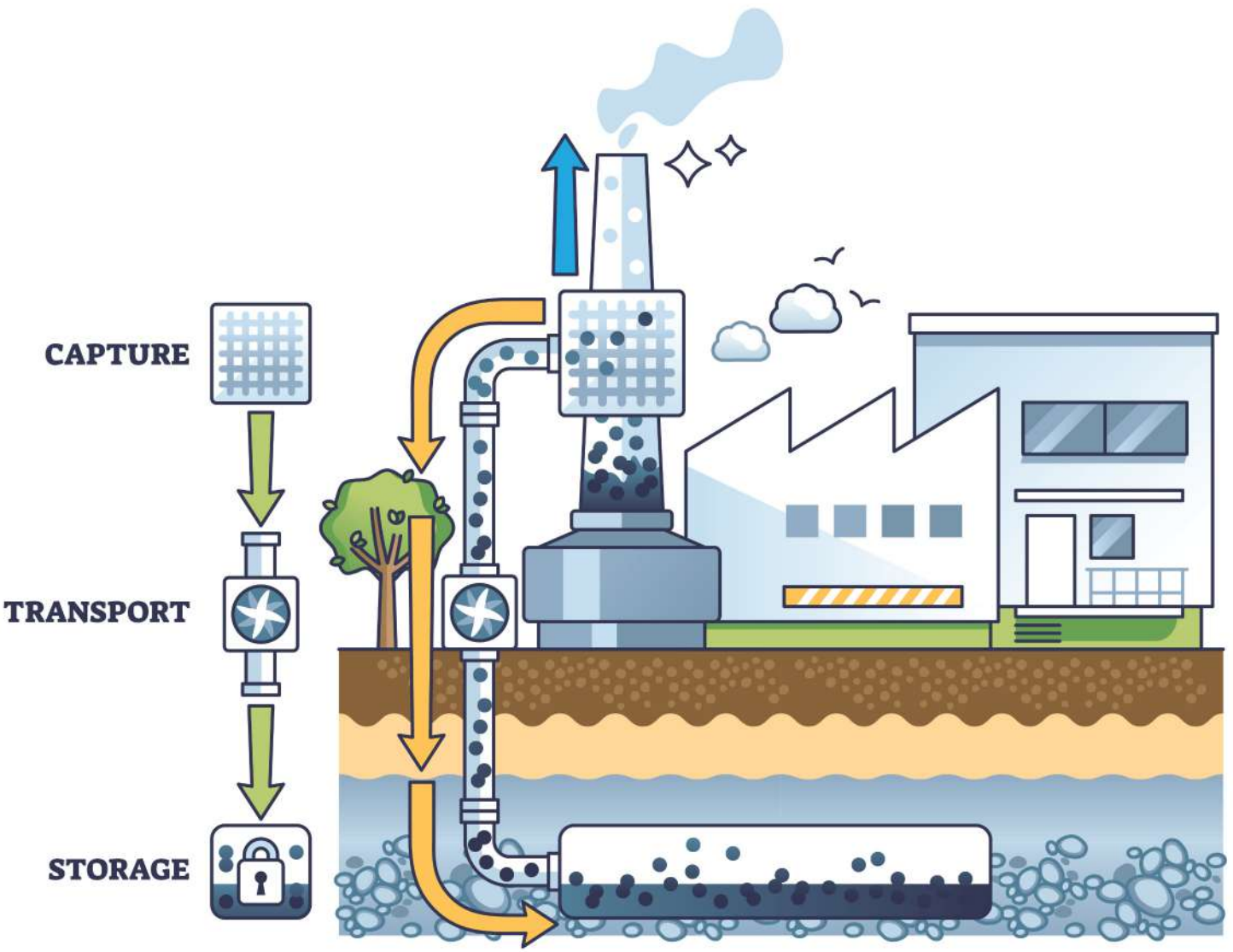
Example:
Scientists estimate we have a limited number of gigatons of CO_2 we can still emit to avoid dangerous climate change.

Credit: Circuit Meter, 2017

CARBON CAPTURE AND STORAGE (CCS)

CCS is a technology that captures CO_2 emissions from industrial sources and stores them underground, preventing them from entering the atmosphere.

Example:
A coal power plant uses CCS to trap carbon from its smokestacks and inject it into deep rock formations.



Credit: Pro Enviro, 2025

CARBON CREDIT

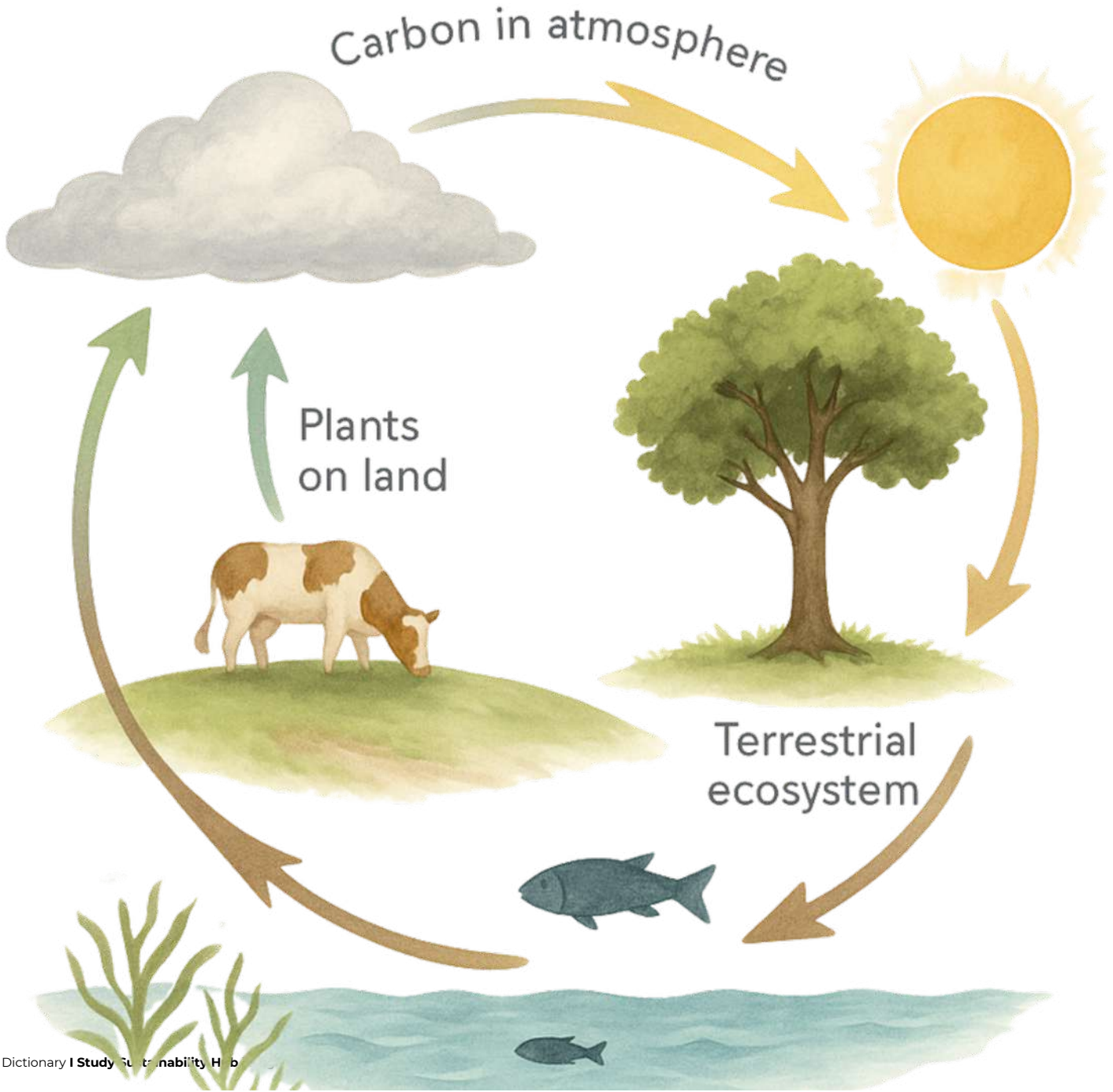
A carbon credit is a certificate that allows the holder to emit one ton of CO_2. These can be bought or sold in carbon markets, supporting Emission reduction projects.

Example:
A company that exceeds its emissions limit can buy carbon credits from a forest restoration project to offset its pollution.

CARBON CYCLE

The carbon cycle is the process by which carbon moves between the atmosphere, land, ocean, and living things.

Example:
Trees absorb CO_2 from the air, store it, and release it when they decompose or burn.



CARBON DIOXIDE (CO_2)

CO_2 is a colorless gas naturally present in the atmosphere but largely increased by human activities like burning fossil fuels.

Example:
Driving a gasoline car releases CO_2, which contributes to climate change.

Credit: The Filter, 2023

CARBON DIOXIDE EQUIVALENT (CO_2 E)

A way to measure all greenhouse gases (not just CO_2) in a single unit, by converting them based on how much they warm the planet compared to CO_2.

Example:
Methane has a stronger warming effect than CO_2, so 1 ton of methane may equal 25 tons of CO_2e.

CARBON EMISSIONS

The release of carbon, especially carbon dioxide into the air, mostly from burning fossil fuels.

Example:
Driving a petrol car or using electricity from coal-fired plants causes carbon emissions

CARBON FOOTPRINT

The total amount of greenhouse gases a person, company, or product causes, measured in CO_2e.

Example:
A person who frequently flies and eats a lot of meat will have a larger carbon footprint than someone who walks and eats mostly plant-based foods.

CARBON FOOTPRINT VERIFICATION (CFV)

A process to check and confirm if a company's carbon footprint calculation is accurate and follows standards.

Example:
A business might hire a third party to verify their emissions report before publishing it.

CARBON INSETTING

Reducing carbon emissions inside a company's own value chain, rather than paying for offsets elsewhere.

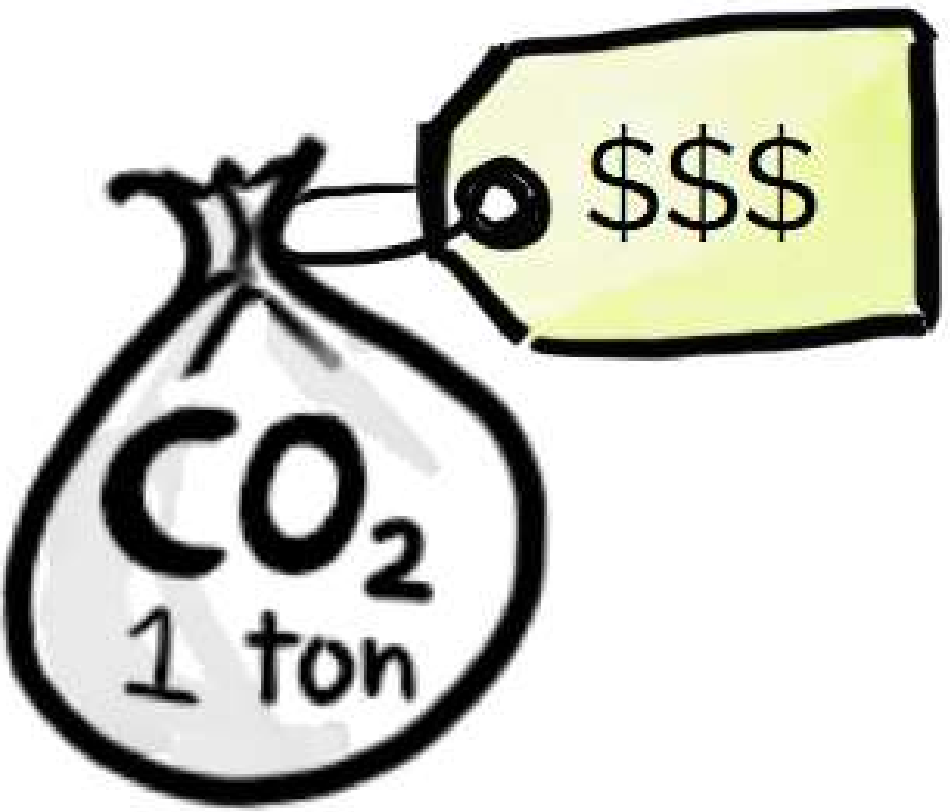
Example:
A coffee company planting trees on the farms it sources beans from to reduce emissions is doing insetting.

Credit: Nestlé NESPRESSO Professional, 2020

CARBON INTENSITY

The amount of carbon emissions per unit of something—like per dollar earned or per kilowatt of energy.

Example:
A factory that emits 2 tons of CO_2 for every $1,000 of products it makes has a high carbon intensity.



Credit: Go Climate, 2018

CARBON LABELLING

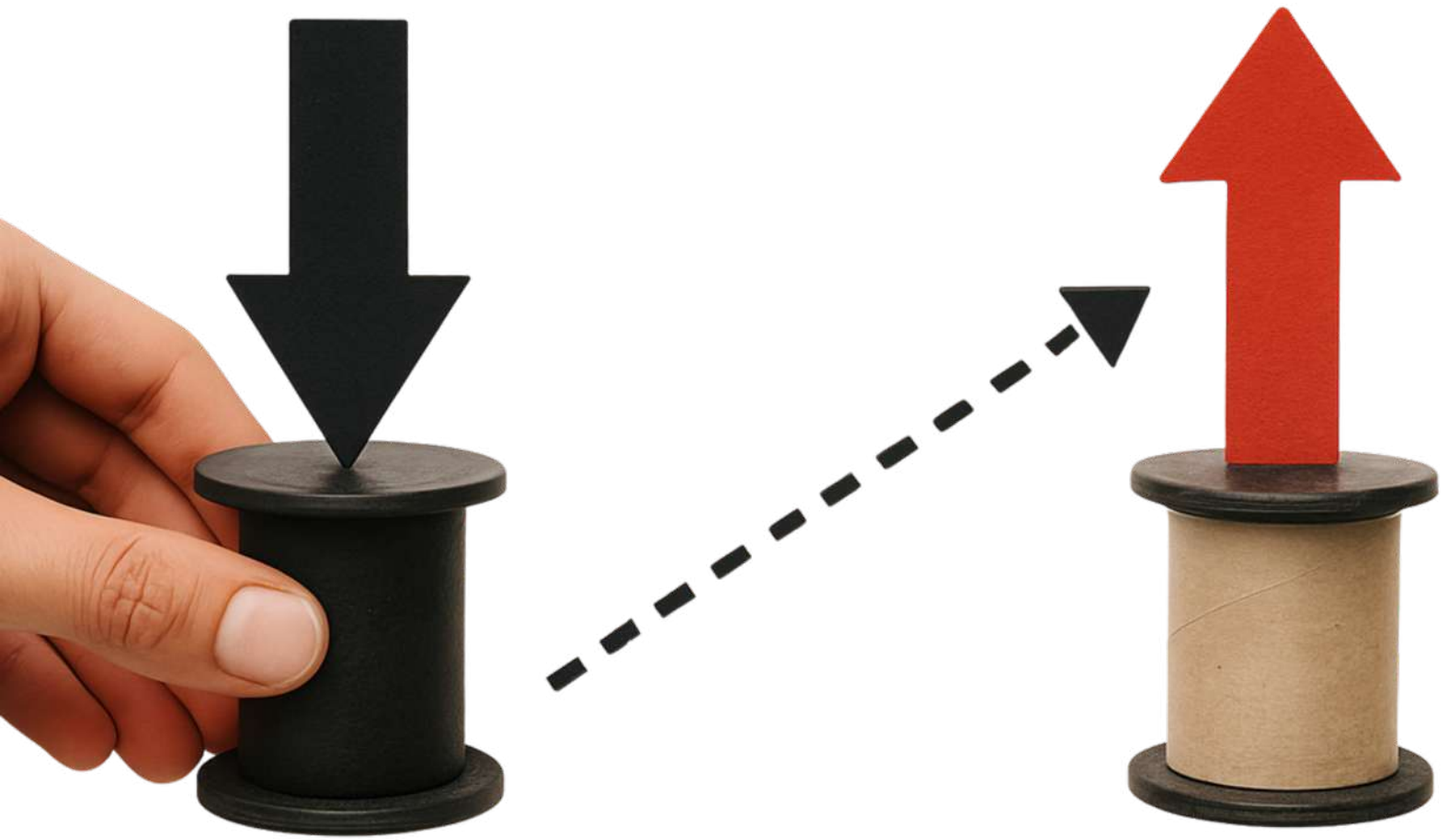
Putting labels on products to show how much carbon was emitted in making and delivering them.

Example:
A bag of chips may say it produced 1.5kg of CO_2e to help customers make low-carbon choices.

CARBON LEAKAGE

When efforts to reduce emissions in one place cause emissions to increase somewhere else.

Example:
If a country tightens emission rules and companies move factories to countries with looser rules, that's carbon leakage.



CARBON MANAGEMENT

The strategies and actions taken to measure, reduce, and report carbon emissions.

Example:
Installing solar panels, switching to electric vehicles, and tracking energy use are all carbon management actions.

CARBON MARKET

A system where companies can buy and sell carbon credits to meet emission goals.

Example:
A company that emits less than its limit can sell its extra allowances to another company that is over its limit.

CARBON NEGATIVE

When a person, product, or company removes more carbon dioxide from the air than it emits.

Example:
A company that captures CO_2 through tree planting and emits very little may be considered carbon negative.

CARBON NEUTRALITY / CARBON-NEUTRAL

When total carbon emissions are balanced by removing or offsetting an equal amount of CO_2 from the atmosphere.

Example:
A company emits 1,000 tons of CO_2 but plants enough trees to absorb 1,000 tons, making it carbon-neutral.

CARBON OFFSETTING

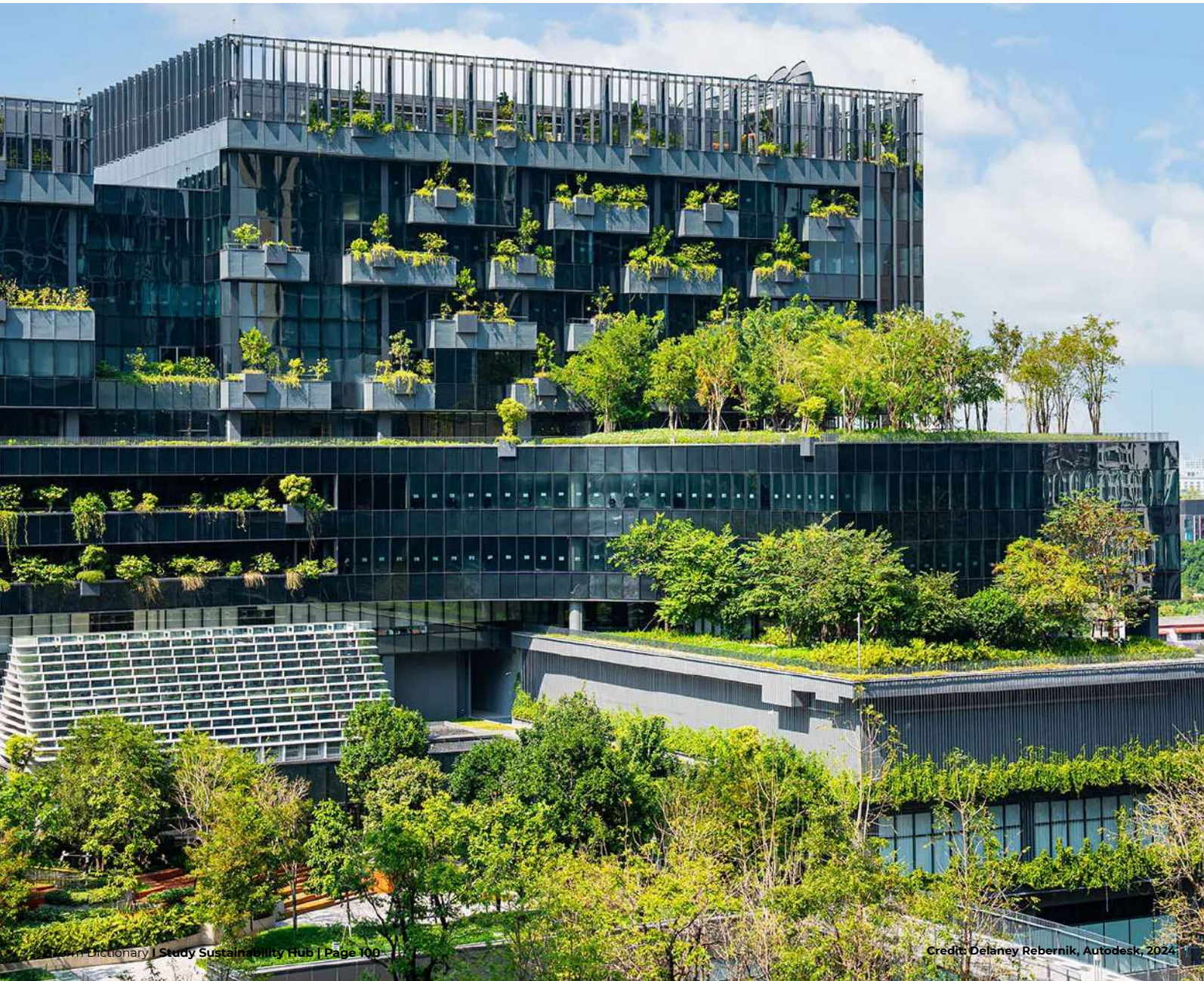
Paying for activities that reduce emissions (like tree planting or renewable energy) to cancel out your own emissions.

Example:
Buying a carbon offset for a flight funds a wind farm elsewhere to balance the plane's emissions.

CARBON POSITIVE

Often used to mean the same as "carbon negative"—removing more CO_2 than is emitted—but can be confusing because the word "positive" usually means adding CO_2.

Example:
A green building that creates more clean energy than it uses may be called "carbon positive."



Credit: Delaney Rebernik, Autodesk, 2024

CARBON PRICING

Charging money for emitting carbon, to encourage people and companies to pollute less.

Example:
A carbon tax makes businesses pay for every ton of CO_2 they release.

CARBON REDUCTION COMMITMENT (CRC)

A former UK program that required large organizations to report and reduce energy use and carbon emissions.

Example:
Big supermarkets in the UK had to follow CRC rules by tracking and cutting their electricity use.

CARBON REGISTRY

A system that records information about carbon credits—who owns them, how they're used, and if they're verified.

Example:
Companies use registries to prove their carbon offsets are real and properly tracked.

CARBON REPORTING

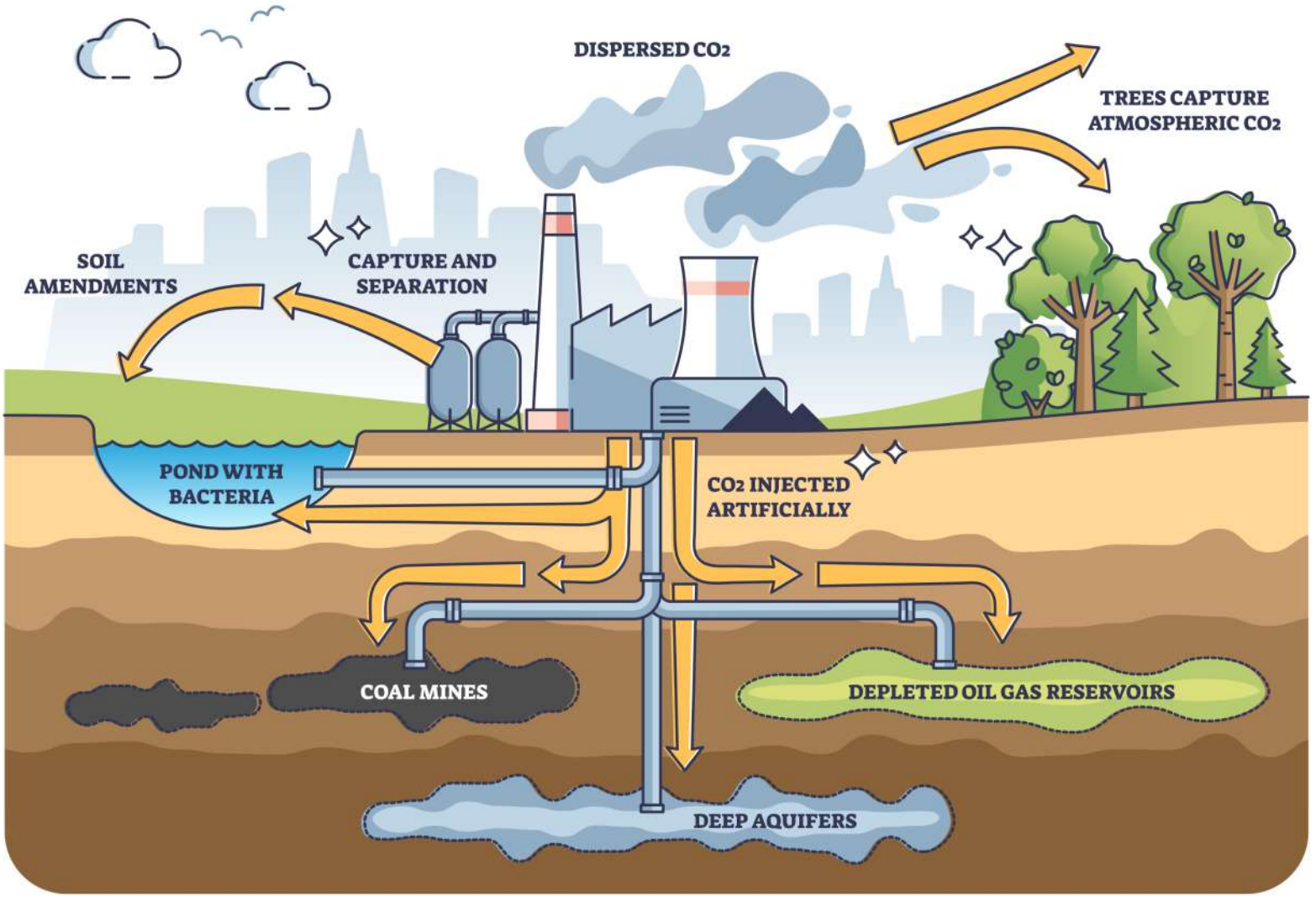
The process of measuring and publicly sharing the amount of carbon emissions a business or project produces.

Example:
A company publishes a report saying it emitted 50,000 tons of CO_2e last year.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION

Capturing and storing carbon dioxide so it doesn't enter the atmosphere.

Example:
Trees naturally sequester CO_2 by absorbing it during photosynthesis and storing it in their trunks and roots.



Credit: Pro Enviro, 2025

CARBON SINK

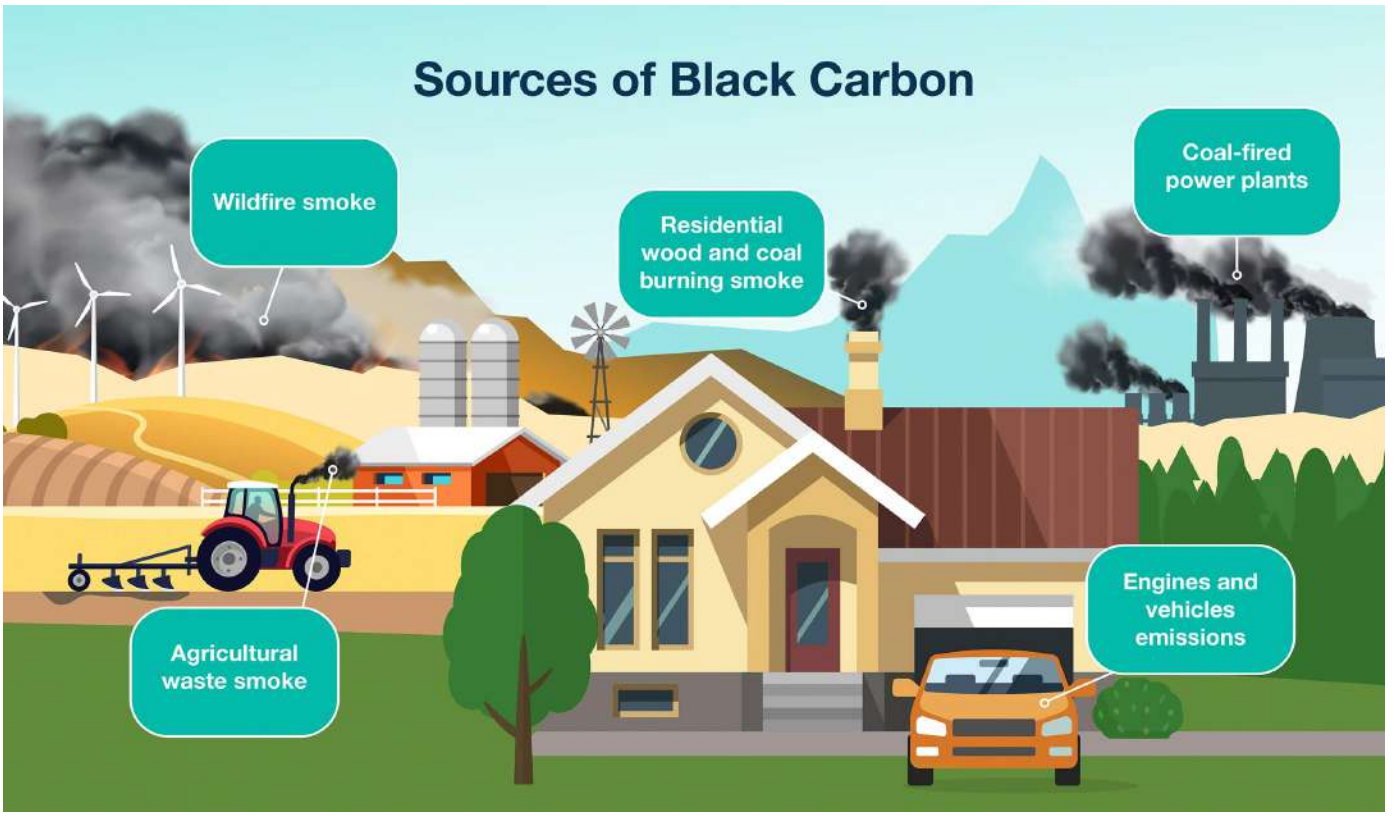
A natural or artificial system that absorbs more CO_2 than it emits.

Example:
Forests and oceans are major carbon sinks that help slow down climate change.

CARBON SOURCE

Any activity or place that releases more carbon dioxide than it takes in.

Example:
Factories that burn coal are carbon sources.



Credit: IQAir, 2016

CARBON TAX

A fee charged on the carbon content of fossil fuels to encourage cleaner energy use.

Example:
Gasoline might cost more if a carbon tax is added to reflect the pollution it causes.

CARBON TOKEN

A digital asset (often using blockchain) that represents a carbon credit or emission reduction.

Example:
A company can buy carbon tokens online to offset their emissions in a transparent, traceable way.

CARBON TRADING

A market system where companies buy and sell permits or credits to emit carbon, helping keep total emissions within a cap.

Example:
If a company cuts emissions and has spare allowances, it can sell them to another company that went over.

CARBON TRUST STANDARD

A certification given to businesses that prove they are cutting carbon emissions year after year.

Example:
A bank gets the Carbon Trust Standard after reducing energy use in its offices by 20%.

CARBON VALUE-AT-RISK (VAR)

A way to measure how much a company's future value could drop due to carbon-related risks like new laws or higher prices.

Example:
A fossil fuel company may have high carbon VaR if governments start banning oil use.

CARBON ZERO (OR ZERO CARBON)

Producing no carbon dioxide emissions at all, often by using 100% clean energy.

Example:
A house powered only by solar and wind energy is zero carbon.

CARBON-BALANCING

Making up for unavoidable emissions by supporting projects that remove an equal amount of CO_2.

Example:
A delivery company plants trees to balance the carbon from its vehicle fuel.

Credit: treeapp, 2024

CDP (ORIGINALLY THE CARBON DISCLOSURE PROJECT)

A global nonprofit that collects environmental data from companies and cities to promote transparency and action on climate change.

Example:
A business reports its carbon emissions to CDP to show investors it's managing climate risks

CHEMICALS AND WASTE

Refers to the production, use, and disposal of chemical substances and waste materials, and the effort to manage them safely to protect health and the environment.

Example:
Proper disposal of batteries and plastics helps reduce harmful chemical waste in the environment.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY

An economic model that focuses on reusing, repairing, recycling, and sharing products and materials instead of throwing them away.

Example:
In a circular economy, a company might design furniture that can be easily taken apart and reused.

CITIZENSHIP

In sustainability, this means being responsible and active in protecting the environment and supporting social justice as part of a community or country.

Example:
Voting for policies that support clean energy is a form of climate-conscious citizenship.

CIVILISATION AND CLIMATE VULNERABILITY

How human societies are exposed and affected by climate change, especially through rising temperatures, food shortages, or natural disasters.

Example:
Ancient civilizations like the Maya collapsed partly due to droughts, showing early climate vulnerability.

CLEAN AIR

Air that is free from harmful pollutants and safe to breathe.

Example:
Clean air has low levels of pollutants like nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter.

Credit: Smart Cities World, 2018

CLEAN DEVELOPMENT MECHANISM (CDM)

A UN program under the Kyoto Protocol that allows richer countries to support climate projects in developing countries and earn emission reduction credits.

Example:
A company in Germany funds a wind energy project in Kenya and uses the credits to meet its emission targets.

CLEAN ENERGY

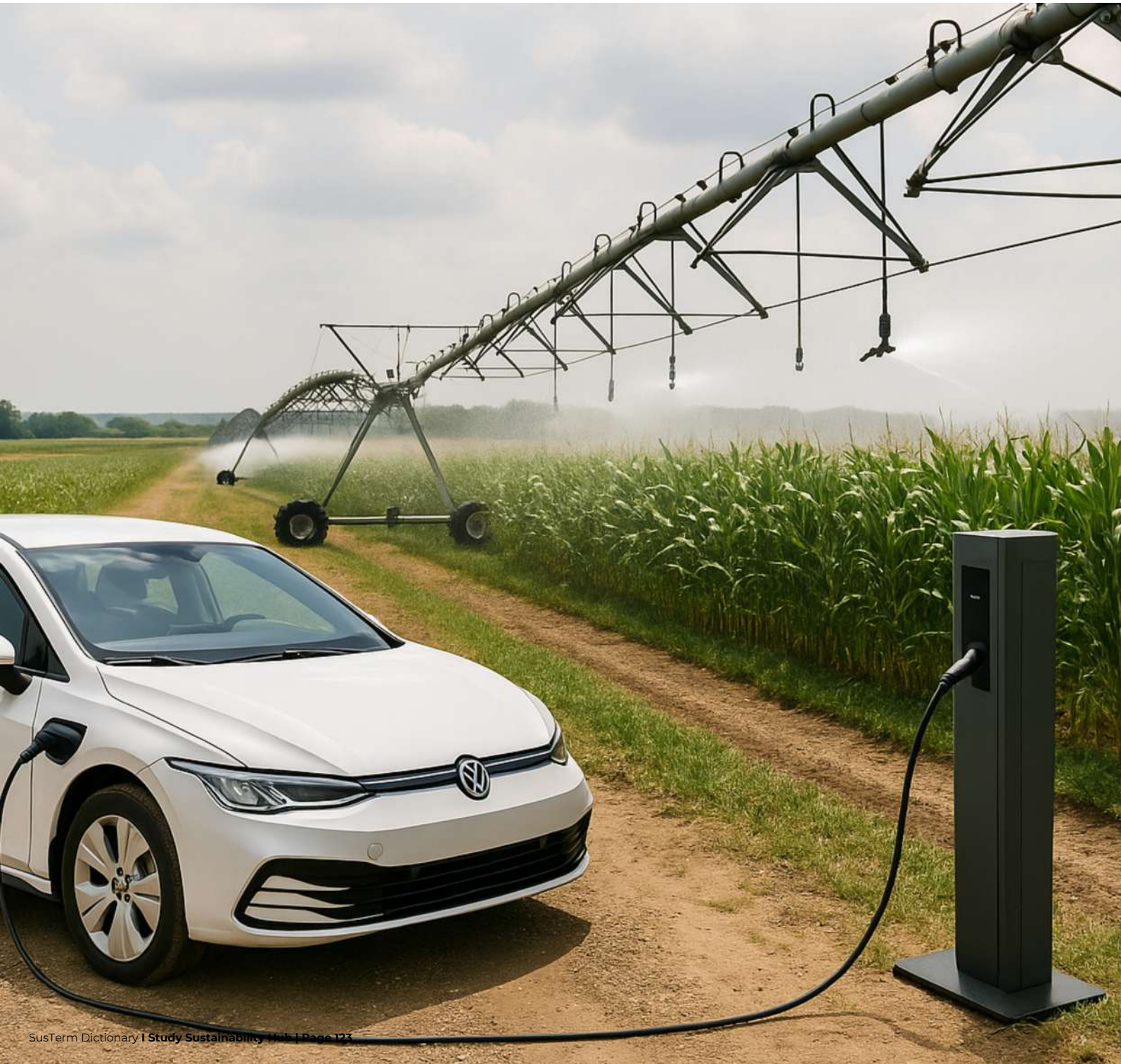
Energy that comes from renewable, non-polluting sources like solar, wind, and hydropower.

Example:
Solar panels on a roof generate clean energy without releasing carbon dioxide.

CLEAN TECH

Short for "clean technology", products or services that reduce environmental harm or use resources more efficiently.

Example:
Electric vehicles and water-saving irrigation systems are examples of clean tech.



CLEAN TECH / CLEANTECH / GREEN TECHNOLOGIES / ECO-TECHNOLOGIES

All these terms refer to innovations that help protect the environment by using energy, water, and materials more efficiently or reducing pollution.

Example:
A smart thermostat that reduces energy waste in homes is a form of green technology.

CLEANER PRODUCTION ASSESSMENT (CPA)

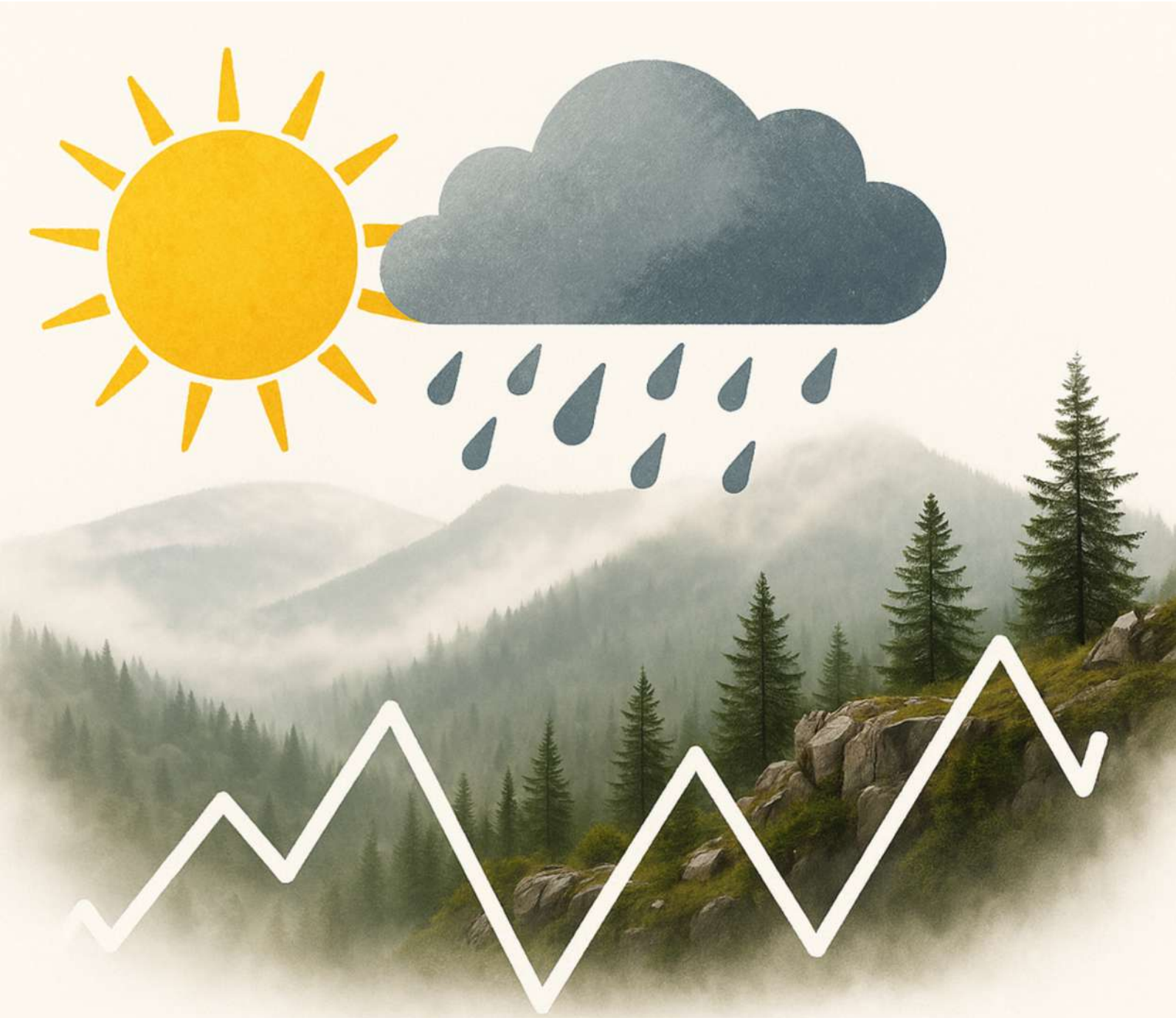
A method to review how a company uses materials and energy to find ways to reduce waste and environmental impact.

Example:
A factory uses CPA to find it can reuse water in its cooling system, cutting waste.

CLIMATE

The long-term pattern of temperature, rainfall, and other weather conditions in a region.

Example:
Ghana has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons.



CLIMATE ACTION

Steps taken by individuals, governments, or businesses to reduce the effects of climate change.

Example:
Planting trees, reducing fossil fuel use, and investing in renewable energy are all forms of climate action.

CLIMATE ACTION 100+

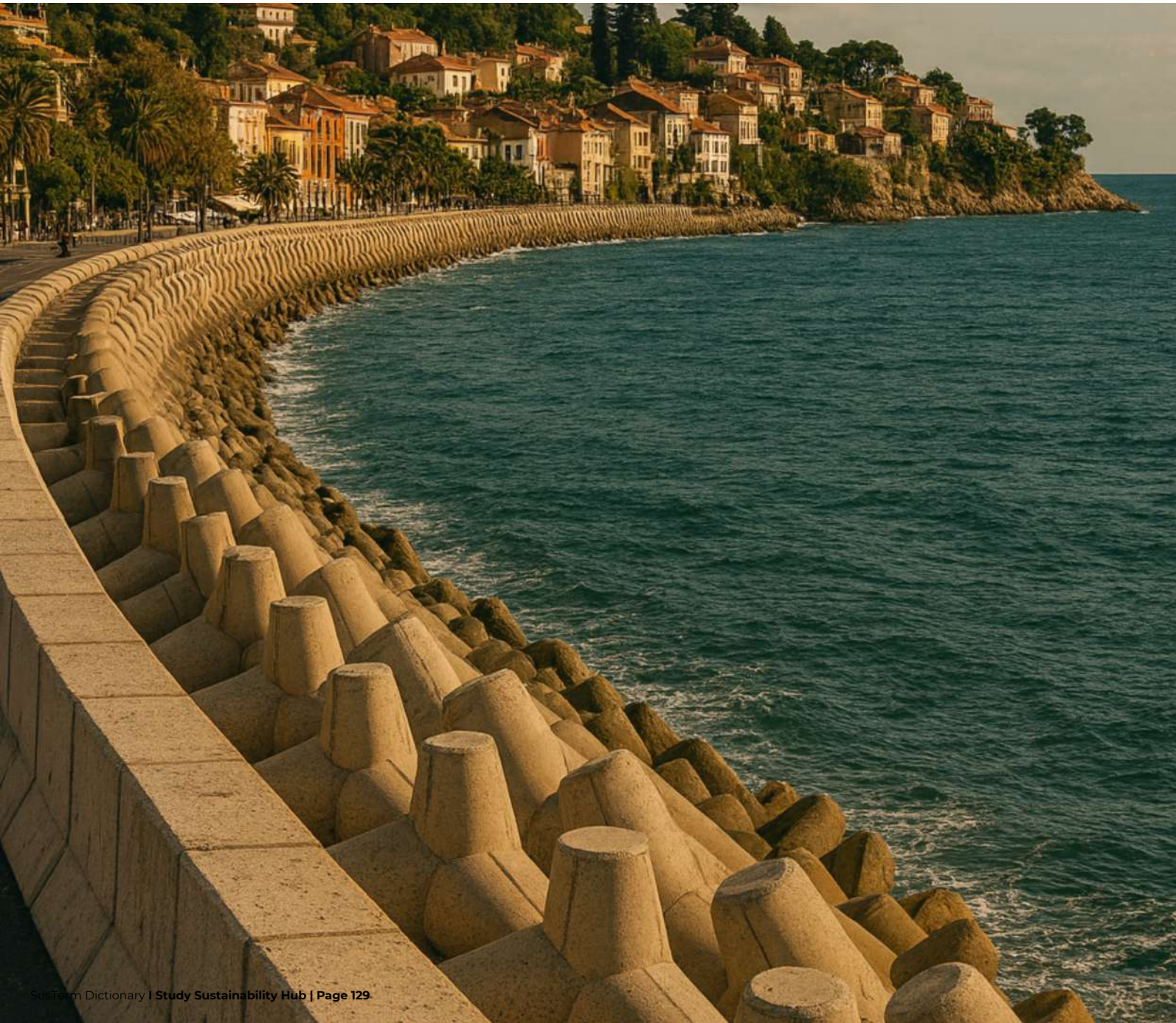
A global investor-led initiative to pressure the world's largest polluting companies to cut emissions and be more transparent.

Example:
Investors in oil companies may demand they publish plans to reach net-zero emissions.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION / CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Actions taken to adjust to current or future effects of climate change to reduce harm or take advantage of new opportunities.

Example:
Building sea walls to protect coastal towns from rising sea levels is climate adaptation.



CLIMATE CHANGE

Long-term changes in global or regional climate patterns, especially due to human activity like burning fossil fuels.

Example:
More frequent floods and heatwaves are signs of climate change.

CLIMATE GOVERNANCE

The systems, rules, and institutions used by countries and organizations to manage and respond to climate change.

Example:
International climate agreements like the Paris Agreement are part of global climate governance.

CLIMATE IMPACT

The effects climate change has on people, nature, and the economy, like floods, droughts, or food insecurity.

Example:
Rising temperatures can damage crops, causing food prices to increase.

CLIMATE JUSTICE

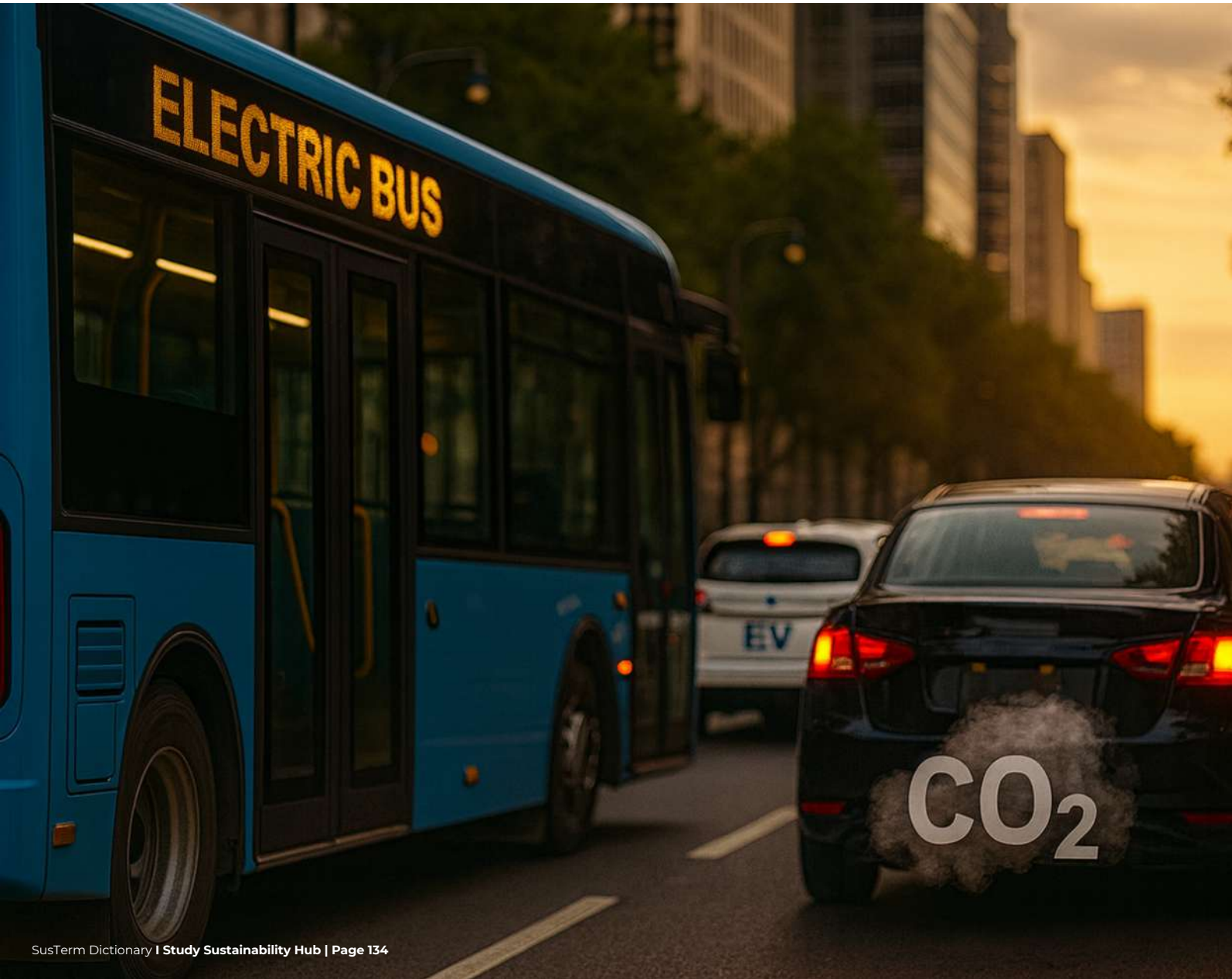
The idea that climate change should be addressed in ways that are fair, especially to vulnerable or poor communities most affected by it.

Example:
Advocating for poor coastal communities to get support after flooding is a matter of climate justice.

CLIMATE MITIGATION / CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Actions taken to reduce or prevent the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, aiming to slow down global warming and climate change.

Example:
Expanding public transportation systems reduces the number of private vehicles on the road, cutting down carbon emissions and helping mitigate climate change.



CLIMATE NEUTRAL

A state where a person, organization, or country balances the amount of greenhouse gases they emit with the amount they remove or offset, resulting in no net emissions.

Example:
A company that reduces its emissions and invests in tree planting to absorb the rest becomes climate neutral.

CLIMATE REFUGEE

A person who is forced to leave their home due to extreme climate events like floods, droughts, or rising sea levels.

Example:
Families leaving coastal villages due to sea-level rise are considered climate refugees.

Credit: EcoWatch, 2021

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

The ability of communities, systems, or environments to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related shocks and stresses.

Example:
A city building flood defenses to protect against stronger storms is improving its climate resilience.

Credit: IEREK, 2025

CLIMATE RISK

Potential negative impacts caused by climate change, including physical risks (like storms) and transition risks (like new regulations).

Example:
A farm facing more frequent droughts due to climate change is experiencing a climate risk.

CLIMATE RISK AND VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT (CRVA)

A tool used to identify areas most at risk from climate change and their capacity to cope, helping decision-makers plan adaptation strategies.

Example:
Governments use CRVA to plan where to invest in climate-proof infrastructure.

CLIMATE SCENARIO ANALYSIS

A method of exploring how future climate-related events might affect a business or area under different temperature or policy scenarios.

Example:
A bank uses scenario analysis to understand how stricter carbon regulations might affect its investments.

CLIMATE SHADOW

A broader look at how someone's actions—beyond just carbon use—affect the climate, including what they vote for, fund, or support.

Example:
Someone might reduce their personal emissions but still support high-emission industries, creating a large climate shadow.

CLIMATE VULNERABILITY

The degree to which people or systems are likely to be harmed by climate change due to exposure and lack of capacity to adapt.

Example:
Low-income coastal communities are highly climate-vulnerable because they lack resources to relocate or rebuild.

Credit: IEREK, 2025

CLIMATE-RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

Business or community chances that arise from acting on climate change, such as creating green jobs or developing renewable energy.

Example:
A startup that creates solar-powered cooking stoves is tapping into a climate-related opportunity.

CLIMATE-RELATED PHYSICAL TASKS

Jobs or actions that involve responding to direct climate effects like heatwaves, floods, or rising sea levels.

Example:
Reinforcing coastal buildings or managing wildfire zones are climate-related physical tasks.

Credit: The Conversation, 2020

CLIMATE-RELATED RISKS

Dangers that come from climate change, including both physical risks (like storms, floods) and transition risks (like changes in laws or markets).

Example:
A company dependent on fossil fuels faces a climate-related risk if carbon taxes increase.

Credit: ESI Africa 2024,

CLIMATE-RELATED TRANSITION RISKS

Risks that come from the move to a low-carbon economy, such as stricter environmental laws or shifts in consumer demand.

Example:
A car company not making electric vehicles might lose customers as fuel car bans grow.

CLOSED LOOP / CLOSED-LOOP ECONOMY

A system where resources are reused or recycled instead of being wasted, aiming for zero waste.

Example:
In a closed-loop economy, plastic bottles are collected, melted, and used to make new bottles.

COLLECTIVE IMPACT

When organizations from different sectors work together on a common social or environmental goal, using a shared plan and measurements.

Example:
NGOs, schools, and businesses teaming up to reduce city air pollution is a collective impact effort.

COMBINED HEAT AND POWER (CHP)

A system that produces both electricity and useful heat from the same energy source, making it more efficient.

Example:
A factory using CHP can generate its own electricity and use the leftover heat for its processes.

COMMUNICATION + ENGAGEMENT

Efforts to inform, involve, and connect people or groups around climate and sustainability actions.

Example:
A city hosting workshops and social media campaigns about recycling is using communication and engagement.

COMPOSTING / COMPOSTABLE

Composting is breaking down organic waste into natural fertilizer; compostable means something can safely decompose this way.

Example:
Food scraps and compostable plates can be composted into nutrient-rich soil.

COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (CNG)

A cleaner-burning fuel made by compressing natural gas, often used in vehicles to reduce pollution.

Example:
Some city buses run on CNG to reduce harmful emissions compared to diesel.

CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES (COP)

The official annual climate meeting of the United Nations, where countries review and negotiate climate actions.

Example:
The Paris Agreement was adopted at COP21 in 2015.

CONSCIOUS CAPITALISM

A business approach that aims to serve all stakeholders—not just profits, but people, the planet, and communities.

Example:
A company that treats workers fairly and donates profits to social causes practices conscious capitalism.

CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM / ETHICAL CONSUMERISM

When people buy products based on environmental and ethical values, like fair trade or low carbon.

Example:
Choosing to buy clothes made in eco-friendly factories is conscious consumerism.

CONSERVATION

The protection and sustainable use of nature, such as forests, water, and wildlife.

Example:
Planting trees and protecting wetlands are conservation efforts.

CONVENTION ON BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (CBD)

A global treaty focused on protecting biodiversity, using nature sustainably, and sharing the benefits fairly.

Example:
Countries that signed the CBD agree to protect endangered species and ecosystems.

CORPORATE CARBON FOOTPRINT (CCF)

The total greenhouse gases a company produces, directly or indirectly, from operations, travel, supply chains, and more.

Example:
A business calculates its CCF to track emissions and set reduction targets.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY (CSR)

A company's efforts to operate in ways that benefit society and the environment.

Example:
A company running volunteer programs and reducing waste is showing CSR.

CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY DUE DILIGENCE

The process companies use to identify and act on environmental and human rights risks in their operations and supply chains.

Example:
A clothing brand checking that suppliers don't harm ecosystems is doing sustainability due diligence.

CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING DIRECTIVE (CSRD)

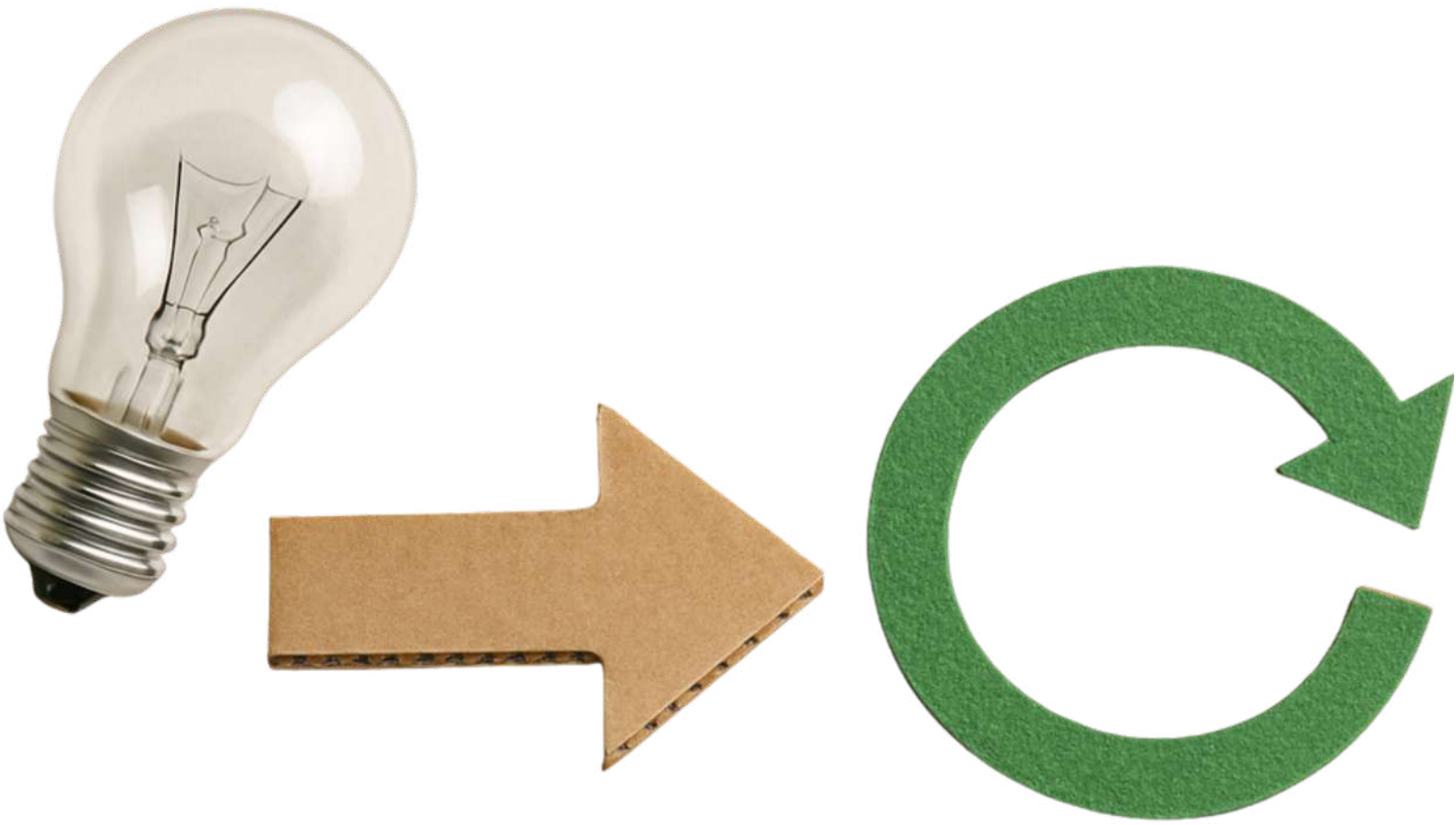
A European Union rule that requires large companies to report their environmental and social impacts in a clear, standard way.

Example:
Under CSRD, businesses must show how they're reducing emissions and respecting human rights.

CRADLE TO CRADLE (C2C)

A product design philosophy where items are made so they can be fully reused or recycled, creating no waste.

Example:
A chair made of materials that can be reused again in new products follows the C2C model.



CRADLE TO GATE

Measuring a product's environmental impact from the raw material stage to when it leaves the factory (not including shipping or use).

Example:
A company analyzing emissions from mining to factory delivery is using a cradle-to-gate assessment.

CRADLE TO GRAVE

Tracking a product's environmental impact from creation to disposal, including use and waste.

Example:
A shampoo bottle's cradle-to-grave footprint includes its plastic production, use, and end in a landfill or recycling plant.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The presence and respect for different cultural identities, practices, languages, and beliefs in a community or organization.

Example:
Supporting cultural festivals in a city shows respect for cultural diversity.

CULTURAL HERITAGE

The traditions, landmarks, and practices passed down through generations, which reflect a community's identity.

Example:
Preserving historic buildings or storytelling traditions helps maintain cultural heritage.

CUMULATIVE ENERGY REQUIREMENTS ANALYSIS

A method to measure the total energy needed across a product's life cycle—from production to disposal.

Example:
Analysts use this method to understand the full energy demand of producing a laptop.

DECARBONISATION

Reducing or eliminating carbon emissions from activities like energy, transport, or manufacturing.

Example:
Switching from coal to solar power is part of a country's decarbonisation plan.

DECENTRALISED ENERGY

Small-scale energy sources like solar panels or local wind turbines that generate power close to where it's used.

Example:
A neighborhood using rooftop solar instead of relying on a national grid is using decentralised energy.

DECENTRALISED WATER SYSTEMS

Water systems that treat and distribute water locally, often for reuse, rather than relying on a large central plant.

Example:
A building that captures and purifies rainwater on-site is using a decentralised water system.

DECOLONISATION

The process of undoing colonial influences, often by restoring local control, knowledge, and decision-making, especially in environmental work.

Example:
Involving Indigenous communities in land management is part of environmental decolonisation.

Credit: IWGIA, 2017

DEEP RETROFIT

A major upgrade to a building to dramatically improve energy efficiency, comfort, and emissions reduction.

Example:
Adding insulation, solar panels, and smart heating in an old home is a deep retrofit.

DEFORESTATION

The removal of forests, often for farming or development, which contributes to climate change and biodiversity loss.

Example:
Cutting down rainforests for palm oil plantations is deforestation.

Credit: The Naked Chemist, 2024

DEGRADATION

The decline in the quality of land, water, or ecosystems due to overuse, pollution, or climate change.

Example:
Overgrazing and erosion turning fertile land into desert is land degradation.

Credit: Carey Marks/Plymouth University, 2018

DEGROWTH

An economic idea that promotes slowing down production and consumption to protect the environment and improve well-being.

Example:
Choosing local food over imported goods supports degrowth by reducing transport emissions.

DESERTIFICATION

The process where fertile land becomes dry and unproductive, often due to deforestation, drought, or poor farming.

Example:
Overgrazing by livestock can cause desertification in semi-arid areas.

Credit: Iberdrola, 2025

DIGITAL CARBON FOOTPRINT

The greenhouse gas emissions caused by using digital technology like emails, streaming, and data storage.

Example:
Watching high-definition videos online contributes to your digital carbon footprint.

DIGITAL SOBRIETY

Using digital tools more efficiently and less often to reduce energy use and environmental impact.

Example:
Choosing audio calls instead of video meetings is a form of digital sobriety

DIGITAL SUSTAINABILITY

Designing and using digital technologies in ways that support environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Example:
Green data centers powered by renewable energy support digital sustainability.

DIRECT AIR CAPTURE

A technology that removes carbon dioxide directly from the air and stores it underground or uses it in products.

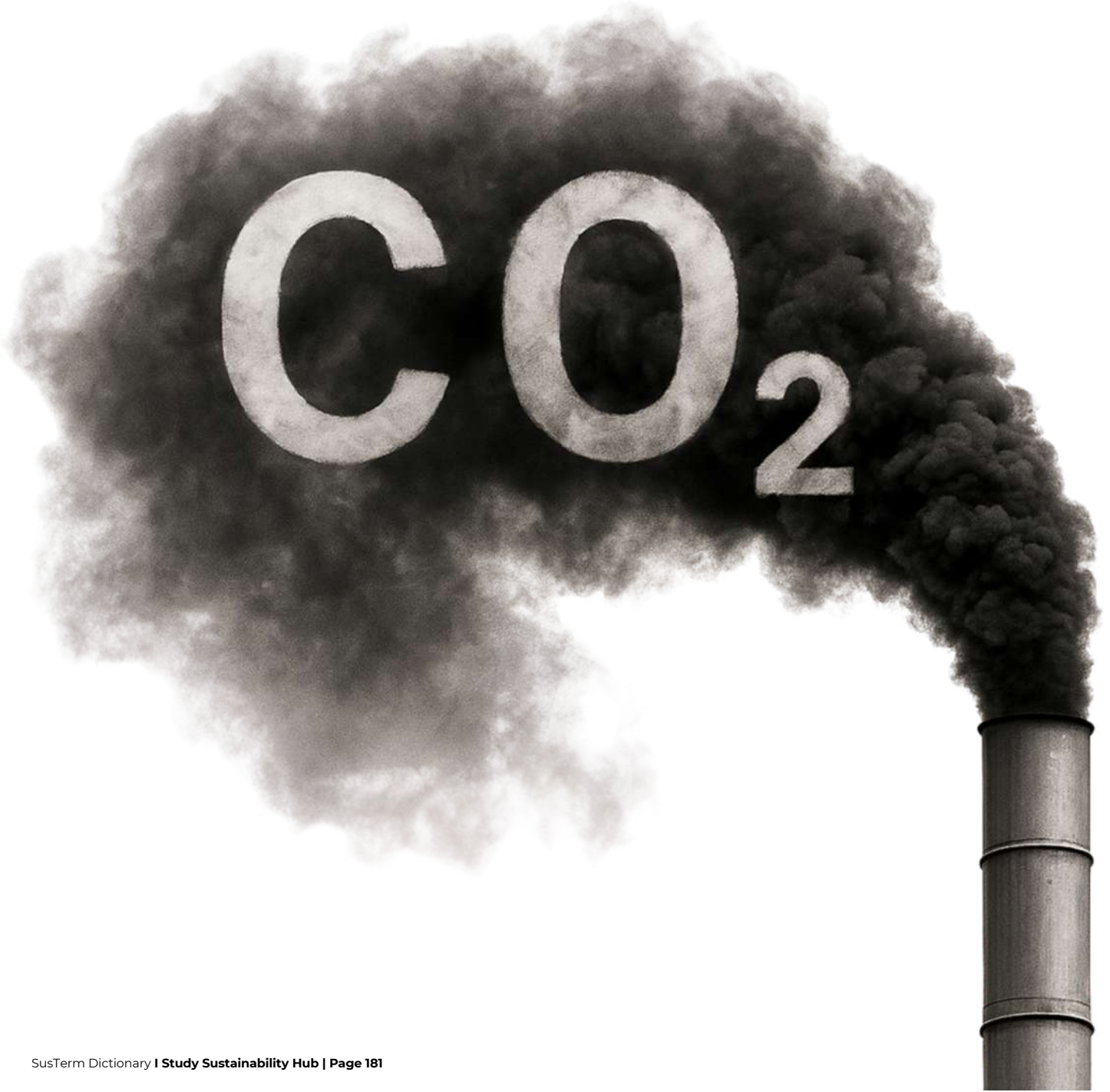
Example:
A direct air capture plant can remove CO_2 from the atmosphere to fight climate change.

Credit: Carbon Direct, 2021

DIRECT EMISSIONS

Greenhouse gases released from sources owned or controlled by an organization.

Example:
A factory's smokestack emissions are direct emissions.



DISASTER RESILIENCE

The ability of communities and systems to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

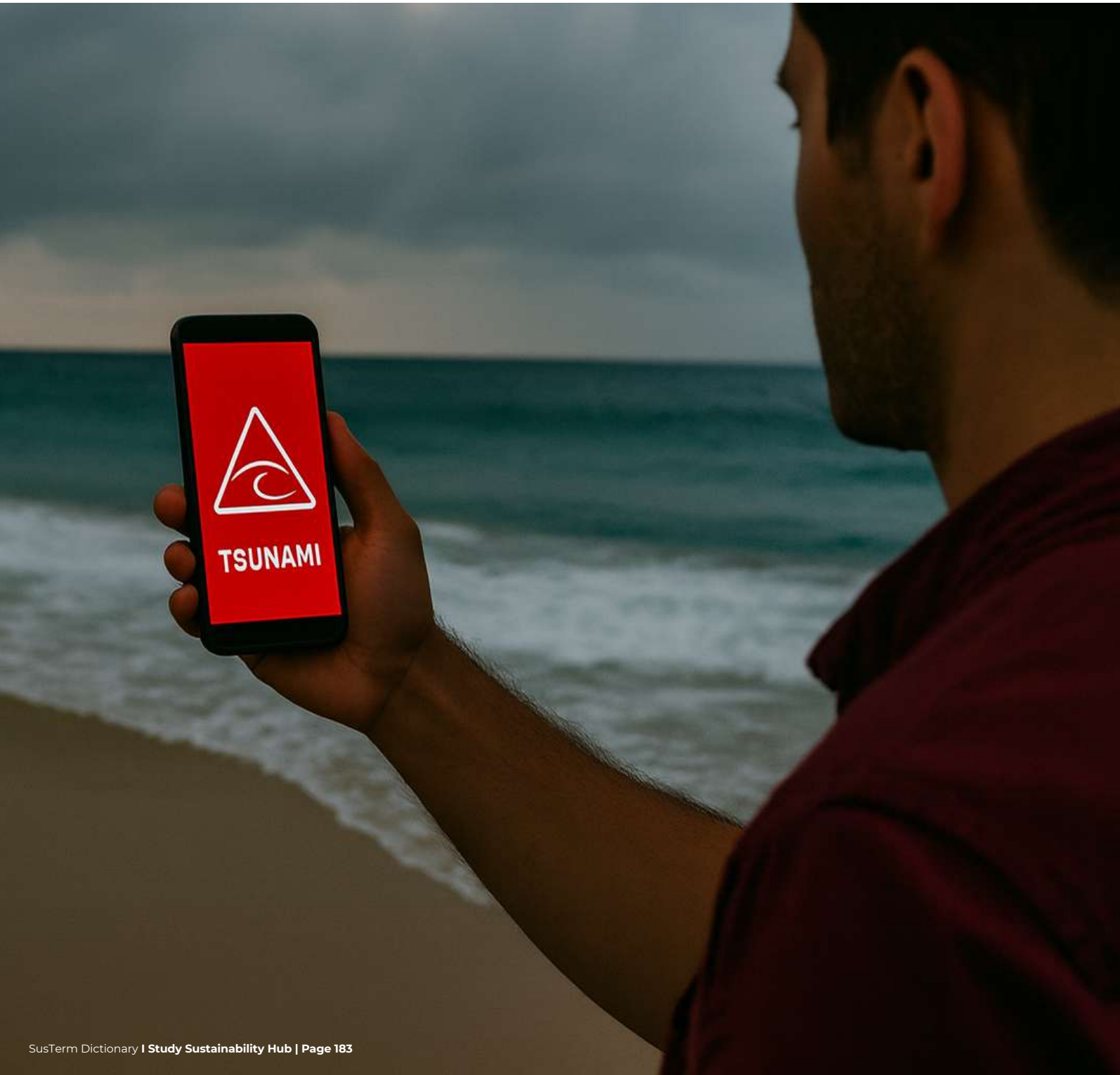
Example:
Building flood-resistant homes increases disaster resilience.

Credit: Max Narula/John Pardey Architects

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Efforts to reduce damage from natural hazards through prevention, preparedness, and response planning.

Example:
Early warning systems for tsunamis are part of disaster risk reduction.



DISCLOSURE / DISCLOSING

Sharing important information, often about environmental or social impacts, with stakeholders or the public.

Example:
A company disclosing its emissions data shows transparency.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Creating environments that respect and include different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

Example:
Hiring people from various cultures and ensuring equal treatment supports diversity and inclusion.

DOHA AMENDMENT

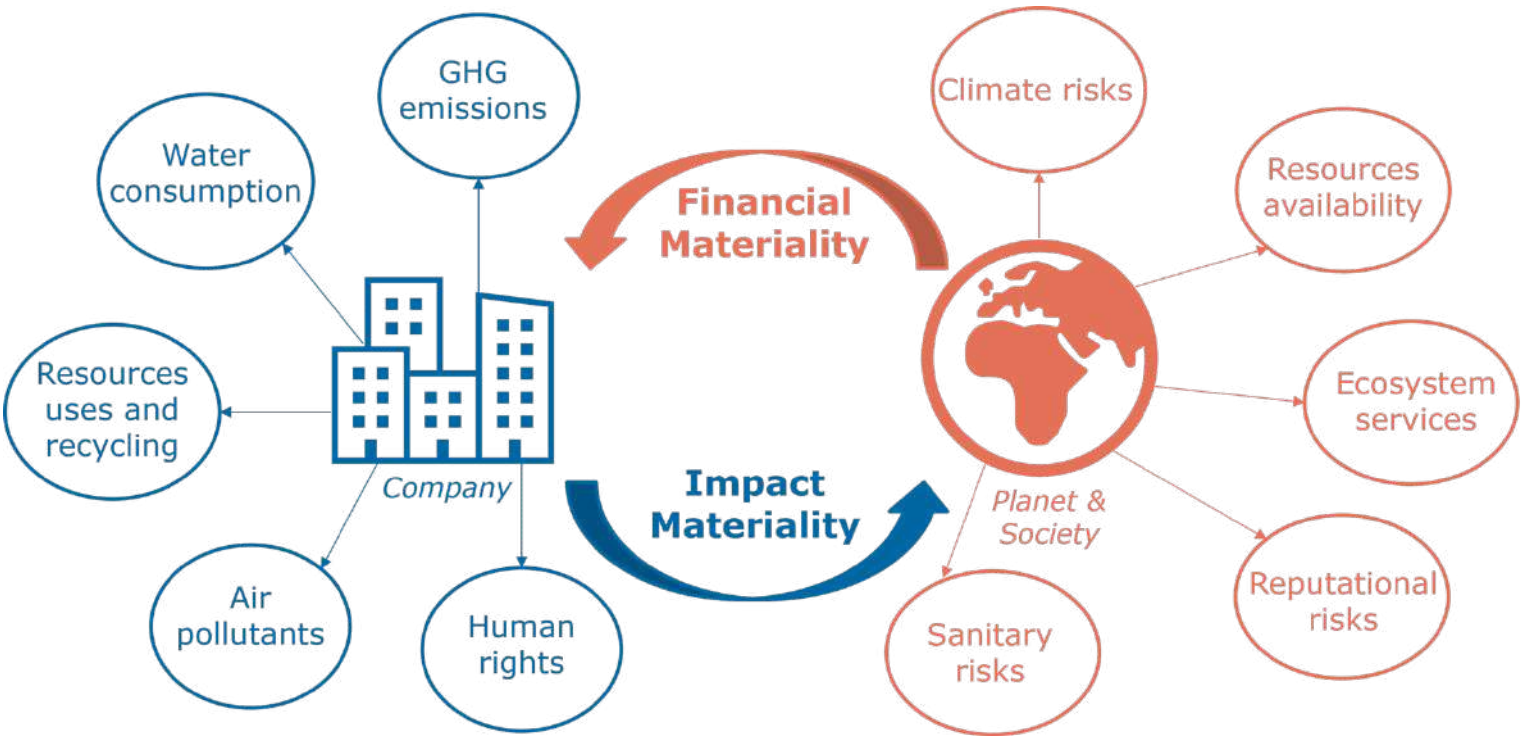
A 2012 update to the Kyoto Protocol, which extended countries' commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Example:
The Doha Amendment added new emission reduction targets for developed countries.

DOUBLE MATERIALITY ASSESSMENT

Looking at how environmental/social issues affect a company and how the company affects the environment/society.

Example:
A company assessing both its water use and how droughts might affect its business uses double materiality.



Credit: Ecoact, 2025

DOUGHNUT ECONOMICS

A model that balances human needs with planetary limits, visualized as a doughnut-shaped space for sustainable living.

Example:
A city using doughnut economics might aim for social equity without harming the environment.

DOWNCYCLING

Recycling materials into products of lower quality or value.

Example:
Turning plastic bottles into carpet fibers is downcycling.

DOWNSTREAM LEASED ASSETS EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 13)

Emissions from assets a company owns but leases out, like buildings or equipment, used by others.

Example:
A business leasing its trucks must account for the emissions from how the lessee uses them.

DOWNSTREAM TRANSPORTATION AND DISTRIBUTION EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 9)

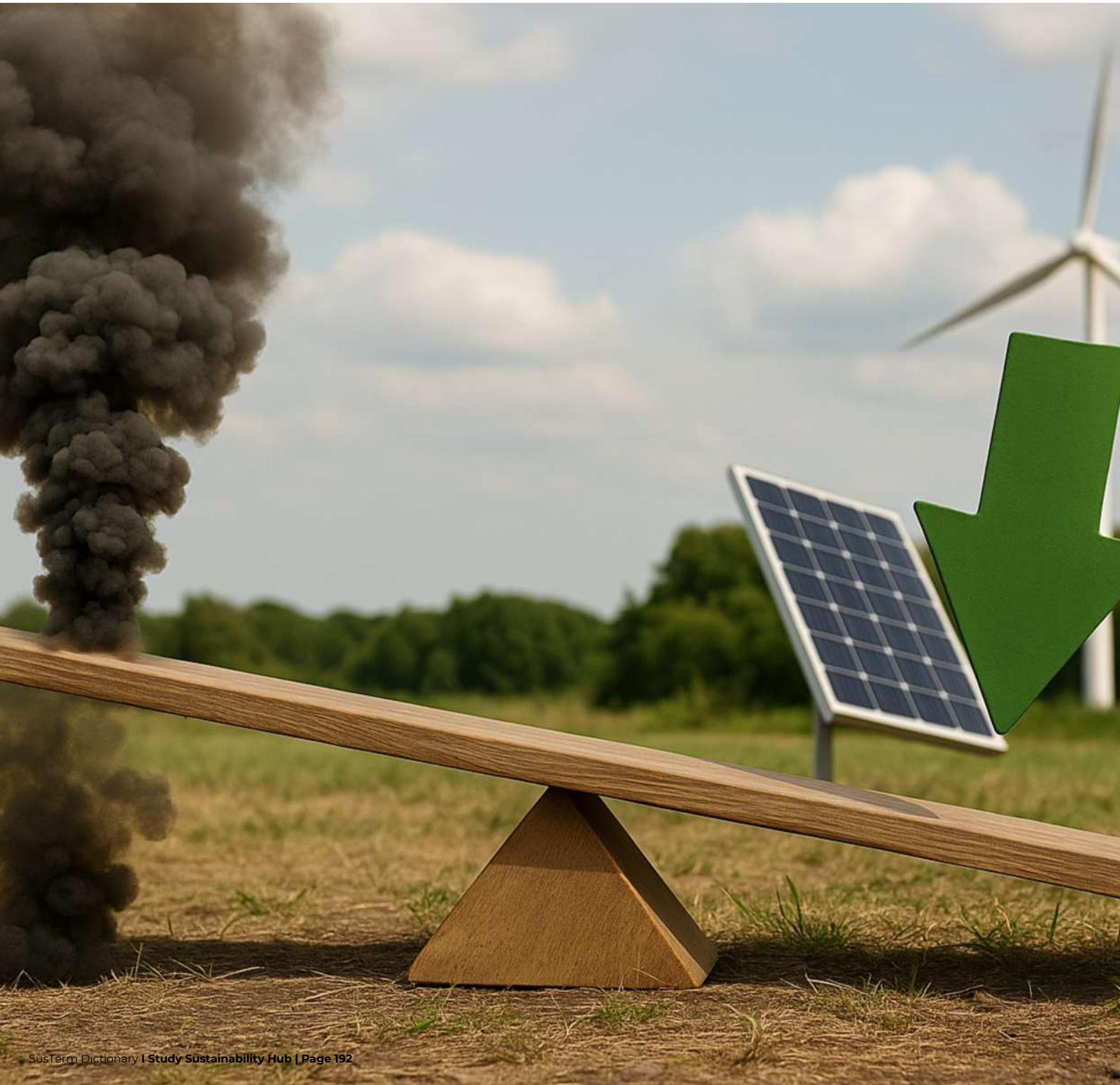
Emissions from delivering sold products to customers, including shipping, warehousing, and retail.

Example:
A company calculates the emissions from transporting its goods to stores.

DRAWDOWN

The point when greenhouse gas levels in the atmosphere stop rising and begin to decline.

Example:
Investing in clean energy and tree planting helps reach drawdown.



DROUGHT

A long period of little or no rain that causes water shortages.

Example:
Crops fail and rivers dry up during severe droughts.

ECO-ANXIETY

Worry or fear about environmental problems like climate change.

Example:
Many young people experience eco-anxiety about the planet's future.

ECO-CONSCIOUS

Being aware of environmental impacts and making choices that help the planet.

Example:
An eco-conscious person brings reusable bags and avoids plastic.

ECO-DISTRICTS

Neighborhoods designed to be environmentally sustainable, with green buildings, clean energy, and smart design.

Example:
An eco-district might use solar power, composting, and bike lanes.

ECO-EFFICIENCY ANALYSIS

A method to compare a product's environmental impact with its value or usefulness.

Example:
A business uses this analysis to choose packaging that uses fewer materials and less energy.

Credit: Enterprise Nation, 2025

ECO-FOOTPRINT

The impact a person, company, or country has on nature based on how much land and resources they use.

Example:
Eating a lot of meat increases your eco-footprint.

ECO-FRIENDLY

Not harmful to the environment.

Example:
Eco-friendly cleaning products are made without toxic chemicals.

ECOLABELS

Labels that show a product meets certain environmental or sustainability standards.

Example:
Products with the EU Ecolabel are certified as environmentally friendly.

ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

A severe disruption in the environment, such as species loss, pollution, or climate change.

Example:
Melting polar ice is part of the global ecological crisis.

ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

The amount of natural resources used to support a person's or group's lifestyle.

Example:
flying frequently and eating imported food increases your ecological footprint.

Credit: Talking Retail, 2020

ECOLOGICAL OR NATURE REGENERATION

Helping nature recover and become healthy again, often by letting ecosystems heal on their own.

Example:
Fencing off a damaged forest to let it grow back is nature regeneration.

ECOLOGICAL OR NATURE RESTORATION

Active efforts to bring back damaged ecosystems, like planting trees or cleaning rivers.

Example:
Replanting mangroves to protect coastlines is ecological restoration.

ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION

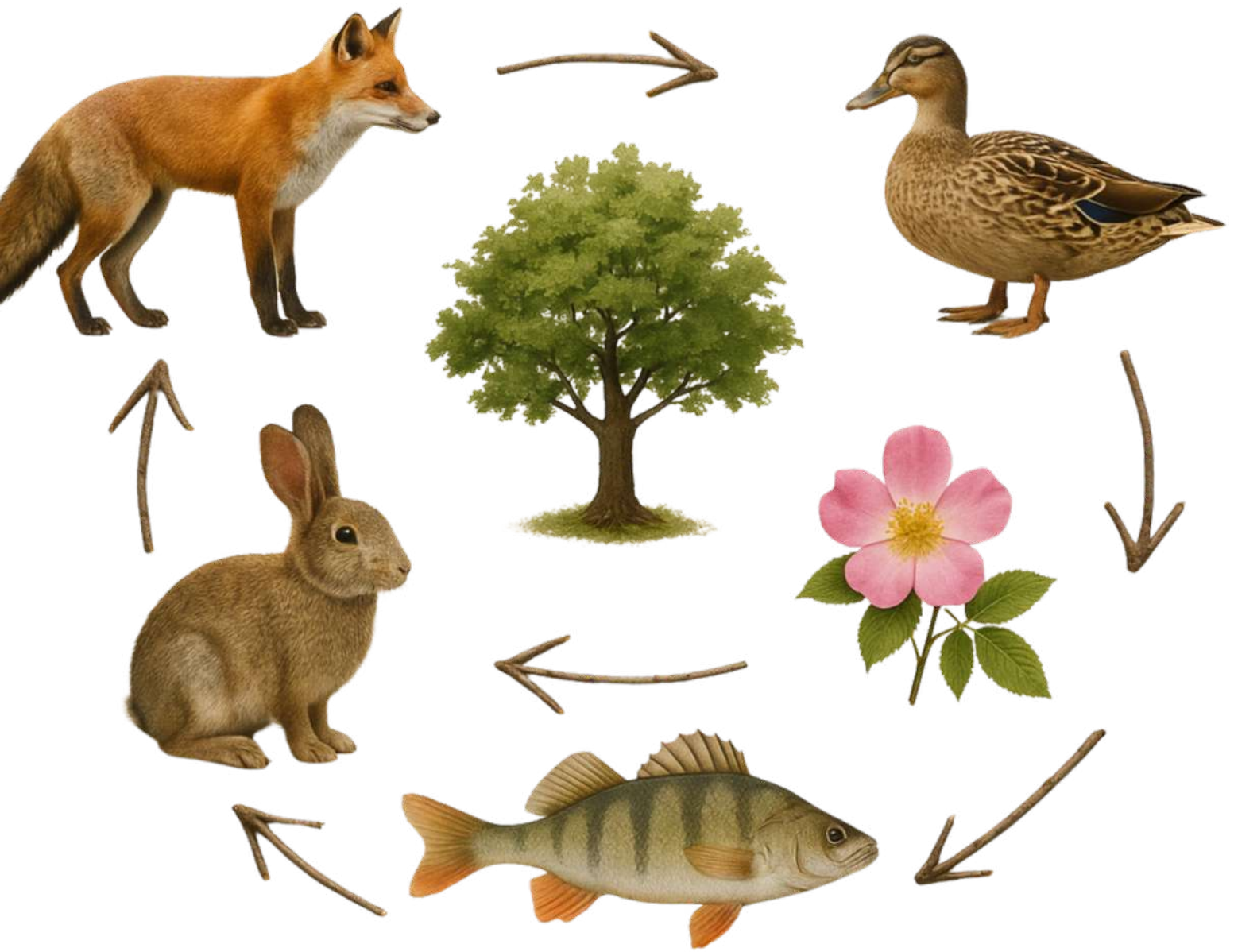
A broader term for restoring degraded ecosystems to their natural state.

Example:
Restoring wetlands that were drained for farming is ecological restoration.

ECOLOGY

The study of how living things interact with each other and their environment.

Example:
Ecology explains how bees pollinate flowers and help plants grow.



ECOSYSTEM

A community of living things and their environment working together as a system.

Example:
A coral reef is a marine ecosystem with fish, coral, and seaweed.

Credit: Jim Stringer Whoi.edu

EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (ESD)

Teaching people knowledge and skills to help build a more sustainable and fair world.

Example:
ESD includes lessons on recycling, social justice, and climate change in schools.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV)

A car or truck powered by electricity, not gasoline or diesel.

Example:
Tesla and Nissan Leaf are popular electric vehicles.

ELECTRONIC WASTE (E-WASTE)

Discarded electronic devices like phones, TVs, or computers.

Example:
Proper e-waste recycling keeps toxic materials out of landfills.

EMBEDDED CARBON / EMBODIED CARBON

The carbon emissions created in making a product—from raw materials to manufacturing.

Example:
The steel in a building has embedded carbon from mining and processing.

Credit: Baker Steel Trading, 2025

EMBEDDED WATER / VIRTUAL WATER / EMBODIED WATER / SHADOW WATER

The hidden water used to produce goods or services.

Example:
It takes about 1,800 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef—this is embedded water.

EMBODIED ENERGY

The total energy used to make a product, including raw materials, processing, and transport.

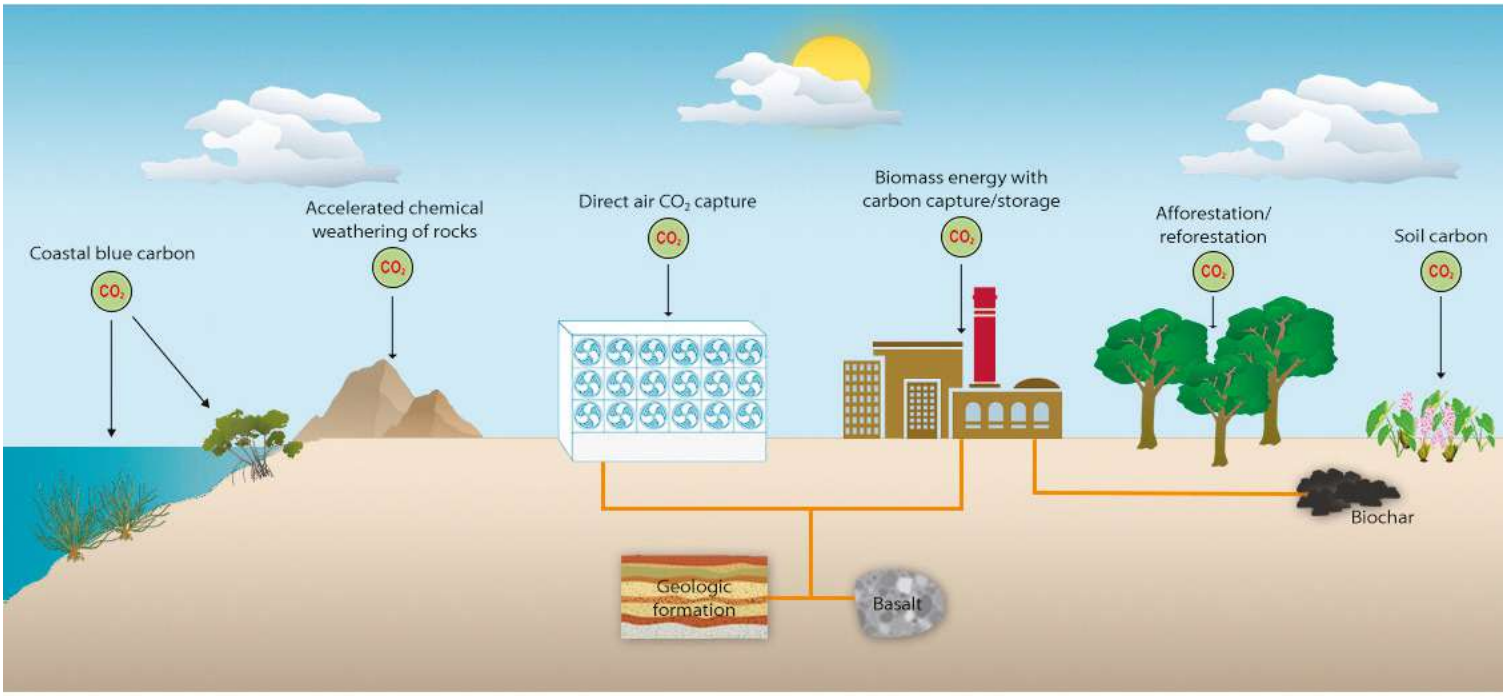
Example:
A concrete block has high embodied energy due to energy used in cement production.

Credit: Convergent Energy and Power, 2023

EMISSION REMOVALS

Activities that take carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere.

Example:
Planting forests or using carbon capture technologies are emission removals.



Credit: Centre for Climate Engagement,

EMISSION SCOPING

The process of identifying and categorizing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions into Scopes 1, 2, and 3 under recognized reporting frameworks (e.g., GHG Protocol).

Example:
A company calculates direct fuel use emissions (Scope 1), purchased electricity emissions (Scope 2), and employee travel emissions (Scope 3).

EMISSIONS

The release of substances such as gases or particles into the environment, often referring to GHGs like CO_2, CH_4, and N_2O that contribute to climate change.

Example:
Car exhaust emits carbon dioxide, a key contributor to global warming.

EMISSIONS TRADING

A market-based system where companies can buy or sell allowances for emitting certain amounts of greenhouse gases, promoting cost-effective reductions.

Example:
A company that emits less than its allowance can sell its surplus to another company exceeding its cap.

EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME (ETS)

A regulated program, often national or regional, that sets an emissions cap and allows trading of allowances to meet climate goals.

Example:
The European Union Emissions Trading System (EU ETS).

EMISSIONS TRADING/CAP-AND-TRADE

A policy tool that limits total emissions (cap) and lets organizations trade allowances (trade) to stay within the limit.

Example:
California's Cap-and-Trade Program.

Credit: Carbon Credit, 2024

EMISSIONS TO AIR

The discharge of pollutants such as GHGs, particulates, and NOx into the atmosphere from activities like manufacturing and transport.

Example:
Smoke from a factory stack.

EMPLOYEE COMMUTING EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 7)

Indirect GHG emissions resulting from employees commuting to and from work.

Example:
Emissions from employees driving to the office in personal vehicles.

END-OF-LIFE SCENARIO

Assumptions or models about how a product is treated at the end of its useful life, including recycling, landfill, or incineration.

Example:
A plastic bottle is assumed to be recycled in 50% of cases.

END-OF-LIFE TREATMENT OF SOLD PRODUCTS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 12)

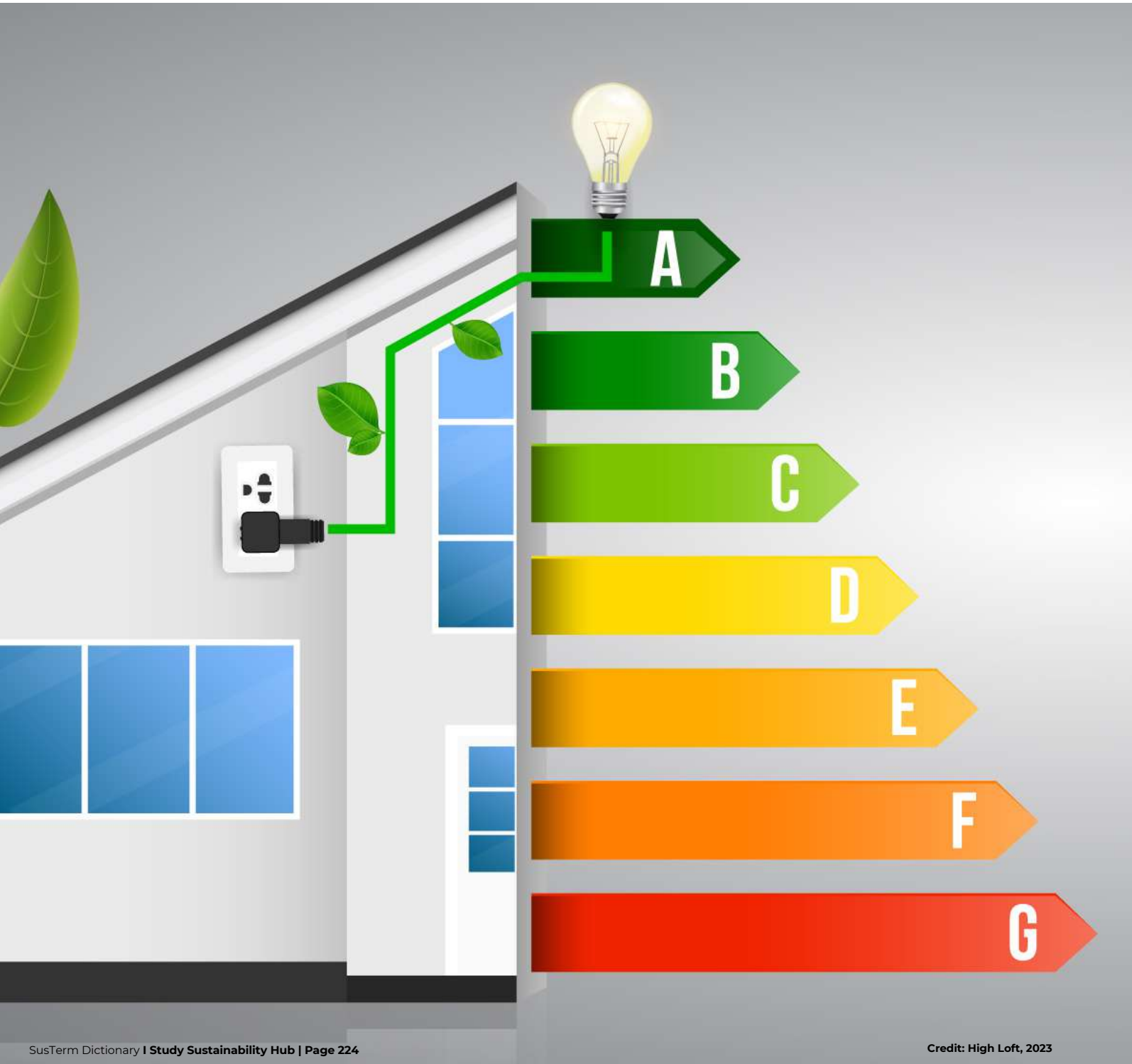
GHG emissions resulting from the disposal or treatment of products sold by a company after their use phase.

Example:
Emissions from burning used electronic devices.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Using less energy to perform the same task, reducing energy waste and emissions.

Example:
Using LED bulbs instead of incandescent bulbs.



Credit: High Loft, 2023

ENERGY MANAGEMENT

Systematic approach to monitoring, controlling, and conserving energy use in an organization.

Example:
Installing smart meters

ENVIRONMENTAL CLAIM

A statement by a company about the environmental benefits of its products, services, or practices.

Example:
A detergent labeled as “100% biodegradable.”

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EIA)

A formal process used to predict environmental consequences of proposed developments before they proceed.

Example:
Conducting an EIA before constructing a hydroelectric dam.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)

A detailed report outlining the findings of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Example:
An EIS describes the expected pollution levels from a new airport.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

The fair treatment and involvement of all people, regardless of race or income, in environmental policy-making and enforcement.

Example:
Ensuring marginalized communities are consulted about new waste management facilities.

ENVIRONMENTAL LAW

Legal rules and regulations that govern how humans interact with the environment.

Example:
The Clean Air Act in the United States.

ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (EMS)

A framework that helps organizations manage their environmental impacts and improve performance.

Example:
ISO 14001-certified EMS in a manufacturing company.

ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING

Regular observation and recording of environmental conditions to ensure compliance and track changes.

Example:
Monitoring air quality near a factory.

Credit: Coda Sensor, 2025

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

The measurable impact an organization has on the environment, often tracked via KPIs.

Example:
A company's reduction in water consumption per unit of product.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRODUCT DECLARATION (EPD)

A verified document communicating the environmental impact of a product throughout its life cycle.

Example:
An EPD for a building material detailing its carbon footprint.

ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY

The study of social factors influencing environmental problems and responses.

Example:
Research on how cultural values affect recycling behavior.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Managing natural resources responsibly to ensure the needs of present and future generations are met.

Example:
Using renewable energy to power factories.

ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL, AND GOVERNANCE (ESG)

Criteria used to assess a company's operations and impact on the environment, society, and governance practices.

Example:
Investors reviewing a company's carbon emissions, labor conditions, and board diversity.

ESG FRAMEWORKS

Guidelines for measuring and reporting on ESG factors.

Example:
Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB).

ESG FUND RATINGS

Ratings that assess investment funds based on ESG performance.

Example:
Morningstar's ESG fund ratings.

ESG INDICES

Stock market indices that include companies meeting ESG criteria.

Example:
Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI).

ESG INTEGRATION

Incorporating ESG factors into financial analysis and decision-making.

Example:
Considering a company's climate risks when evaluating investment options.

ESG INVESTING

Investment strategies that consider environmental, social, and governance factors alongside financial returns.

Example:
Investing in renewable energy companies.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE PRODUCTS

Products that have a lower impact on the environment compared to alternatives.

Example:
Reusable stainless-steel bottles instead of single-use plastics.

EQUITY

Fairness and justice in policies and practices, ensuring no group is disproportionately disadvantaged.

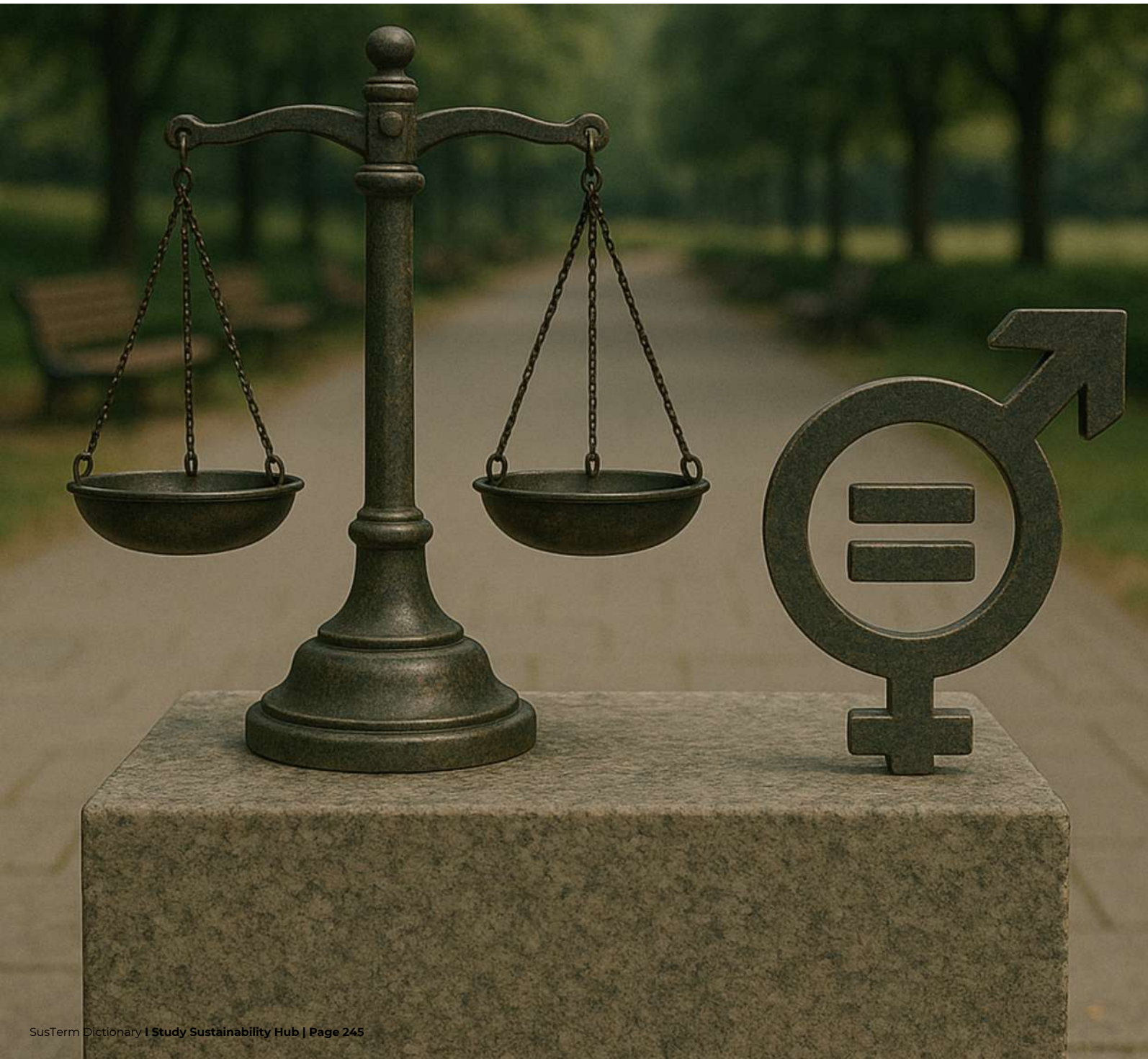
Example:
Ensuring access to clean water in both urban and rural areas.

EQUITY AND GENDER

Promoting equal opportunities and treatment for all genders in environmental and social initiatives.

Example:

A company providing paid paternity leave to male employees, recognising that men also have family and caregiving responsibilities.



EQUITY AND JUSTICE

Ensuring fair treatment, equal opportunity, and justice in environmental and social decision-making.

Example:
Giving Indigenous communities a voice in land-use decisions.

ESG CERTIFICATION

Formal recognition that an organization meets established ESG standards.

Example:
B Corp Certification.

EU DEFORESTATION REGULATION (EUDR)

A regulation aiming to reduce deforestation by ensuring products sold in the EU are deforestation-free.

Example:
Ensuring imported coffee was not grown on deforested land.

EU GREEN CLAIMS DIRECTIVE

EU legislation to prevent misleading environmental claims (greenwashing) by companies.

Example:
Companies must substantiate claims like “climate neutral” with evidence.

EU TAXONOMY

A classification system defining which economic activities are considered environmentally sustainable under EU law.

Example:
Investment in solar farms classified as sustainable.

EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

The EU's plan to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050 through policies on energy, industry, and biodiversity.

Example:
Banning petrol cars by 2035 under the Green Deal.

EUROPEAN SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING STANDARDS (ESRS)

EU standards requiring companies to report consistent, comparable ESG data.

Example:
Large companies reporting under ESRS starting 2024.

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY (EPR)

Policy requiring producers to manage the disposal of products after use.

Example:
Electronics brands funding e-waste collection programs.

EXTERNALITIES

Costs or benefits of economic activities not reflected in the market price, often affecting third parties.

Example:
Pollution from factories affecting nearby residents.

EXTREME WEATHER EVENT

Severe weather phenomena intensified by climate change, such as heatwaves, floods, and hurricanes.

Example:
Record-breaking heatwaves in Europe.

Credit: Frontier for Young Minds, 2022.

FAIRTRADE

A certification ensuring producers in developing countries receive fair wages and work in safe conditions.

Example:
Buying coffee with the Fairtrade logo.

FEED-IN TARIFF

A policy mechanism where governments guarantee payments to individuals or companies for renewable electricity they generate and feed into the grid.

Example:
Households receiving payments for solar power fed into the national grid.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Ensuring individuals and businesses have access to affordable financial services, like loans and insurance.

Example:
Mobile banking services reaching rural communities.

FOOD MILES

The distance food travels from production to consumer, affecting its carbon footprint.

Example:
Locally grown apples have fewer food miles than imported ones.

FOOD SECURITY

Ensuring all people have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food.

Example:
Community gardens supporting local food security.

FOREST RISK COMMODITY

Products linked to deforestation, like palm oil, soy, beef, and timber.

Example:
Unsustainable palm oil plantations clearing rainforest.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP COUNCIL (FSC)

An organization that certifies responsibly managed forests.

Example:
Buying paper products with the FSC logo.

FOSSIL FUELS

Non-renewable energy sources like coal, oil, and natural gas, which emit GHGs when burned.

Example:
Petrol used in cars.

FRANCHISES EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 14)

These are emissions from businesses that use a company's brand or name but are operated by others.

Example:
McDonald's franchise restaurants produce their own emissions, even though they use McDonald's brand.

FUEL AND ENERGY-RELATED ACTIVITIES (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 3)

These are emissions from making, transporting, and using fuel and energy before they reach the company.

Example:
Emissions from refining crude oil into gasoline used by delivery trucks.

GENDER EQUALITY

Ensuring all genders have equal opportunities, rights, and pay.

Example:
Men and women being paid the same for doing the same job.

GENDER INEQUALITY

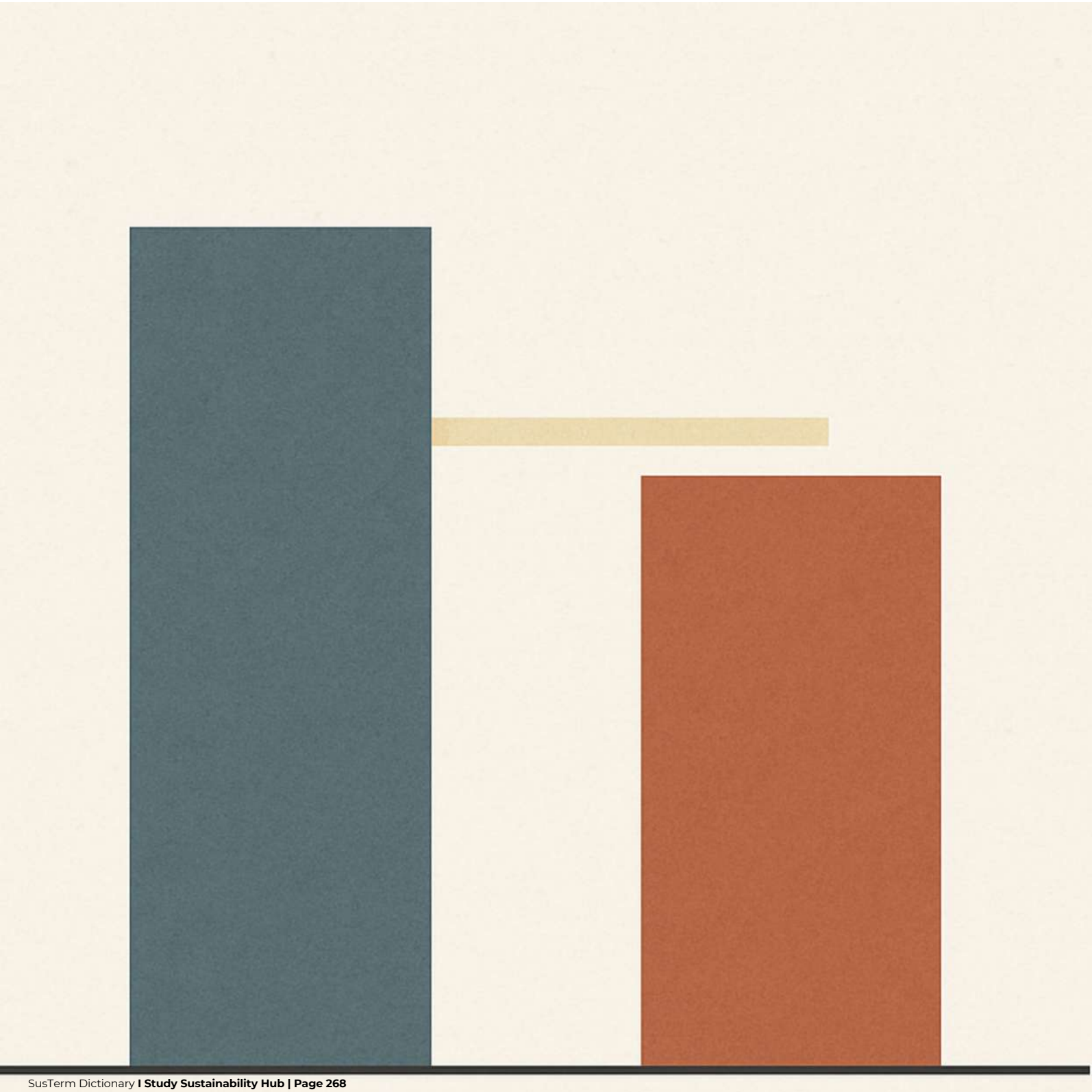
When people are treated unfairly because of their gender, leading to fewer opportunities or lower pay.

Example:
Women having fewer leadership roles in companies compared to men.

GENDER PAY GAP

The average difference in earnings between men and women.

Example:
Women earning 90 cents for every dollar men earn in similar roles.



GEOTHERMAL ENERGY

ergy that comes from heat inside the earth, used to make electricity or heat buildings.

Example:
Using underground heat in Iceland to power homes.

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP

Recognizing global challenges and taking responsible actions that benefit people and the planet.

Example:
Supporting clean water projects in developing countries.

GLOBAL REPORTING INITIATIVE (GRI) FRAMEWORK

A global standard that helps companies report their impact on the environment, people, and the economy.

Example:
A company uses the GRI to report how much pollution it creates and how it helps communities.

GLOBAL SURFACE TEMPERATURE

The Earth’s average temperature across land and oceans, used to track climate change.

Example:
Scientists measure rising global temperatures to study global warming.

GLOBAL WARMING

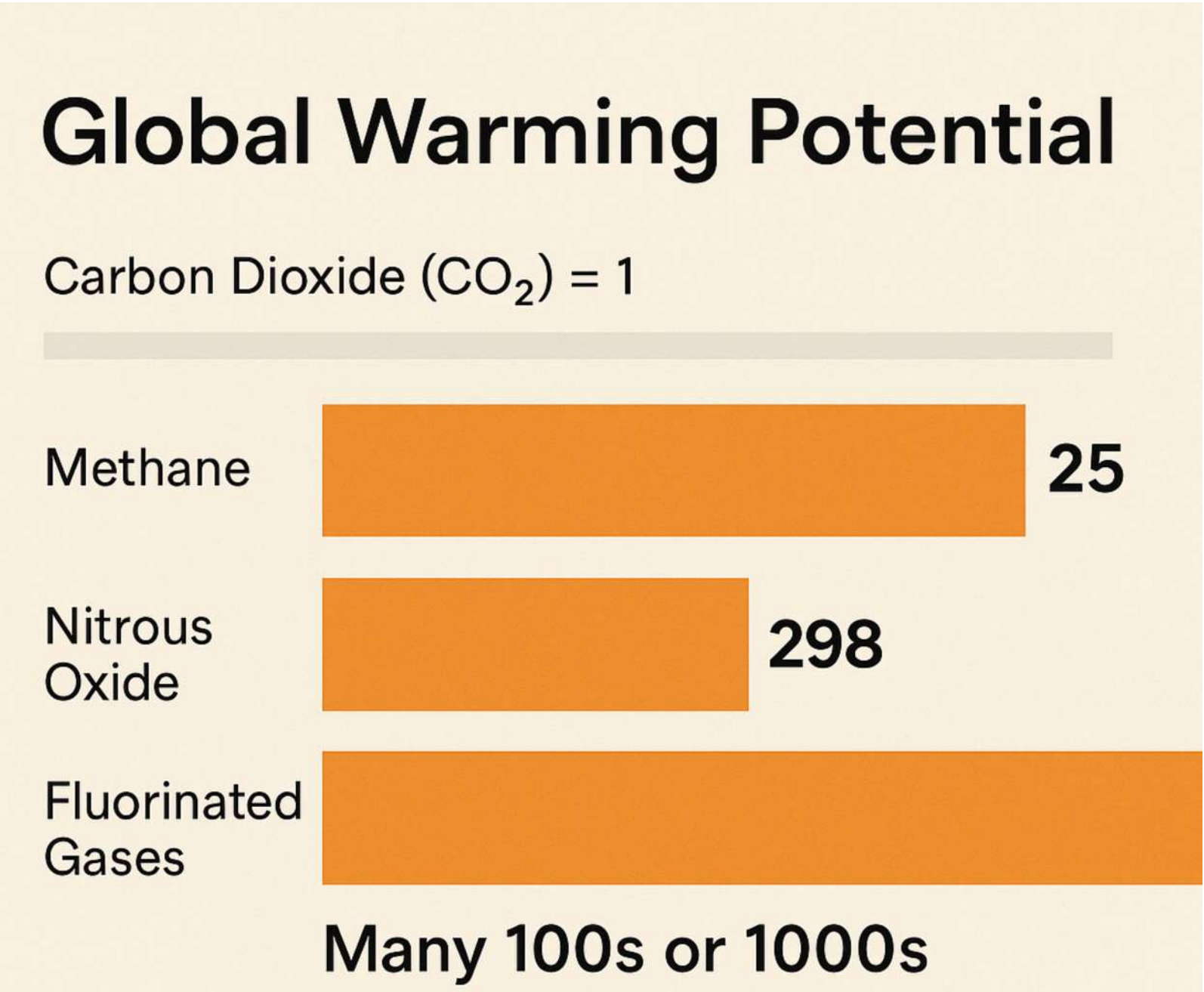
The gradual increase in the Earth's average temperature due to greenhouse gases.

Example:
Melting ice in the Arctic caused by global warming.

GLOBAL WARMING POTENTIAL (GWP)

A way to compare how much heat different greenhouse gases trap compared to carbon dioxide.

Example:
Methane is 25 times more powerful at warming the planet than CO_2.



GOVERNANCE FACTORS

The systems and rules that guide how an organization is managed responsibly and ethically.

Example:
A company having anti-corruption policies and diverse leadership.

GREEN

Anything that supports or protects the environment.

Example:
Using reusable shopping bags instead of plastic ones.

GREEN BONDS

Monies that fund loans to support environmental projects

Example:
A city sells green bonds to fund a solar energy project.

GREEN LOANS

Loans offered to fund projects that reduce environmental harm.

Example:
A company gets a green loan to install energy-efficient equipment.

GREEN BUILDING

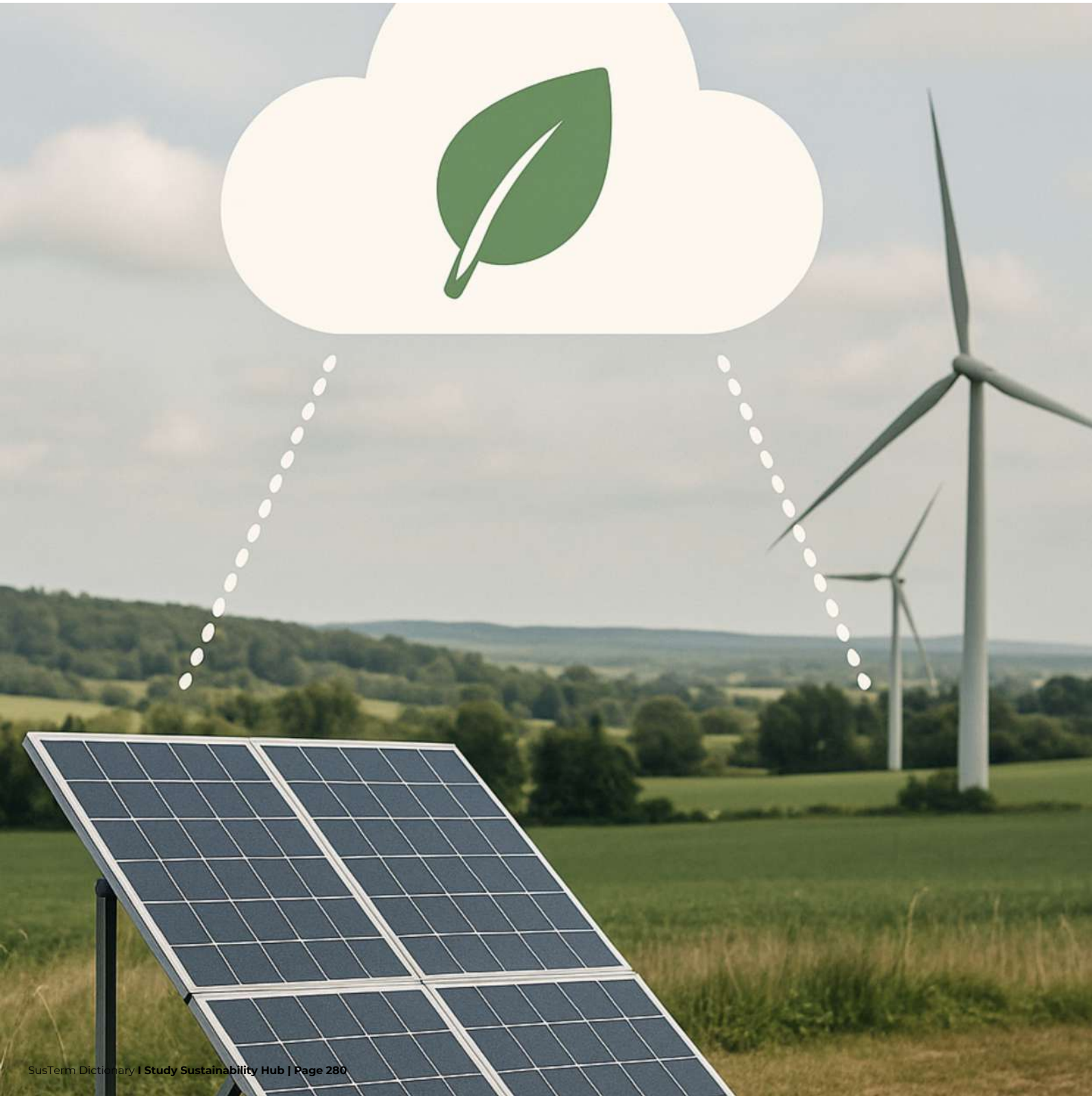
Designing and constructing buildings to save energy, water, and reduce pollution.

Example:
A building with solar panels and rainwater collection systems.

GREEN BUSINESS

Businesses that focus on reducing their environmental impact.

Example:
A clothing brand using organic cotton and recycled materials.



GREEN CLOUD

Using online data storage and services in a way that reduces energy use and emissions.

Example:
A company stores data on servers powered by renewable energy.

GREEN COMPUTING

Using computers and technology in ways that save energy and reduce waste.

Example:
Setting office computers to shut down automatically when not in use.

GREEN CREDENTIALS

Proof or certifications that show a company or product is eco-friendly.

Example:
A company earning a sustainability certification for reducing its carbon footprint.

GREEN ECONOMY

An economy that grows while protecting the environment and using natural resources wisely.

Example:
Jobs in renewable energy, recycling, and organic farming.

GREEN FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Financial products, like loans or bonds, used to fund environmentally friendly projects.

Example:
Green loans for businesses to switch to solar power.

GREEN GROWTH

Economic growth that happens in an environmentally sustainable way.

Example:
A country investing in electric buses to reduce pollution.

GREEN HUSHING

When companies stay quiet about their green actions to avoid public criticism.

Example:
A company uses recycled materials but doesn't advertise it for fear of backlash.

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Natural or eco-friendly structures in cities that help with things like cooling, air quality, and flood prevention.

Example:
Green roofs, parks, and rain gardens.

GREEN IT

Using technology, like computers and data centers, in environmentally friendly ways.

Example:
Data centers that use renewable energy and efficient cooling systems.

GREEN LASHING

When people criticize companies for their green actions, even when they are trying to do better.

Example:
A company is criticized for using recyclable packaging while still working on improving other areas.

GREEN MARKETING

Promoting products or services by highlighting their environmental benefits.

Example:
Advertising an electric car as eco-friendly because it produces no tailpipe emissions.

GREEN MOBILITY

Ways of moving people and goods that are better for the environment.

Example:
Cycling, electric vehicles, or using public transport.

GREEN PREMIUM

A term by Bill Gates describing the extra cost of choosing clean technology over cheaper, more polluting options.

Example:
Paying more for plant-based meat than traditional meat.

GREEN SOFTWARE

Software designed to use less energy and reduce environmental impact.

Example:
Apps that run efficiently and require less data storage, lowering electricity use.

GREEN SPACES

Areas like parks, gardens, and trees in cities that provide clean air, cool areas, and support well-being.

Example:
A public park in the city center providing shade and recreation.

GREEN TRANSITIONS

The process of moving from polluting activities to environmentally friendly ones.

Example:
A country switching from coal power to wind and solar energy.

GREEN TRANSPORT

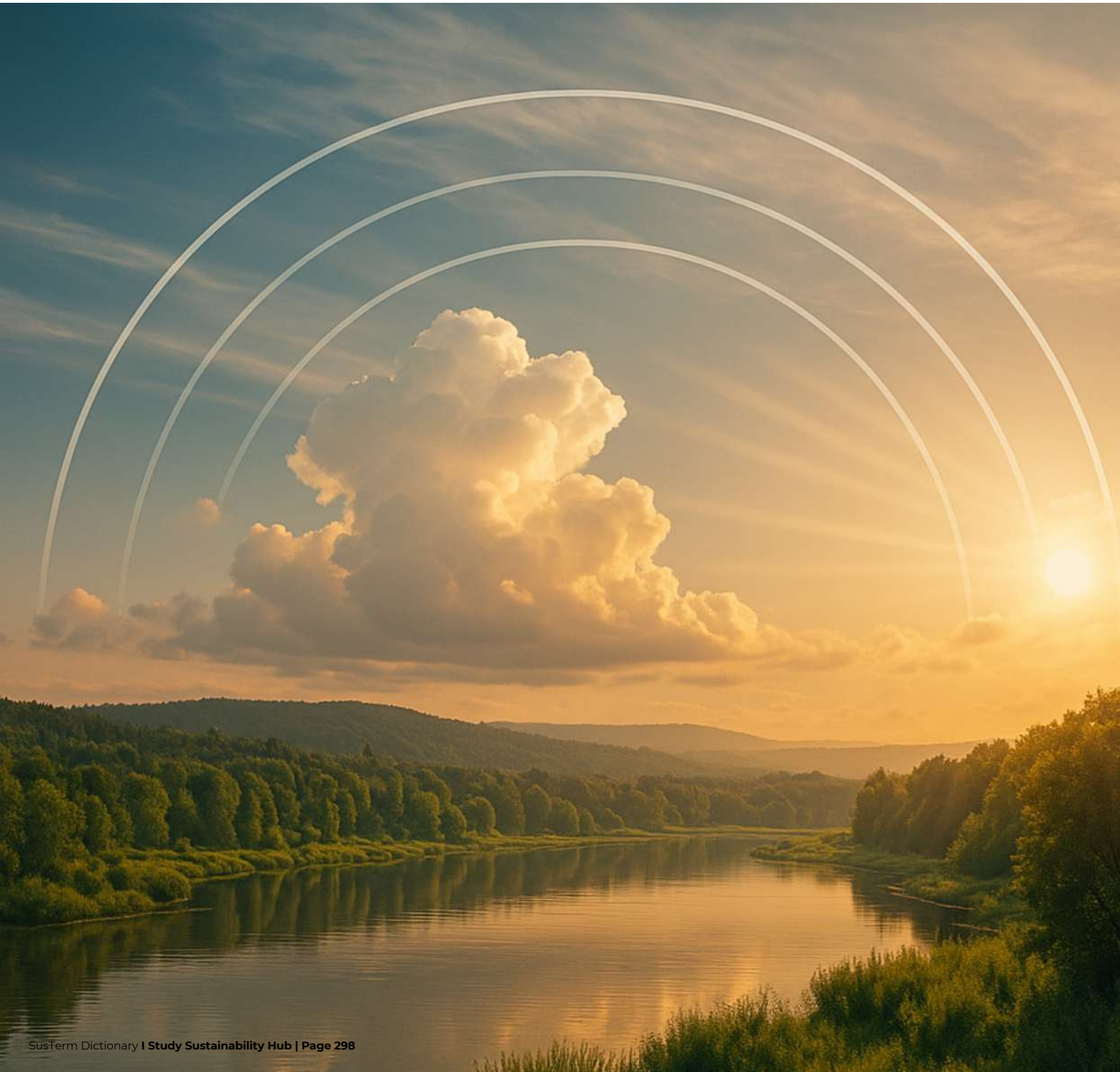
Transport options that produce less pollution and greenhouse gases.

Example:
Electric buses or bicycles.

GREENHOUSE EFFECT

The natural process where certain gases trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, keeping it warm enough for life.

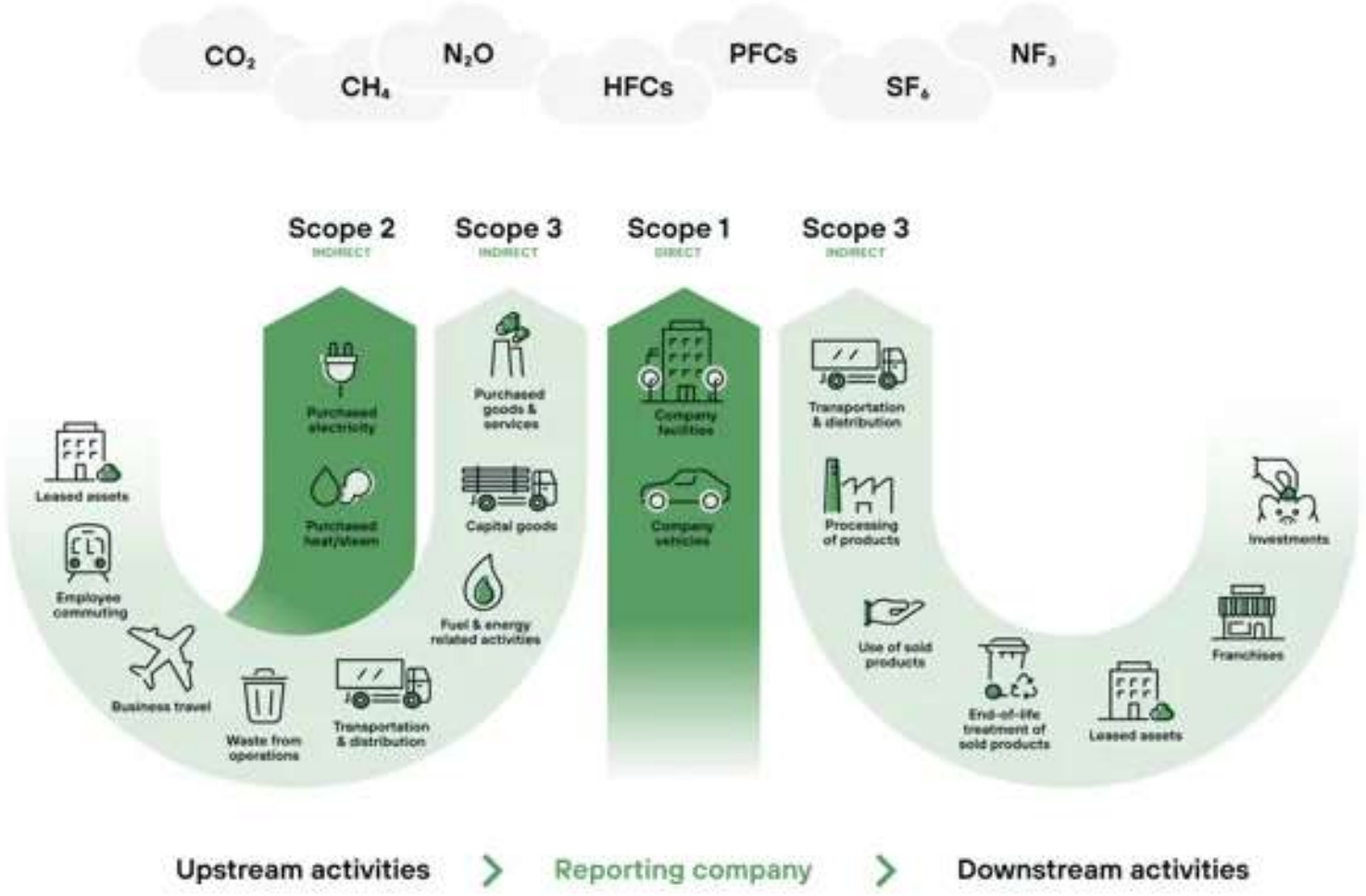
Example:
CO_2 traps heat, helping the planet stay warm, but too much leads to global warming.



GREENHOUSE GAS (GHG) PROTOCOL

A global standard for measuring and managing greenhouse gas emissions.

Example:
A company uses the GHG Protocol to calculate its carbon footprint.



Credit: Green project, 2025

GREENHOUSE GASES (GHGS)

Gases that trap heat in the atmosphere, contributing to global warming.

Example:
CO_2, methane, nitrous oxide.

Credit: Green project, 2025

GREENWASHING/GREEN SHEEN

When a company gives a false impression of being environmentally friendly.

Example:
A brand claims to be eco-friendly but still uses harmful packaging.

GREYWATER/GRAY WATER

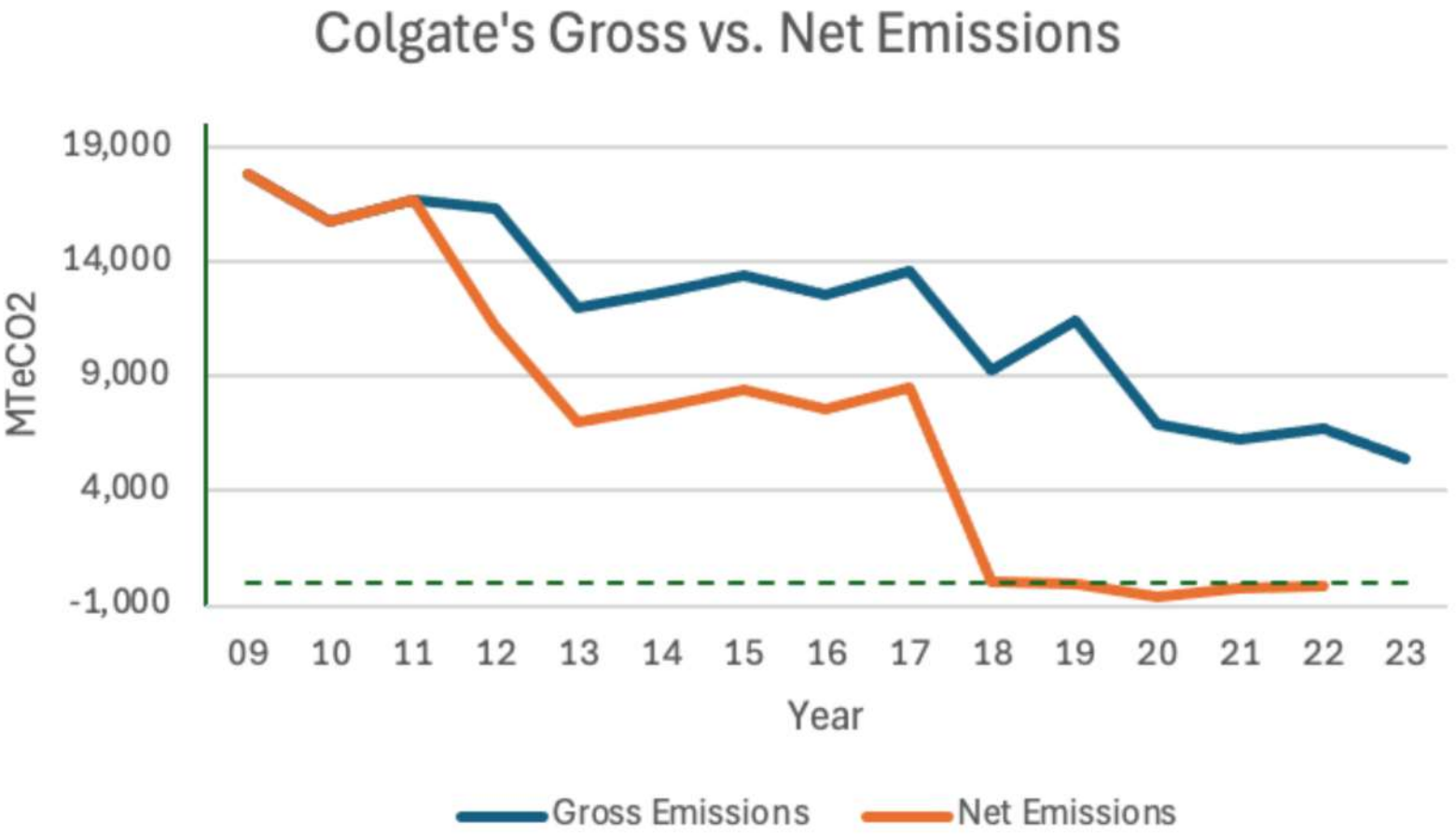
Wastewater from sinks, showers, and washing machines that can be reused for things like watering plants.

Example:
Reusing shower water to water the garden.

GROSS AND NET EMISSIONS

Gross emissions are the total GHGs produced; net emissions are the total after subtracting actions like tree planting that absorb carbon.

Example:
A company emits 1,000 tons of CO_2 but offsets 200 tons through reforestation, leaving net emissions at 800 tons



Credit: Collin Munyan '25, 2024

GROUND SOURCE HEAT PUMP

A system that uses underground heat to warm buildings or provide hot water.

Example:
Using a ground-to-water heat pump in homes for heating during winter.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Ensuring people's physical and mental health is protected, including in workplaces and communities.

Example:
Offices providing green spaces and promoting work-life balance.

HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

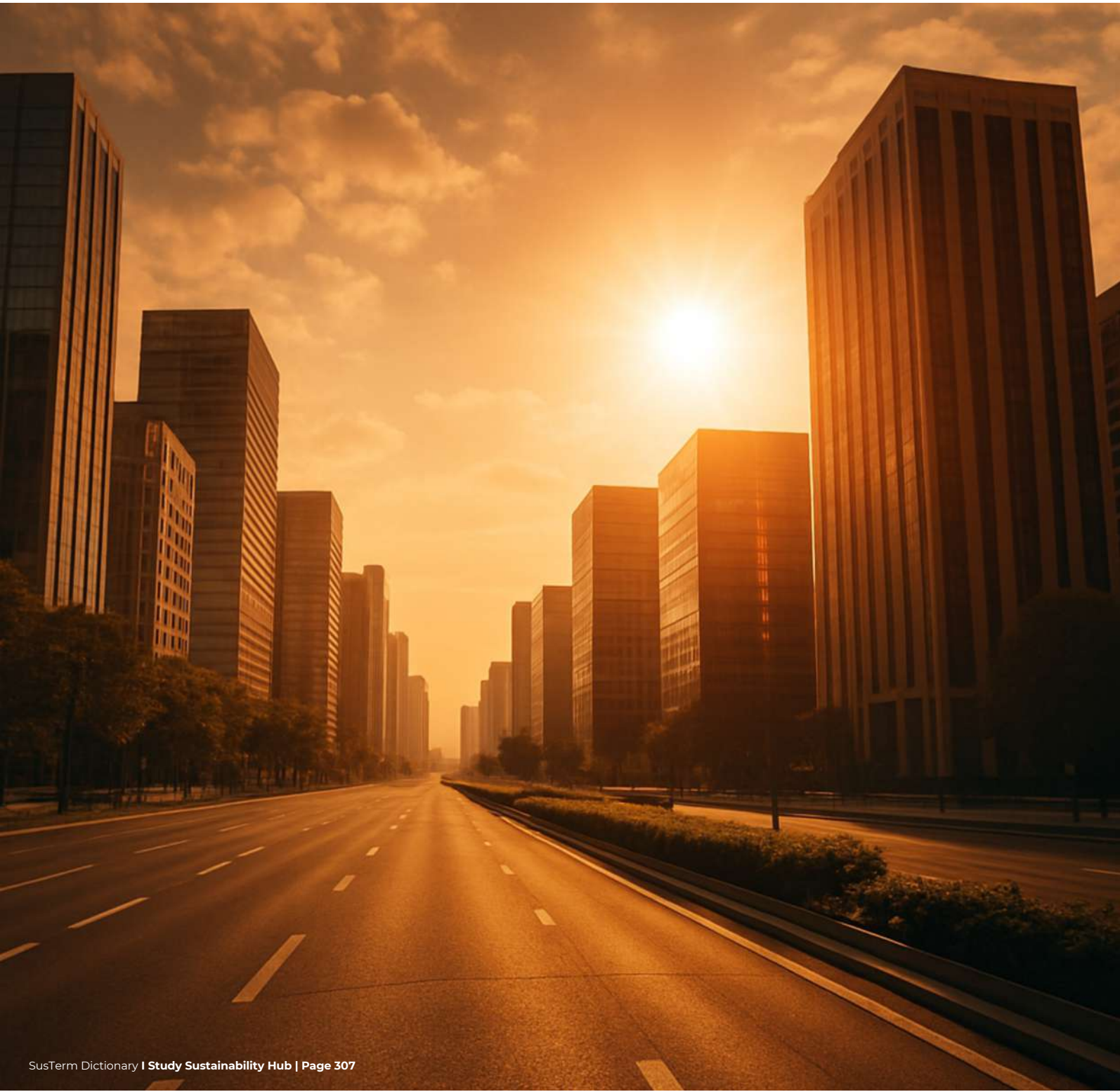
The negative effects of climate change on health, like heat stress or spread of diseases.

Example:
More people suffering from heatstroke during extreme heat waves.

HEAT ISLAND EFFECT

Urban areas becoming much hotter than surrounding areas due to buildings and roads absorbing heat.

Example:
Cities feeling hotter than nearby rural areas during summer.



HIGH EMITTERS

Individuals, companies, or sectors that produce large amounts of greenhouse gases.

Example:
Airlines, oil companies, or wealthy individuals with multiple cars and planes.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE BUILDING

Buildings designed to use less energy, water, and create healthier environments for people.

Example:
Office buildings with solar panels, efficient insulation, and clean air systems.

HSEQ (HEALTH, SAFETY, ENVIRONMENT, AND QUALITY)

A system that manages health, safety, environment, and quality standards in organizations.

Example:
A factory implementing HSEQ to reduce accidents and pollution.

HUMAN CAPITAL MANAGEMENT (HCM)

How companies manage and support their employees' skills, well-being, and development.

Example:
Offering training programs and health benefits for workers.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Basic rights and freedoms all people should have, such as safety, freedom of speech, and fair treatment.

Example:
Workers having the right to safe working conditions.

HYBRID VEHICLE

A car that uses both a traditional fuel engine and an electric motor.

Example:
Toyota Prius, which can run on gas or electricity.

Credit: WIRED.com, 2025

HYDROGEN (H2)

A clean fuel that, when used, produces only water as waste.

Example:
Hydrogen-powered buses that emit only water vapor.

Credit: Fuel Cell Store, 2019

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A study to understand how a project or decision will affect the environment, people, or economy.

Example:
Checking how building a dam will impact nearby communities and wildlife.

IMPACT INVESTING

Investing in businesses that aim to make positive social or environmental change while also making a profit.

Example:
Investing in a renewable energy startup.

IMPACT MEASUREMENT

Measuring how much positive or negative change an activity or investment creates.

Example:
Tracking how many people got access to clean water because of a project.

IMPACT SOURCING

Hiring workers from disadvantaged communities to help reduce poverty.

Example:
A company hires refugees or people from rural areas for digital jobs.

INCINERATION/DIRECT COMBUSTION

Burning waste to reduce its volume and sometimes produce energy, but can cause pollution.

Example:
Burning city waste to generate electricity.

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Ensuring people from all backgrounds, genders, races, and abilities feel welcome and have equal opportunities.

Example:
A company ensuring its leadership includes people from diverse ethnic groups.

INCLUSIVE GREEN RECOVERY

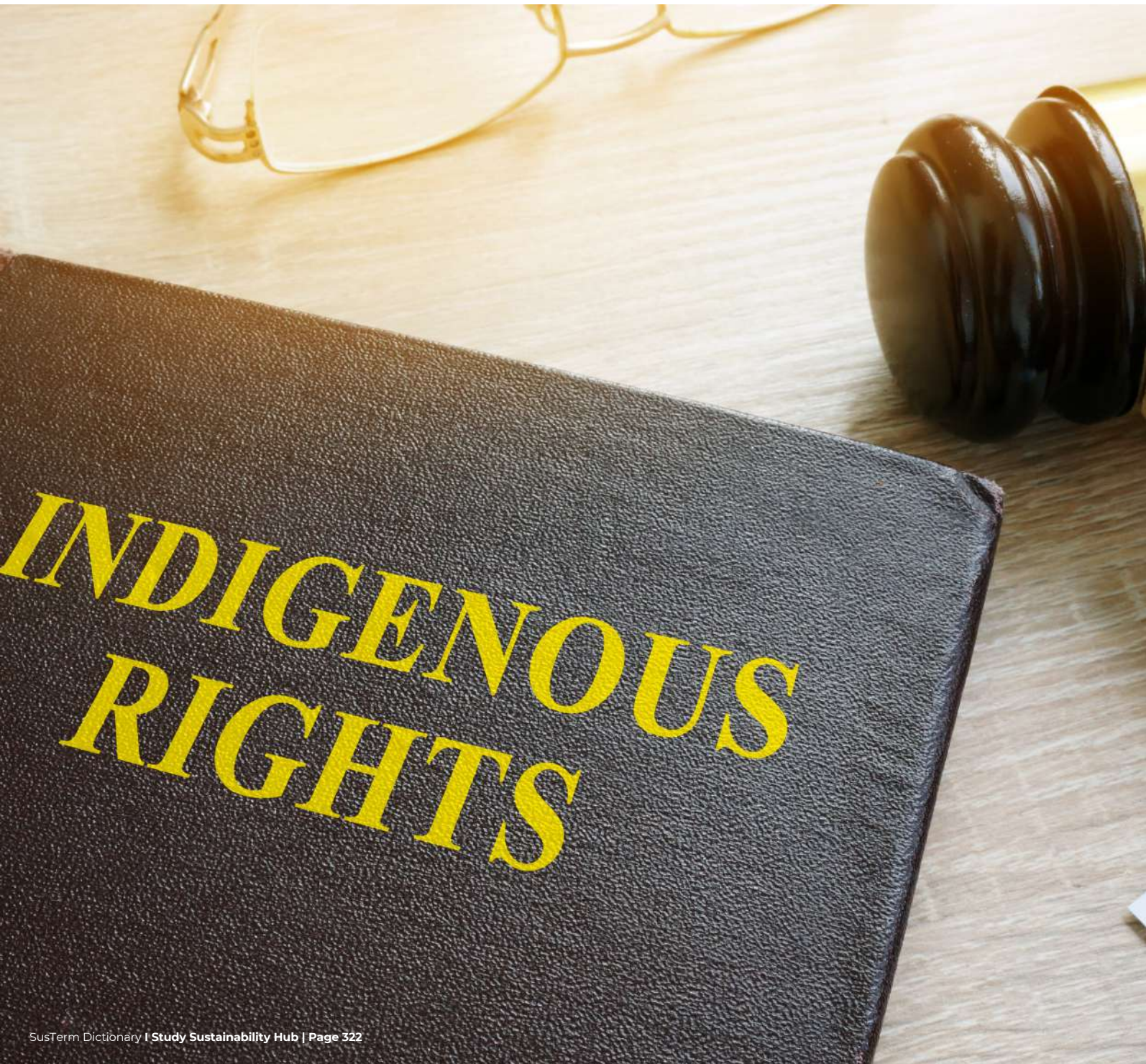
Making sure green economic recovery plans after crises benefit everyone, especially the vulnerable.

Example:
Creating clean energy jobs for women and youth during COVID-19 recovery.

INDIGENOUS RIGHTS

Protecting the rights of native or Indigenous communities to their land, culture, and resources.

Example:
Ensuring Indigenous people are consulted before mining on their land.



INDIRECT EMISSIONS

Emissions that happen because of a company's activities but from sources it doesn't own or control.

Example:
Emissions from the electricity a company buys.

INDUSTRIAL ECOLOGY

Designing industries to work together like ecosystems, where waste from one becomes a resource for another.

Example:
A power plant's heat is used to warm nearby greenhouses.

INSETTING

When a company reduces emissions within its own value chain, often by supporting nature-based solutions.

Example:
A chocolate company planting trees on farms where cocoa is grown.

INTEGRATED DESIGN

A collaborative approach where architects, engineers, and users work together to make sustainable buildings.

Example:
Building designers working with energy experts to create a green building.

INTEGRATED REPORTING

Combining financial and sustainability information into one report to show how a company creates long-term value.

Example:
A company's annual report showing profits, carbon emissions, and community support activities.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE (IPCC)

The UN body that provides scientific reports on climate change and guides global action.

Example:
The IPCC reports warn of the dangers of global warming above 1.5°C.

INTERNAL CARBON PRICING

When a company puts its own price on carbon emissions to encourage cleaner decisions.

Example:
Charging departments internally for their CO_2 emissions to push them to reduce energy use.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON ASSURANCE ENGAGEMENTS 3000 (ISAE 3000)

A global standard for checking and verifying sustainability reports and data.

Example:
An independent auditor uses ISAE 3000 to verify a company's GHG report.

Credit: ESG Excelerate

INVESTMENT EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 15)

Emissions caused by a company's investments in other businesses or projects.

Example:
A bank's loans to oil companies add to its investment emissions.

ISO 14001 - ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

An international standard for organizations to manage their environmental impact systematically.

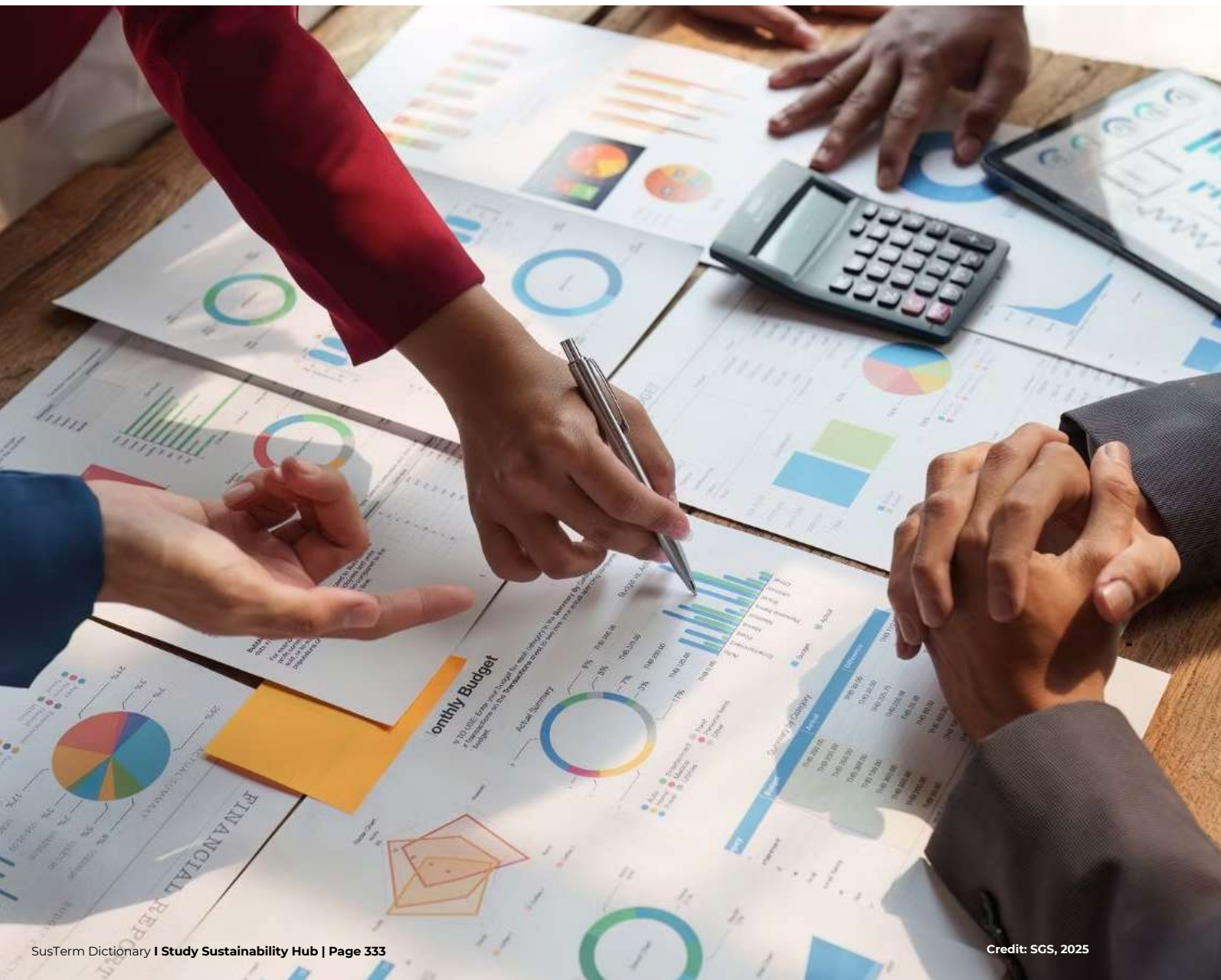
Example:
A factory using ISO 14001 to reduce water waste and pollution.

Credit: Human Focus, 2024

ISO 14019 SERIES - VALIDATE AND VERIFY SUSTAINABILITY INFORMATION

Standards that ensure sustainability data is accurate, reliable, and can be trusted.

Example:
A company's carbon data is checked using the ISO 14019 standard.



Credit: SGS, 2025

ISO 14064

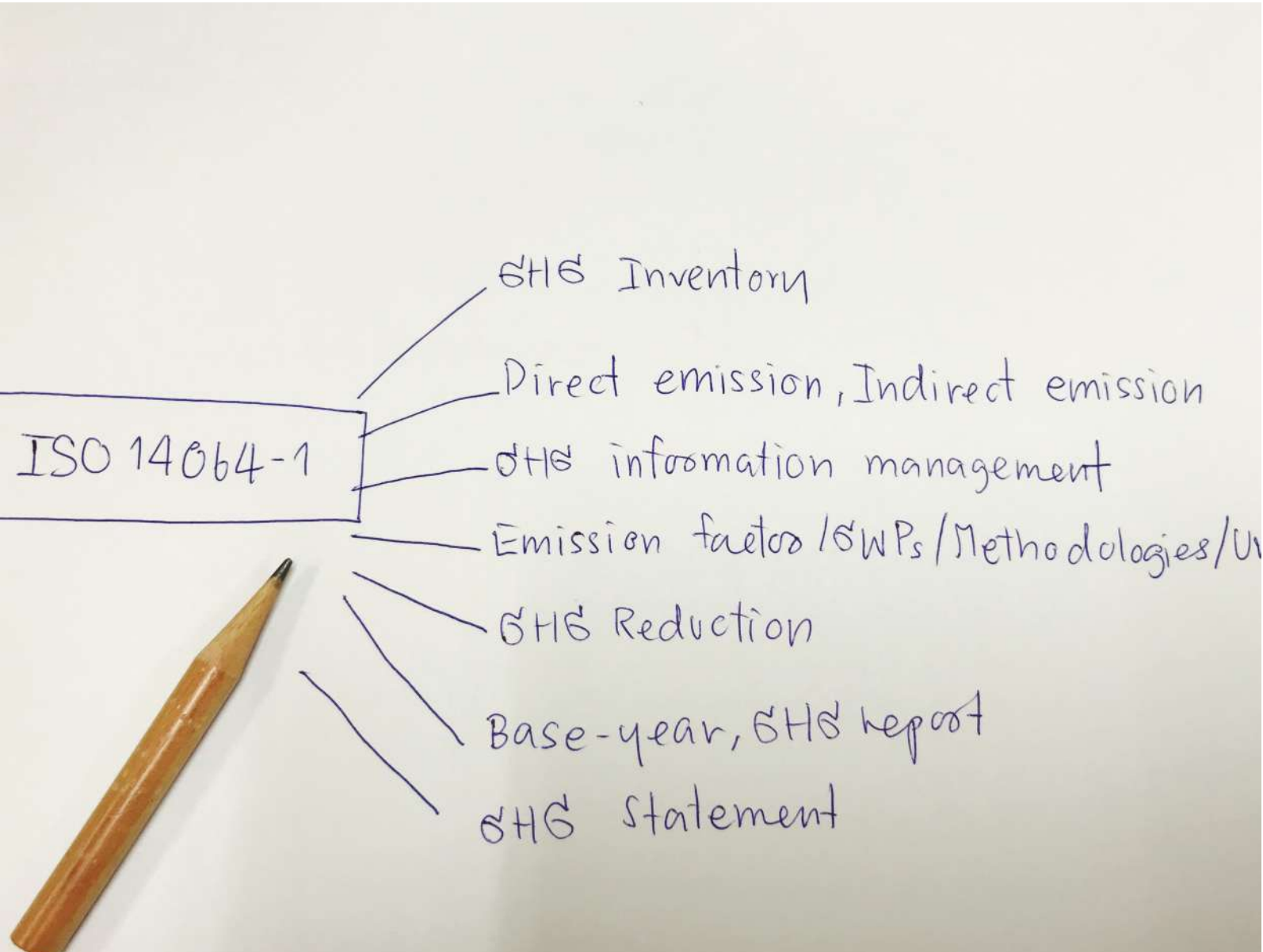
A standard for measuring, reporting, and verifying greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Example:
A company uses ISO 14064 to calculate its carbon footprint.

ISO 14064-1 - QUANTIFY AND REPORT GHG EMISSIONS AND REMOVALS

Part of ISO 14064 focusing on calculating and reporting emissions from an organization.

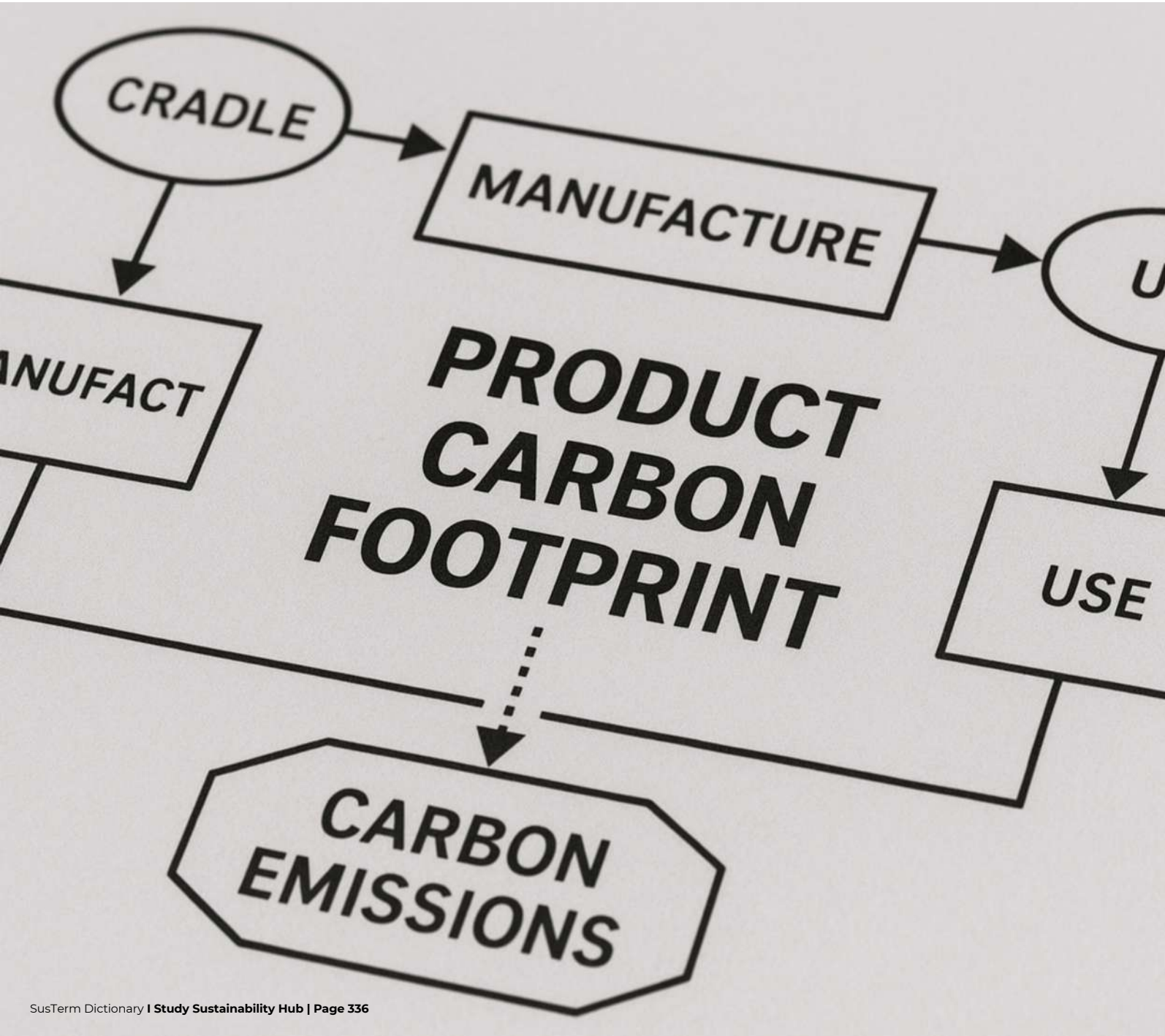
Example:
Reporting how much CO_2 a company emits each year.



ISO 14067 - CARBON FOOTPRINT OF PRODUCTS

Standard for calculating the carbon footprint of products throughout their life cycle.

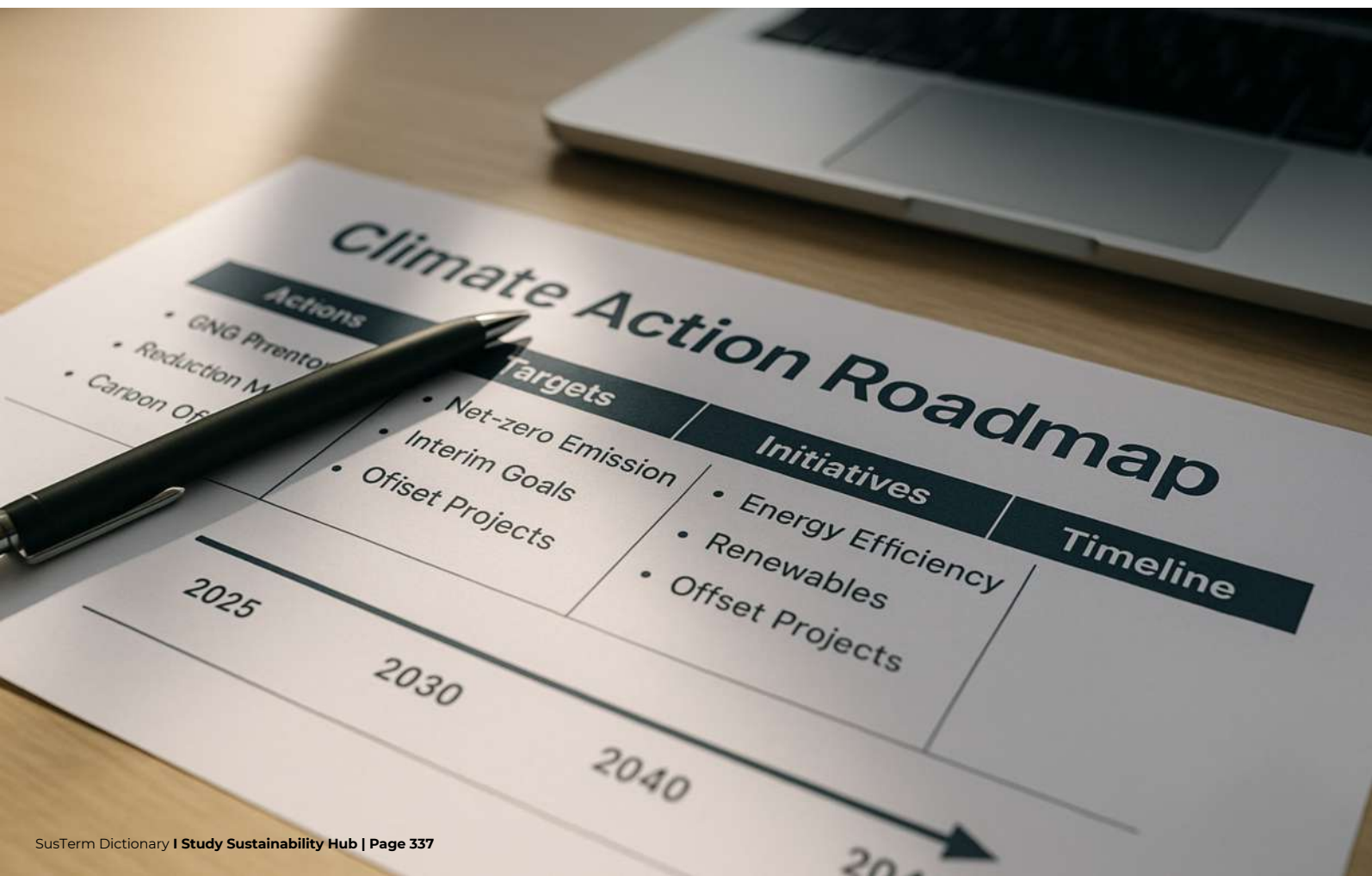
Example:
Measuring the CO_2 emitted to produce and deliver a t-shirt.



ISO 14068-1 - CLIMATE CHANGE MANAGEMENT, TRANSITION TO NET ZERO (PART 1: CARBON NEUTRALITY)

Helps organizations plan and reach carbon neutrality as part of climate change action.

Example:
A business creates a roadmap to become carbon neutral by 2030.



JUST TRANSITION

Ensuring the move to a green economy is fair and supports workers and communities.

Example:
Training coal workers for renewable energy jobs.

KYOTO PROTOCOL

An international agreement where countries committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Example:
Countries like Japan and the EU agreed to cut emissions under the Kyoto Protocol.

LAND DEGRADATION

When land becomes damaged and can no longer support life due to activities like deforestation or overgrazing.

Example:
Farming practices that strip the soil of nutrients, turning it into desert.

LANDFILL

A site where waste is buried underground.

Example:
A city dumps its waste in a large landfill outside town.

LANDFILL-FREE

When all waste is recycled, reused, or composted, and none goes to landfills.

Example:
A company that reuses all its waste materials instead of sending them to a dump.

LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Leading organizations or communities to create long-term, positive environmental and social changes.

Example:
A CEO pushing for 100% renewable energy in their company.

LEED CERTIFICATION

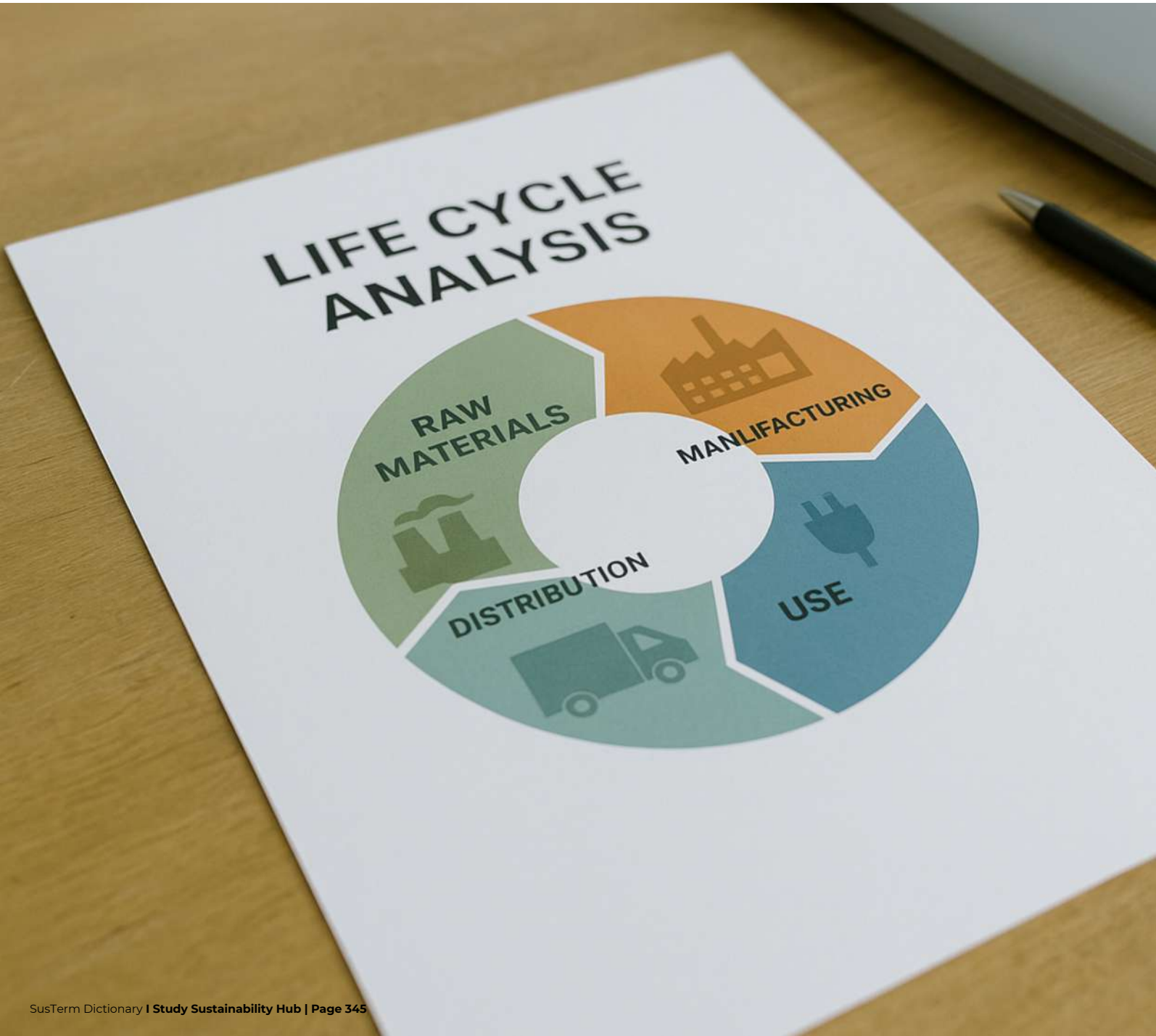
A global green building rating system that recognizes buildings designed to be energy-efficient and environmentally friendly.

Example:
An office building receiving LEED Gold certification for using solar panels and efficient lighting.

LIFE CYCLE ASSESSMENT (LCA)

A method to measure the environmental impact of a product or service from start to finish.

Example:
Measuring the water and energy used to make a pair of jeans.



LIFE CYCLE COSTING

Calculating all costs of a product over its entire life cycle, including disposal.

Example:
Buying LED bulbs that cost more upfront but save on energy and maintenance.

LINEAR ECONOMY

An economic model where resources are taken, used, and then thrown away, leading to waste.

Example:
Buying a phone, using it, and throwing it away without recycling parts.

LONG-TERM SCIENCE-BASED TARGETS

Emission reduction targets based on climate science, set for 2050 or beyond.

Example:
A company aims for net-zero emissions by 2050, following science-based methods.

LOSS AND DAMAGE

The impacts of climate change that people cannot adapt to, either due to severity or lack of resources.

Example:
Coastal villages losing land to rising sea levels with no means to relocate.

LOW-CARBON ECONOMY

An economy where energy and activities emit little to no greenhouse gases.

Example:
Switching from coal to solar power to reduce national emissions.

LOW-IMPACT DEVELOPMENT (LID)

Planning and design techniques that minimize environmental harm.

Example:
Using permeable pavements that let rain soak into the ground.

MATERIAL CIRCULARITY INDICATOR (MCI)

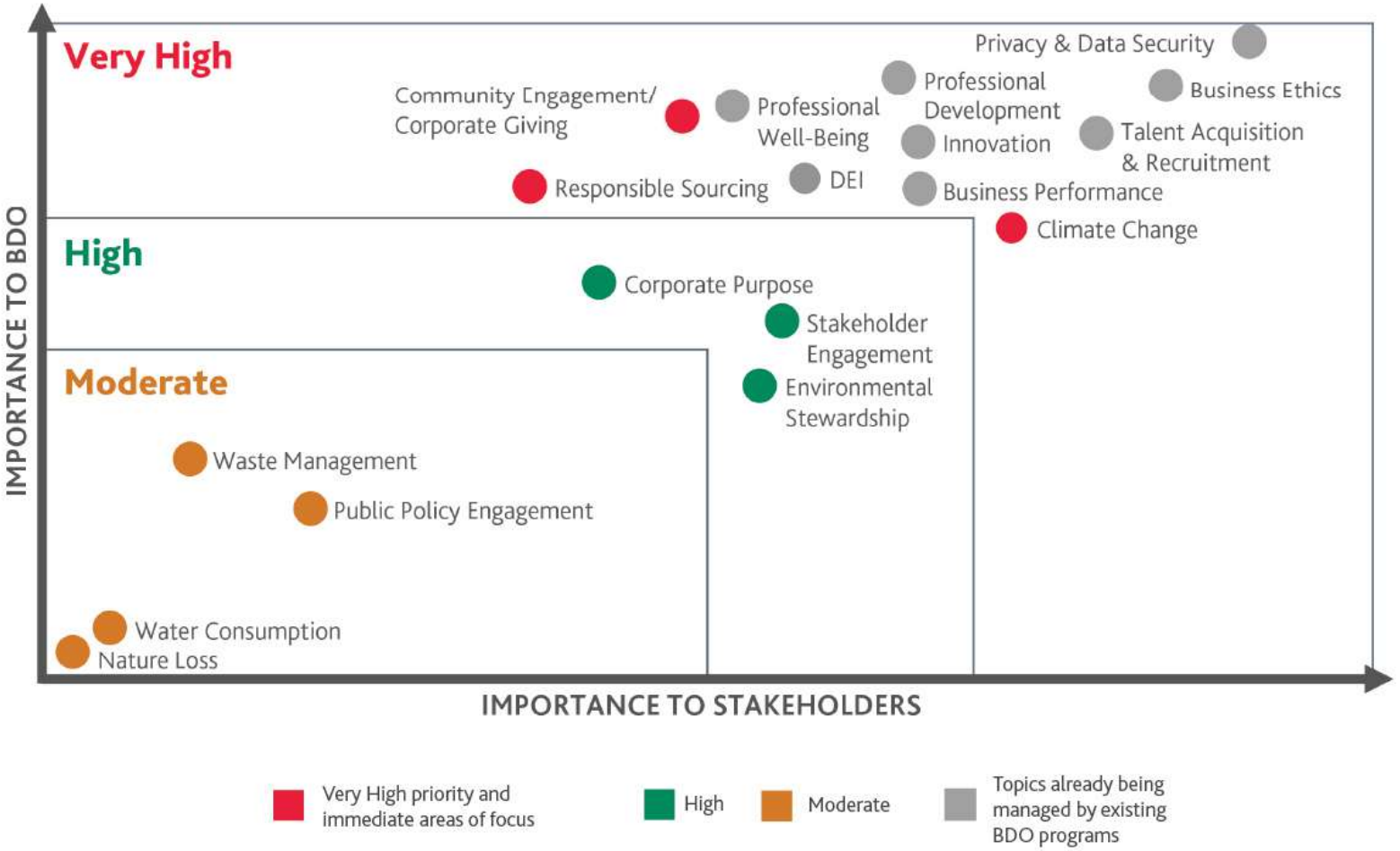
A tool to measure how circular (reused, recycled) a product or process is.

Example:
Checking if a product uses recycled materials and can be recycled after use.

MATERIALITY ASSESSMENT

Finding out which sustainability topics matter most to stakeholders and the business.

Example:
A company surveying employees and investors to see if they care more about emissions or labor rights.



Credit: BDO USA, 2023

MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The link between climate change and its effects on mental health, like eco-anxiety or stress.

Example:
People feeling anxious about wildfires or floods caused by climate change.

Credit: Volo Foundation, 2024

METHANE (CH4)

A potent greenhouse gas, much stronger than CO_2, mostly from agriculture, waste, and fossil fuels.

Example:
Methane leaks from oil and gas wells.

MICROGENERATION/MICRO-ENERGY

Small-scale production of energy by individuals or businesses, often using renewables.

Example:
A house with rooftop solar panels.

MICROPLASTICS

Tiny plastic particles that pollute oceans, soil, and food chains.

Example:
Microbeads in cosmetics that end up in rivers and oceans.

MITIGATION

Actions to reduce or prevent greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change.

Example:
Planting trees, using renewable energy

MITIGATION HIERARCHY

A step-by-step approach to first avoid, then reduce, then offset environmental impacts.

Example:
Avoid cutting down forests, reduce emissions, and finally offset what remains.

MOBILITY MANAGEMENT

Strategies to reduce car use and encourage sustainable transport options.

Example:
Companies providing bike-to-work programs.

MODERN SLAVERY

Situations where people are forced to work against their will, often in supply chains.

Example:
Workers in factories with poor conditions and no freedom to leave.

NAKED PACKAGING

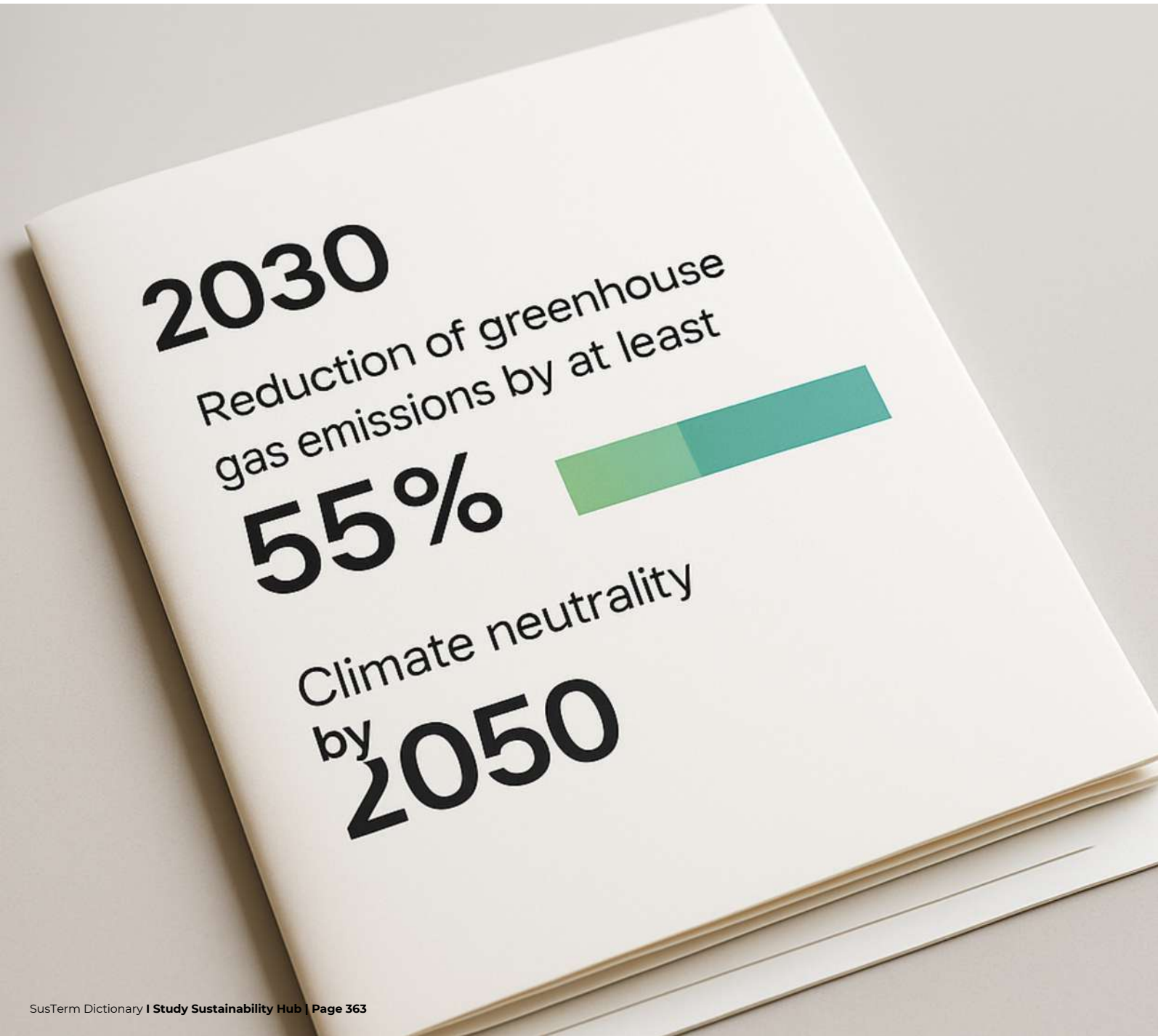
Selling products without unnecessary packaging to reduce waste.

Example:
Buying soap or vegetables without plastic wrapping.

NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (NDCS)

Countries' plans to cut emissions and adapt to climate change under the Paris Agreement.

Example:
Ghana committing to reduce its emissions by 20% by 2030.



NATURAL

Things that occur in the environment without human interference.

Example:
Forests, rivers, wildlife.

NATURAL CAPITAL

The world's stock of natural resources, like water, air, soil, and living things.

Example:
Clean rivers that support fishing and tourism.

NATURAL CAPITAL ACCOUNTING

Measuring and valuing nature's benefits in financial terms.

Example:
Calculating the value of wetlands for flood protection and tourism.

NATURAL RESOURCES

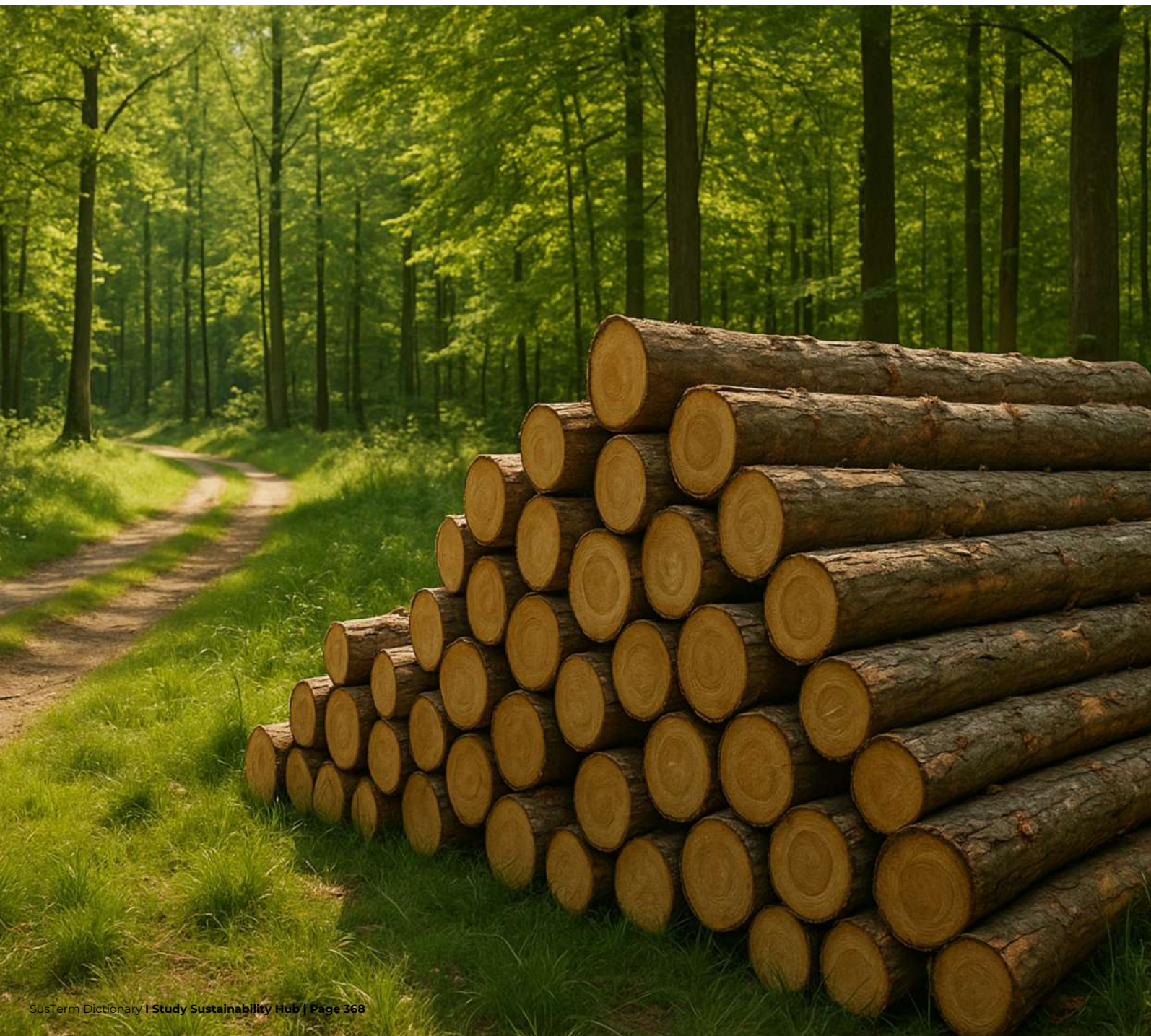
Raw materials from nature, like minerals, water, and trees.

Example:
Gold, oil, or timber.

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Managing natural resources sustainably to meet current needs without harming future generations.

Example:
Controlling fishing to avoid depleting fish stocks.



NATURALISTIC FALLACY

The mistaken belief that everything natural is automatically good.

Example:
Thinking that natural disasters are acceptable because they are 'natural.'

NATURE POSITIVE

Actions that add more to nature than they take away.

Example:
Companies restoring forests while running their businesses.

NATURE REPORTING

Reporting how a company affects and depends on nature, like biodiversity and ecosystems.

Example:
Disclosing impacts on forests in a company's sustainability report.

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS

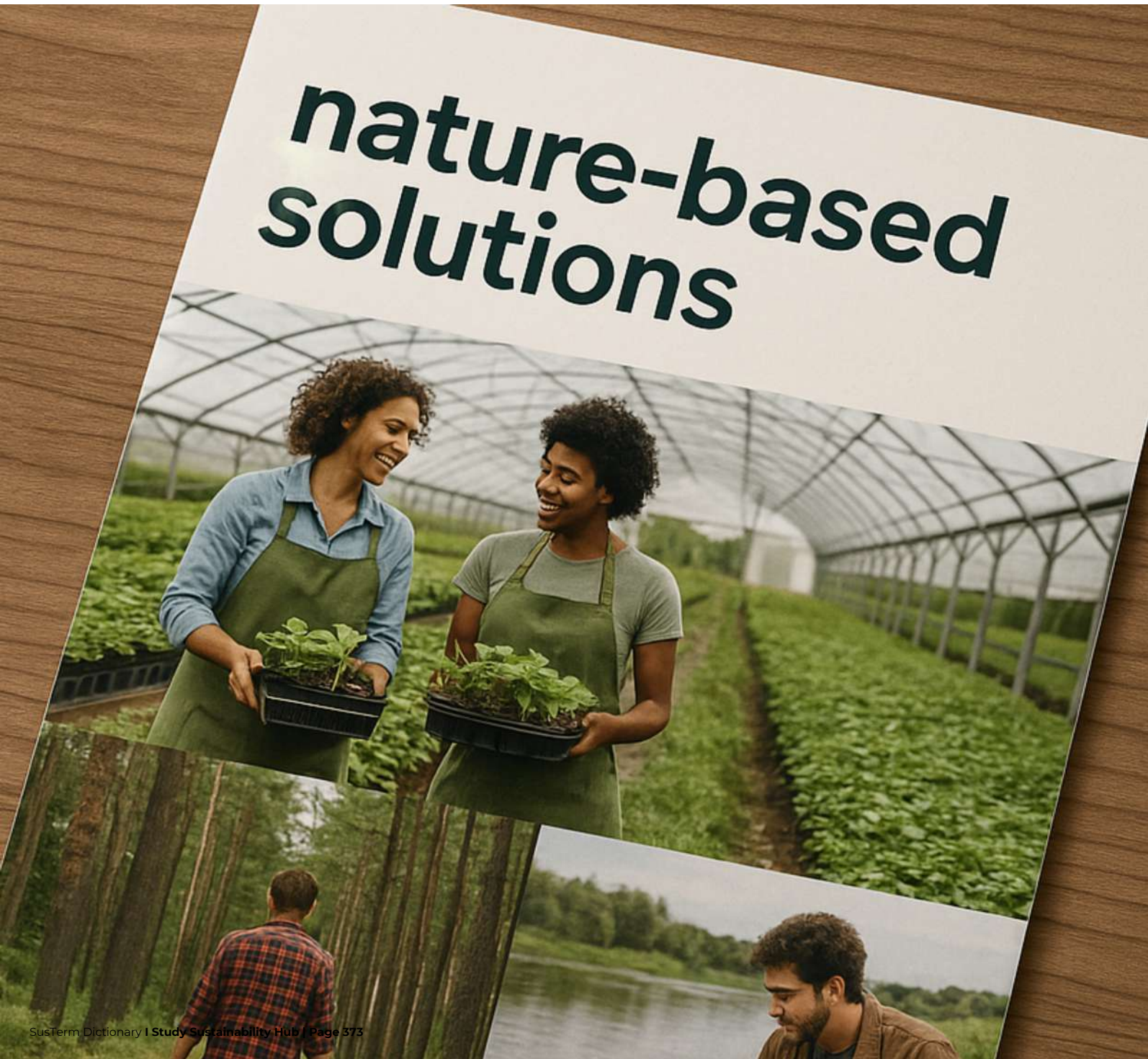
Using nature to tackle challenges like climate change and disasters.

Example:
Restoring mangroves to protect coasts from storms.

NATURE-RELATED OPPORTUNITIES

Business opportunities linked to protecting or restoring nature.

Example:
Creating eco-tourism ventures in protected areas.



NATURE-RELATED PHYSICAL RISKS

Risks from nature, like floods or droughts, affecting businesses.

Example:
A factory closing due to a flood.

NATURE-RELATED RISKS

All risks to businesses from nature loss or dependence on nature.

Example:
A beverage company facing risks from water shortages.

NATURE-RELATED SYSTEMIC RISK

Large-scale risks from nature loss that affect entire industries or economies.

Example:
Global food shortages due to biodiversity loss.

NATURE-RELATED TRANSITION RISK

Risks from the shift to a nature-positive economy, like new laws or changing consumer behavior.

Example:
A food company needing to change ingredients due to deforestation bans.

Credit: World Rain Forests, 2021

NEAR-TERM SCIENCE-BASED TARGETS

Emission reduction goals set for the next 5-10 years, based on climate science.

Example:
A retailer committing to cut emissions by 50% by 2030.

Credit: Harvard Business School Online, 2024

NEGATIVE SCREENING

An investment approach that excludes companies involved in harmful activities, like tobacco or fossil fuels.

Example:
An ethical fund refusing to invest in oil companies.

NET POSITIVE

A sustainability approach where an organization or project goes beyond minimizing negative impacts to actively creating positive environmental, social, and economic benefits.

Example:
A company that offsets more carbon than it emits, supports biodiversity projects, and invests in local communities achieves a net positive impact.

NET ZERO

The state where an entity's greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by an equivalent amount of emissions being removed from the atmosphere, resulting in no net increase in atmospheric GHG levels.

Example:
A business achieving net zero by reducing its emissions and investing in verified carbon removal projects like reforestation.

NET ZERO ASSET MANAGERS (NZAM)

An initiative where investment firms commit to supporting the goal of net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 or sooner, aligning their portfolios with climate goals.

Example:
An asset manager committing to invest only in companies with science-based net-zero targets through the NZAM initiative.

NET ZERO ENERGY BUILDING

A building that produces as much renewable energy as it consumes over a year, achieving a net-zero energy balance.

Example:
An office building with solar panels and energy-efficient systems that generate and save enough energy to meet its annual energy needs.

NET-ZERO CARBON EMISSIONS

Refers specifically to reducing carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions balanced by CO_2 removal projects.

Example:
A logistics company achieving net-zero carbon by electrifying its fleet and offsetting any residual emissions with reforestation projects.

NET-ZERO EMISSIONS

A broader term that covers all greenhouse gases (GHGs), not just CO_2, ensuring that any emitted GHGs are balanced by removals or offsets.

Example:
A manufacturing plant cutting methane, nitrous oxide, and CO_2 emissions while using verified carbon credits to achieve net-zero emissions.

Credit: European Springs and Pressings, 2023

NET-ZERO WATER

A strategy where water withdrawals are balanced by returning the same amount of water to the source or environment, ensuring no net depletion.

Example:
A beverage company recharges local aquifers through rainwater harvesting and treatment to match its water use.

NEUTRALISATION

The process of compensating for any residual emissions that cannot be reduced by supporting projects that remove or store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

Example:
A company purchasing carbon removal credits from direct air capture projects to neutralize its remaining emissions.

NEUTRALIZATION/ CARBON DIOXIDE (CO_2) REMOVAL (CDR)

Technologies and natural solutions that remove CO_2 from the atmosphere, such as afforestation, bioenergy with carbon capture and storage (BECCS), or direct air capture (DAC).

Example:
A company investing in DAC projects that suck CO_2 directly from the air and store it underground.

NITROUS OXIDE (N_2 O)

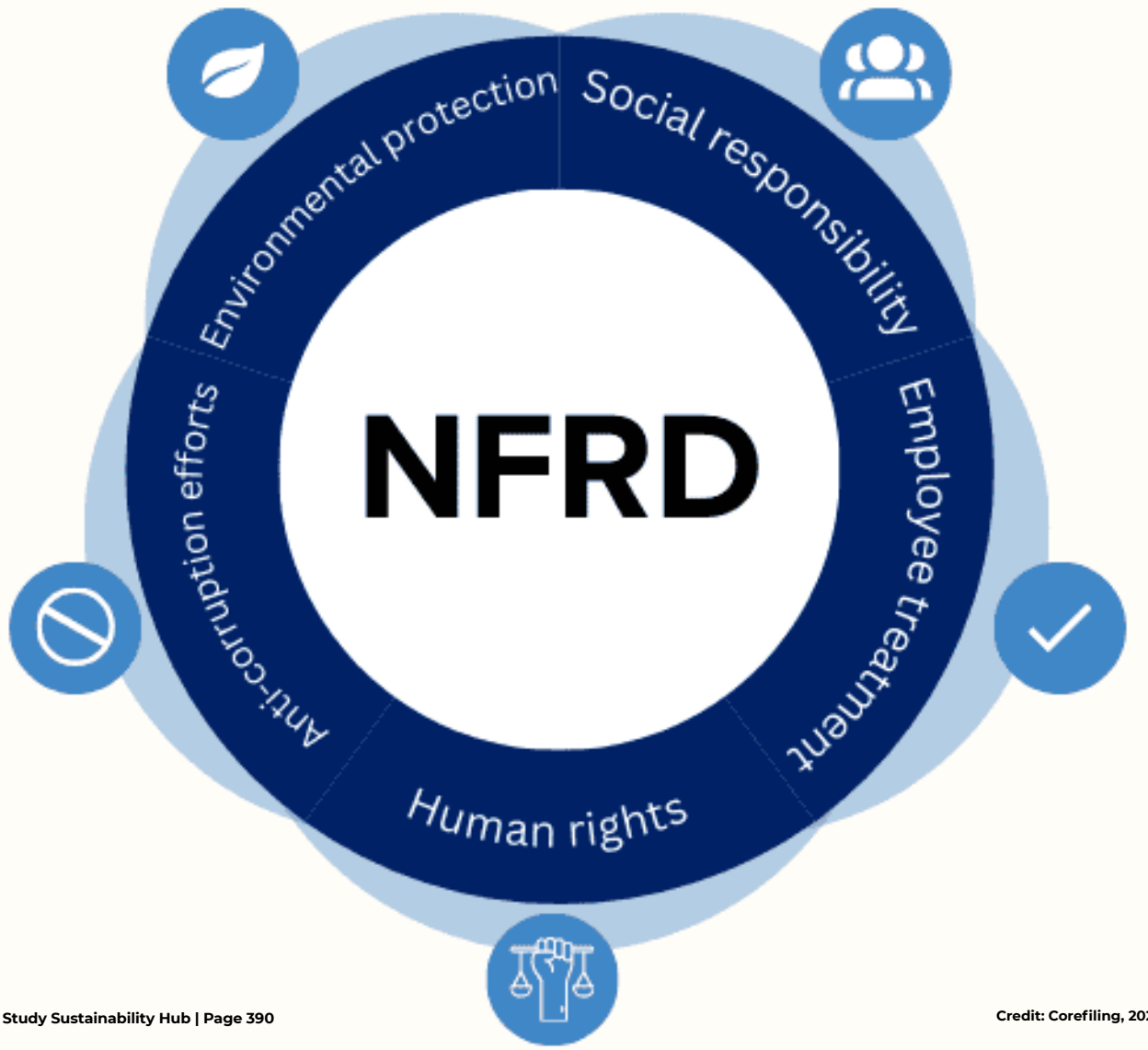
A potent greenhouse gas, about 298 times more effective than CO_2 at trapping heat over a 100-year period, mainly emitted from agricultural practices and industrial activities.

Example:
Fertilizer application in farms releasing nitrous oxide into the atmosphere.

NON-FINANCIAL REPORTING DIRECTIVE (NFRD)

An EU directive requiring large companies to disclose information on how they operate and address social, environmental, and governance challenges.

Example:
A European company reporting its environmental impacts, social policies, and diversity metrics in its annual report under NFRD requirements.



Credit: Corefiling, 2024

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCES

Resources that cannot be replenished within a human timescale, such as fossil fuels, minerals, and certain groundwater sources.

Example:
Coal, oil, and natural gas are non-renewable energy sources.

NUTRITION AND SUSTAINABILITY

An approach that connects sustainable food systems with healthy diets, aiming to reduce environmental impacts while ensuring access to nutritious food.

Example:
Promoting plant-based diets to lower GHG emissions and improve global nutrition.

OCEAN ACIDIFICATION

The decrease in the pH of the Earth's oceans caused by the absorption of excess atmospheric CO_2, harming marine life, especially shell-forming organisms.

Example:
Coral reefs suffering bleaching and degradation due to ocean acidification.

OFFSETTING

A climate strategy where emissions from one source are balanced by reducing or removing emissions elsewhere, usually through purchasing carbon credits.

Example:
A company buying verified carbon offsets to compensate for emissions from employee air travel.

Credit: Lune, 2022.

ORGANIC

Refers to agricultural practices that avoid synthetic chemicals and GMOs, focus on soil health, and promote ecological balance.

Example:
An organic farm using compost and crop rotation to maintain healthy soil without chemical pesticides.

ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

The long-term management approach where an organization integrates environmental, social, and economic considerations into its operations, decision-making, and culture.

Example:
A company embedding sustainability into its strategy, supply chain, and employee programs.

Credit: Ad Astra, 2023

OVERCONSUMPTION

The excessive use of natural resources beyond the planet's capacity to regenerate, leading to resource depletion and environmental degradation.

Example:
Overfishing resulting in the collapse of fish populations.

Credit: Buzz Bournemouth, 2024

OZONE (O_3)

A gas composed of three oxygen atoms. In the upper atmosphere (stratosphere), ozone protects life by absorbing harmful ultraviolet rays. However, at ground level, it is a pollutant harmful to human health.

Example:
Ozone depletion causing increased UV radiation, while ground-level ozone contributes to smog.

PACKAGING WASTE RECOVERY NOTES (PRN) AND PACKAGING WASTE EXPORT RECOVERY NOTES (PERN)

Documents used in the UK under the Producer Responsibility Obligations to demonstrate that a certain amount of packaging waste has been recovered or recycled, either domestically (PRN) or via export (PERN).

Example:
A packaging company using PRNs to prove compliance with recycling obligations.

PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT

An international treaty adopted in 2015 under the UNFCCC, where countries agreed to limit global warming to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.5°C.

Example:
Countries submitting Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement to reduce emissions.

PARTNERSHIP AND DIVERSITY

Collaboration among diverse groups, sectors, and identities to address sustainability challenges inclusively and equitably.

Example:
A business coalition partnering with Indigenous communities to support sustainable land management.

Credit: eSchool News, 2024

PERMACULTURE

A sustainable design philosophy that creates regenerative and self-sufficient agricultural systems by mimicking natural ecosystems.

Example:
Designing a garden that combines crops, animals, and natural water systems to create a closed-loop system.

PLANETARY BOUNDARIES

A scientific framework identifying nine limits within which humanity can safely operate to maintain Earth's stability, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and nitrogen cycles.

Example:
Climate change and biodiversity loss have already crossed safe planetary boundaries.

PLASMA ARC HEATING

A high-temperature process using an electric arc to generate plasma, which can break down waste materials into their basic molecular components, often producing syngas and slag.

Example:
A waste management company using plasma arc heating to convert hazardous waste into clean energy and inert slag, reducing landfill needs.

PLUG-IN HYBRID ELECTRIC VEHICLE (PHEV)/HYBRID VEHICLE

A vehicle that combines an internal combustion engine with an electric motor and a battery that can be recharged by plugging into an external power source, reducing fuel consumption and emissions.

Example:
A plug-in hybrid car like the Toyota Prius Plug-in, which can drive short distances on electricity before switching to gasoline.

POLLUTION

The presence or introduction of harmful substances or products into the environment, causing adverse effects on ecosystems, human health, and biodiversity.

Example:
Plastic pollution in oceans harming marine species like turtles and fish.

POLLUTION PREVENTION

Strategies and practices that reduce or eliminate waste and pollutants at the source rather than dealing with them after they are created.

Example:
A factory redesigning its processes to use fewer toxic chemicals, preventing hazardous waste production.

POLYLACTIC ACID (PLA)

A biodegradable plastic made from renewable resources like corn starch or sugarcane, often used as an alternative to petroleum-based plastics.

Example:
PLA packaging used for compostable food containers.

POSITIVE SCREENING

An investment approach where companies or sectors with strong environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance are actively selected for investment.

Example:
An investment fund focusing only on companies with high ESG ratings or sustainability certifications.

PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABILITY

Core concepts guiding sustainable development, typically including environmental protection, social equity, and economic viability, ensuring resources are used responsibly for present and future generations.

Example:
A company integrating circular economy principles to reduce waste while supporting community welfare and profitability.

PROCESSING OF SOLD PRODUCTS EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 10)

Emissions generated from the processing of intermediate or finished products sold by a company after they are sold to customers.

Example:
A steel manufacturer accounting for the energy used by customers to further process its steel products.

Credit: Cast Master, 2022

PRODUCT CARBON FOOTPRINT

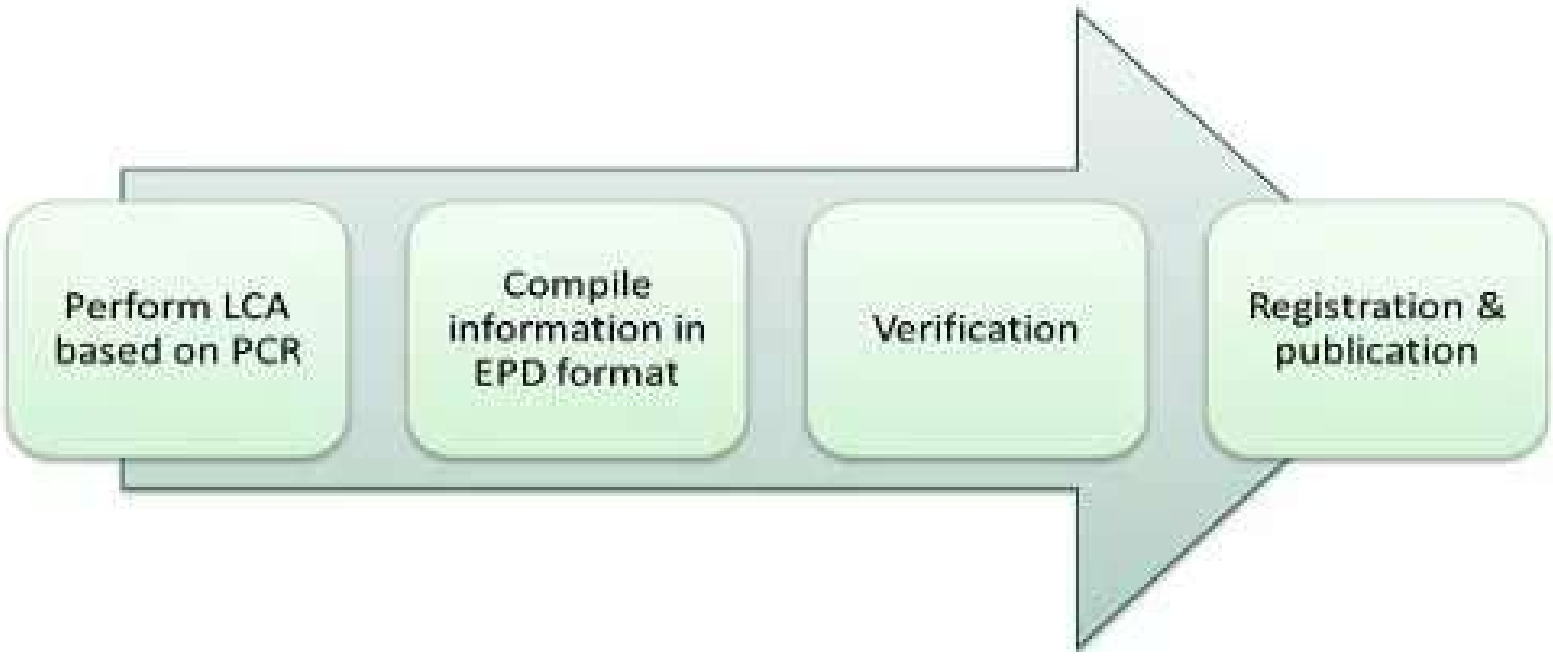
The total greenhouse gas emissions associated with the life cycle of a product, from raw material extraction to disposal or recycling.

Example:
Calculating the carbon footprint of a T-shirt, including cotton farming, manufacturing, shipping, and consumer use.

PRODUCT CATEGORY RULES (PCR)

Standardized guidelines for calculating and reporting environmental impacts of products within specific categories to ensure consistency and comparability.

Example:
Using PCR for plastic bottles to develop Environmental Product Declarations (EPDs).



Credit: Carbon Trail, 2024

PRODUCT ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT (PEF)

An EU method for measuring the environmental impacts of products throughout their life cycle, aiming for consistent, science-based comparisons across products.

Example:
Comparing the PEF of different dairy products to understand which has the lowest environmental impact.

PRODUCT STEWARDSHIP

An approach where all actors involved in the life cycle of a product take responsibility for reducing its environmental and social impacts.

Example:
Electronics companies offering take-back schemes for recycling old devices responsibly.

PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTION

The economic processes of producing goods and services and consuming them, which are critical to sustainability because they drive resource use, waste generation, and emissions.

Example:
Encouraging sustainable production and consumption patterns by promoting reusable products and reducing packaging.

PURCHASED GOODS AND SERVICES EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 1)

Emissions associated with the production of goods and services purchased by an organization, from raw material extraction to delivery.

Example:
A retailer calculating emissions from the manufacturing of the clothes and electronics it sells.

PYROLYSIS

A process of thermally decomposing organic materials in the absence of oxygen to produce bio-oil, syngas, and biochar, often used for waste-to-energy or biofuel production.

Example:
Pyrolysis plants turning plastic waste into usable fuel oil.

RAINFOREST ALLIANCE

A global nonprofit organization that works to conserve biodiversity and ensure sustainable livelihoods by promoting responsible land use, farming, and business practices.

Example:
A chocolate brand sourcing cocoa beans certified by the Rainforest Alliance to support sustainable farming.

RAINWATER HARVESTING

The collection and storage of rainwater for reuse on-site, reducing reliance on municipal water systems and promoting water conservation.

Example:
A building installing rooftop rainwater collection systems for use in irrigation and toilet flushing.

REAFFORESTATION

The process of planting trees in an area where forest cover was previously present but has been lost or degraded.

Example:
Reafforestation projects in degraded lands to restore biodiversity and carbon sequestration.

RECLAIMED

Materials that have been recovered from waste or old products for reuse, reducing the need for virgin resources.

Example:
Using reclaimed wood from demolished buildings for new furniture production.

RECYCLABLE

Materials or products that can be collected, processed, and made into new products, reducing the need for raw materials and minimizing waste.

Example:
Aluminum cans being recycled into new cans or other aluminum products.

RECYCLE/RECYCLING

The process of converting waste materials into new materials and objects, a key part of the circular economy.

Example:
Recycling plastic bottles into polyester fibers for clothing.

REDD+ (REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION)

A UN program encouraging developing countries to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation while promoting conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks.

Example:
A REDD+ project in the Amazon helping local communities protect forests while receiving financial support for doing so.

REDUCE, REUSE, AND RECYCLE (THE THREE RS)

A waste management hierarchy promoting reduction of waste generation, reuse of products and materials, and recycling to conserve resources and reduce environmental impacts.

Example:
Encouraging consumers to use reusable shopping bags (reuse), avoid unnecessary purchases (reduce), and recycle packaging (recycle).

REDUCING

Lowering the use of materials, energy, and resources, which minimizes waste and pollution at the source.

Example:
A company redesigning its products to use less packaging material.

REFORESTATION

The planting of trees in areas that were previously deforested, aiming to restore ecosystems, enhance biodiversity, and sequester carbon.

Example:
Planting native trees in previously cleared agricultural lands.

REGENERATION

The process of renewal, restoration, and growth that makes ecosystems, communities, and economies more resilient and productive over time. Regeneration goes beyond sustainability by seeking to improve systems rather than just maintaining them.

Example:
Regenerating degraded land through soil restoration, tree planting, and community engagement to support biodiversity and livelihoods.

REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

A holistic farming approach focusing on regenerating soil health, increasing biodiversity, improving the water cycle, and enhancing ecosystem services while producing food.

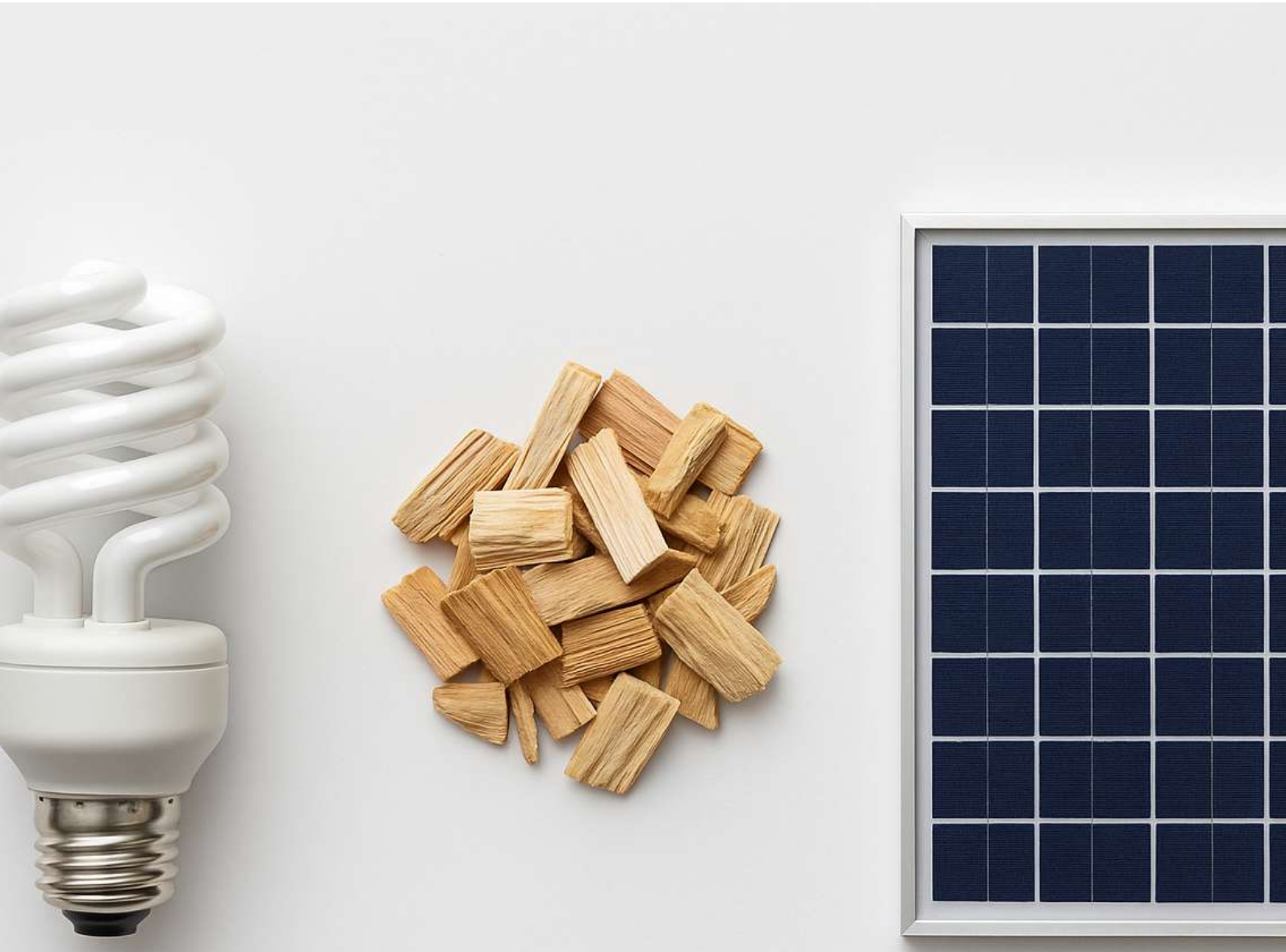
Example:
Practices like no-till farming, cover cropping, and rotational grazing implemented by farms to restore soil and sequester carbon.

Credit: Moore Uni-drill, 2023

REGENERATIVE DESIGN

An approach to design that aims to restore, renew, or revitalize sources of energy and materials, creating systems that are resilient, sustainable, and beneficial for both people and the planet.

Example:
Designing buildings that produce more energy than they consume and regenerate local biodiversity through green roofs and walls.



REGENERATIVE SUSTAINABILITY

An advanced form of sustainability that focuses on creating systems capable of self-renewal and improvement, aiming for net-positive impacts on nature and society.

Example:
A city development project integrating permaculture, renewable energy, and community participation to create thriving, regenerative neighborhoods.

REMINERALIZE/ REMINERALIZATION

The process of adding essential minerals back to depleted soils, oceans, or bodies to restore balance and support life systems.

Example:
Farmers applying crushed rock dust to farmland to restore minerals and improve soil health.

RENEWABLE ENERGY CREDITS (RECS)

Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) are tradable certificates that represent proof that one megawatt-hour (MWh) of electricity was generated from a renewable energy source.

They allow organizations to claim use of renewable energy even if the electricity is not delivered directly.

Examples:
A company purchases RECs to offset its electricity use from non-renewable sources.

RENEWABLE OR GREEN ENERGY

Energy derived from sources that are naturally replenished, such as solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal, reducing reliance on fossil fuels and cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Example:
A solar farm providing clean energy to power a local community.

RESILIENT DESIGN

Design strategies that enable systems, structures, or products to withstand or adapt to environmental, social, and economic disruptions.

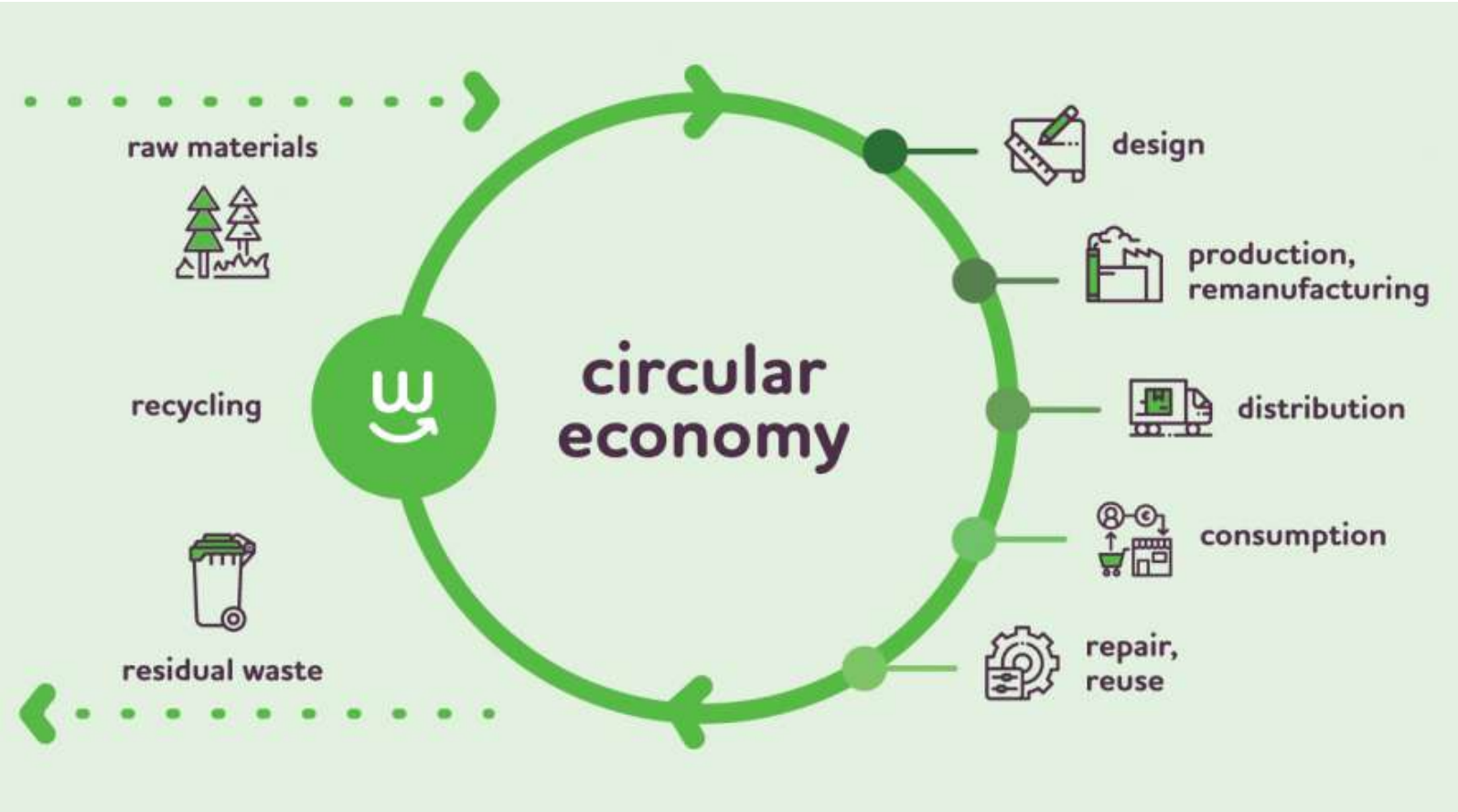
Example:
Coastal infrastructure designed to cope with sea level rise and extreme storms using resilient materials and adaptive features.

Credit: Geographical Association

RESILIENT PRODUCTS + BRANDS

Products and brands that are designed and managed to endure changing market, social, and environmental conditions by being sustainable, adaptive, and purpose-driven.

Example:
A clothing brand using recycled materials, transparent supply chains, and circular models to maintain resilience in a fast-changing industry.



Credit: Mother Erasmus Plus, 2022

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION

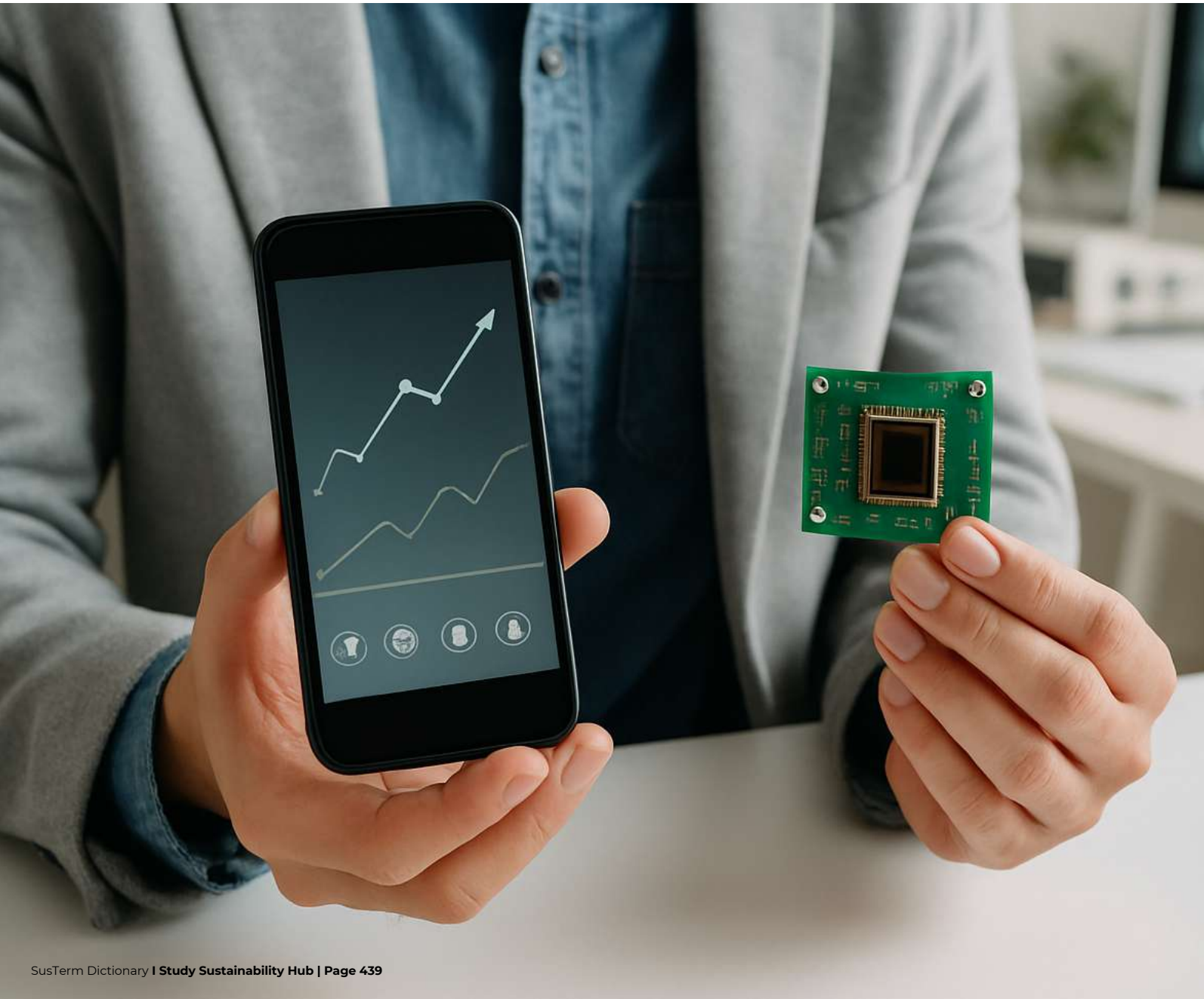
Consumption patterns that minimize environmental impact, reduce waste, and promote ethical production and purchasing behaviors.

Example:
Choosing fair-trade coffee, buying second-hand clothes, or opting for locally sourced food.

RESPONSIBLE INNOVATION

Innovating in a way that anticipates and addresses ethical, social, and environmental impacts, ensuring that new technologies benefit society.

Example:
Tech companies creating AI tools with built-in privacy protections and environmental considerations.



RESTORATION

The process of returning degraded or damaged ecosystems to a healthy, functional state.

Example:
Restoring wetlands to improve biodiversity, water filtration, and carbon sequestration.

REUSE

Using products or materials again for the same or a different purpose, extending their lifespan and reducing waste.

Example:
Glass jars being reused as storage containers at home.

REWILDING

Conservation efforts aimed at restoring ecosystems to their natural, wild state, often by reintroducing key species and removing human interventions.

Example:
Reintroducing wolves to Yellowstone National Park to restore ecosystem balance.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The systematic process of identifying, analyzing, and evaluating potential risks that could negatively impact people, organizations, or the environment.

Example:
A company conducting climate risk assessments to understand how extreme weather events might affect its supply chain.

RISKS IMPACTS

The possible consequences or effects that identified risks might have on the environment, economy, society, or organizations.

Example:
The risk of deforestation impacting biodiversity loss, water scarcity, and local communities.

SANITATION

Access to and use of facilities and services for safe disposal of human waste, as well as the management of hygiene and wastewater to protect health and the environment.

Example:
Building eco-friendly toilets and wastewater treatment systems in rural communities.

SCIENCE-BASED TARGETS INITIATIVE (SBTI)

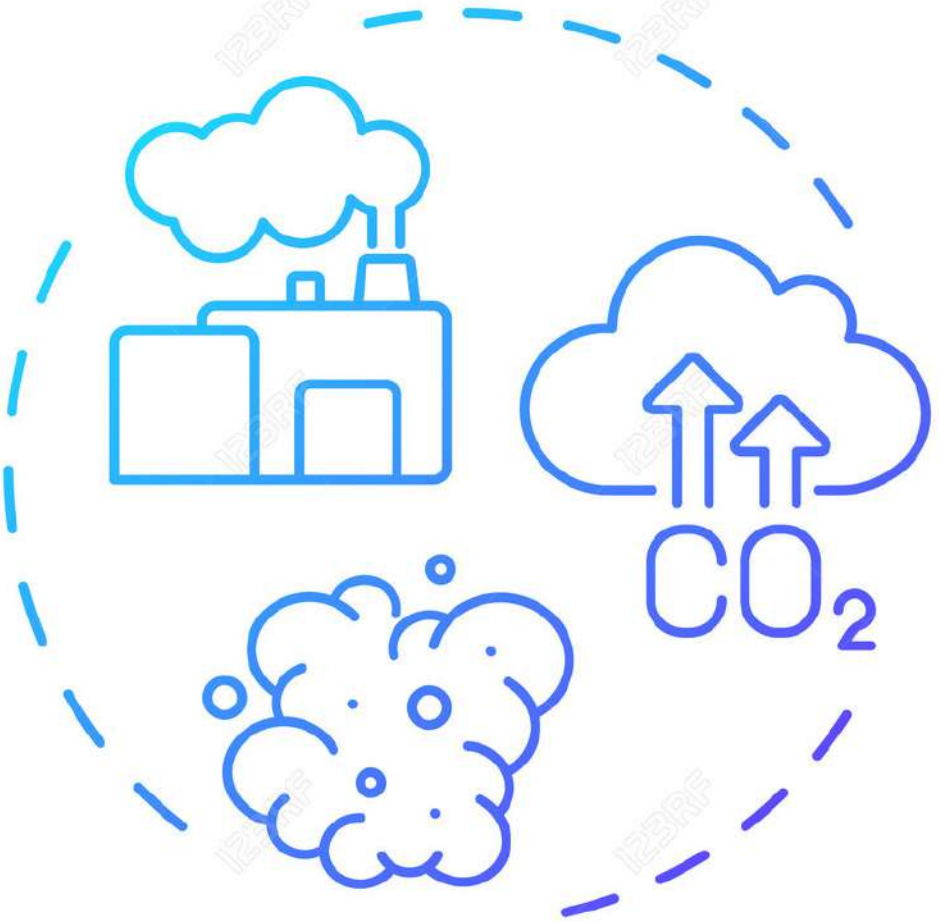
An initiative that helps companies set greenhouse gas reduction targets aligned with climate science and the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Example:
A food company committing to reduce its emissions by 50% by 2030, validated by SBTi.

SCOPE 1 EMISSIONS

Direct greenhouse gas emissions from sources owned or controlled by an organization.

Example:
Emissions from fuel combustion in company-owned vehicles or boilers.



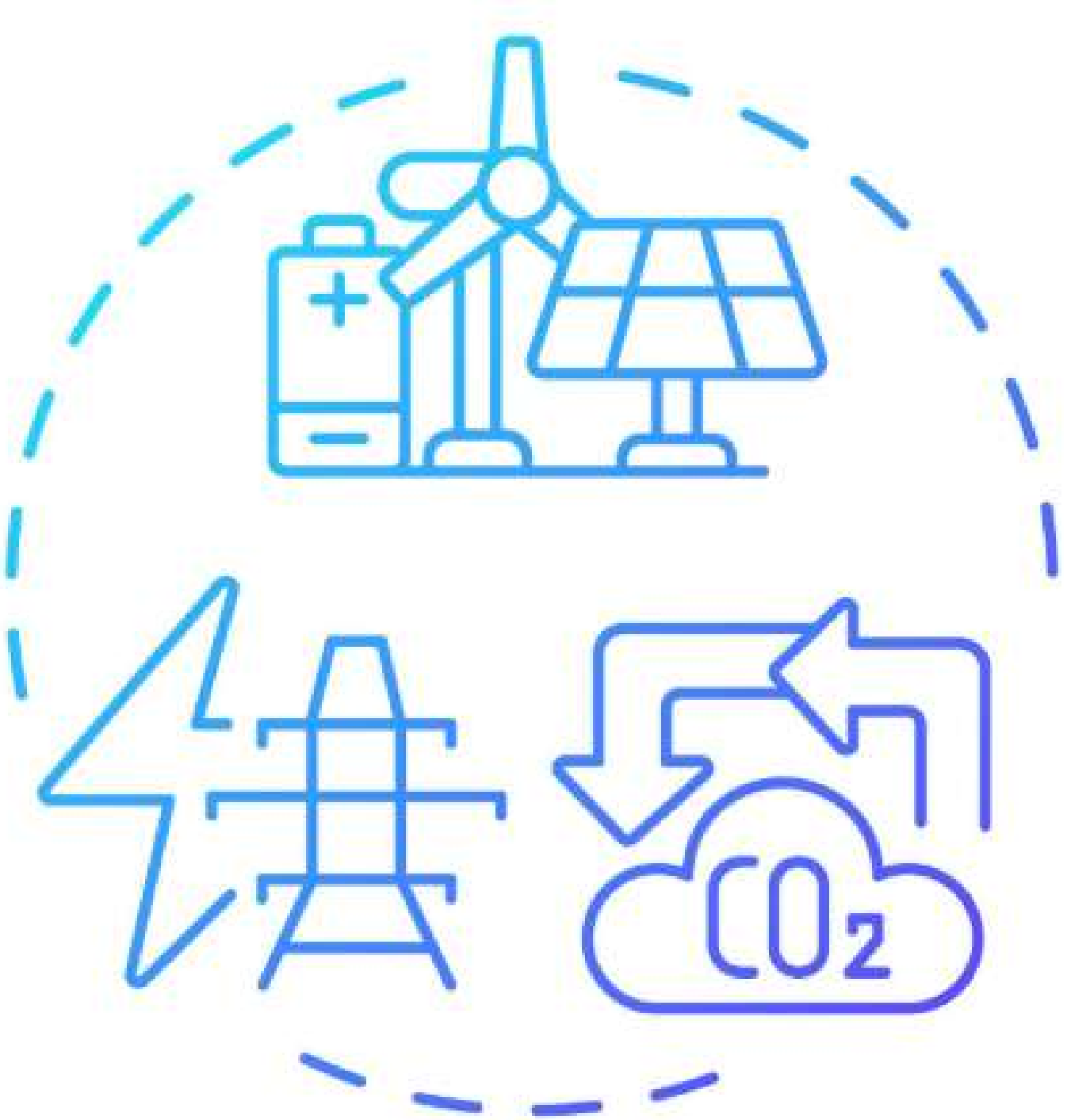
Scope 1
Emissions

Credit: 123rf

SCOPE 2 EMISSIONS

Indirect greenhouse gas emissions from the generation of purchased electricity, steam, heating, or cooling consumed by an organization.

Example:
Emissions associated with electricity purchased to power a manufacturing plant.



Credit: veteezy.com

SCOPE 3 EMISSIONS

All other indirect emissions that occur in a company's value chain, including upstream and downstream activities.

Example:
Emissions from the production of purchased goods, employee commuting, and product disposal.

Credit: alarmy.com

SCOPE 4 EMISSIONS

Also referred to as avoided emissions, these are emissions reductions outside a company's value chain as a result of its products or services.

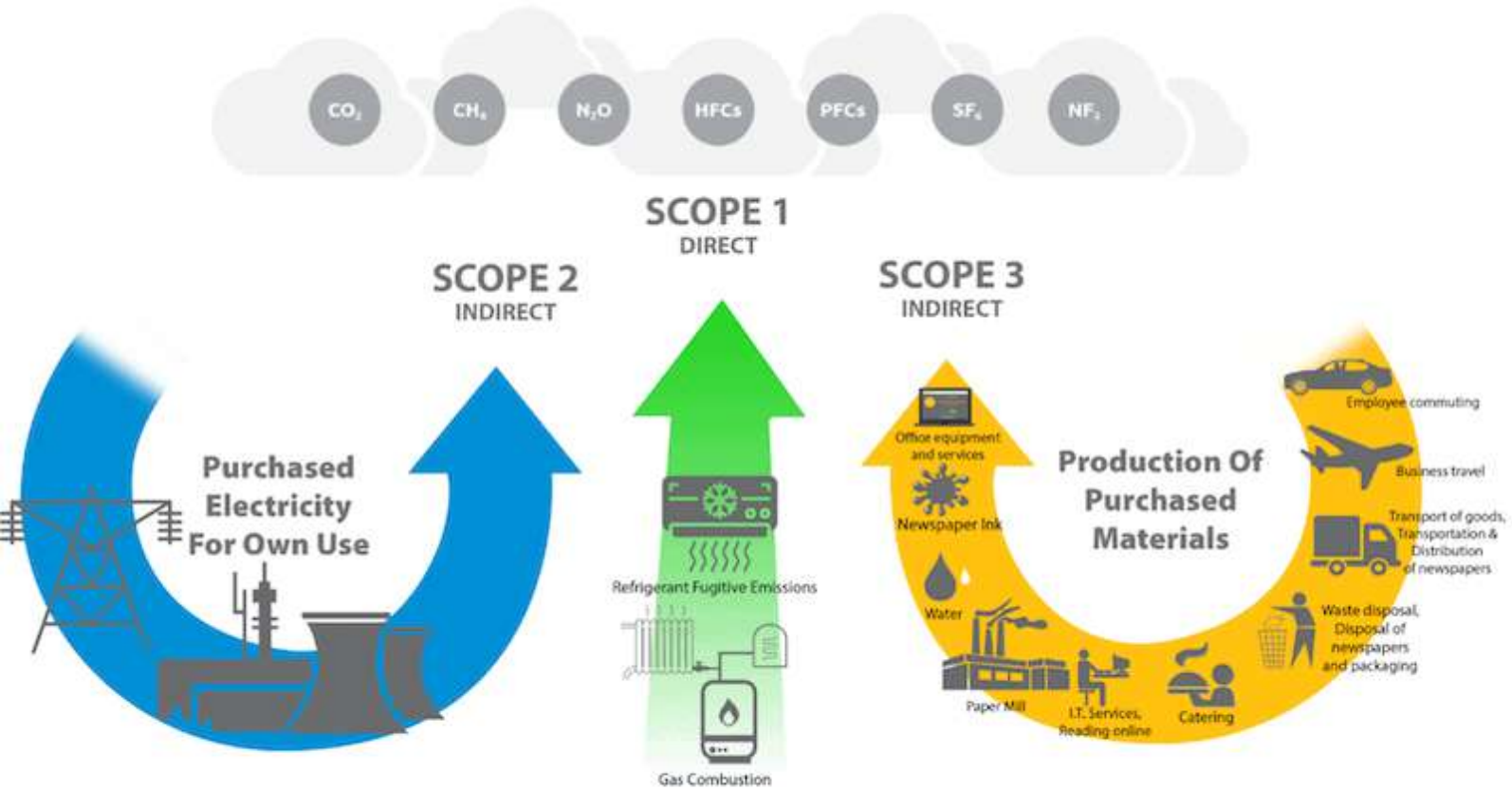
Example:
A solar panel company claiming avoided emissions when its customers switch from fossil fuels to solar energy.

SCOPES OF EMISSION

A classification of greenhouse gas emissions into Scope 1, 2, 3, and sometimes 4, providing a comprehensive framework for measuring and managing corporate emissions.

Example:

A corporate sustainability report disclosing emissions in all three Scopes to provide transparency.



Credit: Green Element, 2018

SECONDARY RECOVERED FUEL

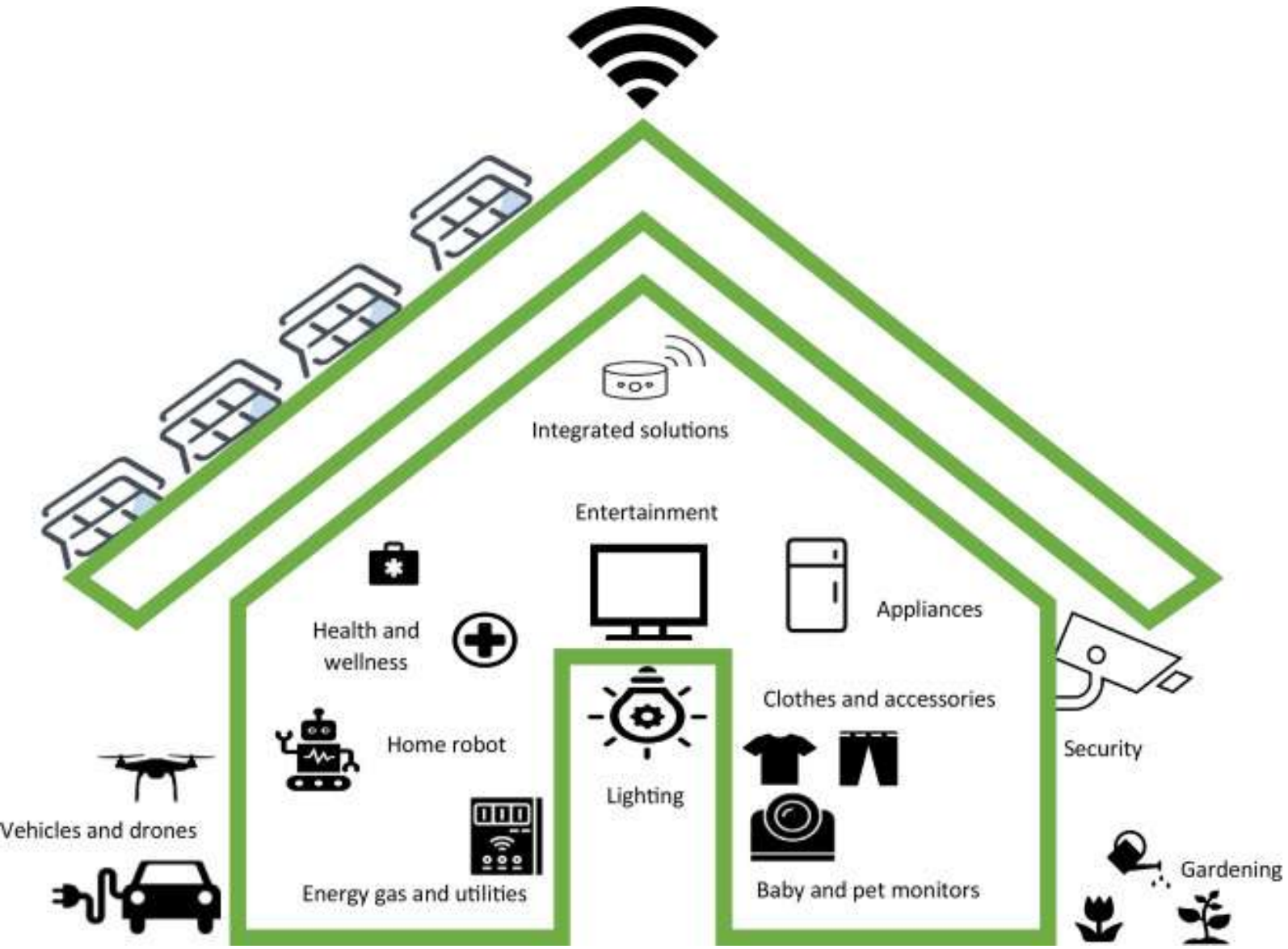
Fuel made from waste materials that can be used in industrial processes as an alternative to fossil fuels.

Example:
Using processed municipal solid waste as fuel in cement kilns.

SECURE SHELTER

Housing that is safe, structurally sound, and provides adequate protection against environmental hazards, contributing to well-being and social stability.

Example:
Post-disaster recovery programs building secure, climate-resilient homes for affected communities.



Credit: Del Rio et al., 2021

SHARED VALUE

A business approach that creates economic value in a way that also produces value for society by addressing its challenges.

Example:
A healthcare company developing affordable medicines for underserved populations while growing its market share.

Credit: Shared Value Initiative Hong Kong, 2025

SHAREHOLDER ACTIVISM

Actions taken by shareholders to influence corporate behavior, often focused on improving environmental, social, or governance performance.

Example:
Investors filing resolutions to push companies to disclose climate-related risks.

SHARING ECONOMY

An economic model based on peer-to-peer sharing of goods and services, often enabled by digital platforms, reducing ownership and resource consumption.

Example:
Ride-sharing services like Uber or peer-to-peer accommodation platforms like Airbnb.

Credit: N.S. Jaisoor, 2018

SIN STOCKS

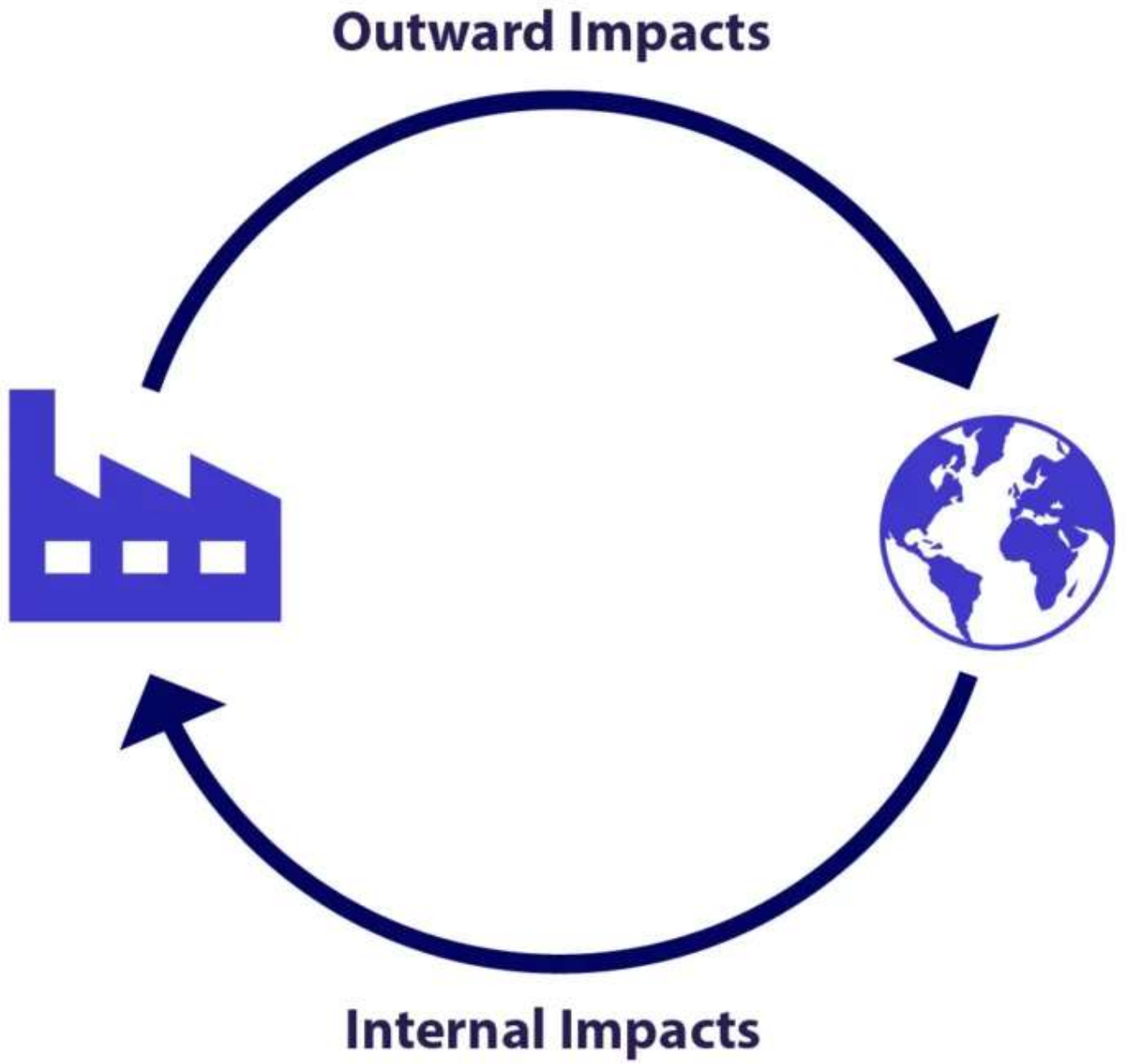
Stocks of companies involved in industries considered unethical or harmful, such as tobacco, alcohol, gambling, or weapons.

Example:
Excluding tobacco company stocks from ethical investment portfolios.

SINGLE MATERIALITY ASSESSMENT

A reporting approach focusing solely on the financial materiality of sustainability issues to the organization, rather than their impact on the environment or society.

Example:
Reporting climate risks only if they materially affect a company's financial performance.



Credit: Velocity EHS, 2022

SINGLE-USE

Products or materials designed to be used once and then discarded, often contributing to environmental pollution.

Example:
Single-use plastic straws and cutlery.

SMART GRID

An advanced energy grid system that uses digital technology to monitor, manage, and optimize electricity delivery, enhancing efficiency and integrating renewable energy.

Example:
Smart meters and sensors used by utilities to balance energy supply and demand in real-time.

SMART GROWTH

Urban planning strategies that promote sustainable, compact, and efficient development to reduce sprawl, preserve green spaces, and enhance quality of life.

Example:
Mixed-use developments with public transit access and green spaces.

SOCIAL BONDS

Debt instruments issued to finance projects with positive social outcomes, such as affordable housing, education, or health services.

Example:
A development bank issuing social bonds to fund COVID-19 recovery healthcare projects.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The networks, relationships, and norms that enable cooperation within or among groups, contributing to social cohesion and community resilience.

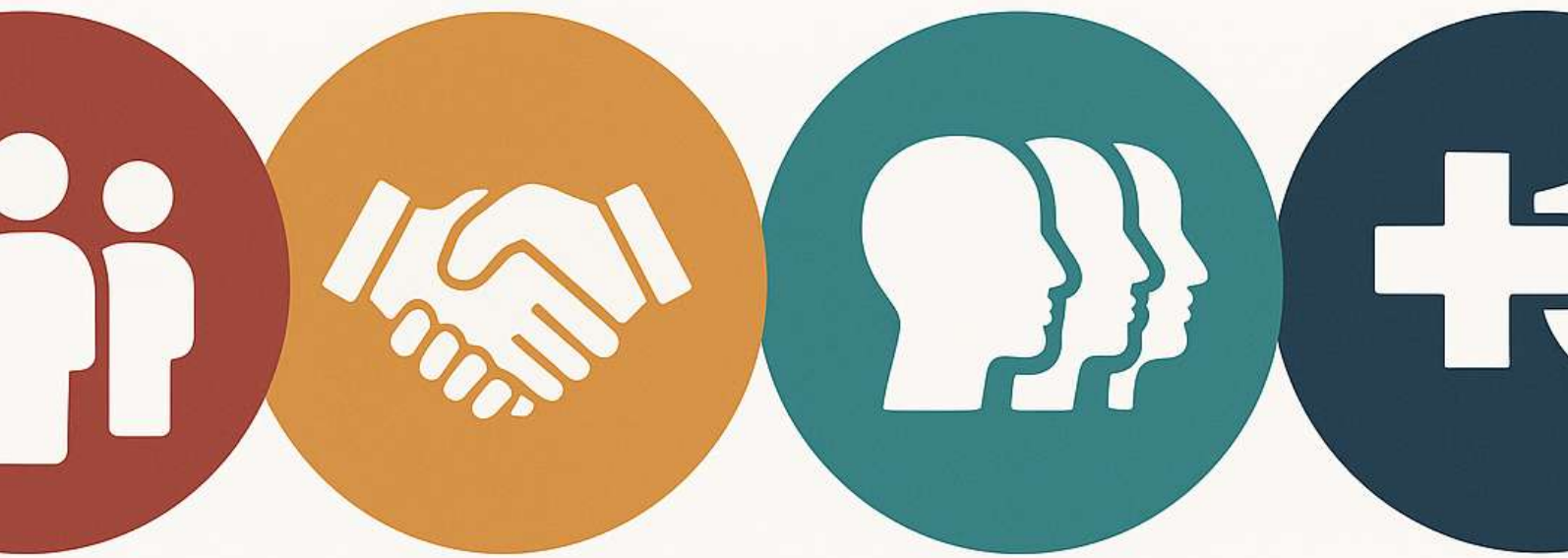
Example:
Local cooperatives that strengthen social bonds and support local economies.

Credit: John Mattone Global, 2025

SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

A business that applies commercial strategies to maximize social or environmental impact alongside profits.

Example:
A company employing marginalized groups to produce eco-friendly products.



SOCIAL FACTORS

Elements that influence an organization's interactions with society, including labor rights, community relations, diversity, and health and safety.

Example:
A company improving worker conditions and diversity policies to enhance social performance.

Credit: alarmy.com

SOCIAL FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Financial products designed to channel investments into projects that generate positive social impacts.

Example:
Social bonds, impact investing funds, or microfinance instruments supporting small businesses in developing countries.

SOCIAL IMPACT

The effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of individuals, communities, and society at large.

Example:
Measuring the positive social outcomes of a company's skills training programs for youth.

Credit: Kheman Kumar, 2021

SOCIAL LICENCE TO OPERATE

The level of acceptance or approval by local communities and stakeholders of a company's operations, often influencing long-term success.

Example:
A mining company engaging with local communities to earn trust and social licence for its projects.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

An organization's duty to act in ways that benefit society and minimize negative impacts on people and communities.

Example:
A retailer implementing fair trade sourcing and supporting local community projects.

Credit: Zycus, 2024

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTING (SRI)

An investment approach that considers both financial return and social/environmental good, often excluding companies that harm society.

Example:
SRI funds that avoid investing in fossil fuel companies and prioritize clean energy.

Credit: Seruds India, 2023

SOLAR ENERGY/ SOLAR PANELS

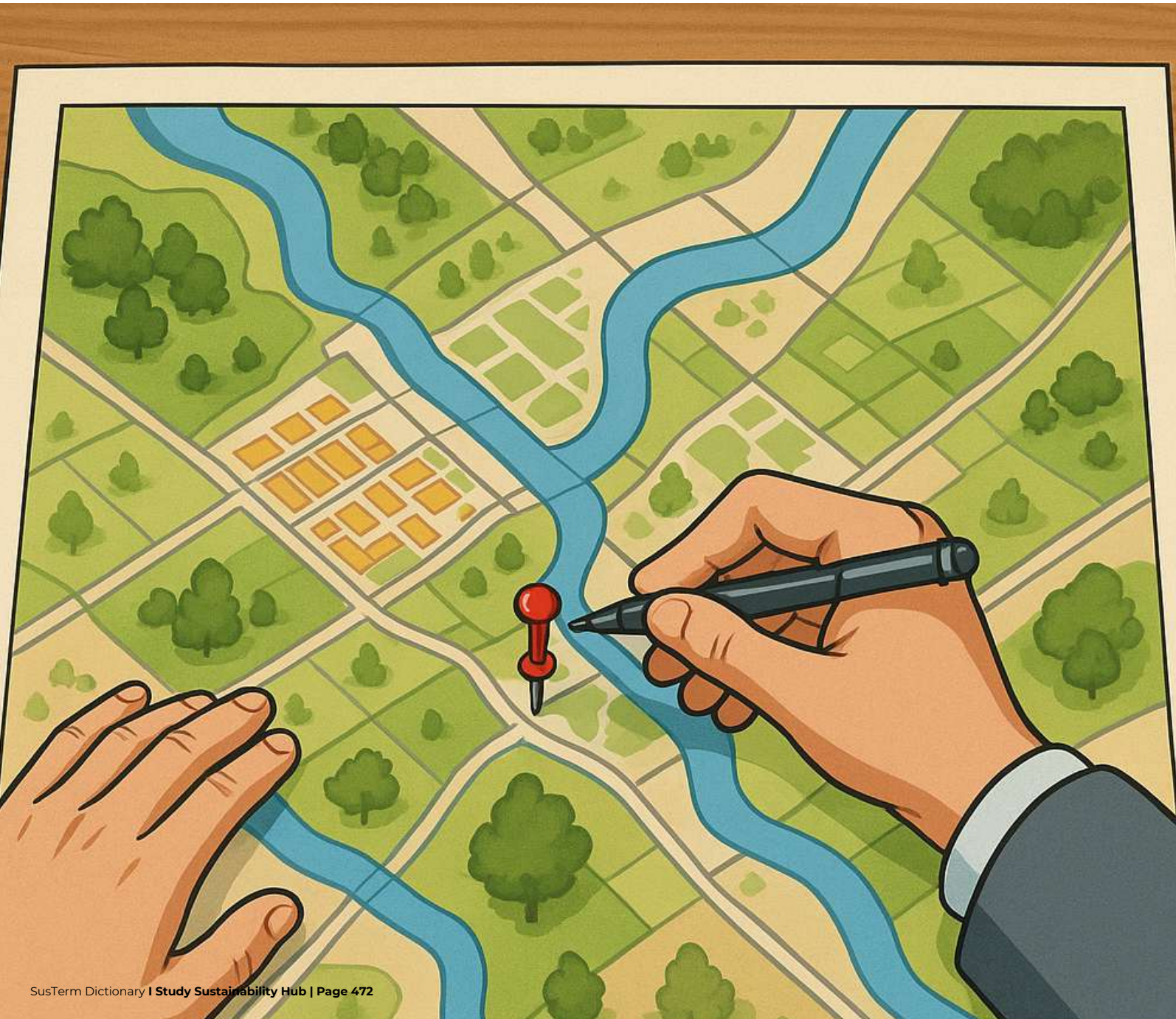
Energy harnessed from the sun using solar panels to generate electricity or heat, providing a renewable, clean source of power.

Example:
Homes with rooftop solar panels that supply clean electricity and reduce grid dependency.

SPATIAL PERSPECTIVES

An approach in planning and decision-making that considers spatial relationships, patterns, and distributions of human and natural activities.

Example:
Using GIS tools to map urban green spaces and inform city planning.



STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM

Stakeholder capitalism is an economic system where businesses focus not only on maximizing profits for shareholders but also on creating long-term value for all stakeholders—such as employees, customers, suppliers, communities, and the environment.

Examples:
A company raises wages and improves benefits for workers, recognizing them as core to success.

SUSTAINABLE BEHAVIOURS

Patterns of individual or group actions that reduce environmental impact, support social equity, and promote responsible consumption.

Example:
Choosing to bike instead of drive, or reducing food waste at home.

SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

An organization that operates in a way that balances economic success with environmental stewardship and social responsibility, ensuring long-term viability.

Example:
Unilever integrating sustainability across its product lines and supply chains.

SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Urban areas designed and managed to balance social, economic, and environmental systems, ensuring a high quality of life without depleting natural resources.

Example:
Copenhagen's integrated bike infrastructure and renewable energy systems.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Communities that strive to meet present needs while safeguarding resources and opportunities for future generations, focusing on environmental health, social equity, and economic vitality.

Example:
Eco-villages that use renewable energy, support local food systems, and promote inclusive governance.

SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION

Building practices that minimize environmental impact through efficient resource use, low-carbon materials, and design for longevity and adaptability.

Example:
Green buildings certified by LEED or BREEAM.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

The use of products and services that meet basic needs and contribute to a better quality of life while minimizing environmental degradation and social inequities.

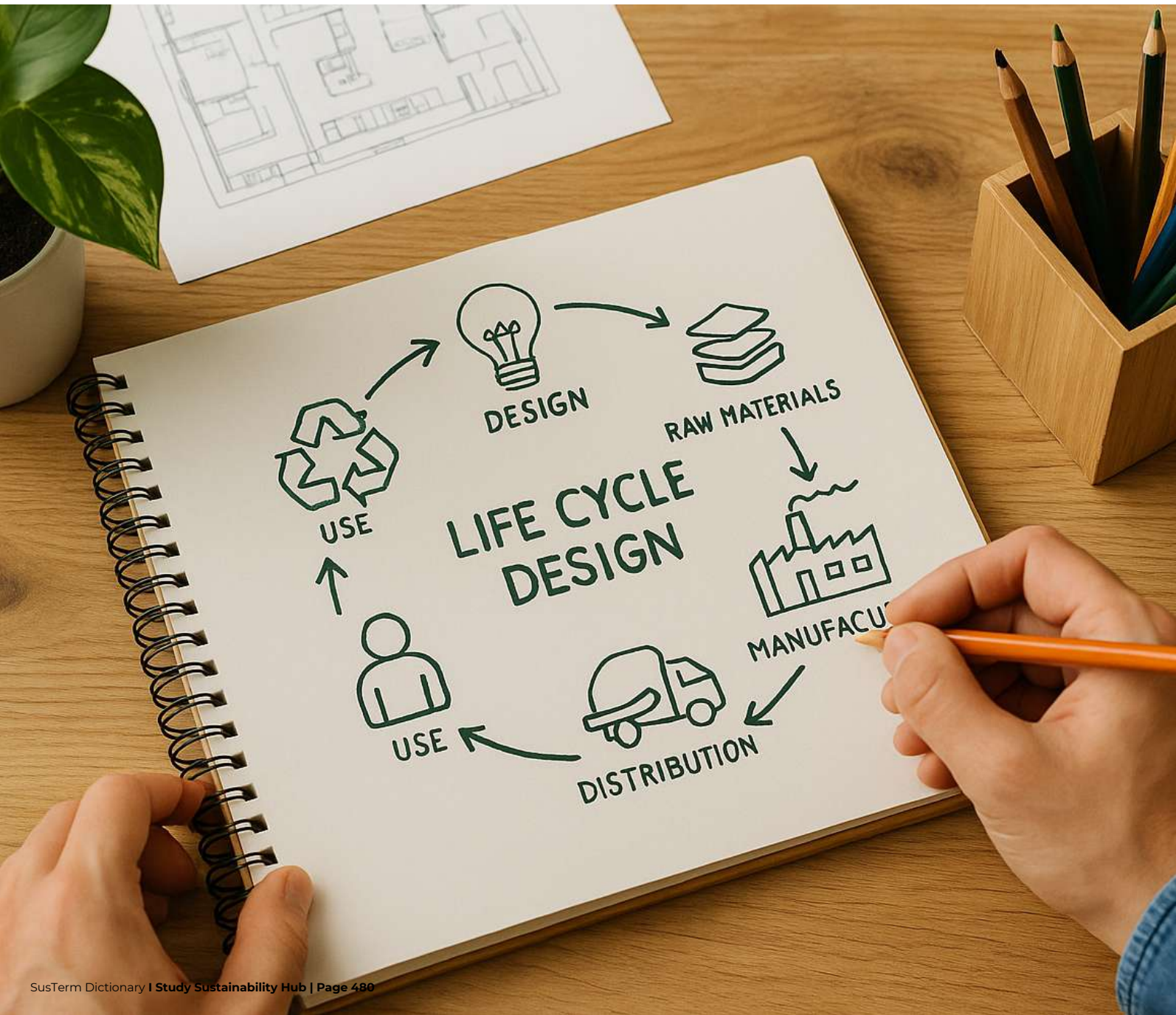
Example:
Opting for Fair Trade certified coffee to ensure ethical production.

Credit: Cafea UK, 2020

SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

Design approach that prioritizes resource efficiency, environmental performance, and social value throughout a product's or building's life cycle.

Example:
A product designed to be durable, repairable, and recyclable.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations.

Example:
Renewable energy projects that provide clean power while creating local jobs.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS)

A universal set of 17 goals adopted by the UN to address global challenges including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice by 2030.

Example:
SDG 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production.

Credit: UN.org

SUSTAINABLE ESTATES

Residential or commercial property developments that incorporate sustainable design, renewable energy, efficient resource management, and community well-being principles.

Example:
Eco-friendly housing developments with energy-positive buildings and shared green spaces.

SUSTAINABLE FIBERS

Textile fibers produced with minimal environmental impact, ensuring responsible water, chemical, and energy use, and promoting social welfare in the supply chain.

Example:
Organic cotton, Tencel, and hemp.

SUSTAINABLE FINANCE DISCLOSURE REGULATION (SFDR)

EU regulation requiring financial market participants to disclose sustainability risks, impacts, and considerations in their investment decisions.

Example:
An investment fund disclosing how it screens for companies with strong environmental practices.

SUSTAINABLE ORGANISATIONS

Organizations that integrate sustainability into their strategy, operations, and governance, balancing profitability with environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

Example:
IKEA's commitment to a circular economy and climate-positive business model.

SUSTAINABLE PACKAGING

Packaging designed to reduce environmental footprint through materials that are recyclable, biodegradable, reusable, or made from renewable sources.

Example:
Compostable food packaging made from plant-based materials.

SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

The process of acquiring goods and services in a way that delivers value for money while considering environmental, social, and economic impacts throughout the life cycle.

Example:
A city government prioritizing vendors that use low-carbon logistics and fair labor practices.

Credit: SDC Executive, 2024

SUSTAINABLE SUPPLY CHAIN

A supply chain managed to minimize environmental harm, respect labor rights, and ensure economic efficiency across all stages—from raw materials to final delivery.

Example:
Apparel brands sourcing materials from certified sustainable producers and ensuring living wages.

SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT

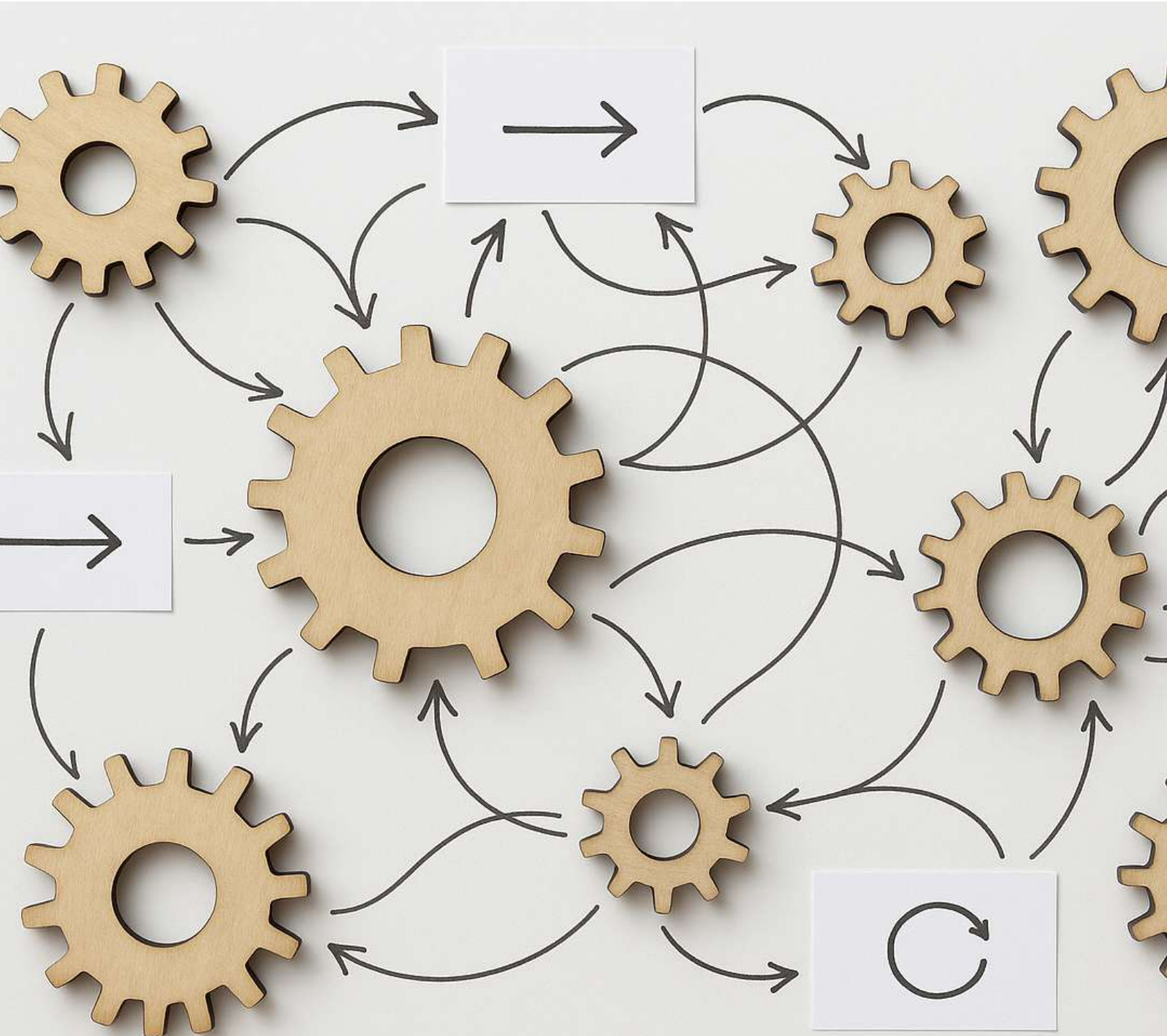
Transportation systems that reduce emissions, improve energy efficiency, and promote accessibility, contributing to healthier communities and lower carbon footprints.

Example:
Expansion of electric public bus networks.

SYSTEMS THINKING

A holistic approach to problem-solving that recognizes interconnections and feedback loops within complex systems, aiming to identify root causes and sustainable solutions.

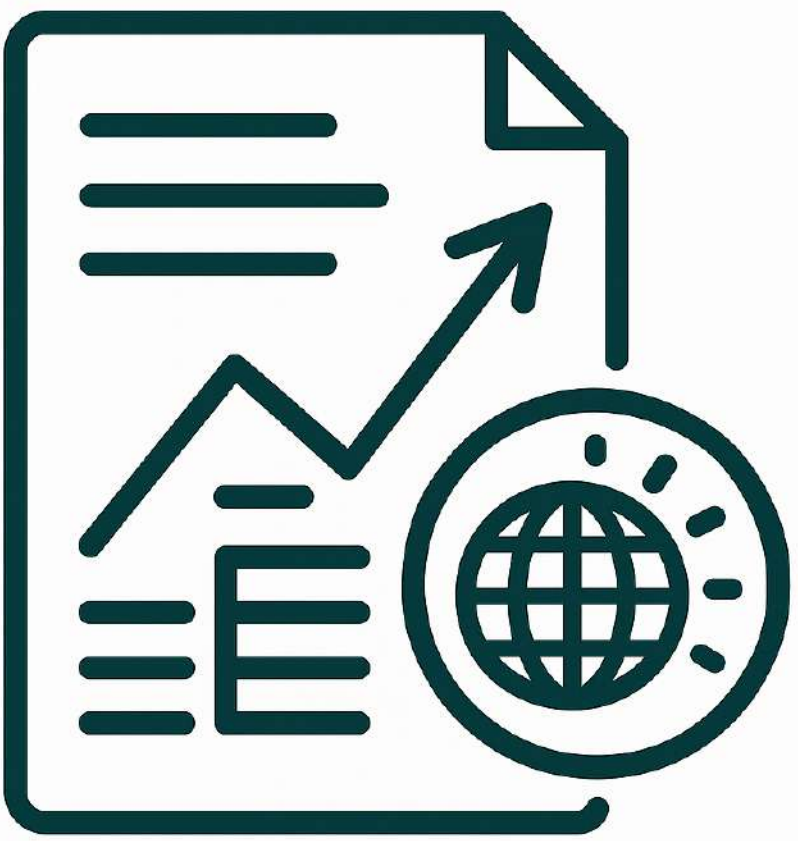
Example:
Addressing food security by considering agricultural practices, water use, trade policies, and social behavior.



TASK FORCE ON CLIMATE-RELATED FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES (TCFD)

A framework developed by the Financial Stability Board to guide companies in disclosing climate-related risks and opportunities, ensuring investors have relevant data.

Example:
A company reporting on how physical climate risks could affect its operations and assets.



TASKFORCE ON NATURE-RELATED FINANCIAL DISCLOSURES (TNFD)

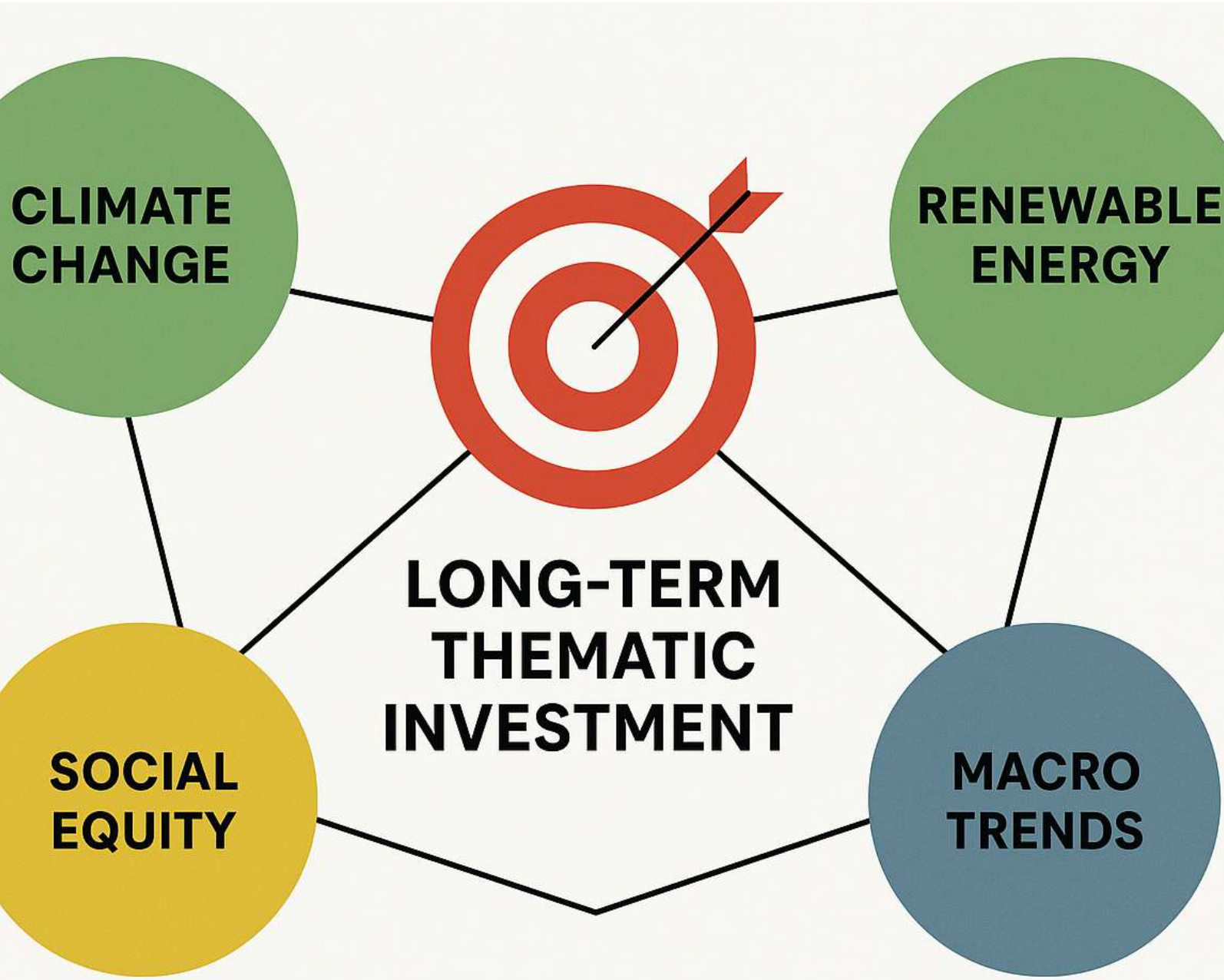
A developing framework for organizations to disclose their impacts, dependencies, and risks related to nature and biodiversity, supporting better financial decision-making.

Example:
A mining company assessing and reporting on biodiversity risks from its operations.

THEMATIC INVESTING

An investment strategy focusing on long-term macro trends, such as climate change, renewable energy, or social equity, regardless of sector or geography.

Example:
A fund investing in companies advancing clean technology.



THIRD PARTY CERTIFIED OR VERIFIED

Products, services, or processes evaluated by independent bodies to confirm they meet recognized sustainability or quality standards.

Example:
FSC-certified timber ensuring sustainable forest management.

TIPPING POINT / CLIMATE TIPPING POINT

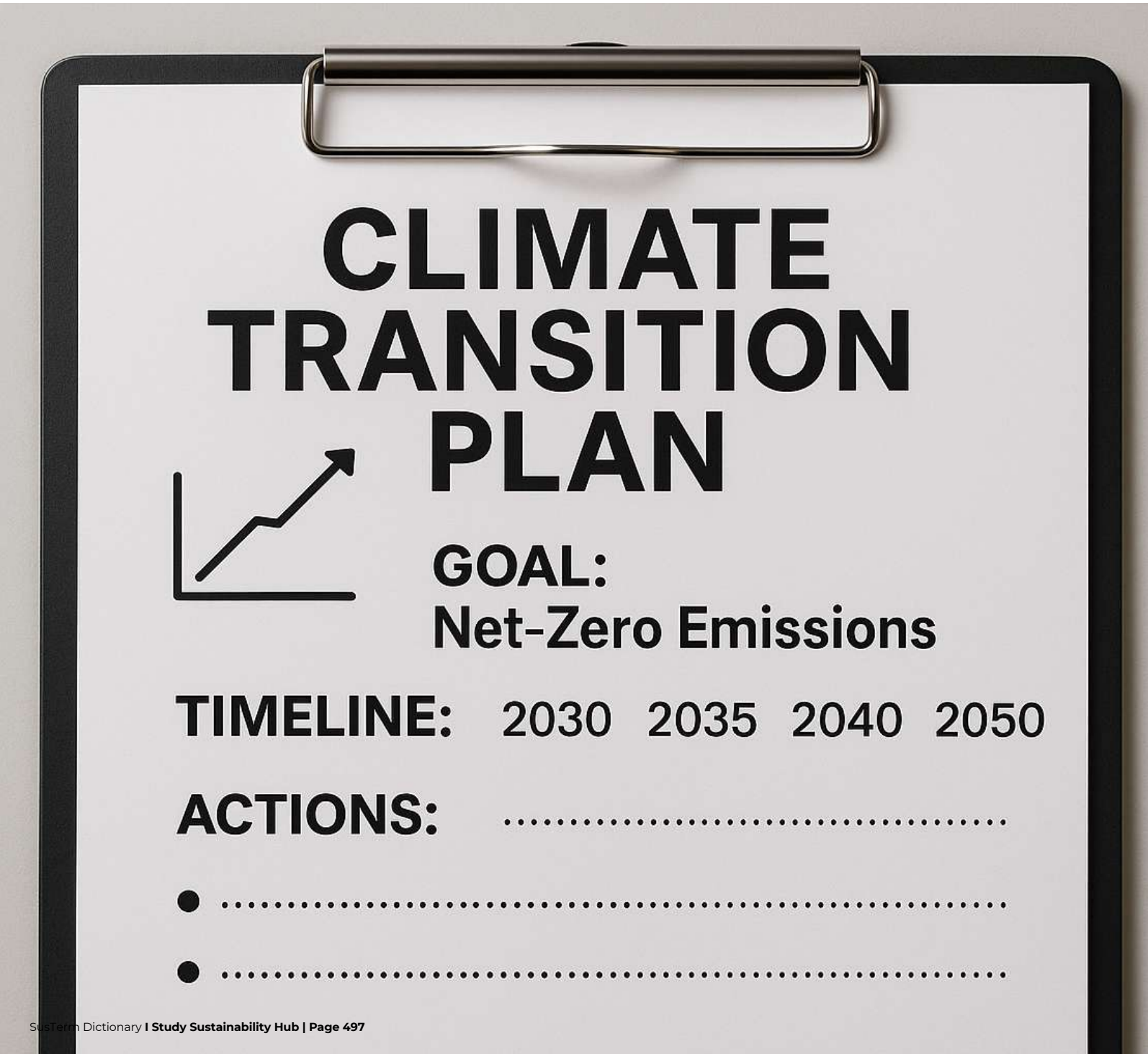
A threshold at which small changes in a system cause sudden and irreversible shifts in environmental conditions, leading to potentially catastrophic impacts.

Example:
Melting Arctic permafrost releasing vast amounts of methane.

TRANSITION PLAN

A strategic roadmap detailing how an organization will shift towards net-zero emissions or climate resilience, including interim targets and actions.

Example:
A utility company's plan to phase out coal by 2030 and invest in renewable energy.



TRANSITION RISK

The financial and reputational risks companies face due to changes in policy, technology, market demands, or investor expectations during the transition to a low-carbon economy.

Example:
Fossil fuel companies facing stranded assets as clean energy becomes mainstream.

TREE WASHING

Exaggerating or falsely advertising tree-planting initiatives as a major sustainability solution without addressing broader environmental impacts or ensuring ecological success.

Example:
Companies planting monoculture trees for publicity rather than restoring natural forests.

TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE (TBL)

An accounting framework evaluating business performance based on three pillars: People (social), Planet (environment), and Profit (economic).

Example:
Reporting environmental impacts alongside financial statements.

TWO-DEGREE LIMIT / TWO-DEGREE TARGET

The internationally agreed threshold to limit global warming to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, as part of the Paris Agreement.

Example:
Climate policies aimed at capping emissions to achieve this target.

UN FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE (UNFCCC)

An international treaty established in 1992 to coordinate global efforts to combat climate change, including overseeing negotiations like the Paris Agreement.

Example:
Annual COP conferences are organized under the UNFCCC.

UN GLOBAL COMPACT

A UN initiative encouraging businesses to align strategies and operations with universal principles on human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption.

Example:
Companies committing to support gender equity and environmental stewardship.

UN PRINCIPLES FOR RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT (PRI)

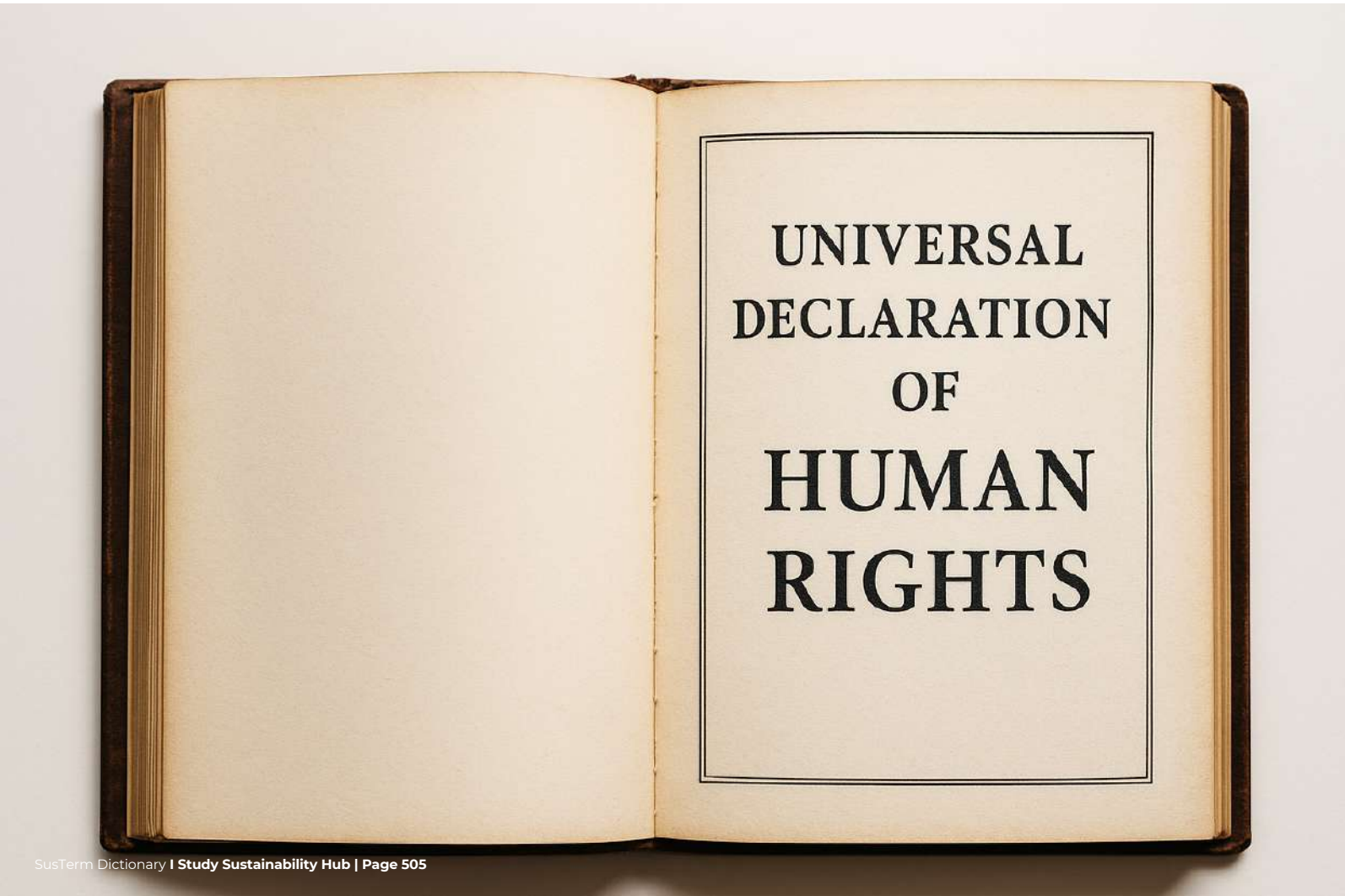
A UN-supported initiative offering principles for investors to incorporate ESG factors into their decision-making and ownership practices.

Example:
Asset managers integrating ESG screening into portfolio analysis.

UN UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (UDHR)

A foundational document adopted in 1948 outlining the fundamental rights and freedoms all humans are entitled to, forming the basis for global human rights laws.

Example:
Right to education, freedom of expression, and protection from discrimination.



UPCYCLING

The creative reuse of waste materials or products to create new, higher-quality items, extending product lifecycles and reducing waste.

Example:
Transforming old shipping pallets into stylish furniture.

UPSTREAM LEASED ASSETS EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 8)

Greenhouse gas emissions associated with the operation of assets leased by the reporting company, where the lessor controls the emissions.

Example:
Emissions from electricity use in rented office space.

UPSTREAM TRANSPORTATION AND DISTRIBUTION EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 4)

Emissions generated from transportation and distribution of products purchased by the company, from suppliers to company-owned facilities.

Example:
Emissions from cargo ships delivering raw materials.

USE OF SOLD PRODUCTS EMISSIONS (SCOPE 3 CATEGORY 11)

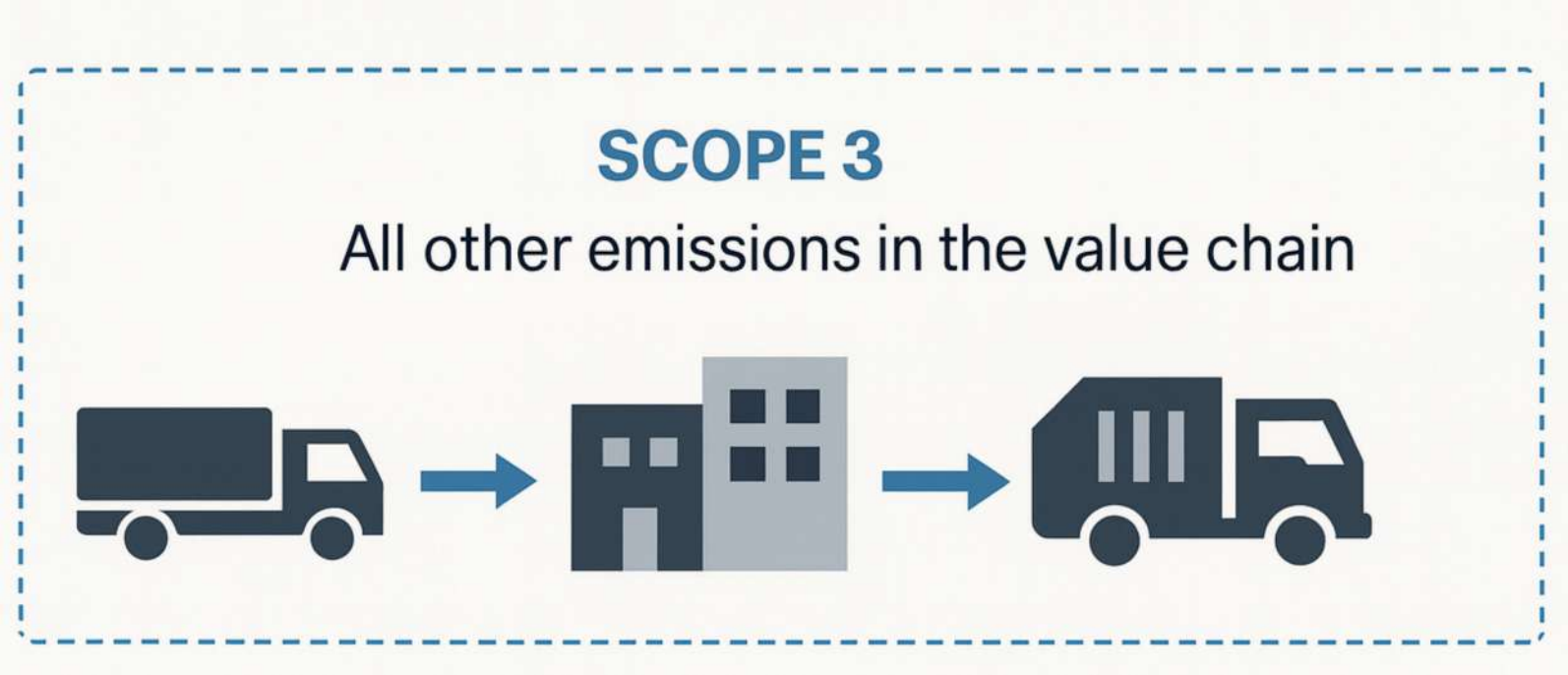
Emissions that occur during the use phase of products sold by the company.

Example:
Emissions from gasoline burned by vehicles sold by an automaker.

VALUE CHAIN EMISSIONS

All direct and indirect emissions across a company's entire value chain, including upstream (suppliers) and downstream (product use, end-of-life).

Example:
Total emissions from sourcing materials, production, and customer use of a product.



VALUE PROPOSITION

The promise of value a company delivers to its customers, often incorporating sustainability as a differentiator.

Example:
Tesla offering customers clean energy solutions through electric vehicles and solar power.

VEGAN / VEGANISM

A lifestyle and dietary choice that avoids the use of animal products, motivated by environmental, ethical, or health considerations.

Example:
Choosing plant-based meat alternatives.

VERIFICATION

The process of independently assessing the accuracy and credibility of reported data, claims, or processes against defined standards.

Example:
Verifying a company's GHG emissions report through third-party auditors.

VERTICAL FARMING

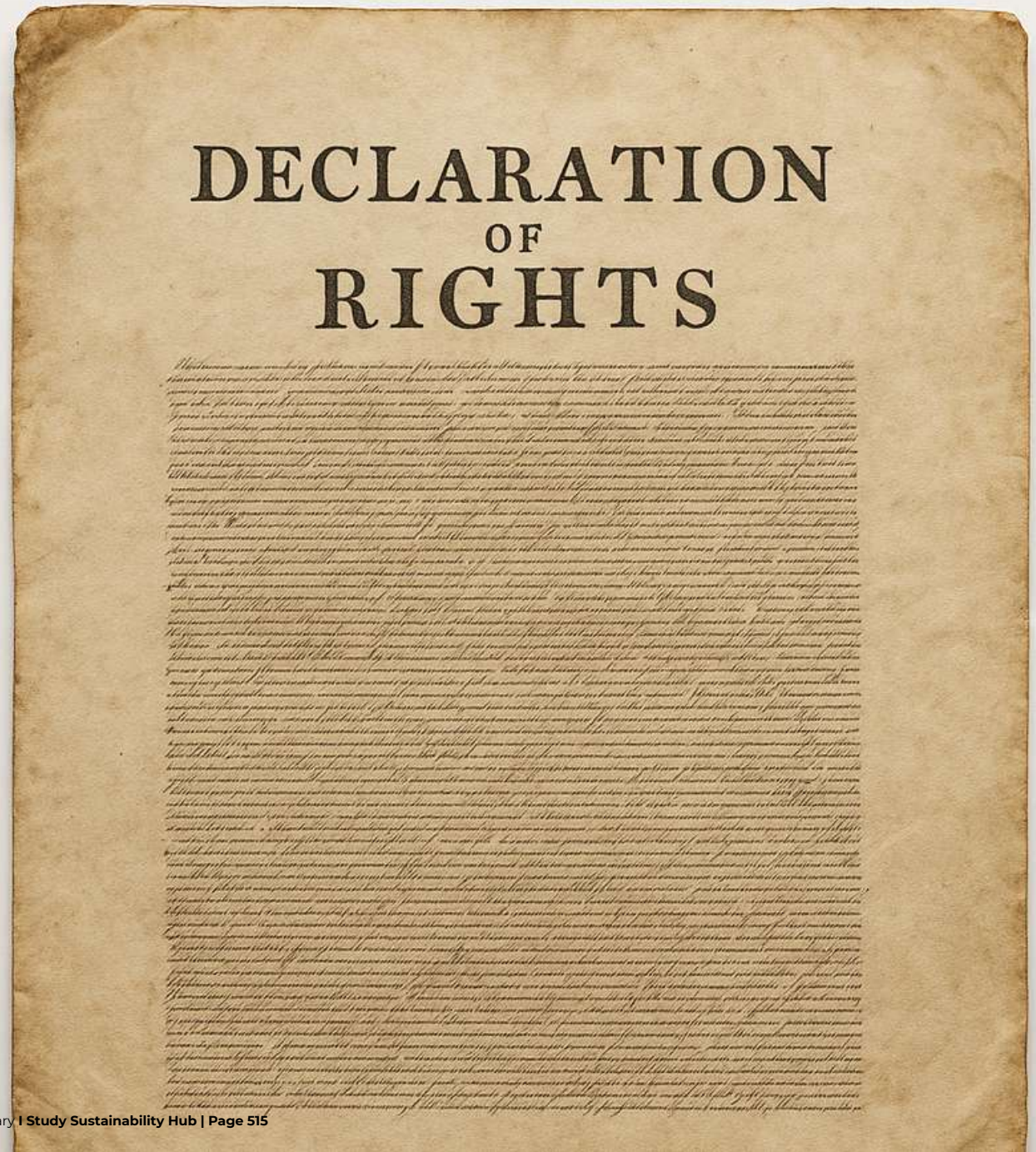
A method of growing crops in stacked layers or vertically inclined surfaces, often in controlled indoor environments, using hydroponics or aeroponics to maximize space and reduce resource use.

Example:
Growing leafy greens in urban warehouses using LED lighting and hydroponics.

VESTED RIGHTS

Legal rights or entitlements that are guaranteed and cannot be revoked without due process, often referring to property or development rights.

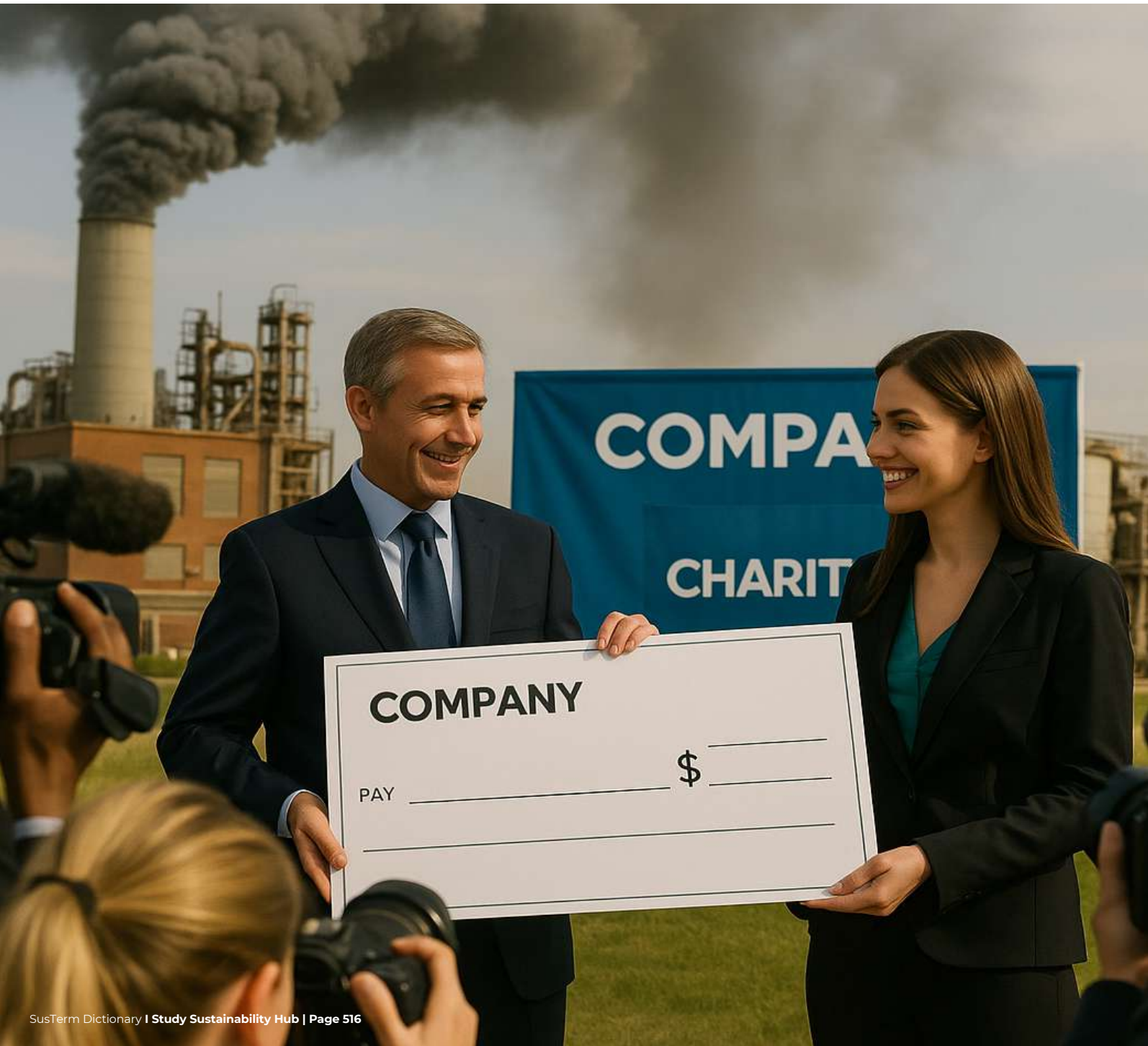
Example:
A developer has vested rights to build after receiving final project approval under existing zoning laws.



VIRTUE SIGNALLING

The act of expressing opinions or actions to showcase one's morality or social responsibility, often more for public image than genuine commitment.

Example:
A company loudly promoting its donation to a cause while neglecting its own unethical practices.



VOLUNTARY CARBON MARKET (VCM)

A market where organizations and individuals voluntarily buy carbon credits to offset their emissions, supporting projects that reduce or remove greenhouse gases.

Example:
A tech company buying carbon credits to offset its data center emissions by supporting reforestation projects.

WASTE AVOIDANCE

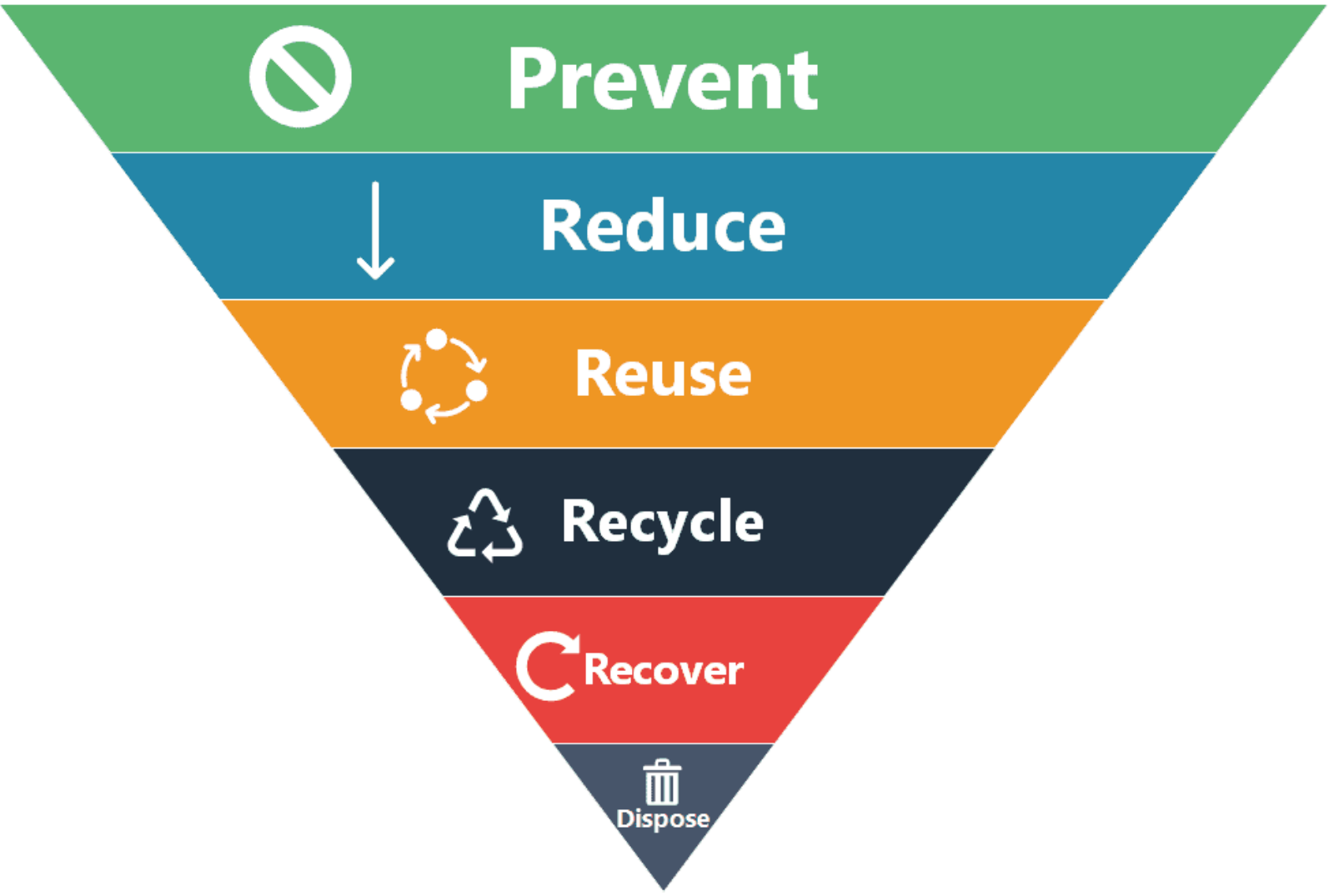
Strategies to prevent the generation of waste at the source, focusing on reducing consumption and promoting efficient design.

Example:
Designing packaging-free stores that encourage customers to bring reusable containers.

WASTE HIERARCHY

A framework that ranks waste management options by environmental preference: reduce, reuse, recycle, recover energy, and landfill as the last resort.

Example:
Prioritizing reusable packaging over recycling single-use items.



Credit: Axil, 2024

WASTE MANAGEMENT

The collection, treatment, and disposal of waste in a way that minimizes environmental and health impacts, and maximizes resource recovery.

Example:
Municipal waste collection combined with recycling and composting programs.

WASTE-TO-ENERGY (WTE)

Technologies that convert non-recyclable waste into usable forms of energy, such as electricity, heat, or fuel.

Example:
Incineration plants that generate electricity from household waste.

WATER CONSERVATION

Efficient use and management of water resources to reduce wastage and preserve supply for future needs.

Example:
Installing low-flow toilets and promoting rainwater harvesting in households.

Credit: World Bank Blog, 2020

WATER EFFICIENCY

Using less water to achieve the same tasks or outcomes through technology, behavior change, or process optimization.

Example:
Drip irrigation systems that deliver water directly to plant roots, minimizing evaporation.

WATER NEUTRAL

A state where an organization balances the water it consumes by reducing consumption and replenishing water to the environment or communities.

Example:
A beverage company restoring water to local watersheds equal to its production use.

WATER POLLUTION

Contamination of water bodies through harmful substances, making the water unsafe for consumption, ecosystems, or recreation.

Example:
Chemical spills from factories entering rivers.

WATER POSITIVE

Going beyond water neutrality by contributing more clean water to communities and ecosystems than an organization consumes.

Example:
Microsoft committing to replenish more water than it uses by 2030.

WATER SCARCITY

A situation where water demand exceeds available supply, or when water quality limits its usability for people or ecosystems.

Example:
Cape Town's 2018 water crisis where reservoirs nearly ran dry.

WATER STEWARDSHIP

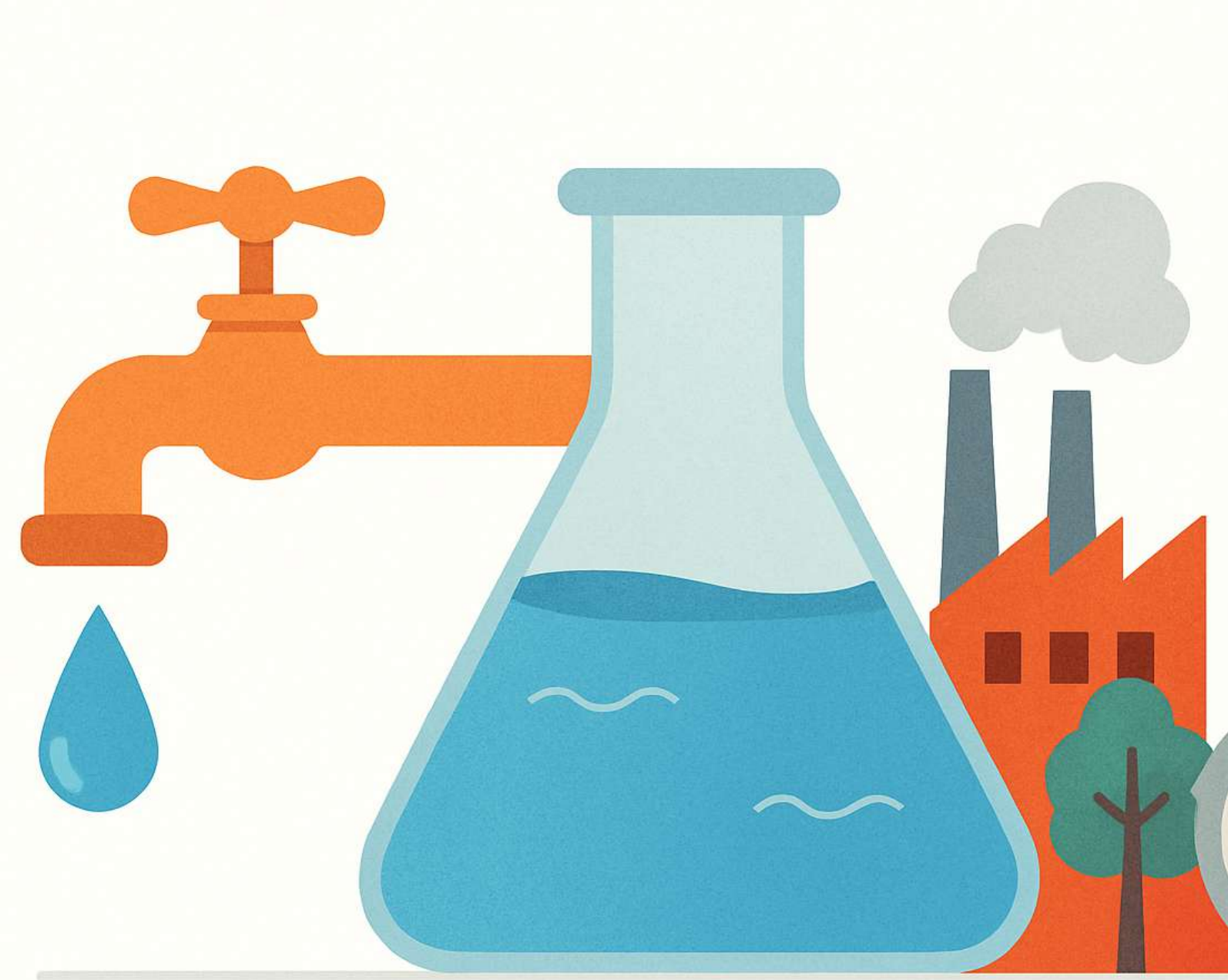
Responsible use and management of water resources through collective action, ensuring availability, quality, and accessibility for all users.

Example:
Companies working with communities to improve watershed management.

WATER STRESS

The pressure placed on water resources due to high demand or low supply, often measured as the ratio of withdrawal to available renewable water.

Example:
Countries in the Middle East experiencing high water stress due to limited freshwater sources.



WATERSHED

An area of land where all water drains into a common water body, like a river or lake, also called a drainage basin.

Example:
The Mississippi River watershed spans 31 U.S. states.

WEATHER

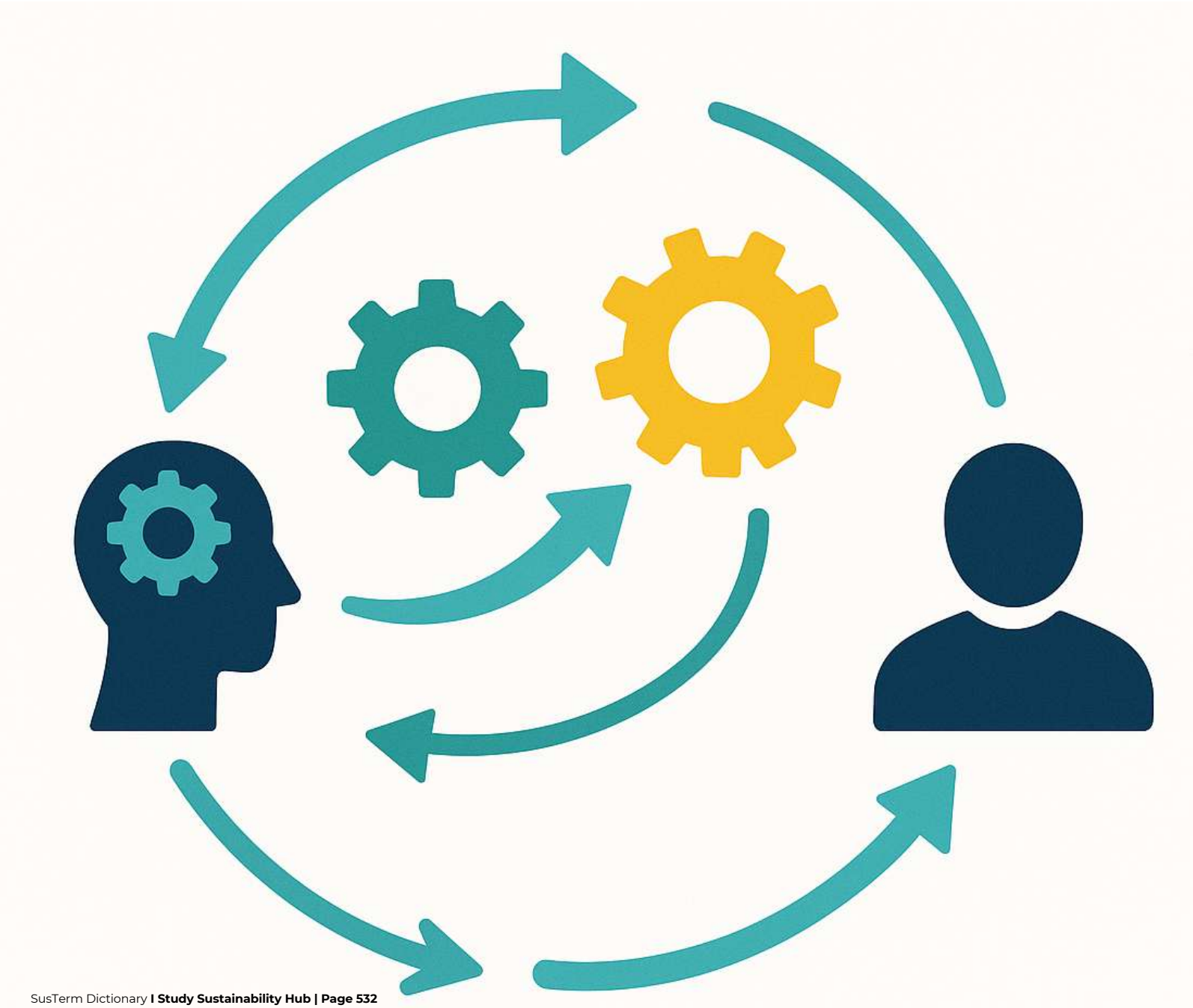
The short-term atmospheric conditions in a specific area, such as temperature, rainfall, wind, or humidity, over hours or days.

Example:
Forecast predicting thunderstorms tomorrow.

WHOLE SYSTEMS THINKING

An approach that views problems and solutions by considering entire interconnected systems rather than isolated components.

Example:
Designing a building by considering not just energy use, but also material sourcing, water use, and occupant well-being.



WILDLIFE CORRIDOR

A protected route that allows animals to move between habitats safely, supporting biodiversity and genetic diversity.

Example:
Highway overpasses built for animals to cross roads safely.

WILDLIFE CRIME

Illegal acts harming wildlife, including poaching, trafficking, or destruction of habitats, threatening species survival.

Example:
Illegal ivory trade fueling elephant poaching in Africa.

WILDLIFE FRIENDLY

Practices or products that protect or benefit wildlife, reducing harm to habitats and species.

Example:
Shade-grown coffee plantations that preserve bird habitats.

WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

The inclusion of individuals from varied backgrounds, identities, and perspectives within an organization, enhancing innovation and decision-making.

Example:
A company ensuring representation across gender, race, age, and ability in leadership roles.

WORKFORCE INCLUSION

Creating an environment where all employees feel valued, respected, and able to contribute fully, regardless of their background.

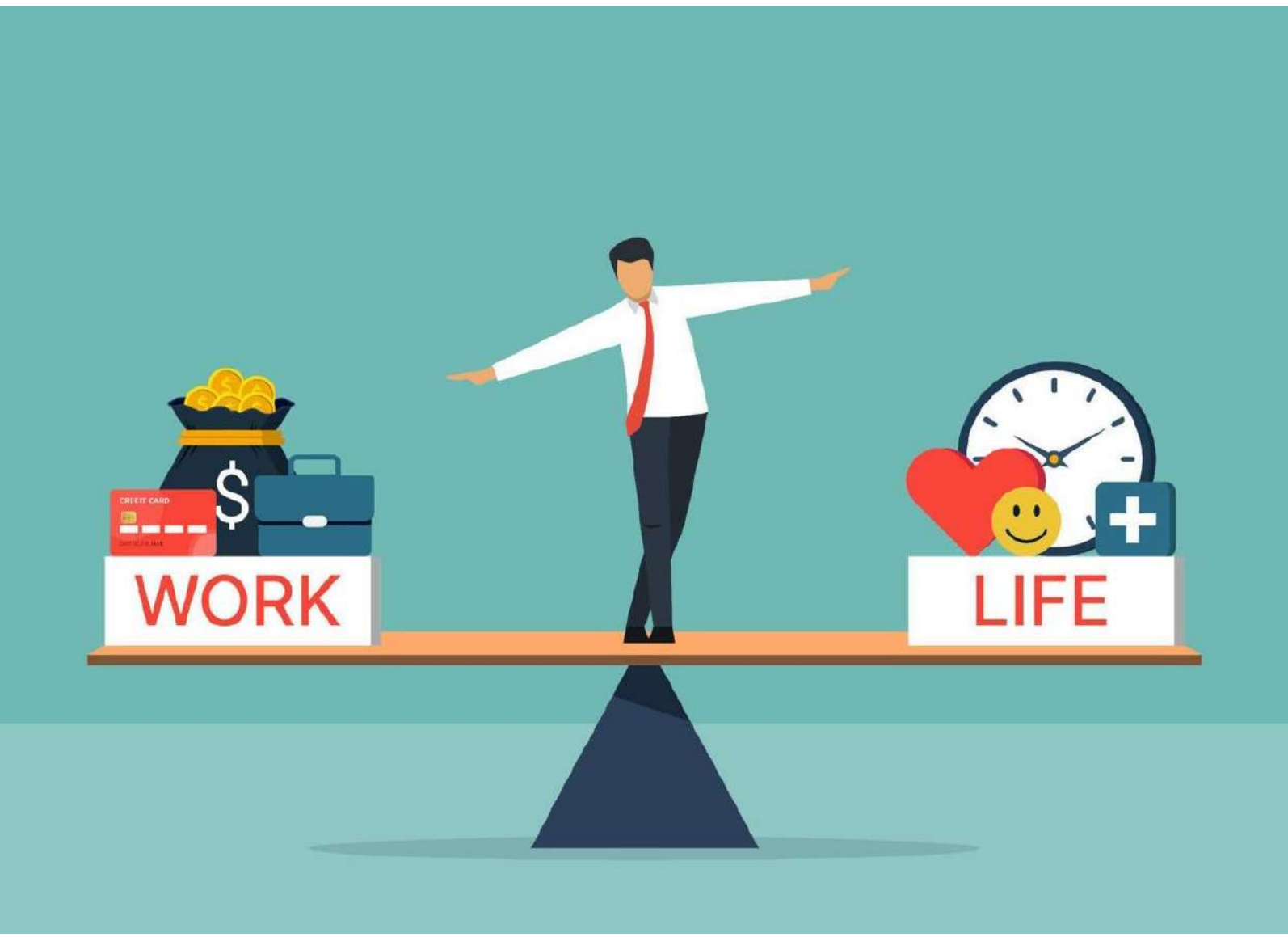
Example:
Providing flexible work arrangements to support employees with disabilities.

Credit: Chief Learning Officer, 2025

WORKPLACE WELLBEING

Policies, practices, and cultures that support employees' physical, mental, and emotional health at work.

Example:
Offering mental health support programs and promoting work-life balance.



Credit: vecteezy.com