

1 **The Role of Energy in Sustainable Development: Basic Facts and Issues**

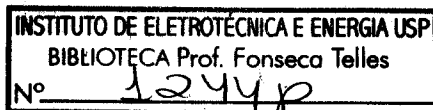
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The concept of sustainable development refers to development that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.¹ This has social, economic, and environmental dimensions. In all three areas the way energy is used and produced plays an essential role. Current primary energy sources in the world are shown in Figure 1-1.

The energy system today is heavily dependent on the use of fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas), which together account for 80 percent of global primary energy consumption. The large global energy system has the following characteristics:

- Total energy sales worldwide amount to some US\$1 trillion per year (3 percent of the world's gross domestic product).
- Subsidies on fossil fuel sales are on the order of US\$150 billion per year.
- Sales of 'new renewables' are on the order of US\$20 billion per year.

Figures 1-2 through 1-4 show the distribution of primary energy sources for industrialised, transition, and developing countries, and key facts about each of those systems.



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