Entrepreneurial Sustainability Canvas

Version 2.0

A practical tool to design ventures that create economic value, deliver sustainability outcomes, and stay legitimate in a world of scrutiny and controversy.

What you will get

- A clear problem-opportunity statement (business + sustainability).
- A value model (create / capture) that matches your stakeholders.
- A legitimacy plan: rules, expectations, and proof for your sustainability claim.

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Prior knowledge / experience

Business

Strength (1-10): ____________

Sustainability

Strength (1-10): ____________

Opportunities

What is the business opportunity AND the sustainability opportunity?

Business

Strength (1-10): ____________

Sustainability

Strength (1-10): ____________

Your product / service

What do you offer, to whom, and what do you replace/stop?

Legitimacy & sustainability context check

How will your sustainability claim be judged in the real world?

Rules / standards

Norms / expectations

Value conflicts (logics)

profit vs planet vs rights

Proof / trust signals

metrics, audits, partners

Tensions & trade-offs

Real trade-offs: who benefits, who pays, what's your red line?

Value arrangement

Develop = value you create; Sustain = value you protect/maintain

Develop

Sustain

Value exchange

Creation = for whom/how; Capture = from whom/how you earn

Creation

Capture

Execution

What resources and actions make this real?

Key resources

Key actions

Safeguards & red lines

Foreseeable harms + how you prevent/repair them

Expected outcomes & evidence

Economic + sustainability outcomes, and how you will prove them

Economic gains

Sustainability gains

Evidence / legitimacy proof

How to use the Canvas

Workshop flow (4 hours)

- Work in teams of 3-5. One person is the scribe (writes), one is the skeptic (asks who pays), one is the evidence keeper.
- Use sticky notes first. Do not aim for perfect writing; aim for clear choices.
- Sequence: Opportunity -> Product -> Value (Develop/Sustain) -> Exchange (Create/Capture) -> Context check -> Execution -> Outcomes.

Step 1 (5 min): Choose a venture focus

Pick one: your own idea or a real market problem you care about. Write one sentence: "We help ___ to ___ by ___."

Step 2 (15 min): Opportunity + Product

- Fill Opportunities (Business + Sustainability). Make them specific and measurable.
- Fill Product/Service. State what you replace/stop (waste, unsafe behavior, opacity, etc.).

Step 3 (15 min): Value design

- Fill Develop (value you create) and Sustain (value you protect).
- Fill Creation/Capture. If you cannot explain capture, you do not have a business yet.

Step 4 (15 min): Legitimacy & context check

- Identify rules/standards and stakeholder expectations that define what "sustainable" means in this field.
- Name one value conflict (profit vs planet vs rights). Decide your red line.

Step 5 (15 min): Execution + Outcomes

- List key resources and actions for the first 90 days.
- Write outcomes and how you will prove them (metrics, audits, partners).

Output: 5-minute pitch

Pitch your canvas: merge all the blocks into one compelling story, and proof plan.Peers challenge the weakest block.

Legitimacy, institutions, and sustainability

Why the context check matters for sustainability

Sustainability is contested: different audiences use different "rules of worth" to judge whether your venture is responsible. The same action can look sustainable to one group and unacceptable to another. The context check helps you anticipate backlash, comply early, and design credible proof.

A simple way to use institutional logics

- Market logic: price, growth, efficiency (investors, many customers).
- State logic: compliance, safety, sovereignty (regulators, public procurement).
- Community/civic logic: fairness, dignity, rights (workers, NGOs, local communities).
- Professional logic: standards and best practice (auditors, engineers, certifications).
- Ecological logic: planetary boundaries and ecosystems (climate and nature advocates).

How to apply it (3 questions)

- Who are your top 3 audiences (e.g., customers, regulator, NGO)? Which logic do they use most?
- Where do logics clash (e.g., speed vs safety, margin vs fairness)? Which trade-off will you take on purpose?
- What proof will satisfy each audience (metrics, audits, certifications, transparency, governance)?

Rule of thumb

Translate your venture for each audience, but do not change the core reality. If your sustainability claim needs hiding, it needs redesign.

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Prior knowledge / experience

Business

Built B2B apps

Partnered with restaurants

Sales + UX

Strength (1-10): ______

Sustainability

Food waste & circular economy

LCA basics

Equity lens

Strength (1-10): ______

Opportunities

Business

Restaurants lose money on unsold food.

Consumers want cheaper meals.

Strength (1-10): ______

Sustainability

Cut food waste + emissions.

Support affordable access.

Strength (1-10): ______

Your product / service

App matching consumers with discounted surplus food from restaurants & stores.

Legitimacy & sustainability context check

Rules / standards

Food safety rules;

allergen info;

Norms / expectations

No 'poverty marketing'.

Fair treatment of workers.

Value conflicts (logics)

Market: margin + volume.

State: safety +

Proof / trust signals

Kg food saved;

CO2e avoided;

Tensions & trade-offs

Low price vs fair pay.

Growth vs quality control.

Who pays for logistics?

Value arrangement

Develop

Revenue for vendors.

Affordable meals.

Local jobs.

Sustain

Less waste to landfill.

Lower emissions.

Community support.

Value exchange

Creation

For restaurants (sell surplus);

for users (cheap meals);

for city (less waste).

Capture

Commission per sale.

Subscription for vendors.

Data insights (opt-in).

Execution

Key resources

App + matching engine;

restaurant partners;

Key actions

Onboard vendors;

quality checks;

Safeguards & red lines

No deceptive impact claims.

Safety checks + traceability.

Clear complaint/appeal process.

Expected outcomes & evidence

Economic gains
Commission revenue.

Sustainability gains
Waste + CO2e reduction.

Evidence / legitimacy proof
Monthly impact report.