

The Social Dimension in Achieving Sustainable Development



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Received date: 26/11/2025

Accepted date: 15/12/2025

Publication date: 01/01/2026

Abstract:

Sustainable development is one of the modern concepts through which the state seeks to improve the quality of life for future generations. It attempts to enhance the social dimension so as to achieve its developmental objectives whenever social security and stability are ensured. This is done through the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities, which guarantees the realization of social justice in a manner that is consistent with the goals of sustainable development.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development; Social Security; Social Justice; Social Dimension.

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Introduction:

Development is one of the modern concepts which represents a qualitative shift at the level of society as a whole and across all its social strata. Development seeks to elevate human thinking, to invest in latent human capacities, and to secure a dignified life for the individual. Consequently, it acquires economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

Contrary to what some economists once believed, the realization of development requires directing attention not only to economic growth, but also to social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. This proceeds from the principle that development is a comprehensive process which cannot be confined to the quantitative aspect alone (that is, growth). If it were restricted to growth only, it would be exposed to risks in the long term. To avoid such risks, it has become necessary to address what is now commonly referred to as sustainable development.

Within the scope of sustainable development, the social domain occupies an important place. It is concerned with raising the standard of living—both quantitatively and qualitatively—to the highest possible level and with eliminating poverty. This cannot be achieved unless the aggravation of unemployment is brought under control, effective contributions are made to the creation of job opportunities, and active encouragement is given to education and the provision of healthcare services.

Among the dimensions of sustainable development, the social dimension stands out, especially as a new dimension for a deeper understanding of the level of development, through its focus on social welfare. This is what has increased our interest in examining the social dimension in sustainable development.

First: Sustainable Development:

1. The Concept of Sustainable Development:

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines sustainable development as: "the conscious management and protection of the natural resource base and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner as to ensure the continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations, in a continuous way, with the aim of improving the quality of life in all sectors and domains."(Karbali, 2010, P45).

Sustainable development is, therefore, a form of development that takes into account the rights of future generations to natural resources. It accords great importance to the essential needs of human beings in all sectors—health, education, housing, work, and food—on a permanent basis that guarantees the quality of social life. Through this, the importance of the social dimension in sustainable development becomes evident. From this concept, we can derive that

sustainable development embodies a set of characteristics, which may be summarized as follows:(Abu Al-Nasr, 2017, P29).

- The ultimate objective of sustainable development plans is to achieve human well-being and prosperity.
- Sustainable development emphasizes popular participation, or citizen participation, as one of the manifestations of democracy in all stages of the developmental process and in benefiting from its outcomes.
- It has an ethical nature and carries human values that help to guide it morally and socially.
- It is a purposeful and conscious process of change rather than a random one; it is based on long-term strategies, phased and concurrent objectives, deliberate plans, and programs rooted in reality, in order to address challenges in a fundamental and structural manner.
- It is essentially directed toward meeting the needs and requirements of the poorest segments of society and seeks to limit the aggravation of poverty in the world by achieving a balance between the environmental, economic, and social systems, thereby realizing social welfare.
- Its components cannot be separated, nor can its indicators be measured in isolation, due to the overlap between the quantitative and qualitative dimensions it contains.
- It is based on the idea of social justice between individuals, between generations, and between peoples. It also pays attention to the role of civil society and its organizations, as well as all groups of society—particularly women and children—in developmental activities, in a way that contributes to raising the standard of living of members of society.
- It pays attention to resources—whether human, environmental, or societal—and strives, through its various activities, to raise awareness about the need to preserve and invest them, especially in their connection with human development. The continuity of development depends on human decisions; therefore, empowering human beings, educating them, and organizing them constitutes one of its basic pillars.
- It places the time factor at the core of its considerations, as it is a form of long-term development based on assessing present capacities while respecting the rights of future generations to the available societal resources, or those that can be made available. It also depends on coordination and integration between resource uses, investment orientations, and institutional structures.

2. Elements of Sustainable Development:

In order to achieve sustainable development, it is necessary to identify the most important elements on which it is based:(Madjid , 2016, P50).

a) The Economic Element:

This element refers to improving the standard of living of individuals by meeting their needs for goods and services. The economic dimension of sustainable development revolves around the present and future impacts of the economy on the environment. It raises the issue of choosing, funding, and improving industrial techniques in the field of the use of natural resources.

The economic element can be limited to the share of individual consumption from natural resources and the need to end their depletion by changing consumption patterns that threaten biological diversity. It also encompasses the responsibility of advanced countries for pollution and for addressing it, as the problems of global pollution fall on the industrialized countries. In addition, it seeks to reduce the dependence of developing countries, to devote natural resources to the continuous improvement of living standards, and to recognize the close links between poverty and environmental degradation, rapid population growth, underdevelopment resulting from colonial history, and absolute dependence on capitalist powers. The economic element calls for reducing disparities in income and, consequently, for achieving greater equality in the distribution of resources.

b) The Social Element:

In this domain, the idea of sustainable development emerges through the eradication of hunger and poverty, the reduction of widespread unemployment, and the limitation of discrimination and inequality between the sexes, as well as the reduction of violence against women and all matters related to vulnerable groups in all areas of social life. The social element is thus a foundation for development and contributes to the realization of social justice among members of the present generation and between the present and future generations.

c) The Environmental Element:

The environmental dimension of sustainable development is of great importance because it addresses the relationship between development and the environment by laying down the foundations on which the limits that must not be exceeded are built. This element is represented in the preservation of natural resources and their optimal use on a sustainable basis guided by precaution and conservation (Abu Al-Nasr, 2017, P35).

The environmental elements can be summarized as follows: preventing soil destruction through pesticides and the devastation of plant cover; improving the efficiency of water networks; reducing the loss of biological habitats, that is, preserving the richness of the Earth's biological diversity for future generations;

protecting the climate from global warming; and ensuring the rational exploitation of energy and mineral resources.

d) The Technological Element:

Sustainable development is associated with strengthening the use of technological means that are more compatible with rapid technological transformation due to their capacity to evolve, to save natural resources, to reduce pollution, and to contribute to the development of societies in the shortest possible time, within an environment that achieves social stability and environmental balance (Issa Ali Ibrahim, 2004, P23).

3. Goals of Sustainable Development:

The concept of sustainable development has been used to express the formation and evolution of dynamic systems that are subject to structural changes leading to progress in their elements. Its goals seek to improve the quality of life through developmental strategies. On this basis, future development goals over the long term were articulated in the form of seventeen goals, which can be detailed as follows: (Touati, March 2017, P60).

Goal 1: End Poverty

The core of sustainable development is to provide people, in all parts of the world, with the support they need to liberate themselves from poverty in all its manifestations. This includes providing opportunities for decent work, ensuring access to basic services, and adopting policies that protect the poorest and most vulnerable segments of society so that they may overcome poverty on a sustainable basis.

Goal 2: End Hunger

Sustainable development seeks to achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. This goal addresses the fundamental human need to obtain sufficient, healthy food and the means and mechanisms through which food can be provided on a sustainable basis for all. It includes improving agricultural productivity, protecting farmers—particularly smallholders—and ensuring the resilience of food systems in the face of crises and climate change.

Goal 3: Ensure Healthy Lives for All at All Ages

This goal encompasses all major priorities in the field of health. It calls for improving general health levels, promoting maternal and child health, ending communicable diseases and other health risks, and ensuring that everyone has access to safe, effective, high-quality, and affordable medicines and vaccines. It also stresses the importance of providing health coverage and services for all without discrimination.

Goal 4: Eradicate Illiteracy and Ensure Quality Education

This goal seeks to guarantee that all people have access to quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning. It goes beyond mere school enrollment to include the acquisition of twenty-first-century skills in an effective manner. It aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable education and at enhancing opportunities for learning at all stages of life, thereby contributing to human development and social progress. (Khaled Mostafa Qassem, 2007, P72)

Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality

This goal is pursued by empowering women and granting them a greater role in national development on an equal footing with men. It calls for the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in some societies and for the achievement of gender equality in a way that does not conflict with Islamic law. It further includes addressing violence against women, ensuring their participation in decision-making, and guaranteeing their social and economic rights.

Goal 6: Ensure the Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All

This goal aims at addressing challenges related to access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene services for the population. If the quality and sustainability of water resources and sanitation services are not ensured, progress in many other fields will be impeded. Therefore, it calls for improving water quality, increasing water-use efficiency, and providing adequate sanitation facilities for all.

Goal 7: Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable, and Modern Energy for All

This goal seeks to ensure that everyone can benefit from modern energy services by expanding opportunities for access, improving the efficiency of energy use, and increasing reliance on electricity, clean fuels, and clean technologies. It also emphasizes the use of renewable energy sources in order to limit negative environmental impacts and support sustainable development.

Goal 8: Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth

Economic growth is the main driver of sustainable development. Through it, a greater number of people can leave the circle of poverty, especially when accompanied by the expansion of opportunities for full and productive employment. This goal therefore seeks to promote economic policies that support decent work, improve productivity, and ensure that growth benefits all segments of society.

Goal 9: Build Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization and Foster Innovation

Infrastructure, industrialization, and innovation constitute three key drivers of economic growth. When these drivers are available to all in a resilient and sustainable manner, economic growth supports sustainable development. This

goal calls for building quality, reliable, and sustainable infrastructure; promoting industries that make efficient use of resources; and encouraging innovation and technological progress.

Goal 10: Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries

This goal seeks to reduce all forms and manifestations of discrimination and to achieve equality among members of society in rights, duties, and available opportunities. It also aims at protecting the right of every human being to a dignified life by addressing disparities in income and ensuring the inclusion of marginalized and vulnerable groups. (Issa Ali Ibrahim, 2004, P41)

Goal 11: Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable

The world has witnessed unprecedented rates of urban growth, with more than half of the world's population now living in cities. Cities must therefore become incubators of innovation and contributors to employment and economic growth. This goal focuses on improving urban planning, providing adequate housing and basic services, reducing environmental impacts, and strengthening resilience to disasters.

Goal 12: Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

This goal focuses on decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation. It calls for ensuring the sound management of chemicals and hazardous waste in ways that reduce their impact on human life and the environment. It also encourages sustainable consumption patterns, efficient use of natural resources, and the reduction of waste at all stages of production and consumption.

Goal 13: Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and Its Impacts

In recent years, the need to make stronger efforts to build resilience and reduce climate-related risks and natural disasters has become evident. This goal calls for integrating climate change measures into national policies and planning, improving awareness and institutional capacity, and supporting actions that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. (Khaled Mostafa, 2007, P72)

Goal 14: Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources

Oceans cover nearly three-quarters of the planet and contain the largest ecosystem on Earth. However, the increasing negative effects of climate change, overfishing, and marine pollution are putting oceans, seas, and marine resources at risk. This weakens recent gains that have been made in protecting parts of the world's oceans. The goal therefore focuses on conserving marine ecosystems, regulating exploitation, and reducing pollution to safeguard marine biodiversity.

Goal 15: Protect, Restore and Promote Sustainable Use of Terrestrial Ecosystems

Protected and restored ecosystems, along with the biodiversity they support, can help mitigate the effects of climate change. This goal calls for conserving terrestrial ecosystems, combating desertification, halting and reversing land degradation, and preventing biodiversity loss. It also seeks to strengthen the resilience of ecosystems in the face of increasing human pressures and natural disasters.

Goal 16: Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development

Issues of peace, justice, effective, accountable and inclusive institutions are fundamental to sustainable development. This goal emphasizes reducing all forms of violence, ensuring equal access to justice, combating corruption, and building transparent institutions that are accountable to the public.

Goal 17: Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Achieving the goals of sustainable development requires a stronger commitment to partnership and cooperation at the global level. This goal calls for coherent policies and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels, and for all actors. It highlights the importance of mobilizing financial resources, transferring technology, building capacity, and enhancing international trade and partnerships to support sustainable development efforts.

Second: The Social Dimension:

1. Concept of the Social Dimension (Social Dimension)

The social dimension focuses on the fact that the human being constitutes the core and ultimate goal of development. It does so through an emphasis on social justice, combating poverty, and providing social services to all those who need them. It also includes ensuring democracy through popular participation in decision-making in a transparent manner, as well as the sustainability of institutions and cultural diversity.(Hamza, 2021, P63).

In addition to this, the social dimension addresses the challenge posed by rapid and unstable demographic growth, which makes it necessary to preserve human balance by finding an equilibrium between the exploitation of available resources—such as oil, petroleum, and other natural resources—and the long-term size of the population for future generations. The social dimension is therefore concerned with achieving the highest possible degree of popular participation by raising awareness among members of society and encouraging solidarity in building a united society that embodies the principle of equal opportunities, leading to the realization of social justice.

2. Objectives of the Social Dimension:

The use of indicators lies in assessing the extent to which states and institutions actually progress toward achieving the objectives of sustainable

development, so that policymakers may rely on them when making decisions. Dependence on sound indicators helps in achieving goals and in providing the conditions that enable states and human beings to realize the following objectives: (Madjid mellouk semrani, 2016, P49)

a) Social Equality:

This includes achieving fairness in the distribution of wealth and combating poverty. Two key indicators are used to measure the extent to which states realize social justice: the proportion of the population living below the poverty line and the degree of disparity between wealthy and poor groups.

b) Healthcare:

This refers to appropriate healthcare for all segments of the population, with particular attention to remote areas and rural regions. It also includes controlling endemic diseases and epidemics resulting from environmental pollution. The progress of healthcare is measured through indicators such as maternal and child mortality rates, the provision of primary healthcare, life expectancy at birth, and the rate of immunization against infectious diseases.

c) Education:

Education is one of the most important human rights in any modern society. This is achieved by redirecting education toward the importance of development, the means of achieving it, and its various fields. It also involves increasing awareness among individuals—especially the poor—about the importance of education for the individual and for society. Indicators of educational progress include literacy rates, the continuation of individuals in the educational process, and the percentage of state expenditure on education and scientific research.

d) Housing and Population:

Rapid population growth and the migration of rural populations to cities affect the achievement of sustainable development and may lead to the failure of economic and urban development plans. Two indicators are used to measure this: the rate of population growth and the per capita share of urban buildings or housing. (Nouredine harmez, 2007, P28)

e) Social Security:

This refers to protecting individuals from crime and ensuring security, which is realized through the achievement of justice, democracy, peace, and social stability.

Third: The Social Dimension in Sustainable Development:

The social dimension in sustainable development refers to paying attention to providing opportunities for access to work and public services, most

notably health, education, and justice. Sustainability in this context is understood as "how to achieve growth that takes into consideration and respects the human dimension in all its economic, social, and ethical aspects." This cannot be accomplished without eliminating all forms of imbalances and disparities—whether within the same society among its various groups, between the North and the South, or between different generations (National, 2025, P110).

Some scholars believe that the idea of sustainability relies on two indicators: the first is environmental and is called the "ecological footprint"; the second is social and is referred to as the "social development index." The ecological footprint makes it possible to measure the area of land exploited for development, whereas the social development index includes, among other things, poverty, unemployment, quality of life, education, and population growth. Economies that are characterized by sustainability are those that strive to meet and respect both conditions simultaneously.

Social development cannot be achieved without ensuring that human beings attain a minimum standard of living below which they should not fall. This involves providing education, healthcare, adequate housing, and suitable work that corresponds to human capacities, as well as social security and insurance, the elimination of exploitation, and the removal of unequal opportunities.

Despite the growing interest in achieving sustainability, the current reality of states—especially developing ones—does not allow this sustainable development to be fully realized, due to the aggravation of poverty in all its forms and components, the persistence of illiteracy and unemployment, and high mortality rates, among other factors. From the perspective of sustainability, it becomes clear that social issues are closely linked to economic growth and development, and that achieving sustainable development depends on addressing social issues across all social sectors. (Salma, 2020, P93)

Work and unemployment can be considered the missing link in the equation of sustainable development and its relationship to social security. For individuals to feel reassured and free of threats to their lives, it is necessary to emancipate them from injustice and social deprivation and to ensure their ability to adapt to social changes in a way that allows them to reach social welfare. The absence of such conditions would amount to a violation of human rights and dignity and would increase the risk of social tensions and violence. Therefore, striving to reach a level of life appropriate for the productive working class is the core of development and the key to eradicating poverty.

The sustainability of the social dimension is one of the components of human development and aims at providing the conditions that allow future generations to preserve human dignity. This requires effort on the part of present generations, thereby contributing to the provision of the elements necessary for long-term growth for future generations.

Poverty is closely linked to work and unemployment. The World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen affirmed the existence of a connection between the eradication of poverty and employment. There is also a direct relationship between the qualitative components of employment—such as the level of qualification, training, and competence—and poverty and labor productivity (Noureddine, 2007, P67)

Improving productivity is a vital source for sustainable and non-inflationary improvements in living standards, job opportunities, the reduction of poverty, and the achievement of social protection and social welfare. This is what the social dimension seeks to achieve for all members of society.

Conclusion:

Sustainable development represents a form of development that allows for continuity and stability from the perspective of its employment of social dimensions. This takes place through a strategy that takes into account the achievement of social balance and the provision of equal opportunities for all members of society.

We have addressed the importance of the relationship that links the social dimension and sustainable development, and it has become clear that they flow in the same direction: the essential concern for the human being through development and sustainability, while placing social programs, principles, and objectives that seek development and sustainability within a framework that respects the social dimension.

It is not possible for the various dimensions of development to contribute effectively to the implementation of their goals without committing themselves to their responsibilities toward the society in which they operate, while also coordinating with other active dimensions and ensuring their effectiveness and continuity in achieving their objectives for future generations over the long term.

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