



TOWARDS THE DEFINITION AND ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL COMPONENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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ABSTRACT

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This paper defines social development in the context of sustainable development. To this end, the concept of development and its evolution has been reviewed over the past seven decades. The concept of development has evolved from economic growth to poverty alleviation, sustainable development, human development, and most recently the millennium development goals towards sustainable development goals. A preliminary finding shows that the concept of development has focused more on the economic and environmental aspects in comparison to the social aspect of development. In recent years, however, the concept of sustainable development has begun to emphasis on the social aspect as a fundamental aspect of development. Thereafter, it has gained significant recognition, especially in the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in the late 1990s. However, the definition of social development remains vague and there is no consensus of what perspectives should be adopted in defining social development. Therefore, this paper aims to define and analyse social development from related modern literature on development and argues for the need for a new definition of the social component of sustainable development. Furthermore, the paper adopts meta-analysis and content analysis methods by reviewing and analysing related literature on development from journals, books, conferences, and reports.

Contribution/ Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature that provides a comprehensive overview of the current understanding of social development and identifies the main propositions of the concept. Besides, the analysis of the existing social component of sustainable development can give insights in developing more comprehensive social development concept in the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of development has appeared as a formal set of theoretical principles and policy prescriptions after the Second World War. Numerous studies and researches have been conducted on the concept of development in various scientific fields including sociology and economics. There is inconsistency in terms of defining the concept of development because of the emergence of many theoretical principles. As a result, the concept of development became complex, multifaceted and developed or almost meaningless when applied.

Over the past seven decades, the concept of development has evolved from economic growth to poverty alleviation, sustainable development, human development, and most recently the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). During this period, many countries are racing at various levels of their economic and development to put forward the economic and development plans and design the required strategic planning. Available literature suggested that economic growth is considered necessary but not enough condition to reduce the problem of poverty, unemployment and other social issues facing developing countries. It also suggested that rapid economic growth would lead to a negative impact that hinders the development efforts and plans made by those countries. For this reason, it could lead to a rapid deterioration in the quality and level of the environment as well as to the damage of ecological and natural resources. This idea has contributed significantly to the reformulation of conventional development perspective.

In recent decades, several development economists concluded that real development is no longer viewed as the value of physical and material aspects. Thus, they began the research for an accurate concept of economic development that would be beyond the weaknesses and limitations of conventional economic development. It became an urgent need for a new concept of development based on a healthy economy, broad participation of development benefits and revenues that meet the needs of humanity. At the same time, it tries properly to protect the environmental resources and their uses that enables future generations to meet their needs. As a result, the idea of sustainable development has appeared as a concept that blends many components. It is a comprehensive and most appropriate compared to previous development concepts and theories. In the 1987 Brundtland Report of United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined development as: “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). This definition looked at sustainable development from three aspects: social, economic, and environmental. Yet during the period, sustainable development focused solely on economic and environmental aspects giving little emphasis to the social aspect, which is very fundamental to sustainable development. In recent years, the social component which is the key focus in this paper appeared as an important aspect of development. Thereafter, it has gained significant recognition, but its definition is still vague. Many development economists have discussed numerous definitions of social development, but most of these definitions are generally not recognized and there is no consensus of what perspectives should be adopted in defining social development in the context of sustainable development. Each author or policymaker derives their own definition according to discipline-specific criteria or study perspective, making a generalised definition difficult to achieve.

In view of the limitations of existing social development definition, this paper attempts to define and analyse social development from related modern literature on development and argues for the need of a new definition of the social component of sustainable development. The final expected outcome of this study is a comprehensive definition reflecting social development in the setting of sustainable development. This paper is divided into three major areas in addition to the conclusion. The first section discusses the introduction of the study. The second section describes the data and research methods. The third section reviews the concept of development and its evolution over the past seventy years from related modern literature on development and argues for the need of a new definition of social component of sustainable development. This section also describes the definition and analysis social development. The concluding section presents the research conclusion and suggestion.

2. DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

This paper examines the definition and analysis of social development in the context of sustainable development. The paper is evaluative in nature focusing more on qualitative information collecting and analysis. This study adopts meta-analysis and content analysis methods by reviewing and analysing of related literature on economic development from contemporary journal articles, conference paper proceedings as well as from books and reports. Accordingly, it has been done a systematic literature review by using available library sources related to economic development and its evolutions throughout the research process.

3. EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

The concept of development has evolved through six major phases in the past two centuries: economic growth in (1950s) and (1960s), poverty alleviation (1970s), sustainable development (1980s), human development (1990s), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in (2000s), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in (2015). What is obvious in these phases are the focus on material development, and lack of emphasis on social development, among others.

Although the idea of development was mainly used in the context of economic development, it has been interpreted as economic growth during the 1950s and 1960s, which became the focus and the main instrument to bring about structural and functional changes to individuals and society. Hence, economic growth became the main objective of development (Aziz *et al.*, 2015). However, during this period, development economists have found that economic growth is considered necessary but not enough condition to reduce the problem of poverty, unemployment and other social issues facing developing countries. They argued that growth policies are needed to be accompanied by social policies that directly address the problem of poverty. Among the notable economists who directly responded to the integration of economic and social policies was when he published a study in the late 1950s entitled 'economic theory and under-developed regions'. Myrdal argued that the combination of economic and social policies is needed to ensure that economic growth raised the standard of living of the entire population. He concluded his study by advising the United Nations on formulating an approach to economic development planning known as 'unified socioeconomic development' which would achieve this objective. In the same line, Seers (1969) argued that the impressive economic growth rates recorded in many developing countries since the 1950s did not accompany by a concomitant decline in poverty and unemployment. He stated that development may not have meaning unless it was accompanied by social improvement. Therefore, development policy must address the problem of inequality. This required policies that would be promoted equality (Midgley, 2014). In this discussion, there is a clear emphasis that development is not only concerned with economic policies but also the integration of social policies is needed in order to achieve real economic development.

The debate on the issue of economic growth has led to the redefinition of economic development. The concept was expanded in the 1970s to include the notion of poverty alleviation, with a new emphasis on the distribution of income (Ayasrah, 2012). During the period, the concern of many people living subsistence lives in poverty has led development economists to focus and think more on the lives of people instead of their income. This raised the question of whether the objective of development could be realized and sustained by only a rise in income and wealth and the satisfaction of just the material needs of the people (Chapra, 2008). Development economists failed to provide appropriate answers to their excessive emphasis on physical aspects of development at the expense of the social conditions of people's life. This was shown by the fact that even though real income dramatically rose in several countries during the period, the self-reported subjective well-being of their populations did not only fail to increase but in fact declined (Chapra, 2008). It is widely believed that the focus on man's material needs at the neglect of the social factors were the reasons for the disappointing concept of economic development.

Several development economists have argued that the concept of development focuses on the inequalities income and wealth that accompany economic growth. Kuznets (1955) proposed that although income inequality is most marked in the earliest stage of development and will subsequently be reduced, Seers (1969) and others argued that government intervention is needed to address the problem. Furthermore, Chenery *et al.* (1974) and others discussed that the fast pace of economic growth did not by itself spread the benefit of economic development sufficiently widely to raise standards of living for all and, for this reason, they argued that measures that directly reduce income and wealth inequality are needed (Midgley, 2014). As Schultz (1981) argued the concept of human capital investment which affirmed the need for educational, nutrition and health programs that would enhance population quality and, at the same time, contribute to development. Furthermore, Boserup (1970) and others argued that women are not only mainly responsible for the well being of the family but play a vital role in economic

development. They actively involved in agriculture, crafts, trade and other productive economic activities, all of which researchers and international organizations were ignored. This debate gave rise to a powerful movement that campaigned for women's contribution to be recognised and for an end to gender discrimination and oppression (Midgley, 2014).

In general, therefore, several development economists concluded that real development is no longer viewed as the value of physical and material aspects. They also found that the focus of development on material and physical aspects did not include the sustainability of growth in the future due to the destruction of resources, environmental degradations and others. Thereafter, they started thinking about sustainability to ensure the right of the future generation in these resources was preserved. In the 1980s, the global trend on the concept of development shifted to sustainable development, coinciding with a time when the world was experiencing large scale environmental degradations (Sakamoto, 2009). Hence in the 1987 Brundtland Report, the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) connected the following concept of development to include environmental issue: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). This definition looked at sustainable development from three aspects: social, economic, and environmental. Yet during the period, sustainable development focused solely on economic and environmental factors giving little emphasis to the social factor, which is very fundamental to sustainable development. Therefore, there are very few works of literature that focus on social component of sustainable development to the extent that a comprehensive study of this concept is still missing.

Many researchers such as Metzner (2000); Dempsey *et al.* (2011); Boström (2012); Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017) agreed that the definition of social development remains unclear and there is no agreement of what criteria and perspectives should be adopted in defining social development in the context of sustainable development. Murphy (2014) described that social development is the most conceptually elusive dimension in sustainable development discourse. In fact, Littig and Griessler (2005) argued that approaches to social component of sustainable development do not have a theoretical base but only depends on a practical understanding of plausibility and current political agendas. Moreover, a recent study by indicated that social component of sustainable development is currently dealt with in connection with the social implication of environmental politics rather than as an equally constitutive component of sustainable development. Furthermore, Metzner (2000) also criticised these disjointed approaches of social component by saying that social policy research or social sciences has been proposed a set of social objectives strategies and measurement instruments, but it is very little attention of the social component from a sustainable development perspective. Therefore, although there exist abundant social research studies and policy documents, these have rarely been defined in the context of sustainable development. In the same vein with an emphasis on the conception of social development, Brown *et al.* (2009) and Boström (2012) highlighted that social factors: income equality or employment rates could be maximized or measured, but the problems when it comes to such social matters as social recognition, quality of life and well-being of people. They argued that the essential differences in the attributes of sustainable development dimensions: environmental, economic, and social show the inadequate of measuring, reporting and conceiving of these facets in the same way.

Although sustainable development concept emphasised that the primary goal of development was to create a better condition of life (economic, environmental and social aspects), in fact, social and human dimensions were neglected. The discussion on this missing dimension contributed significantly to the reformulation of the ideas of making development humane. In the 1990s, human development became the primary goal of development, thus placing people at the center of the development agenda. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) promoted the concept of human development by redefining development as centering on people rather than simple material growth and as a process of enlarging people's choices, enriching the idea of social development (Sakamoto, 2009). This implies that the conceptualization of human development closely related to the foundation of the social development concept (Sakamoto, 2009). Hence, the concept of social development became refined, and its

importance was confirmed globally in the Social Summit of 1995. The Social Summit described social development in terms of three basic criteria: poverty eradication, employment generation, and social harmony. The leaders of state or government agreed that development should promote and improve the quality of people's life. The leaders also emphasised that economic and social objectives will be accordingly connected which together with social and economic elements donate to sustainable development (Aziz *et al.*, 2015). Although the Summit provided the countries' considerable strengths in areas of poverty, education, health and employment, the countries' ability to address other important dimensions of the Summit agenda such as the social impact of adjustment, and issues of diversity and pluralism, social cohesion and social integration were left behind (Davis, 2004). The debate on these issues led to the expansions of the dimensions of development to reflect the dynamics of social aspect of development.

In the 2000s, the emphasis on development shifted to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a new vision for the global efforts on development over the next 15 years. In this new concept, the following eight goals that focused on social development were spelled out: the reduction of poverty, improvements in school attendance, the promotion of gender equity, reductions in child and maternal mortality and enhanced international cooperation (Midgley, 2014). It was expected that by 2015, the human race socially would have achieved the following: ending extreme poverty, achieving quality education for all and getting rid of preventable disease. However, by 2015 much of these goals were not achieved because the MDGs lost its direction and instead focused on poverty relative to meeting the basic needs and poverty alleviation.

Many researchers have discussed that the MDGs have focused more on poverty alleviation as only one of the seven key goals of the Declaration, while other social goals such as peace, security, human rights and democracy were ignored (Gwatkin, 2005; Waage *et al.*, 2010). Fehling *et al.* (2013) argued that the empowerment of women and gender equality of the MDGs were limited to gender equality in education. Furthermore, Other authors argued that social goals such as equity and equality appeared as an essential value of the Millennium Declaration, but most of its elements are insufficiently addressed in the literature. Indeed, Fukuda-Parr (2010) believed that equity and equality have missed from MDGs as a goal for reducing inequality among and between countries. While, Brikci and Holder (2011) identified "a missing focus on the 'poorest of the poor', masked by using national averages or aggregated information". Vandemoortele (2011) "even calls it a 'tyranny of averages' where issues of inclusive and equitable progress are ignored within the framework due to 'abstractions and over-generalization". Besides that, Maxwell (2003) argued that the formulation of poverty reduction in objective one of the MDG have prioritised material aspects of deprivation over non-material ones' and leads to a reduced concept of poverty. Fukuda-Parr (2016) stated that the eight MDGs and 21 targets were limited to ending extreme poverty, thus reconceptualising development.

Due to these limitations of MDGs, a new concept of development emerged: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It was intended to remedy the weaknesses in MDGs. The SDGs are about sustainable development as new guidance and principle for economic, environmental, and social development after 2015 (Dariah *et al.*, 2016). In late 2015, the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which comprises a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Dariah *et al.*, 2016). The 17 goals are primarily intended for the well-being of human beings. According to eight of these goals are mainly focused on social component that includes poverty alleviation, zero hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, decent work and economic growth and reduce inequality. It is expected that by 2030, the human race socially will have achieved: end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, good health, quality of education, and tackle climate change (Dariah *et al.*, 2016). However, social development appeared as a vital component of sustainable development, but still the availability of literature that focuses on the social component of sustainable development to the extent that a comprehensive study of this concept is still missing.

Based on the discussions above, social development has offered a unique response to the weakness and limitations of the development concept over the past seventy years. It offers a broad macro perspective on social welfare and implies a variety of strategies which seek to enhance the levels of living of the whole population. It also offers a comprehensive perspective on social issues such as quality of life, community well-being, and social recognition. Although these achievements, social development is still poorly defined and there are very few attempts to define social development as an independent dimension of sustainable development. Besides that, there is also no consensus of what criteria and perspectives should be adopted in defining social component in the context of development. According to Pawar and Cox (2010b) definitions of social development are varied and differs from author to author. Based on the discussion above, it could be categorized almost all of the definitions of recognized scholars of social development in two categories based on their approach. The first category of definitions is that definitions focus on the process of societal change. The second category of definitions is that definitions focus on human interactions and quality of life.

Definitions that emphasize the process of societal change and the connection between social and economic development, Midgley (1995) defined social development as a process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the population as a whole in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development. This definition overcomes the constraining duality of social and economic, and includes many facets of the development process beyond the economic one. Gore (1973) defined social development as an inclusive of economic development but differs from it in the sense that it emphasizes the development of the totality of society in its economic, political, social, and cultural aspects. Along similar lines, Barker (2003) defined social development as planned comprehensive social change designed to improve people's general welfare. The interrelatedness of major social problems requires the economic and cultural efforts of national and international government structures and society's institutions and all its citizens. Throughout these definitions, social development could be defined as the process of societal change and the link between social and economic development.

Regarding the definitions that emphasize human interactions and quality of life. Pandey (1981) defined social development as "improvement in the quality of life of people; equitable distribution of resource; broad-based participation in the process of decision making; and special measures that will enable marginal groups and communities to move into the mainstream". As Littig and Griessler (2005) defined social development as a quality of societies which means "*the nature-society relationships, mediated by work, as well as relationships within the society. Social development is given, if work within a society and the related institutional arrangements satisfy an extended set of human needs [and] are shaped in a way that nature and its reproductive capabilities are preserved over a long period of time and the normative claims of social justice, human dignity and participation are fulfilled*". Paiva (1982) defined social development in two interrelated dimensions: "it is the capacity of people to work continuously for their welfare and that of society; or is the alternation or development of a society's institutions so that human needs are met at all levels, especially at the lowest level, through a process of improving the relationships between people and social economic institutions". Hollister (1977) defined social development as the process of planned institutional change to bring about a better fit between human needs and social policies and programs. Along a similar line, Pawar (2014) in his book *Social and Community Development practice* has identified a few core skills, such as policy analysis, social planning, community organization, administration, program evaluation, and social advocacy as necessary to engage in the social development process.

Furthermore, Mohan and Sharma (1985) defined social development as "the evolution and transformation through which people and societies maximise their opportunities, and they become empowered to handle their affairs". Cox et al. (1997) defined social development as "a participatory process of planned social change designed to promote the well-being of the people, and which, as such, offers an effective response to the innate needs and aspirations of the whole population for the enhancement of their quality of life". Davis (2004) defined social development in two ways: the first is to improve in the welfare and quality of life of individuals; the second is to

change in societies – in their norms and institutions- that make development more equitable and inclusive for all members of a society.

In general, therefore, a critical examination of these definitions has clearly shown that the idea of social development is different from author to author. Some definitions have focused on the process, while some others have limited on the outcome, and some have centred on both process and outcome. Furthermore, there are also some other definitions of social development. Some of these definitions cover the meaning and goal of social development, and others include only one element of it. Hence, the conceptual analysis suggests that social development is about a process of societal change and the connection between social and economic development, including individuals, groups and their interactions, patterns of social relations between individuals and groups in which society is divided, and social traditions and values affect the exploitation of the environmental resource. Besides that, there are other goals which have been included reducing disparities and inequalities, creating opportunities and empowering people, attaining human welfare and wellbeing, improving relationships between people and their institutions, and, finally, ensuring sustainable development.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the concept of development and its evolution over the past seventy years from related modern literature on development to define and analyse social development. The study emphasised that there is a significant literature gap on the comprehensive understanding of social components of sustainable development. In fact, social development is a multifaceted concept which might be studied through the lenses of separate disciplines and theoretical viewpoints. A preliminary finding shows that the concept of social development is gaining ever more recognition by researchers and international organizations as well as policymakers, yet the definition of social development is still vague. This study has also analysed and reviewed the ongoing debate concerning the definitions of social development's scholars that have categorized into two groups based on the definitions that focus on the process of societal change as well as human interactions and quality of life. Accordingly, social development is about a process of societal change and the connection between social and economic development, including individuals, groups and their interactions, patterns of social relations between individuals and groups in which society is divided, and social traditions and values affect the exploitation of the environmental resource. Hence, the analysis of the existing social development could give insights in developing more comprehensive social development concept in the future.

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