

The Sociology of Development between Classical Approaches and the Contemporary Challenges of Sustainability

Dr. Hati Karima¹

¹Lecturer Class A, University- Algiers 2. Abou El Kacem Saadallah, Algeria. E-mail:

karima.hati@univ-alger2.dz

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Abstract: This article addresses the field of the sociology of development by tracing its evolution from classical approaches to contemporary perspectives related to sustainable development. Classical approaches focused on economic growth, modernization, and industrialization as key indicators of development. In contrast, critical approaches—particularly dependency theory—offered an explanation for underdevelopment based on power relations and inequalities among societies and states. With the escalation of social and environmental crises, the concept of sustainable development has emerged as a more comprehensive vision of the development process. This vision is based on the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions, with an emphasis on social justice, community participation, and the protection of natural resources. The article concludes that development is no longer merely the achievement of economic growth, but has become an integrated human and social process, and that the sociology of development contributes to understanding its transformations and challenges and to building more just and sustainable policies.

Keywords: sociology of development / development / sustainable development / human development.

Definition of Sociology

Researchers in psychology have differed in their definitions and conceptualisations of the term *sociology*. For example, James Vander believes that sociology is the science that studies human behaviour and interaction, as manifested in the relationships among individuals. It is concerned with what occurs between people, the activities they practice among themselves, and the relationships that grow and develop between them, as well as with the preservation of these ties. McGee, together with his colleagues, views sociology as the science that studies the social system, which expresses the pattern upon which relations among individuals in society are based, ranging from simple relations among individuals, such as cooperation, to relations among groups that share particular political positions and speak the same language.

The positivist philosopher Auguste Comte referred to this science as *social physics* because of his belief that social phenomena are subject to the laws of nature, and he employed the term *sociology* to designate this science. The credit for establishing sociology upon firms and clear

scientific foundations is attributed to Émile Durkheim, leader of the French sociological school, who defined sociology as a method concerned with the study of social phenomena, which constitute forces imposing upon society specific forms of behaviour, thought, and emotion. These phenomena are not created by individuals within society; rather, they precede them in existence.

Fields of Sociology

Sociology encompasses numerous and varied subjects, including crime, religion, the family and the state, divisions within society, and social classes. Sociology also investigates the social causes and consequences of many issues, such as love, ethnic identity, deviant behaviour, aging, and family problems. It studies poverty, wealth, schools, and education and analyses many phenomena, such as population growth, migration, war and peace, and economic development.

The methods employed by sociologists in conducting research also differ. They observe the daily lives of individuals, conduct surveys, analyse data, and carry out interviews and tests. Notably, sociology constitutes a field through which intellectual horizons may be broadened and social relationships among human beings analysed, in addition to studying the relationships between humans and different cultures and institutions. Sociology is regarded as one of the difficult and complex sciences in terms of study; nevertheless, it remains one of the disciplines that attracts people.

The complexity and difficulty of studying sociology stem from its concern with human relationships, which are often unclear. The most important subject studied by sociology is what is termed the *social system*, namely, a group of people connected to one another through common ties and who participate in one or more activities. Examples include the simple social system composed of a husband and wife or the complex system represented by a factory that includes numerous employees and workers or an army comprising thousands of soldiers.

The Development of Sociology

Sociology developed through three principal periods. It first emerged in the late nineteenth century and continued until the first World War. This was followed by a phase characterised by explosive growth and the unification of cultures and later by what became known as the period of fragmentation during the years 1945–1975.

The sociological method was developed on the basis of Darwin's theory as an attempt by sociologists to establish the discipline upon a scientific methodology. They formulated standards for comparing human beings with other living organisms and introduced numerous concepts, such as variation, inheritance, and natural selection. Darwinian theory was subsequently replaced by four principal theories:

Economic Theory

This theory centred upon Marx's ideas, which explain that social distinction and class levels within society emerged as a consequence of economic factors.

Geographical Theory

This theory indicates that societies are influenced by geographical and climatic changes, as climate significantly affects the development of societies.

Psychological Theory

This theory refers to the influence of temperament, intelligence, psychological conditions, and various instincts on social development.

Cultural Theory

This theory affirms that human beings are capable of innovation and that culture constitutes an important factor in the occurrence of social development.

Sociology of Development

Introduction

Development is a continually evolving and difficult issue to address, as development programmes differ according to the actors involved (the state, private capital, local communities, etc.), the stakes at issue (economic, social, political, etc.), and the fields of intervention (industrial, agricultural, service-oriented, technological, etc.). Furthermore, the developmental trajectories pursued by societies reveal overlap among numerous levels: local, sectoral, national, regional, continental, and international.

The concept of development emerged at the end of the Second World War and was initially dominated by political and economic dimensions, as development constituted a central focus in postwar reconstruction programmes in Europe and in postcolonial programmes among the “newly independent” states. The concept first appeared in two types of writings: first, in applied expert literature published by international organisations within the framework of their programs (for example, the United Nations Development Programme), in the form of reports, investigations, and studies conducted by specialists in the field; second, in academic scientific texts such as books, articles, and studies produced by specialised laboratories and university research centres.

This analytical review addresses “development” as a problematic concept employed in sociology through the presentation of a set of theories and explanatory models, themselves branching into a series of conceptual, analytical, explanatory, and interpretative propositions related to development. The presentation follows a historical progression extending from the mid-twentieth century to the threshold of the twenty-first century, accompanied by comparisons, parallels, and contrasts among schools, currents, and propositions.

I. The Subject Matter of the Sociology of Development

Development is a contentious issue involving numerous parties in terms of intervention, management, and benefit; therefore, it is necessary to situate the concept within the understanding of development as a complex process rather than a single, comprehensive, and clearly defined act. Although theories of development have multiplied according to the diversity of schools and intellectual currents, their principal concern remains, from a sociological perspective, reflection upon developmental action as a social act. This is achieved

through analysing the practices occurring within its context and the resulting transformations in the mode of wealth production, the manner of its valuation or standardisation, and the policies governing its distribution.

This is undertaken by concentrating research questions upon three principal axes: the social practices of the various actors, their resources, strategies, and stakes; the social relations underpinning the mode of wealth production; and the manner of transition from one social mode of wealth production to another.

II. Development Under the Dominance of the Economic Dimension of the Concept

From this perspective, development is defined as the achievement of a society's capacity to respond to the need to develop the economic factors that contribute to the advancement and growth of production. Economics attained historical precedence in addressing development as growth because economic sciences rely on a quantitative methodology primarily focused on statistics, tables, and mathematical equations through which rates and proportions of wealth increase are calculated. This methodology granted the economic sciences dealing with the issue of development a form of legitimacy in claiming to constitute the most appropriate scientific field for the study of development. This quantitative economic perspective dominated approaches to development during the 1950s and 1960s, particularly in expert writings.

Returning to the beginnings of economic theorisation in the nineteenth century, it may be observed that the processes of creating wealth, developing it, and increasing productive capacity were regarded as multidimensional. In his book *Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, David Ricardo considered economic thought on the basis that it is managed as a political process, whereby the political economy constitutes the science concerned with production, distribution, and the movement of labour power in relation to an economic and social system governed by specific political laws. Similarly, Karl Marx, in his works "*A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and *Capital*", indicated that addressing the issue of wealth, its distribution, and the manner of benefiting from it is a process in which political, economic, and social components intersect. This results from the division of society into owners of the means of production and wage labourers who do not possess such means and are therefore compelled to sell their labour power.

For this reason, the foundations of thinking about development may be traced not to the twentieth century and the economic, social, and political transformations that followed the Second World War but rather to the nineteenth century, which witnessed social transformations generated by the Industrial Revolution and facilitated reflection upon the wealth of nations (the title of Adam Smith's work), the position of labour within it, and the effects of its social organisation.

The French economist François Perroux defines "growth" as an increase, over successive periods, in quantities measured by a specific indicator, namely, gross domestic product. On this basis, he defines "development" as the set of social processes introducing intellectual and

social transformations within a society that render the increase in gross domestic product possible in a cumulative and sustainable manner.

In contrast to this conception, which associates the use of mathematical language with scientific research and studies, a conception that has faced numerous criticisms of sociology places society and the human being at the centre of its inquiry and addresses relationships to wealth and its distribution on the basis of general human needs in all their dimensions. Since these needs are both material and immaterial in their totality, restricting analysis to the quantitative approach may lead to the fallacy of establishing a deterministic link between economic growth and development understood as the improvement of living conditions within a given society.

III. Major Theoretical Currents and School in the Sociology of Development

1. The Modernisation School

Modernisation theory is founded upon a fundamental problem, namely, how can rapid economic growth and the accumulation of capital be ensured? As previously indicated, economists were at the forefront of those concerned with answering this question. In 1959, the American economist Walt Whitman Rostow published his work *The Stages of Economic Growth*, in which he explained that economic growth passes through five major stages:

1. The stage of traditional society (which is synonymous with agrarian society)
2. The stage of establishing the preconditions for take-off
3. Stage of take-off
4. The maturity stage
5. Stage of high mass consumption

Rostow's approach is characterised by a highly precise rationality through its determination of the progression of stages, a progression reflecting a classification of societies according to their position along a historical trajectory of quantitative economic development. The author considers that the history of societies necessitates their passage through these stages along a historical line, compelling movement forwards.

Moreover, classical Marxist thought (during the final quarter of the nineteenth century) regarded the expansion of the Western capitalist model beyond Europe as a positive factor in the development of underdeveloped societies and in accelerating their transition towards the capitalist stage and, subsequently, socialism, particularly in the absence of endogenous factors conducive to the emergence of self-generated industrial revolutions. This analysis was later applied to the conditions of the mid-twentieth century, where Marxists considered it necessary for underdeveloped societies to pass through a stage of "capitalist modernisation" because of the dependency of the economies of these states upon the colonial powers.

In general, the analyses, interpretations, and propositions grouped under the heading of "modernisation theory" adopt this comprehensive and stereotypical perspective, treating the various economies of the world as although they were subject to a single orientation proceeding along one path and through the same stages. On this basis, modernisation theory

focuses on its classification of societies upon “industrialisation”, that is, the transition from a society primarily dependent upon nonindustrial production to one in which industry constitutes the principal economic activity. Hence, societies are divided into two categories:

- **Underdeveloped or traditional societies:** These are dual-structured societies in which certain industrial sectors may exist (light industries, extractive and mining industries, etc.), yet the traditional character of production predominates. Underdeveloped societies are fundamentally agrarian societies, and even the agriculture within them remains traditional, meaning nonindustrialised (due to the absence of advanced machinery). Modern institutional structures are likewise absent from these societies, and even when they exist, they remain governed by traditional relations. The market is limited and uncaptialised, functioning on the basis of precapitalist exchanges rather than institutionalised and capitalised financial transactions.
- **Advanced or industrial societies:** Their economies are fundamentally based upon heavy industries and upon the industrialisation of nonindustrial sectors such as agriculture and services. Their institutions also play a central role in structuring and expanding the market and in regulating productive and social relations.

Modernisation theory dominated most theoretical treatments of development during the post-Second World War period until the mid-1960s, whether with regard to the economic reconstruction programmes adopted by European states or the national development programmes of postcolonial states. However, critics of this theory realised that it was incapable of understanding the underdevelopment of Third World countries because it had been formulated in light of the cultural and historical context of American and European capitalist societies. The pioneers of this theory based their interpretation of underdevelopment and development upon a historical model specific to advanced capitalist societies, which they generalised to all societies and adopted as the standard for explaining what they termed the “phenomenon of underdevelopment”.

2. The Dependency School

This current falls within the framework of neo-Marxist thought that emerged at the beginning of the 1960s in several South American countries. Dependency theory provided a new analytical framework for studying the issue of underdevelopment without abandoning the Marxist intellectual reference point. The foundations of this theory were laid by the Brazilian sociologist Fernando Henrique Cardoso, the Chilean historian Enzo Faletto, and others beginning in 1964.

This current achieved widespread diffusion during the 1970s, not only in South America but also in many countries similar and dissimilar to it in Europe, despite its analytical premises specialising in the study of development issues in Latin America. Several states in that region had achieved early political independence (during the nineteenth century) compared with the states of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. The pioneers of this school worked on analysing the structure of relations between the class formations of their societies, the trajectories of

their development, and the political and cultural components of the social structures that emerged within the framework of the interaction between Latin American states and the central states in Europe (primarily Spain and Portugal) and the United States.

This school rejected the modernisationist notion that the development of underdeveloped countries could occur solely through the spread of modernising factors derived from the West (the advanced centre) and their exportation to the Third World (the underdeveloped periphery). Here, their fundamental sociological question emerges: what explains the existence of underdeveloped countries in a condition of nondevelopment?

The pioneers of the dependency school constructed a distinct, independent, and integrated perspective, beginning from a critique of modernisation theory that touched upon several elements, most importantly:

- **A methodological element:** Modernisation theory is a stereotypical theory that claims scientific validity while standardising the trajectory of economic growth on the basis of studying the course of Western development, without taking into consideration the material characteristics and the distinct historical and cultural contexts of other countries. Consequently, it becomes difficult to accept a single modernisation model applicable to all countries.
- **An operational element:** Development in underdeveloped countries is presented in the form of strategic plans and programs formulated by specialised bodies (national or international) according to external conditions that do not correspond to the needs of societies but rather represent the interests of the central states. Consequently, these plans are characterised by a lack of realism and by the impossibility of their implementation and success in practice.
- **A social element:** The social classes that emerge within underdeveloped economies are generally fragile in formation, rendering the industries of these countries equally fragile and incapable of expansion or of exerting a positive influence upon other economic sectors, especially agriculture. These societies exhibit a complete absence of heavy industries owing to weak capital, the weakness of the bourgeoisie whose upper strata are tied to external interests, and the limited technical skills and cognitive capacities of the working strata and groups. Furthermore, these societies remain connected to precapitalist forms of production from which they have never entirely detached themselves. The result is that such societies possess a dual structure, a duality that continually deepens and becomes more firmly entrenched.
- **A theoretical element:** This concerns the structural nature of the relationship between the developed centre and the underdeveloped periphery. Indeed, the pioneers of dependency theory view the global economy as an integrated and interconnected unit, yet the reality of exchange within it remains unequal. Samir Amin, for example, in his work *Unequal Development*, focuses on the study of the capitalist social formations surrounding the centre and emphasises the structural nature of the relationship, which

is contradictory at its core, between the developed centres and the underdeveloped and dependent peripheries. The emergence of capitalism in Western countries, at least since the fifteenth century, together with the economic and intellectual developments and the accumulation of capital that resulted from it, was founded upon an increasingly unequal exchange. Under this system, the countries possessing raw materials were the party that did not benefit, as their wealth was exhausted through its purchase at the lowest possible prices, in addition to their provision of cheap labour, before ultimately falling under direct colonial domination.

As a consequence, the central states also endeavour to destroy any attempt to create an emancipated developmental trajectory within Third World countries by imposing imported manufactured products at the expense of local products. The process of unequal exchange thus becomes deeper and more entrenched, as Third World countries export cheap agricultural or mineral raw materials while importing expensive manufactured goods. Consequently, the economies of Third World countries remain in a permanent state of dependency upon the economies of the central states, since they cannot dispense with the manufactured products imported from them while simultaneously lacking alternative markets in which to market the raw materials they produce. This is what the theorists of the dependency school term the “development of underdevelopment”.

Despite the validity of many of the realities demonstrated by dependency theory, this school nevertheless faced numerous critical observations. The reason is that it did not move beyond the economic logic centred upon the accumulation of capital and the elevation of growth indicators. Researchers concerned with development have continued to focus on statistics and numerical indicators, particularly gross domestic product, to justify the occurrence of development while neglecting the deeper sociological dimension.

Among the foundations of this criticism is the argument that the progress achieved by industrial capitalist states did not depend solely upon the exploitation of the wealth of dependent peripheral countries but was also the product of internal factors represented by the existence of human competencies capable of developing society. This idea leads to the necessity of examining the internal causes that contribute to deepening underdevelopment irrespective of colonialism and dependency upon the central states. In addition to weak national income rates, these countries experience severe deterioration in health conditions and educational standards, together with the absence of adequate infrastructural and institutional foundations and the political environment necessary for achieving development.

Another criticism of dependency theory is that it is a structural theory characterised, in many analyses, by formalistic stereotyping that fails to take into account the diversity and transformation of conditions within dependent countries themselves, as well as their own passage through different trajectories of “development”.

3. The Local Development Current

The problem with structural analysis in relation to development is that it focuses primarily upon analysing the relationships between elements while neglecting, to some extent, the nature of the elements themselves. With the increasing role of the state and governments in shaping developmental action, particularly following the difficulties of the 1930s in advanced industrial capitalist countries and the contradictions it produced, which ultimately led to the Second World War, the authority of decision-making and the engineering of development strategies became concentrated in centres and capitals. This concentration intensified economic and social disparities among different regions, countries, areas, and sectors.

Following the Second World War, the domination of international organisations over the formulation of major development plans generated a form of standardisation that hindered the implementation of these projects and programs. Since the 1970s, indications have emerged of the existence of industrial poles in certain regions of the capitalist countries themselves that have experienced more rapid growth, greater integration, and greater concentration upon specific types of economic activity than others.

Beginning in the early 1980s, reflection increasingly turned toward new contexts capable of transforming development into an internal process through heightened attention to local communities, which were considered the primary means for achieving comprehensive development. The concept of local development is based upon two principal elements: grassroots participation in developmental efforts and the encouragement of autonomous initiatives liberated, to varying degrees, from central control.

Local development seeks to improve infrastructure and the local community in pursuit of comprehensive development. It is a process of construction originating from below, whereby the development of local communities according to the specificities and needs of the region constitutes the fundamental starting point for the development of society as a whole. This requires decentralisation as a framework for planning and implementing projects through granting participation rights, sharing roles among different administrative levels, activating the role of local authorities and universities, and integrating civil society associations into development processes, whether at the planning or implementation stage.

One of the distinguishing features of local development is that its roots may be found within various intellectual trajectories concerned with the problem of development. In advanced countries, for example, it appears as the product of capitalist transformations and the redistribution of the developmental map. In these countries, leading industrial sectors (such as Silicon Valley in California and the United States) influence other industries while being concentrated within a particular region, thereby rendering it a pioneering and influential area within the sectoral economy in particular and within the national and global economy more broadly.

The roots of local or regional development may also be found in the experiences of certain Third World countries (such as Brazil) through the encouragement of sectors in which the

state is able to intervene. This creates an economy of a social nature dependent upon small and medium-sized enterprises, which may at times possess a family character and benefit from state loans and facilities, particularly in the field of marketing. In this example, the state pursues a policy of protection toward these institutions by placing them within an economic cycle somewhat separate from the highly competitive commercial market. This example is characterised by its incorporation within a noncommercial context in the traditional sense of the term (that is, the liberal globalised meaning), and it seriously raises the possibility of conceiving a noncommercial form of local economic development. In the Brazilian case, the success of this model may be observed in the central region, that is, outside the traditionally developed geographical sector.

Among the renewed developments within local development theory are the consideration of local development as a current of developmental practices and applications capable of responding to the new hegemonic tendencies of advanced industrial capitalist economies possessing global reach. Tefenio Müller, for example, as indicated by the title of his work, regards “local development” as “a political response to globalisation”.

4. The Human Development Current

This current emerged during the 1980s through the work of the economists Mahbub ul Haq of Pakistan and Amartya Sen of India, both of whom, as may be observed, originated from countries outside the traditional capitalist centre. India, for example, belongs to the BRICS countries, a group comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. This grouping calls for a reconsideration of the global capitalist economy dominated by the United States.

For this reason, human development theory may be regarded as one of the first theories to emerge outside the dominant modes of thought associated with traditional capitalist powers. It also insists upon transcending the economic perspective, considering that improvement in human living standards cannot be measured solely through quantitative economic indicators, as emphasised, for example, by the United Nations. What reflects development in people’s minds is not fundamentally economic but rather connected to the expansion of the field of choices.

Thus, Mahbub ul Haq defines human development as “the enlargement of people’s choices”, while Amartya Sen adds, “the enhancement of people’s capabilities and freedoms in choosing what enables them to live longer and healthier lives, with access to knowledge, a decent standard of living, participation in society, and involvement in shaping the decisions affecting their lives.”

Human development theory revolves around a fundamental question: How can development be conceived on the basis of its benefit to human beings? This conception is founded upon refuting the generalised image of measuring the phenomenon of development solely through broad indicators (such as gross income, the development of the industrial sector, or the expansion of the modern sector) and instead moves toward establishing precise indicators that

confirm development as the expansion of choices, greater empowerment in determining one's destiny, and a just distribution of wealth.

The concept of human development proposes the advancement of measurement standards through moving from generalisation to specification, that is, abandoning measurement on the basis of society as a whole and shifting towards measurement at the level of the individual. This alteration in the criteria of measurement raised a problem concerning the compatibility of the concept, namely, the concept of development, with its traditional definition. Put more simply, abandoning the previous standard necessitates changing the old definition and formulating a new definition centred upon the notion that the true wealth of societies lies in the human being.

According to the United Nations definition (Development Programme, 1992), the concept of human development encompasses three fundamental dimensions:

- Building human capacity through improving levels of training, education, and health;
- Investing in and employing human capacity to improve living conditions;
- Enhancing the welfare of society by enabling individuals to enjoy longer lives, better health, and broader choices.

The Human Development Index is likewise founded upon three dimensions, which are subdivided into four secondary indicators:

- **The first dimension:** health, measured through life expectancy at birth between a minimum and maximum threshold;
- **The second dimension** is education, which is itself divided into two indicators, namely, the average duration of schooling and the average effective enrolment rate;
- **The third dimension is the** standard of living, expressed as gross national income divided by per capita.

Despite the attempt by the pioneers of this current to refine the measurement of development through the creation of an indicator that takes individual specificities into account, they nevertheless fell into the trap of generalisation, since the Human Development Index does not consider regional, age-based, or sex-specific characteristics, for example. Furthermore, the process of evaluation did not move beyond the logic of numbers and figures expressing formalistic and general mathematical relations that frequently conceal inequality, disparity, and the absence of justice.

The most significant criticism directed against the human development current, however, concerned the operational level. State intervention based upon this indicator is distributed equally among all groups, strata, and classes, implying that all citizens benefit from services (such as food subsidies). This, in turn, reproduces inequality by reinforcing the capacities already available to affluent classes and groups while offering only uncertain improvements in the capacities of poorer classes.

5. The Sustainable Development Current

Within the framework of this current, sociology takes nature as a fundamental datum in its reflection. However, the management and exploitation of nature, the introduction of changes within it, and the distribution of wealth extracted from it directly or indirectly constitute sociological phenomena in the sense that they occur only within a context characterised by unequal resources, competing strategies, and conflicting stakes.

Current studies of sustainable development focus on human intervention in nature and the impact of such intervention on the process of development and the sustainability of natural reserves. In general, and in light of the unequal positions of social strata, groups, and classes in relation to “nature” and their varying degrees of benefit, the study of human intervention in nature reveals it to be a heterogeneous, problematic intervention differing in methods, objectives, and outcomes.

Consequently, it generates disparities that lead to social and political conflicts, the principal cause of which lies in disputes concerning the ownership of nature, the unequal distribution of its wealth, the necessity of protecting it, rationalising methods of managing it, and preserving the integrity of the conditions of life on earth, including its water and air.

On this basis, the concept of justice within the sustainable development current is distinguished by its incorporation of the rights of future generations to nature and the earth such that it is not confined merely to resisting present social inequality. For this reason, the pioneers of sustainable development emphasise three necessary conditions:

- Ensuring a decent life for all;
- Ensuring the capacity of economies to develop;
- Ensuring the sustainability of the earth’s resources.

They also rely upon an equation involving three fundamental dimensions that achieve social balance without disrupting the ecological system:

- **Resources:** air, soil, water, vegetation cover, and organic elements;
- **Activities:** Management of natural resources, treatment of damage resulting from human intervention, and protection of natural resources;
- **Objectives:** Protection of the ecological system, improvement of economic productivity, and achievement of social stability.

6. The Social and Solidarity Economy Current

The principal characteristic of this current lies in its focus on the economic sector existing outside the influence of the state, which is considered the controller of the public sector, and outside the influence of the market, which is considered the sphere of intervention of private capital. The intervention of this sector produces a new configuration of the developmental landscape composed of the state and its public sector, the market and its private sector, and the social cooperative sector.

Although the practical experience of adopting the ideas of this current remains limited, they are distinguished by being extremely old and by having continuously existed within all

economies, even in precapitalist periods. Moreover, no developmental experience has occurred without the existence of some form of social and solidarity sector, as it constitutes a refuge for marginalised groups excluded by the state from the public sector and excluded by capital from production and distribution within the market.

The social and solidarity economy generally expanded during periods of crisis, as was the case at the end of the nineteenth century in Europe, for example, or at the beginning of the twentieth century in Tunisia and in many other Arab countries, such as Egypt. At present, the renewed emergence of this current is associated with anti-globalisation social movements, which have created a severe imbalance between the capacity of global capital to penetrate national borders, influence state policies, and impose the logic of the capitalist market, on the one hand, and the ability of states to resist and combat this penetration, on the other hand.

In many societies, including advanced industrial capitalist societies (such as France) or societies possessing developed leftist, labour, and trade union experiences (such as those in South America), varying indications suggest that the national market has collapsed and that the state no longer constitutes a barrier against capital. This has compelled social groups excluded from the cycle of production to create a parallel productive cycle founded upon initiative and private efforts and governed by three fundamental conditions:

- The agreement of a particular group upon this form of solidarity;
- The pooling of capacities;
- The establishment of regulations governing the use of resources, whether material or immaterial.

This sector also possesses a set of necessary characteristics defining its identity:

- Voluntary membership and withdrawal;
- The absence of a profit-oriented character within the project (in the capitalist sense of the term, namely, the accumulation of wealth);
- Collective decision-making and management through the creation of a grassroots democratic organisation (one person, one vote);
- Public benefit, with this benefit being collective and distributed to relatively equal degrees, whether materially or socially.

First: The Concept of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development¹ is a process in which the exploitation of resources, the orientation of investment, the directions of technological development, and institutional change are harmonised in a manner that enhances both present and future capacities to fulfil human needs and aspirations.

It is also defined as genuine development possessing the capacity for continuity and sustainability from the perspective of its use of natural resources. This may be achieved through a strategy that adopts ecological balance as its regulatory framework, a balance that may be realised through a socioenvironmental framework aimed at improving the living

conditions of individuals through political, economic, social, and cultural systems that preserve the integrity of the environmental framework.²

According to the definition formulated in 1987 by the World Commission on Sustainable Development in the report entitled *Our Common Future and Sustainable Development*, sustainable development is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

During the previous century, industrial consumerist thought prevailed, particularly following economic liberalisation, as human beings became preoccupied with technologies capable of generating rapid profit through the production of commodities possessing a consumer market, without regard for product quality, the nature of the raw materials employed, or the energy consumed. This led to the proliferation of numerous polluting industries and, in the long term, resulted in pollution levels exceeding permissible limits, rising rates of disease, declining productivity, and the emergence of new life-threatening illnesses.

Thus, sustainable development may be defined as the achievement of economic development that satisfies the needs of the present while maintaining a balance between these needs and future requirements, thereby enabling future generations to fulfil their own needs.³ From this, the following conclusions may be drawn:⁴

- Desired development does not seek limited human progress in restricted locations for only a few years but rather aims at the advancement of humanity as a whole across the distant future.
- Standards of living exceeding the basic minimum level of needs cannot be sustained unless levels of consumption everywhere take into account the requirements of long-term sustainability.
- Needs, as conceived by people, are socially and culturally determined; consequently, sustainable development requires the dissemination of values encouraging levels of consumption that do not exceed environmentally feasible limits.

Thus, the pursuit of sustainable development requires a productive system that respects the obligation to preserve the balance of the environmental foundation upon which such development depends.⁵

Second: Indicators of Sustainable Development

A. The United Nations Programme for Sustainable Development Indicators⁶

In its third session in 1995, the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development, affiliated with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and established in December 1992 to ensure effective follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, approved a programme of work concerning sustainable development indicators covering the social, economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions of sustainable development. Governmental organisations and major participating groups, acting as agencies responsible for particular indicators, contributed to the formulation of this program.

In addition to strengthening existing activities related to the collection of data concerning sustainable development, countries were specifically requested to devote particular attention to fields such as demographic factors, urban planning, poverty, health, the right to access resources, and special groups such as women, youth, and children with disabilities, as well as to the relationships between these fields and environmental problems.

The principal objective of the work program of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development was, by the year 2001, to establish a list of sustainable development indicators adapted to the national level and sufficiently flexible to be measured and utilised in countries possessing different levels of development while remaining consistent enough to permit comparisons and to place these indicators at the disposal of decision makers at the national level.

The work programme included a list comprising 134 sustainable development indicators published in August 1996 in a document known as the “Blue Book”. These indicators were grouped into four major categories—economic, social, environmental, and institutional—and organised according to the classical framework of pressure, state, and response. Each indicator was presented in a detailed methodological sheet explaining its definition, methods of calculation, and the criteria governing its selection by the United Nations Organisation. Countries were requested to select from among these indicators those corresponding to their national priorities, objectives, and goals.

To analyse their applicability to local conditions and the possibility of quantifying them, 134 sustainable development indicators formulated by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development were tested.

B. Criteria for Preparing Effective Sustainable Development Indicators⁷

- They should reflect something essential and fundamental concerning the long-term economic, social, or environmental health of society across generations.
- They should be clear and achievable such that society can easily understand and accept them.
- They should be measurable and predictable.
- They should possess available threshold values.
- They should clarify whether variables are reversible and controllable or not.
- Specific aspects: The methods employed in preparing any indicator should be clearly defined, accurately applied, socially and scientifically acceptable, and easily reproducible.
- Sensitivity to time: This means that the indicator should point to typical trends when used annually.

A private enterprise is an institution that aims to maximise its profits within a competitive market, albeit within the limits permitted by systems, laws, and traditions.

Third: Requirements of Sustainable Development

Achieving effective sustainable development requires compatibility and harmony among the following systems:

- **A political system:** ensuring democracy in decision-making;
- **An economic system:** capable of generating surplus and based upon self-reliance;
- **A social system:** consistent with development plans and their methods of implementation;
- **A productive system:** establishing the principle of environmental feasibility within projects;
- **A technological system:** enabling research and identification of solutions to the problems encountered;
- **An international system:** promoting cooperation and the exchange of expertise within the development project;
- **An administrative system that is** flexible and capable of self-correction;
- **A cultural system:** fostering the integration of the environmental dimension into all activities of life in general and sustainable development in particular.

3. Objectives of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development seeks to achieve several objectives, which can be summarised as follows:⁸

- Sustainable development is a conscious, complex, long-term, comprehensive, and integrated process encompassing economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions;
- Whatever human objectives may be, individuals must preserve the environment in which they live. Consequently, their aim should be to introduce fundamental transformations within infrastructural and superstructure systems without harming the surrounding environmental elements;
- This model of development enables all individuals to expand their human capacities to the greatest possible extent and to employ these capacities in the most effective manner across all fields;
- It is a model that protects the choices of future generations yet unborn and does not exhaust the natural resource base necessary to sustain development in the future.

Third: Dimensions and Principles of Sustainable Development

1. Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is founded upon several dimensions, the most important of which can be summarised as follows:

A. Environmental Dimension

This dimension clarifies the strategies that must be established and respected within the field of industrialisation to ensure the optimal management of natural capital, rather than its irrational waste and depletion, so that the environmental balance is not disturbed. This is achieved through regulating the use of resources, employing technologies capable of

controlling waste production and pollutant use, and guiding society toward the era of clean industries.⁹

To achieve a clean industry, the United Nations proposes the following measures:

- Encouraging environmentally sustainable industry within the framework of flexible plans;
- Require multinational corporations to apply the same standards both within and outside their home countries;
- Raising awareness through all possible means concerning the losses and dangers resulting from pollution, whether direct or indirect;
- Introducing the concepts of environmental safety and the obligation to preserve it at all stages of education, both for individuals and for society;
- Involving communities in the mechanisms of sustainable development through the efforts of the media and cultural initiatives;
- Encouraging environmentally clean production through market mechanisms and taxation policies.

In addition to adopting a clean industry, as previously mentioned, highlighting the concept of environmental projects is useful. These are projects that consider the environmental dimension as a fundamental basis for their establishment. Some also regard them as projects contributing to economic development while simultaneously preserving the environment and cooperating with employees and society in general with the aim of improving the quality of life for all parties.¹⁰

If a project is economic in nature, environmental feasibility studies must not be neglected. Such studies involve “the examination of the reciprocal impact between development programme projects and the environment, with the objective of reducing or preventing negative effects or maximising positive effects.”¹¹

The principal elements included within the environmental dimension can be summarised as follows:

- Ecological systems;
- Energy;
- Biodiversity;
- Biological productivity;
- Adaptive capacity;
- Information and culture for all;
- Clean industry.

B. Economic Dimension

If the concept of sustainable development for the industrialised countries of the North signifies striving towards a substantial and continuous reduction in the consumption of energy and natural resources, introducing radical transformations in prevailing patterns of consumption and production, and limiting the exportation of their industrial model to underdeveloped

countries, then the perspective of poor countries concerning sustainable development signifies the utilisation of resources to raise the living standards of the poorest populations.¹²

The principal issues taken into consideration within the economic dimension can be summarised as follows:

- The share of individual consumption of natural resources;
- The responsibility of developed countries for pollution and its treatment;
- The dependency of developing countries;
- Equality in the distribution of resources;
- Military expenditure;
- Inequality in incomes.

D. Social Dimension

At the human and social level, sustainable development seeks to achieve high growth rates while maintaining stable population growth so that excessive pressure is not imposed upon natural resources and thus halts the flow of individuals toward cities. This is pursued through improving health and educational services in rural areas and ensuring the broadest possible popular participation in development planning.

Hence, the social dimension directs attention toward the following points:¹³

- Equality in distribution;
- Social mobility;
- Popular participation;
- Cultural diversity;
- Institutional sustainability;
- Population growth and distribution;
- Health, education, and the fight against unemployment.

E. Technological Dimension

This dimension signifies guiding society toward the era of clean industries that employ environmentally friendly technologies and produce the minimum possible amount of polluting and heat-trapping gases harmful to the ozone layer.¹⁴

Technology may be strengthened in the service of sustainable development through the following measures:¹⁵

- Research activities should be developed through the promotion of new materials technology, information technology, and communication technologies and through the adoption of sustainable mechanisms;
- Improving the performance of private institutions through specific inputs based upon modern technologies;
- Establishing new institutional patterns, including technology cities and incubators;
- Strengthening capacity-building in science, technology, and innovation to achieve the objectives of sustainable development within a knowledge-based economy, particularly since capacity-building constitutes the sole means of enhancing

- competitiveness, increasing economic growth, creating new employment opportunities, and combating poverty;
- Plans and programs aimed at transforming society into an information society should be formulated by integrating new technologies into social and economic development plans and strategies, alongside the achievement of global objectives such as the Millennium Development Goals.

The Natural Resources Report emphasises that the common denominator linking these economic, social, environmental, and technological dimensions is that, for development to be sustainable, the following considerations must be respected:

- That it should not disregard environmental controls and constraints;
- That it should not lead to the destruction and depletion of natural resources;
- It should contribute to the development of human resources through combating unemployment and poverty and improving the status of women within society;
- That it should bring about transformations within the prevailing industrial base.

2. Principles of Sustainable Development

A new environmental doctrine began to take shape at the beginning of the twenty-first century, adopted by the World Bank, and was founded upon ten fundamental principles:¹⁶

First Principle: Careful Determination of Priorities

The seriousness of environmental problems and the scarcity of financial resources necessitated strict prioritisation and the phased implementation of remedial measures. This approach is based upon the technical analysis of the health, productivity, and ecological impacts of environmental problems and upon identifying the problems that must be addressed effectively.

The Second Principle: Making Use of Every Dollar

Most environmental policies, including successful ones, were excessively costly without justification, leading to an increasing emphasis on cost-effectiveness.

This emphasis makes it possible to achieve significant accomplishments with limited resources, which requires a multidisciplinary approach and calls upon environmental specialists and economists to work together in determining the optimal means of confronting major environmental problems.

Third Principle: Seizing Opportunities for Mutual Benefit

Certain environmental gains involve costs and trade-offs, whereas others may be achieved as byproducts of policies designed to improve efficiency and reduce poverty, particularly through reducing the resources allocated to solving environmental problems, including reducing subsidies for the use of natural resources.

Fourth Principle: Employing Market Instruments Whenever Possible

Market-based incentives aimed at reducing harmful effects are considered preferable both in principle and in practice. For example, certain developing countries impose fees on emissions and waste disposal, as well as market-based charges related to extraction activities.

The Fifth Principle: Economy in the Use of Administrative and Organisational Capacities

Efforts must be directed toward implementing more organised and effective policies, such as imposing taxes on fuel or restrictions upon the import of certain types of pesticides, as well as introducing incentive systems for industrial institutions seeking to reduce environmental risks.

The Sixth Principle: Working with the Private Sector

The state must deal seriously and objectively with the private sector as a fundamental element of the investment process. This is achieved through encouraging environmental improvements within institutions and establishing ISOs, certifying that companies possess sound systems of management and environmental governance.

The Seventh Principle: Full Participation of Citizens

When confronting the environmental problems of a particular country, the prospects for success become considerably stronger if local citizens participate. Such participation is necessary for the following reasons:

1. The capacity of citizens at the local level to determine priorities;
2. Members of local communities possess knowledge of possible local solutions;
3. Members of local communities frequently monitor environmental projects;
4. Citizen participation may assist in building broad public support for change.

The Eighth Principle: Employing Successful Partnerships

Governments should rely upon tripartite partnerships involving the government, the private sector, and civil society organisations and should work through integrated plans to address particular environmental issues.

The Ninth Principle: Improving Administrative Performance Based upon Efficiency and Effectiveness

Competent administrators are capable of achieving substantial environmental improvements at minimal cost. For example, factory owners may reduce the levels of air and dust pollution by between 60 and 80 percent by improving the internal organisation of facilities.

The Tenth Principle: Integrating the Environment from the Outset

In terms of environmental protection, prevention is unquestionably better than a cure. Most countries now seek to evaluate damage mitigation and adopt what is termed environmental feasibility. They also consider relative costs and benefits when designing energy-related strategies and increasingly incorporate the environment as an effective component of economic, financial, social, and commercial policies.

Fourth: The Reality and Prospects of Sustainable Development in Algeria

1. Challenges of Sustainable Development in Algeria

Like the rest of the countries of the world, Algeria has recognised the importance of establishing a balance between the obligations of environmental protection and the requirements of development through the prudent management of resources. To achieve this objective, the country has adopted measures and policies aimed at improving the living,

economic, social, and health conditions of citizens. However, these efforts have encountered obstacles preventing the achievement of the desired objective. Among these obstacles are the following:¹⁷

- **The problem of desertification:** Desertification constitutes a major problem affecting the future of agriculture in Algeria, as vast areas of land are exposed to this danger.
- **The problem of urban expansion at the expense of agricultural land:** Enormous areas are being converted into buildings, while large quantities of forests are being lost because of fires and pests. The per capita share of agricultural land declined from 1.1 hectares in 1962 to 0.35 hectares in 1980, and it is expected to decrease below 0.15 hectares by the middle of the present century.
- **Environmental pollution:** The problem of pollution in Algeria has worsened alarmingly owing to increasing population growth. The population is expanding at a rate that exceeds the carrying capacity of available environmental resources, in addition to generating pressure in the fields of housing, healthcare, energy, water, services, and other essential requirements. The population of Algeria increased more than fivefold between 1962 and 2002, rising from 6 million to more than 30.6 million inhabitants, at an annual growth rate exceeding 0.3%. It was projected to reach approximately 42 million inhabitants by the year 2020.
- **Air pollution:** Vehicles, particularly old ones, constitute the principal source of environmental pollution in major cities. In Algeria, a high proportion of vehicles should have been withdrawn from use. This is compounded by the enormous volume of medical waste burned in unsafe and unhealthy ways to reduce costs and evade taxes. The annual volume of such waste is estimated at approximately 124,000 tonnes, including 22 tonnes of putrefied waste posing severe health risks and 29,000 tonnes of toxic waste.
- **Water pollution:** Environmental scientists worldwide agree that the third millennium is the “white gold” (drinking water) millennium owing to the anticipated reduction in water supply in relation to increasing global demand. Among the principal causes of water pollution are inadequate sewage services and waste disposal systems, the disposal of industrial waste without treatment or only partial treatment and the seepage of chemicals and pesticides into the soil, thereby contaminating groundwater. A recent study conducted by the National Agency for Water Resources in Algeria concerning the quality of consumed water revealed that 40% of the water was of good quality, 45% was of satisfactory quality, and 15% was poor quality. To reduce the problem of water shortages in Algiers and certain major coastal cities, the government resorted to constructing seawater desalination plants that cost approximately 25 million US dollars, with a production capacity reaching 200,000 cubic metres per day.

The Necessity of Development Towards Sustainable Development

The necessity of development arises from the fact that most countries around the world are moving toward sustainable development, including neighbouring states, which publish annual reports concerning the economic situation at the comprehensive level and concerning the various sectors of development, including the demographic, social, economic, and environmental sectors.

In Morocco, a study concerning a national strategy for environmental protection and sustainable development, prepared on the basis of an economic approach and relying upon existing and available data concerning the state of the environment, made it possible to establish a set of indicators related to water, air, solid waste, the urban environment, soil, and natural and coastal areas. Among the objectives of the Environmental Management Programme is the implementation of a system of environmental information and data. In this regard, it is useful to note that the indicators of human development and human poverty are highly advanced in Morocco. Furthermore, a publication concerning social indicators is prepared annually by the Directorate of Statistics affiliated with the Ministry of Economic Forecasting and Planning. This publication, presented in the form of chronological statistical tables, makes it possible to evaluate the results of actions undertaken in various fields and to assess the scale of achievements realised within the framework of sustainable human development.

In Egypt,¹⁸ a committee for sustainable development was established in cooperation with all other concerned parties to formulate a common strategy for the process of sustainable development. At the national level, the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) coordinates and monitors environmental issues with the relevant ministries with the aim of ensuring sustainable development. Both the Environmental Information and Monitoring Programme (EIMP) and the Environmental Information System Project, which are currently under implementation, are intended to assist decision makers in formulating and applying environmental policies, legislation, and programs. A national project has also been prepared with the aim of defining the responsibilities assigned to the various governmental agencies within the framework of the Earth Summit to avoid overlap in responsibilities.

Tunisia also publishes annual reports concerning the state of the environment. The sustainability indicators currently presented in a limited form seek to evaluate the general development observed at the human, economic, social, and environmental levels. These indicators are founded upon the general philosophy of Agenda 21 at the national level. The list of indicators is not comprehensive but rather limited, and the approach remains exploratory.

Fourth: Algeria's Efforts in the Field of Sustainable Development

During the past five years, Algeria has established institutional, legal, financial, and internal mechanisms to ensure the integration of the environment and development into the decision-making process. These mechanisms include, in particular, the State Secretariat for the Environment, a General Directorate enjoying financial autonomy and public authority, the

Higher Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development, which is a multisectoral consultative body chaired by the Head of Government, and the National Economic and Social Council, which functions as an advisory institution.

Numerous significant actions have been undertaken within the framework of development efforts during recent years as part of the implementation of Agenda 21, producing noteworthy results in several fields, particularly poverty reduction, the control of demographic transformations, the protection and promotion of preventive healthcare, the improvement of human settlements, and the integration of environmental concerns into the decision-making process. Nevertheless, major obstacles, especially financial difficulties, problems related to access to technology, and the absence of effective information systems, have limited Algeria's efforts to implement Agenda 21.

The following table shows that the available data and information concerning demographic transformations and sustainability in Algeria are considered¹⁹ very good, as are those related to health.

Good	Some Good but Incomplete Data	Weak
▪ Combating poverty	▪ Integrating environmental issues and development into the decision-making process	▪ International cooperation and trade
▪ Changing consumption patterns	▪ Protection of the atmosphere	▪ Conservation of biodiversity
▪ Human settlements	▪ Conservation of biodiversity	▪ Farmers
▪ Integrated planning and management of land resources	▪ Water resources	▪ International institutional arrangements
▪ Combating deforestation	▪ Toxic chemical substances	
▪ Combating desertification and drought	▪ Farmers	
▪ Sustainable exploitation of mountains	▪ Financial resources and mechanisms	
▪ Supporting sustainable agricultural and rural development	▪ Technology, cooperation, and capacity-building	
▪ Biotechnology	▪ Science in the service of sustainable development	
▪ Oceans, seas, coastal areas, and their resources	▪ International cooperation for capacity-building	
▪ Hazardous waste	▪ International legal instruments	
▪ Education, public awareness, and training	▪ Information for decision-making	

Conclusion

Keeping pace with the indicators of sustainable development has become an unavoidable necessity to avoid lagging behind the community of nations politically on the one hand and economically on the other, particularly since the resources currently exploited to generate foreign currency revenues are nonrenewable. This demonstrates the extent to which it is appropriate to proceed with the application of sustainable development indicators through the exploitation of renewable energies and the preservation of the share of future generations in natural wealth.

Although certain indicators reflect Algeria's strong desire to move forward toward a sustainable development strategy, even a simple comparison with neighbouring countries in the same field clearly demonstrates that willingness alone is insufficient; rather, the capacity to implement the plan must take precedence. It is therefore necessary to confront all the points of weakness related to this issue through the following:

- Initiate policies for the rehabilitation of infrastructure;
- Intensifying environmental awareness policies;
- Combating all forms of pollution that threaten environmental wealth in general;
- Attempts have been made to bridge the gap between education at various levels, particularly in the environmental field, and the existing reality.

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