

Human and Environmental Dimensions of Development: Theory and Practical Challenges

Keynote Speech

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Abstract

Development is, generically speaking, a process of passing to a higher/further level or stage. As related to human society the concept of development appears to have been truly evolving and diversified concept often preceded by certain adjectives such as “economic”, “human” and “environmental”. Albeit diversified, the concept of development does essentially connote a notable and permanent improvement of welfare or wellbeing of humans as individuals or a society.

Development is not only a diverse concept but also an evolving one. The mainstream understanding up to World War II had generally been that development in economic terms was basically the capacity of a nation or a country to generate and sustain an increase in its product/income, despite earlier efforts to consider income or wealth distribution, e.g., the Lorenz curve and the Gini coefficient propounded early in the 20th century). That is, development meant economic growth. Upon the aftermath of WWII, there became a tendency to expressly incorporate the “social dimension” into the concept of development though growth was still a major concern, redistribution was now increasingly emphasized, meaning the emphasis on social indicators such as income distribution, literacy&education, access to proper healthcare, housing, transportation, etc. During that time we observe not only an increased use of Lorenz curve and Gini coefficient but also a new income distribution hypothesis that was developed by S. Kuznets. The consequence was the origination of the term “economic development” that consisted of elimination (or reduction) of poverty, inequality, unemployment, unwellness, illiteracy and the like within the context of a growing economy. Later on the so called environmental revolution/movement began in the late 1960s and the early 1970s which gave the stimulus to gradual “enrichment” of the concept of economic development with inclusion of the “environmental dimension” concerning issues such as deforestation/land degradation/desertification, water and air quality deterioration, loss of biodiversity and wildlife, noise disturbance, etc. Subsequently, the pathbreaking term or concept of “sustainable development” was introduced in *Our Common Future*, the 1987 report by the UN World Commission on Environment and Development, also known as the *Brundtland Report*.

Although theoretical and political discussions and deliberations have been continuing on sustainable development, the concept itself consists of not only economic but also social and environmental/ecological dimensions of development. More specifically, the originally proposed definition of sustainable development makes references to “*meeting the needs of the present*” as for the economic and social dimensions, to “*the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” as for the intergenerational social dimension, and to averting “*compromising*” the aforementioned ability of the generations to come which suggests the limits of natural resources and the environment, i.e., the environmental dimension. As regards to modeling the connections among the three dimensions envisaged in the concept of sustainable development several models

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have been proposed including the simplest three-pillar model, the overlapping circles model and the nested dependencies model.

The issue of measuring and monitoring is no easier than conceptualizing and defining development. It becomes far more difficult when it comes to sustainable development. Of the three dimensions or aspects of sustainable development, economy is the least difficult dimension with fairly established and reasonably comparable criteria and indicators such as GDP, GNP, PPP, IPI, and CUR. The social dimension is undoubtedly a more complex issue to measure and monitor. To date the most established approach in this regard has been the human development index (HDI) that was officially debuted in 1990 after a decade-long discussions and preparations where economists Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen served as the main figures. The HDI is based on life expectancy, education and income. There have been nevertheless a number of expansions of HDI in order to incorporate other social aspects such as income inequality, poverty, and gender issues; such expanded indices include IHDI, GDI, GII, and MPI. Finally, the environmental/ecological dimension is the most difficult one to measure and monitor in the context of sustainable development. The problem arises not because of the difficulty in measuring environmental properties individually but because of the subjectivity of selecting the environmental properties among the many to measure as well as because of the difficulty, if not impossibility, of calculating a single acceptable environmental index. Not surprisingly, the difficulty of a possible sustainable development index multiplies particularly due to the abovementioned problems in measuring the social and environmental dimensions of development.

The quest for development in its broadest sense is to continue. Whatever the scope and definition or the methodology to measure, we do now definitely know that a true “development” cannot be achieved and sustained without taking into account the environmental/ecological limits and human dimension besides the narrowest economic considerations.

Key words: Economic development, human development index, sustainable development, Brundtland report