

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A VIABLE SOLUTION TO REDUCE POVERTY

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ABSTRACT: Poverty is one of the world's greatest economic and social problems of all time. Therefore, sustainable solutions to reduce it are essential to increase the well-being of individuals and society. In this paper, the various causes of poverty, such as social and economic inequalities, limited access to education and health, will be analysed. After an introduction, the concept of sustainable development will be presented, underlying the virtues, as well as limits of it. There will be explored sustainable solutions for poverty reduction, which focus on sustainable development and the promotion of social and economic inclusion. Such solutions could be the creation of jobs and investment in the agricultural sector, the development of infrastructure and public services, the promotion of access to education and health services, and support for local communities and the social and solidarity economy. To validate these findings, qualitative methodology based on content analysis of sustainable development literature will allow to identify and evaluate good practices in sustainable development and poverty reduction. Therefore, it will be possible to show that sustainable solutions for poverty reduction are not only feasible but also effective in terms of social and economic impact. The paper will end with conclusions, arguing that sustainable solutions to poverty reduction are the key to increasing the well-being of individuals and society, and showing that interconnectivity, when considered in a sustainable approach, can improve the benefits for economic and social life.

KEY WORDS: sustainable development, poverty reduction, economic growth, sustainable solutions

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, more specifically in the late 20th and early 21st century, economic models have been used that have imbalances leading to environmental degradation and social inequity. While there has been economic growth, as defined by traditional models, this has been at the expense of natural resources and the living standards of vulnerable groups, including the poor and future generations. To combat these adverse effects, an interest in the concept of “sustainability” has emerged. In 1987, the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future defined sustainable development as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. In this definition, the term “*needs*” refers to the essential needs of the world's poor, which should be met as a priority.

Therefore, according to the definition mentioned above, one of the basic characteristics of sustainable development is poverty reduction. With this as a starting point, the paper aims to present the relationship between sustainable development and poverty reduction. In order to make this possible, the following research questions have been pursued:

RQ1: What is sustainable development and how does it influence poverty reduction?

RQ2: What are the actions through which sustainability helps reduce poverty?

The paper will be organised as follows: first, the concept of sustainable development and its importance in the process of poverty reduction will be briefly explored. Then, the article will explain the methodological approach for this paper, which involves a content analysis of selected articles presenting the relationship between sustainability and poverty alleviation. The article will go on to identify on the variety of methods of poverty eradication through sustainable actions. Finally, the article

concludes with suggestions for further research and future action.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding the concept of sustainable development

As mentioned in the previous section, the concept of sustainable development refers to a model of economic development that reduces the negative environmental impact of the activities envisaged by a conventional economy and that brings well-being to the population by reducing poverty and social inequalities. Sustainable development has two key concepts: the essential needs of the world's poor and the limitations imposed by technology and social organization on the capacity of the environment to meet present and future needs (Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014). Thus, the criteria sought for development to be sustainable are that it simultaneously meets human needs, especially the needs of the population that currently lacks access to basic products and services and is able to protect as much as possible natural resources and the environment so that future generations will also have access to some of the resources they need.

The emphasis on sustainable development that meets current needs, but without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs, was also highlighted in the first Sustainable Development Report. Hence, the term “*common*” in the title of the report “*Our common future*” refers to the fact that a society may diminish in many ways its ability to fulfil the essential needs of its population in the future, for instance by overexploiting resources. This aspect needs to be considered when pursuing a particular direction of technological development, because it may solve some immediate problems, but it can create even greater ones, and unwise development can lead to the exclusion of a large part of the population.

In other words, sustainable development must be progressive and must start from the basic human needs of those people in developing countries who do not yet have access to food, health care, clothing, shelter and jobs. Taking into consideration these deficiencies, economic and social transformation must begin, bearing in mind that some countries face a rigid social and political environment. Whether the political context is favourable or not, economic and social development should emphasise sustainability. This means that in all developed and developing countries, basic needs must be satisfied and opportunities for all to fulfil their aspirations for a better life must be extended. It is imperative to do so because a world where poverty and inequality are endemic will always be vulnerable to environmental and other crises (Imperatives, 1987).

Thus, over time, various events have taken place that had sustainable development at their core, and they will be briefly outlined below. The first event to consider sustainability was the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, which was in fact a conference highlighting the interdependence and simultaneous development of social, economic and environmental factors. It stressed that success in one sector requires action in other sectors to ensure long-term sustainability. The main objective of the summit was to create a comprehensive agenda, called Agenda 21, a new global plan of action on environmental and development issues. It aimed to guide international cooperation and shape development policies for the 21st century. The summit concluded that sustainable development is an achievable goal for people at all levels and recognised the importance of integrating economic, social and environmental concerns. This required a change in perception and approach to production, consumption, lifestyle, work and decision-making. The concept of sustainable development has triggered significant debates within and between governments and with citizens on how to ensure a sustainable future. <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992>

The next event to focus on sustainable development and poverty reduction was the Millennium Summit in September 2000, where, through the Millennium Declaration, all countries and major development institutions around the world unanimously agreed on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These goals cover a wide range of targets, such as halving extreme poverty, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and achieving universal primary education, all to be achieved by 2015. This collective project has triggered unprecedented initiatives to address the needs of the world's poorest people (United Nations, 2015).

Shortly after the Millennium Declaration, the Johannesburg Declaration, adopted at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in South Africa in 2002, was also drawn up. Its aim was to focus global attention and mobilise action to address formidable challenges such as increasing human well-being and protecting our natural resources (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2022). These challenges arise in a world marked by population growth, escalating demand for necessities such as food, water, shelter, sanitation, energy, health care and economic stability.

After 10 years, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2012. This resulted in a concentrated policy document establishing concrete actions to achieve sustainable development. At Rio+20, member states agreed to launch the elaboration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a follow-

up to the Millennium Development Goals and as an extension of the post-2015 development agenda (Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2012). Another important achievement of the conference was the adoption of revolutionary guidelines on green economy policies.

In 2015, United Nations Member States unanimously agreed on the most recent set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) under the 2030 Agenda (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015b). This agenda is centred on the 17 SDGs, which represent a persuasive call to action for countries across the world, regardless of their level of development. They recognise the interdependent relationship between poverty eradication, health and education improvement, inequality alleviation and economic growth. By the same time, they address the urgent problems of climate change as well as the preservation of our oceans and forests. The Sustainable Development Goals highlight the necessity of a global partnership to tackle these major challenges effectively.

2.2. Poverty and its various causes

Poverty is a complex problem and not just an economic one. This is a multidimensional phenomenon which involves both lack of income and lack of essential capabilities to live a decent life. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights defined poverty in 2001 as „*a human condition characterized by the sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights*” - see paragraph 8 of the definitions section of “*Substantive Issues Arising In The Implementation Of The International Covenant On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights: Poverty And The International Covenant On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights*” published by the Committee On Economic, Social And Cultural Rights in 2001 in Geneva (Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 2001). Extreme poverty, on the other hand, has been described as „*the combination of income poverty, human development poverty and social exclusion*” (Human Rights Council, 2008). It refers to a situation in which the lack of basic security simultaneously affects many aspects of people's lives, severely compromising their chances of being able to exercise or regain their rights in the future.

Poverty is not just a humanity issue but also a rights issue. It is both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations and contributes to the persistence of other types of violations. It is characterised by multiple and mutually reinforcing infringements of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Those who live in poverty often experience regular deprivation of their dignity and equality.

Moreover, people living in poverty face numerous barriers to accessing their rights and benefits, including physical, economic, cultural and social barriers. They confront interdependent and mutually reinforcing deprivations such as insecure working conditions, poor housing, lack of nutritious food, inequitable access to justice, political powerlessness and limited access to healthcare. All of these prevent the realisation of their rights and thus perpetuate the cycle of poverty. In this way, people experiencing poverty find themselves in a vicious circle of disempowerment, racism, discrimination, exclusion and material deprivation, which reinforce each other. (Human Rights Council, 2012)

Unfortunately, poverty is not unavoidable and it is mainly the result of the actions and inactions of governments and other

economic actors. Previous public policies have often failed to reach people in poverty, leading to the transmission of poverty from one generation to the next. Structural and systemic inequalities within society - social, political, economic and cultural - often remain unresolved and exacerbate poverty (Human Rights Council, 2012). The lack of policy consistency at national and international level weakens or contradicts the commitment to combat poverty. However, even though poverty is not inevitable, there are solutions at hand to eradicate it, and sustainable development includes such solutions, which will be presented in the results and discussion section.

3. METHODOLOGY

To carry out this paper, quantitative methodology was used, a research approach that aims to understand and interpret social experiences and phenomena by collecting and analysing the content of the most relevant sources in the literature. This methodology was approached because a complex and diverse social phenomenon such as poverty reduction, and its relationship to sustainable development, cannot be easily measured or quantified.

Therefore, the data used to carry out this study were collected through research questions. To answer them, various academic and non-academic works were reviewed, but both scholarly and strictly related to the topic of this paper. Reliable sources such as Scopus, Web of Science and Mendeley were used to select academic papers and rich and detailed data was collected through probing and reflective skills. Regarding the information retrieved from non-academic papers, there have been approached the most reputable platforms, partnerships and programmes that aim at sustainability.

The entire research process used to develop this study can be delineated into three stages as follows:

- (1) Literature review phase
- (2) Identification of the definition and characteristics of sustainable development
- (3) Linking sustainable development to poverty reduction

The literature review phase started with the definition of key words, followed by a search of the most relevant academic sources in known databases. These included: sustainable development, poverty reduction, sustainable future, social equity, economic development. After finding academic articles containing at least one of the above keywords, they were analysed and selected, first by title and then by abstract content. For the information taken from platforms or programmes dedicated to sustainable development (UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, Green Growth and Sustainable Development Forum - OECD) there was considered that the information in the reports published by them should be as recent as possible.

Subsequently, the study materials that were selected were read in their entirety and study sheets were prepared for each of them. The most relevant information found in these materials was mentioned in these sheets.

In the second stage, which involved identifying the definition and characteristics of sustainable development, the information in the study sheets produced in the previous stage was analysed. This enabled the most commonly used definition of the concept of "sustainable development" to be determined. In addition to the definition of this concept, its characteristics were identified and the expected effects of sustainable development in the social

sphere were emphasised. The results obtained will be presented in the section dedicated to them.

The third stage of the research process consisted of linking sustainable development with poverty reduction. In other words, based on the characteristics of sustainable development identified in the second stage, only those characteristics were selected which would have an impact in the social area and which could help reduce poverty.

4. DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Fighting poverty - a human rights approach

Thinking about children living in miserable conditions because of poverty is unacceptable. Governments have a vital responsibility to ensure that every child has equitable access to essential services, whether they are at or outside the home. It is essential that these children benefit from a range of basic social services such as medical care, proper nutrition, secure housing, pure drinking water and elementary education. Why are these services so necessary? Because it is only through access to them that children will be able to develop to their full potential without being limited by illness, poor nutrition, lack of literacy or other forms of deprivation. Of course, it is also essential that adults have unrestricted access to these basic social services (Human Rights Council, 2012).

A further key issue is the provision of adequate acknowledgement and treatment for all people in poverty, recognising them as independent and autonomous individuals. Therefore, poverty policies should aim at empowering these people and be based on the principle that they have the right to exercise their own choices. Respecting their ability to reach their full potential, to retain their dignity and to participate in decisions that affect their lives is essential.

In addition to this, states have the responsibility to ensure that people living in poverty participate actively, freely, informed and meaningfully in all stages of decision-making. Building the capacity of these people and providing them with human rights education is fundamental. Moreover, specific mechanisms and institutional arrangements are needed to overcome the barriers faced by poor people (Human Rights Council, 2012).

An essential issue of concern is that people living in poverty often suffer from a lack of access to basic information, which negatively affects their lives. States are responsible for making public services and programmes affecting these people transparent. They should ensure accessible and culturally relevant information about the services and rights that are available, promoting them actively using all available communication channels. In addition, governments must ensure that the right of people living in poverty to seek, receive and impart information about decisions affecting their lives is respected. Governments are also responsible for ensuring access to information on the respect of rights and should find ways to sanction those who violate the rights of the poor.

Thus, based on human rights (Human Rights Council, 2012), states should develop and adopt a poverty reduction strategy, so that people and groups affected by this social phenomenon are actively involved in its development and implementation. Such a strategy must have clear objectives, a well-defined timeframe, a well-defined implementation plan and, finally, the budget needed to achieve the objectives. In addition, the authorities and bodies responsible for initiating the actions set out in the strategy and for penalising those who fail to carry them out properly should be specified.

In view of the above, policies and strategies to combat poverty should follow the next steps to ensure that the objectives of these strategies are achieved:

Identification of vulnerable groups it is very important that groups facing poverty, social exclusion and discrimination of any kind are recognised and targeted.

Once vulnerable people have been identified, they should have their *capacities strengthened* through education and training so that they can be empowered and participate effectively in decision-making processes.

For vulnerable groups to be involved in decision-making at different levels, *specific institutional mechanisms and arrangements* need to be put in place.

Obviously, these groups of people in a disadvantaged social condition must be *adequately represented* at all stages of policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

They must also be *empowered*, by supporting and empowering these groups to express their views and needs, ensuring that their voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Protecting and supporting individuals, organisations and social movements that advocate for the rights of those living in poverty must be actively manifested.

Finally, the progress of these actions must be *regularly monitored and evaluated* to determine their effectiveness, and if they prove to be ineffective, they must be adjusted to ensure meaningful participation and empowerment of vulnerable groups.

4.2. Fighting poverty with sustainable solutions

In the section on understanding the concept of sustainable development, various events were highlighted that aimed to develop strategies and plans that would gradually lead to sustainable development. The most recent sustainable development plan is the 2030 Agenda, which includes 17 goals, the first of which is poverty reduction. So any step towards achieving the first sustainable development goal will actually be a step towards poverty reduction.

The United Nations has set several targets that need to be met in order to achieve the main goal of poverty reduction (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015a) In the following, the targets will be described and then some ways in which they can be achieved will be presented.

The first target to be achieved is the eradication of extreme poverty for all people worldwide by 2030 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015b). Thus, since extreme poverty means a person living on less than \$1.25 a day, families and local communities in this situation need support from governments. By supporting them, individuals can access resources and services, such as providing access to health care, social services and financial assistance programs, that can help them overcome poverty. In this regard, there have been several social assistance programs over the years, and two of the most well-known are the “*Bolsa Familia*” program in Brazil (see Figure 1) and the “*Oportunidades*” program in Mexico (see Figure 2).

Through the poverty reduction target, it is expected that half of the men, women and children facing poverty will lead better lives and escape poverty (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015a). Because education is a powerful weapon in the fight to reduce poverty. Governments should invest more

in education and build schools, provide scholarships and support teacher training programmes. These issues are very important because educated people who have the skills and knowledge to secure better paid jobs will be able to improve their standard of living.

States around the world should also provide access to public services and developed infrastructure. This is the only way to achieve economic growth, and for this to happen, investment is needed in infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges and water systems, as well as public services such as healthcare, education and sanitation.

Bolsa Familia Program

Appearance: Bolsa Familia is a conditional cash transfer programme implemented by the Brazilian government since 2003.

Purpose: To reduce poverty and promote social inclusion by providing financial assistance to low-income families.

Eligibility: The programme targets families living in extreme poverty and those with children.

Benefits: Eligible families receive a monthly cash transfer, and pregnant women, infants and children are offered additional benefits to ensure their health and nutrition needs are met.

Conditions: Regular school attendance and vaccination of children.

Results: The programme has reached millions of families in Brazil, making a significant impact on their lives. According to evaluations, Bolsa Familia has contributed to reducing extreme poverty, increasing school enrolment rates, improving children's health and nutrition and promoting social mobility.

Success of the program: Bolsa Familia has a strong targeting system, making sure that funds are directed to the poorest and most deserving families. Secondly, the programme focuses on conditionalities, promoting investment in human capital and promoting positive behavioural change. Third, Bolsa Familia is run through a decentralised system which involves both local authorities and community participation, helping to ensure effective implementation and monitoring.

Feedback: The success of the Bolsa Familia programme has led to its replication in other countries with similar challenges and has become a model for many other conditional cash transfer programmes around the

Figure 1. Bolsa Familia in Brazil: A successful poverty reduction program - Figure by the author based on information from the World Bank - Bolsa Familia: Changing the Lives of Millions (The World Bank, 2010)

Another viable solution for significantly reducing the number of people in poverty could be investment in agriculture and entrepreneurship, both of which are key factors in economic growth and development. More specifically, regarding agriculture, the focus should be on organic farming, which brings not only social but also environmental benefits. In this respect, access to funding, training and technical assistance from relevant organisations should be ensured (Elder, Wilkings, Larrea, Elamin, & Fernandez de Cordoba, 2021).

Another objective is to ensure the right to economic resources, property, natural resources, appropriate new technologies and financial services for vulnerable people by 2030 (UN

Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015b). Thus, this goal implies transparency and access to information. This can be ensured by governments providing access to information about their policies, programmes and budgets. Moreover, it is also necessary to involve communities in decisions that can influence their lives, so their involvement in the design and implementation of policies and programmes should be promoted.

Oportunidades / Prospera Program

Appearance: Mexico's conditional cash transfer programme called "Oportunidades" has been operating since 2002. This is currently known as "Prospera".

Purpose: To reduce poverty and improve human capital among vulnerable populations.

Eligibility: Under the programme, cash transfers are provided to low-income families, targeting in particular households with children.

Benefits: Conditional cash transfers

Conditions: Transfers are conditional on the fulfilment of certain requirements, such as children's regular school attendance, participation in health check-ups and families' participation in nutrition education.

Results: It has had a significant positive impact on poverty reduction and social development in Mexico. It has effectively improved educational attainment, health outcomes and overall well-being among beneficiary households. Key outcomes and impacts of the programme include increased school enrolment and attendance rates, improved child nutrition, reduced child labour and increased access to health services.

Success of the program: First and foremost, Oportunidades/Prospera has a strong focus on targeting the most vulnerable populations, ensuring that resources reach those who need them most. Second, conditionalities create incentives for families to invest in education and health, breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Third, the programme is well implemented through a robust monitoring and evaluation system, which helps track progress and make necessary adjustments.

Feedback: The programme has set a good example for other countries facing high levels of people in poverty.

Figure 2. Oportunidades/Prospera: A successful conditional cash transfer program in Mexico - Figure by the author based on information from the World Bank - A Model from Mexico for the World (The World Bank, 2014)

As the least developed countries will not be able to achieve these goals, international collaborations are envisaged that could ensure significant resource mobilisation from a variety of sources and development cooperation. In this way, developed countries should come to the aid of less developed countries by promoting trade and investment and supporting international cooperation on issues such as climate change and global health. It is not only governments that are responsible for such international collaboration, but also non-state actors, including business enterprises. In this regard, corporate social responsibility should be promoted and business-community partnerships supported.

Finally, strong national, regional and international policy frameworks need to be developed based on pro-poor development strategies to accelerate investment in poverty eradication (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs,

2015a). But this would not be possible without continuous monitoring. Clear goals and targets should be set, robust monitoring and evaluation systems developed and people and communities involved in the process. And to ensure that policies and programmes are implemented in a way that is consistent with human rights and social justice, governments should promote community involvement in policy-making and focus promoting diversity and inclusion and the needs of marginalised and vulnerable populations.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Analysing the results, it can be concluded that sustainable development is a viable solution for poverty reduction, as it approaches the social phenomenon from several points of view and analyses both its root causes and its consequences. Given the fact that sustainable development includes certain policies and strategies that have social effects, an environment can be created that is conducive to poverty reduction, so that the well-being of the world's population can be increased.

However, as mentioned in the paper, poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires a complex approach. Thus, a first point that can be made is that by promoting a sustainable economy, poverty could be combated. There are sufficient solutions such as investment in sustainable sectors, like renewable energy or sustainable agriculture, which can be real employment opportunities for those affected by poverty. Moreover, a sustainable economy is about the responsible use of natural resources, promoting their efficient use, which can contribute to long-term economic stability and reduce social inequalities.

In addition to the economic aspects, sustainable development also takes into account the social dimension of poverty. Thus, the focus is on ensuring access to basic services such as education, health, clean water and safe housing, all with the aim of improving the quality of life of the poor. Moreover, more attention is paid to vulnerable groups, such as children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, so that they benefit from equal opportunities.

Another aspect that sustainable development encourages is the participation and inclusion of vulnerable groups in decision-making. By involving these communities in the planning and implementation processes of development policies and projects, solutions appropriate to them can be adopted and their needs considered. The active participation of the poor in decisions that affect them gives them a sense of ownership and empowerment, thus increasing their chances of improving their situation and reaching their full potential.

In conclusion, sustainable development is a comprehensive and coherent framework for tackling poverty. It involves not only economic but also social and environmental measures to ensure balanced and sustainable development. To build a better and fairer world, poverty must be addressed in the context of sustainable development and it must be ensured that no individual is left behind. Finally, it must be mindful of Nelson Mandela's very true statement that: „*Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom.*” Nelson Mandela Johannesburg, South Africa - 2 July 2005.

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