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An Analysis on the Sustainable Development Goals of U.N. on the Eve of its 75th Anniversary

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is a development model that considers the environment when achieving balanced growth with efficiency and fairness. In addition, it focuses on the short- and long-term local and overall interests while contributing towards the socioeconomic systems and individuals' lifestyles. The sustainable development theory emphasizes maintaining the integrity and sustainability of development. In this case, integrity refers to achieving the developmental goals by considering both local and overall interests. In other words, the overall interests (interests of all the stakeholders) should not be sacrificed for regional interests during development; various systems should coordinate and promote each other to achieve common progress. This paper traces the evolution of the concept of sustainable development. It also analyses the sustainable development goals of U.N. in the light of Agenda 30.

Keywords: *Sustainable development, Agenda 2030, United Nations, Economic development, Global goals.*

I. INTRODUCTION

First, sustainable development emphasizes the coordinated development between resource utilization and economic growth. The countries and regions recording a relatively backward economic development must change the traditional development mode, which neglects environmental protection and resource saving, and emphasize cleaner production and civilized consumption to achieve sustainable economic growth. This can be achieved through a combination of rational resource utilization and environmental protection. The level of the contemporary economy should be improved while ensuring the goal of sustainable economic growth in the future.

Second, the theory of sustainable development emphasizes moderate development, taking into account the environmental carrying capacity while using natural resources. In the process of

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development, we should fully consider the scarcity and non renewability of resources; ensure rational development, utilization, and conservation of resources; improve the cleaner production and environmental self-protection capacities; and improve the utilization rate of environmental resources, to establish a stable ecosystem and realize the development goals.

Finally, the main goal of the sustainable development theory is to improve the quality of human life. In other words, sustainable development emphasizes that human society should reduce the gap of wealth and unemployment rate by controlling population growth rate and by improving and regulating social distribution to ultimately establish a geo-social environment, in which people can live and work in peace and contentment and have a high quality of life.²

II. DEFINITION AND DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development is the overarching paradigm of the United Nations. The concept of sustainable development was described by the 1987 Brundtland Commission Report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” It is generally conceived as resting on three pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. Looking more closely into the term “sustainable”, it is defined as something that is “able to be upheld or defended” . The first part of this definition indicates that sustainable development is the development that can be maintained over time, while the second part indicates that sustainable development is the development that can be safeguarded from the impact of negative events and processes. These two parts are closely related, as it is not only events and processes that may impact development, but the means for development may also increase or create new events and underlying processes that in turn make it difficult to maintain development over time.³

There are four dimensions to sustainable development – society, environment, culture and economy – which are intertwined, not separate. Sustainability is a paradigm for thinking about the future in which environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of an improved quality of life. For example, a prosperous society relies on a healthy environment to provide food and resources, safe drinking water and clean air for its citizens.⁴

² Malin Song, ... Xianyou Pan, in Sustainable Marine Resource Utilization in China, 2020

³ Conceptual Frames for Risk, Resilience and Sustainable Development Per Becker, in Sustainability Science, 2014.

⁴ UNESCO. 2021. *Sustainable Development*. [online] Available at: <<https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd/sd>> [Accessed 10 August 2021]. 1

III. EVOLUTION OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The industrial revolution is connected to the rise of the idea of sustainable development. From the second half of the 19th century, Western societies started to discover that their economic and industrial activities had a significant impact on the environment and the social balance. Several ecological and social crises took place in the world and raised awareness that a more sustainable model was needed.

Here are some examples of the economic and social crises that shook the world in the twentieth century:

- 1907: the American banking crisis
- 1923: the crisis of American hyperinflation
- 1929: the financial crisis of the 1930s begins
- 1968: the worldwide protests against bureaucratic elites
- 1973 and 1979: oil shocks
- 1982: the debt shock of developing countries

And some examples of ecological crises:

- 1954: Rongelap nuclear fallout
- 1956: Mercury crisis of Minamata
- 1957: Torrey Canyon oil spill
- 1976: Seveso disaster
- 1984: Bhopal disaster
- 1986: Chernobyl nuclear disaster
- 1989: Exxon Valdez oil spill
- 1999: Erika disaster

But also: global warming, air pollution, the issue of the ozone layer, the loss of biodiversity...⁵

The world's vision and commitment regarding sustainable development have been changing throughout the time. Science has been developing and helping to build the foundations of what are the causes and consequences of climate change. Simultaneously, world leaders have been changing their commitments to this problem. Find below a summary of some of the most important conferences about sustainable development.

⁵ Youmatter. 2021. *World conferences on sustainable development - Youmatter*. [online] Available at: <<https://youmatter.world/en/definition/definitions-world-conferences-sustainable-development/>> [Accessed 10 August 2021].

IV. UN ENVIRONMENT CONFERENCE & SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, 1972

After the tragedy of commons and limits to growth theories, the world organized itself regarding global politics. The first historical conference about environmental concerns was organized in Stockholm in 1972. Here, the world leaders meet to discuss the human impact on the environment and how it was related to economic development. One of the main goals of this gathering was to find a common outlook and common principles to inspire and guide the world's population to preserve the "human environment".

(A) 1st World Climate Conference, 1979

In 1979, the World Climate Organization (WMO), the UN Environment Programme, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) organized the First World Climate Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. One of the main goals of the conference was to assess the knowledge of climatic change as for how natural and anthropogenic causes influenced it. The other objective was to analyze possible future climatic variability and its implication on human society.

(B) World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere, 1988

The World Conference on the Changing Atmosphere, also known as the Toronto Conference, took place in Toronto, Canada, in 1988. More than 300 scientists and policy-makers participated with the goal of taking specific actions to reduce the threatening crisis caused by the pollution of the atmosphere. The Conference aim was also to develop a comprehensive framework for protocols on the protection of the atmosphere.

(C) Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit & Sustainable Development, 1992

Twenty years after the Stockholm Conference, the UN tried to help world leaders rethink economic development and come up with solutions to prevent the destruction of irreplaceable natural resources and the pollution of the planet. The conference's main message was that a transformation of attitudes and behavior would bring the necessary changes and that more consciousness about the impact that excessive consumption was having on the environment was needed. Governments acknowledged the call to redirect international and national projects and policies to assure that economic decisions took environmental impacts into consideration. It was also stated that toxic components such as gasoline or poisonous waste would be scrutinized and that alternative sources of energy should be developed for the future. The need to rethink public transportation systems in order to reduce emissions and to fight the health problems in cities caused by polluted air were discussed as important issues to reach a

sustainable development.

(D) UN Conference on Human Rights & Sustainable Development, 1993

This conference took place in Vienna, Austria, and its main outcome was the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. This document stated that the universal nature of all human rights and fundamental freedoms was unquestionable and that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and inter-related. At the same time, the world leaders also confirmed that international actions would be taken to promote and protect human rights.

(E) 1st Conferences Of Parties (COP) & Sustainable Development, 1995

The first UN Climate Change Conference took place in 1995 in Berlin. It was focused on the ability of the world's nations to develop and implement policies to fight climate change. Specifically, the world's leaders started negotiating legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases – that would later be materialized in the Kyoto protocol.

These Conferences Of Parties (COP) are yearly conferences held by the UN that aim to formally gather the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to assess the progress in dealing with climate change.⁶

(F) World Food Summit & Sustainable Development Conference, 1996

The World Food Summit took place in Rome, Italy, in 1996. The summit was organized by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The big conclusions of this conference were written in the Rome Declaration on World Food Security. This document's main ideas were that all people have the right to have access to safe and nutritious food and that politicians would commit to ongoing national and international efforts to eradicate hunger in all countries and to immediately reduce the number of undernourished people in the world.

(G) The Kyoto Protocol & Sustainable Development Conference, 1997

The Kyoto Protocol is an international treaty that lengthens the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and was adopted in Kyoto (although it only entered into force in 2005). It represents the commitments that state parties made to reduce GHG emissions. The parties recognized the threat of GHG emissions to global warming and how human activities had been increasing these emissions.

In other words, the goal of this protocol was to stabilize the greenhouse gases (GHG)

⁶ Ibid.,

concentrations (specifically CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide, sulfur hexafluoride, hydrofluorocarbons and perfluorocarbons) in the atmosphere at a level that prevents dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

(H) Millenium Summit & Sustainable Development Conference, 2000

The goal of this 3-day conference that was held in New York, USA, was to discuss the role of the United Nations at the turn of the 21st century. 189 member states of the United Nations, the largest gathering of world leaders in history up to that date, agreed on the need of helping the world's poorest countries to develop and achieve a better life by the year 2015. This and other agreements on global issues were summarized in the millennium declaration, from which 8-millennium development goals (MDG) were created:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger;
- Achieve universal primary education;
- Promote gender equality and empower women;
- Reduce child mortality;
- Improve maternal health;
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases;
- Ensure environmental sustainability;
- Develop a global partnership for development.⁷

(I) Johannesburg's Conference on Sustainable Development 2002

The Johannesburg Earth Summit 2002 gathered tens of thousands of participants focused on discussing how to improve people's lives, preserve natural resources and dealing with global problems such as the demand for food and water or the improvements needed in the energetic and economic fields. In this conference, companies joined governments and NGOs for the first time.

(J) New York World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2005

The 2005 World Summit took place in New York and the international community discussed concrete ways to fight poverty and all forms of terrorism, re-inforcing their willingness to protect civilians from all crimes committed against humanity such as genocide or war crimes. In this way, both the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council were created

⁷Ibid.,

to help in the war to peace transition.

(K) Copenhagen Summit & Sustainable Development, 2009

The Copenhagen Conference signaled the climax of a two-year negotiation that started in Conferences Of Parties 13 in Bali, whose aim was to enhance international climate change cooperation. Expectations were that the Copenhagen Climate Conference would end up in an agreement. And the hopes were this agreement would lead the world toward a path to prevent and fight climate change after the Kyoto's Protocol deadline. Nonetheless, no specific consensus was reached and this wasn't really the case as. Although many countries pledged they'd act, the Copenhagen Accord wasn't formally adopted after the negotiations.

(L) Rio20+ UN Conference on Sustainable Development, 2012

(M) UN Climate Change Conference & Sustainable Development, 2014

The United Nations Climate Change Conference or Conferences Of Parties 20 was held in Peru in 2014. In this meeting, negotiations towards a global climate agreement started being made. The goal was to reduce the greenhouse gases emissions and to limit the global temperature increase to 2° Celcius.

(N) Conferences Of Parties 21 & the Paris Agreement for Sustainable Development, 2015

In COP21 the Parties to the United Nations Framework on Climate Change reached a landmark agreement. They agree to accelerate and intensify the actions and investments needed for a sustainable low carbon future. In fact, the Paris Agreement brought for the first time all nations into a united cause: taking bold efforts to fight climate change and adapt to it. It marks a new course in the global climate effort. One that aims to keep the global temperature rise below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Moreover, the agreement also aims to strengthen the capacity of nations to deal with the consequences of climate change.

(O) New York & the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2015

In 2015, in New York, the 193-Member United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This agenda is a course of action for people and the planet to be able to prosper in a peaceful and wealthy world.

The world leaders recognized that eradicating poverty was the biggest global challenge to sustainable development. They stated all nations and stakeholders should collaborate to implement the new agenda. This program is divided into 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets. All of these goals and targets are integrated with the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

(P) Conferences Of Parties 24 in Katowice, Poland, 2018

During this conference, important announcements were made, starting with the UN general director. António Guterres warned humankind is out of the desired path regarding the climate change fight. He also underlined that most nations responsible for GHG emissions are late in their efforts to accomplish their Paris' promises.

The world leaders detailed the rules for the application of the Paris Agreement in December 2018. At the same time, they also set guidelines to fight climate change over the next few years. Over 160 countries presented their plans to reduce greenhouse gases emissions and the missing ones must do so until 2020.

V. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF U.N- AGENDA 2030.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The 17 SDGs are integrated—they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Countries have committed to prioritize progress for those who're furthest behind. The SDGs are designed to end poverty, hunger, AIDS, and discrimination against women and girls.

The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context.⁸The international community has also created rules to verify if nations' goals are being accomplished after 2024. The idea is that every two years every country presents reports of its climate change actions. And these will afterward be reviewed by specialists. Nevertheless, nations that don't comply won't be punished (they won't be fined). As well, on a 5-year basis, the global efforts to keep the Earth's temperature under 2°C will be assessed. This assessment will start in 2023.⁹Such Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are as follows:

(A) Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Eradicating poverty in all its forms remains one of the greatest challenges facing humanity. While the number of people living in extreme poverty dropped by more than half between 1990

⁸ United Nations Development Programme. 2021. *Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>> [Accessed 10 August 2021].

⁹ Youmatter. 2021. *World conferences on sustainable development - Youmatter*. [online] Available at: <<https://youmatter.world/en/definition/definitions-world-conferences-sustainable-development/>> [Accessed 10 August 2021].

and 2015, too many are still struggling for the most basic human needs. The SDGs are a bold commitment to finish what we started, and end poverty in all forms and dimensions by 2030. This involves targeting the most vulnerable, increasing basic resources and services, and supporting communities affected by conflict and climate-related disasters.

(B) Goal 2: Zero Hunger

Unfortunately, extreme hunger and malnutrition remain a huge barrier to development in many countries. The SDGs aim to end all forms of hunger and malnutrition by 2030, making sure all people—especially children—have sufficient and nutritious food all year. This involves promoting sustainable agricultural, supporting small-scale farmers and equal access to land, technology and markets. It also requires international cooperation to ensure investment in infrastructure and technology to improve agricultural productivity.

(C) Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

Good health is essential to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda reflects the complexity and interconnectedness of the two. It takes into account widening economic and social inequalities, rapid urbanization, threats to the climate and the environment, the continuing burden of HIV and other infectious diseases, and emerging challenges such as noncommunicable diseases. Universal health coverage will be integral to achieving SDG 3, ending poverty and reducing inequalities. Emerging global health priorities not explicitly included in the SDGs, including antimicrobial resistance, also demand action.¹⁰

(D) Goal 4: Providing quality education

Achieving inclusive and quality education for all reaffirms the belief that education is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for sustainable development. This goal ensures that all girls and boys complete free primary and secondary schooling by 2030. It also aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education.

(E) Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Ending all discrimination against women and girls is not only a basic human right, it's crucial for sustainable future; it's proven that empowering women and girls helps economic growth and development. It is vital to give women equal rights, land and property, sexual and reproductive health, and to technology and the internet. Today there are more women in public

¹⁰ United Nations Development Programme. 2021. *Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>> [Accessed 10 August 2021].

office than ever before, but encouraging more women leaders will help achieve greater gender equality.

(F) Goal 6: Ensure access to water and sanitation for all

Water scarcity affects more than 40 percent of people, an alarming figure that is projected to rise as temperatures do. Safe and affordable drinking water for all by 2030 requires we invest in adequate infrastructure, provide sanitation facilities, and encourage hygiene. Protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems is essential.

Ensuring universal safe and affordable drinking water involves reaching over 800 million people who lack basic services and improving accessibility and safety of services for over two billion.

(G) Goal 7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy

Investing in solar, wind and thermal power, improving energy productivity, and ensuring energy for all is vital if we are to achieve SDG 7 by 2030. Expanding infrastructure and upgrading technology to provide clean and more efficient energy in all countries will encourage growth and help the environment.

(H) Goal 8: Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all

The SDGs promote sustained economic growth, higher levels of productivity and technological innovation. Encouraging entrepreneurship and job creation are key to this, as are effective measures to eradicate forced labour, slavery and human trafficking. With these targets in mind, the goal is to achieve full and productive employment, and decent work, for all women and men by 2030.¹¹

(I) Goal 9: Build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

Investment in infrastructure and innovation are crucial drivers of economic growth and development. With over half the world population now living in cities, mass transport and renewable energy are becoming ever more important, as are the growth of new industries and information and communication technologies.

(J) Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Income inequality requires global solutions. This involves improving the regulation and

¹¹ Ibid.,

monitoring of financial markets and institutions, encouraging development assistance and foreign direct investment to regions where the need is greatest. Facilitating the safe migration and mobility of people is also key to bridging the widening divide.

(K) Goal 11: Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

The rapid growth of cities—a result of rising populations and increasing migration—has led to a boom in mega-cities, especially in the developing world, and slums are becoming a more significant feature of urban life.

Making cities sustainable means creating career and business opportunities, safe and affordable housing, and building resilient societies and economies. It involves investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in participatory and inclusive ways.

(L) Goal 12: Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns

Achieving economic growth and sustainable development requires that we urgently reduce our ecological footprint by changing the way we produce and consume goods and resources. Agriculture is the biggest user of water worldwide, and irrigation now claims close to 70 percent of all freshwater for human use.

The efficient management of our shared natural resources, and the way we dispose of toxic waste and pollutants, are important targets to achieve this goal. Encouraging industries, businesses and consumers to recycle and reduce waste is equally important, as is supporting developing countries to move towards more sustainable patterns of consumption by 2030.¹²

(M) Goal 13: Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

There is no country that is not experiencing the drastic effects of climate change. Greenhouse gas emissions are more than 50 percent higher than in 1990. Global warming is causing long-lasting changes to our climate system, which threatens irreversible consequences if we do not act.

Supporting vulnerable regions will directly contribute not only to Goal 13 but also to the other SDGs. These actions must also go hand in hand with efforts to integrate disaster risk measures, sustainable natural resource management, and human security into national development strategies. It is still possible, with strong political will, increased investment, and using existing technology, to limit the increase in global mean temperature to two degrees Celsius above pre-

¹² Ibid.,

industrial levels, aiming at 1.5°C, but this requires urgent and ambitious collective action.

(N) Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources

The SDGs aim to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems from pollution, as well as address the impacts of ocean acidification. Enhancing conservation and the sustainable use of ocean-based resources through international law will also help mitigate some of the challenges facing our oceans.

(O) Goal 15: Sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss

Human life depends on the earth as much as the ocean for our sustenance and livelihoods. Plant life provides 80 percent of the human diet, and we rely on agriculture as an important economic resource. Forests cover 30 percent of the Earth's surface, provide vital habitats for millions of species, and important sources for clean air and water, as well as being crucial for combating climate change.

Urgent action must be taken to reduce the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity which are part of our common heritage and support global food and water security, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and peace and security.

(P) Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

We cannot hope for sustainable development without peace, stability, human rights and effective governance, based on the rule of law. Yet our world is increasingly divided. Some regions enjoy peace, security and prosperity, while others fall into seemingly endless cycles of conflict and violence. This is not inevitable and must be addressed.

Armed violence and insecurity have a destructive impact on a country's development, affecting economic growth, and often resulting in grievances that last for generations. Sexual violence, crime, exploitation and torture are also prevalent where there is conflict, or no rule of law, and countries must take measures to protect those who are most at risk.

The SDGs aim to significantly reduce all forms of violence, and work with governments and communities to end conflict and insecurity. Promoting the rule of law and human rights are key to this process, as is reducing the flow of illicit arms and strengthening the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.

(Q) Goal 17: Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

The SDGs can only be realized with strong global partnerships and cooperation. The world is more interconnected than ever. Improving access to technology and knowledge is an important

way to share ideas and foster innovation. Coordinating policies to help developing countries manage their debt, as well as promoting investment for the least developed, is vital for sustainable growth and development.

The goals aim to enhance North-South and South-South cooperation by supporting national plans to achieve all the targets. Promoting international trade, and helping developing countries increase their exports is all part of achieving a universal rules-based and equitable trading system that is fair and open and benefits all.¹³

VI. CONCLUSION

In September 2015, the General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building on the principle of “leaving no one behind”, the new Agenda emphasizes a holistic approach to achieving sustainable development for all. Through the pledge to Leave No One Behind, countries have committed to fast-track progress for those furthest behind first. That is why the SDGs are designed to bring the world to several life-changing ‘zeros’, including zero poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls.

From analysing the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is understood that it requires collective and coordinated action from all the countries of the world to reach the targets set out in the SDGs by 2030. Achieving the SDGs demands the partnership of governments, private sector, civil society and citizens alike to make sure we leave a better planet for future generations. Every country should contribute their valuable efforts to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030.

¹³ United Nations Development Programme. 2021. *Sustainable Development Goals | United Nations Development Programme*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>> [Accessed 10 August 2021].