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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A GLOBAL WORRY

Abstract: Sustainable development is a critically important and complex issue being addressed on a global scale. While the international community recognizes its significance, reaching a consensus on the necessary course of action remains a challenge. Extensive consultations have taken place, yet concrete measures to address pressing environmental concerns, such as the impact of global warming and climate change, still need to be included. Notably, global institutions, including the United Nations, have prioritized sustainable development on the international agenda, but conclusive strides toward mitigating these challenges still need to be made.

Keywords: sustainable development, progress, order, United Nations, States, ecology, environment, engagement

ZRÓWNOWAŻONY ROZWÓJ: GLOBALNY PROBLEM

Streszczenie (abstrakt): Zrównoważony rozwój to niezwykle ważny i złożony problem, którym zajmuje się społeczność międzynarodowa. Podczas gdy społeczność międzynarodowa uznaje jego znaczenie, osiągnięcie konsensusu w sprawie niezbędnego kierunku działań pozostaje wyzwaniem. Odbłyły się szerokie konsultacje, ale nadal należy uwzględnić konkretne środki mające na celu rozwiązanie pilnych problemów środowiskowych, takich jak wpływ globalnego ocieplenia i zmiany klimatu. Co ciekawe, instytucje globalne, w tym Organizacja Narodów Zjednoczonych, nadały priorytet zrównoważonemu rozwojowi na arenie międzynarodowej, ale nadal należy poczynić zdecydowane kroki w celu złagodzenia tych wyzwań.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, postęp, porządek, Organizacja Narodów Zjednoczonych, państwa, ekologia, środowisko, zaangażowanie

The global interconnectedness of human activities necessitates an examination of the far-reaching impact of current trends. Simultaneously, it is imperative to recognise how these trends are influenced by the behaviours of the world's eight billion or so inhabitants. These behaviours are shaped by the political, economic, and social institutions individuals operate within. Sustainable development is a social endeavour that envisions the future, necessitating changes in our actions to chart new courses. It is reasonable to assert that addressing our challenges requires collective efforts from all societal stakeholders at every decision-making level (Yigit, 2024a). While cultural diversity and the autonomy of human communities are fundamental to sustainable development, fostering a unified vision capable of orchestrating collective efforts for tangible outcomes is imperative.

Nevertheless, complexities arise in navigating the multitude of initiatives purporting to promote sustainable development, often from disparate actors and guided by divergent, sometimes conflicting, motivations (Yigit, 2023a). How do people effectively steer toward their intended course when an overarching consensus on the vision is lacking? While no one claims to have definitive answers to these intricate questions, one proposal can be to engage in a reflective process responsive to the complex and pressing challenges that must be addressed. The need for a shared vision in this context cannot be overstated.

In order to facilitate the successful implementation of sustainable development, several key facets must be considered: Firstly, a comprehensive understanding of the system's functionality is essential. This necessitates integrating scientific insights into collective knowledge and proficient comprehension of the operational dynamics of political, social, and economic institutions.

The second imperative is articulating a shared vision, underscoring the significance of democratic deliberation. Nevertheless, the realisation of this vision is liable to remain uncertain, particularly within a context where control is elusive, and influence is the best-case scenario. Engaging in reflective discourse concerning the foundational principles and values that steer society's envisaged future is crucial. This obligation must be unrestricted within the discourse of sustainable development.

A third vital step involves formulating precise guidelines encompassing targeted objectives and indicators. Subsequently, action must be taken at varied hierarchical strata, with numerous initiatives underway at multiple levels.

Finally, the indispensable culminating point is the provision and optimisation of the resources necessary for action-taking, amending established methodologies, monitoring the outcomes of these adjustments, and modifying approaches accordingly.

The objective is to outline the options for facilitating the transition towards sustainable development. This involves engaging diverse stakeholders and implementing interventions at various levels (Beck et al., 2023).

Sustainability issues, such as climate change, resource depletion, and social inequality, are extremely complex. They impact all aspects of human societies. The science of complexity can significantly contribute to our understanding of these intricate issues, emphasising the need for cautious application of methods and principles derived from the natural sciences in addressing social matters (Sigahi et al., 2023).

Complex systems are defined by non-linear interactions among multiple actors or autonomous entities within a network structure, and they exist as open systems. These systems give rise to new emergent properties that transcend the mere summation of individual components' properties, exhibiting behaviours and properties not inherent in their constituent parts (Yigit, 2023b). Consequently, they defy reductionism, rendering it impossible to ascribe their explanation to limited, defined causes (Ruggerio, 2021). Furthermore, the evolution of complex systems eludes precise anticipation, precluding control and definitive knowledge of intervention outcomes within these systems.

Amidst this complexity, the principles of adaptation and self-organisation guide the evolution of complex systems, offering a beacon of hope. These principles can serve as a compass, illuminating effective action strategies in this intricate landscape. Striving for adaptability, fostering mechanisms to address unforeseen circumstances, and upholding the autonomy of actors are touted as the most promising strategies in navigating this complex terrain.

Sustainable development is not a static endpoint but a dynamic process of continuous progress. It is a response to the complexity of our world, requiring flexibility for adaptation and self-organisation. The idea of progress, now widely accepted in modern society, was not present in pre-modern societies, such as medieval Western societies (Japee, & Oza, 2021). This concept now guides our approach to sustainable development. The interplay between cooperation and competition and the integration of science into decision-making are clear examples of the complexity we face in pursuing sustainable development.

Assuming that each society may define this advancement as deemed appropriate based on their specificities, questions remain regarding the means at the disposal of each society to attain it. Whether it pertains to fertile land, energy sources, access to maritime or land transport routes, technology, or knowledge, these resources are not uniformly distributed across societies and nations, nor within individual national units. In our increasingly globalised world, typified by deepening interdependencies among global economies and societies, financial transfers alone are inadequate to rectify such disparities; addressing their origins becomes imperative (Hoang, Nguyen & Le, 2022). Resolving certain quandaries inevitably relies on the actions of others, necessitating consideration of each party's objectives, actions, and limitations, thus underscoring the need for cooperation. The realisation that cooperation is fundamental to societal progress underpins establishing international organisations, functioning as platforms for crafting a vision of progress and as mechanisms for fostering it.

Nevertheless, member countries of international organisations underscore that their foremost responsibility lies in improving conditions for their citizens (Yigit, 2024b). Secondly, this enhancement rests on maximising available opportunities, encompassing resources within their territorial boundaries and those obtainable through trade, production, and investment mechanisms elsewhere.

Options

The concept of transcendent order is typically found in myths or religious beliefs rather than in a vision of an attainable future. Globally, progress often hinges on competition among nations for resource access. The coexisting notions of cooperation to improve the quality of life for all humanity and competition to enhance the quality of life for specific national populations present a multifaceted challenge. While the underlying principles and values often conflict, most development strategies seek to strike a middle ground without acknowledging this inherent conflict. This paradox is a significant feature of the contemporary world, where the pursuit of cooperation must grapple with the imperative of competition.

Two options are available when selecting a path forward, each with distinct advantages and limitations. One approach involves crafting a unified future vision that aligns with consistent principles to galvanise collective action. However, realising this objective today is challenging, and desirable and feasible actions may be postponed. Nevertheless, it offers the advantage of establishing criteria and guidelines for assessing the many unforeseen consequences of actions.

The second option involves seeking a compromise on specific actions and the means to execute them before a consensus on the overarching vision and values to be embraced. This alternative, characterised by pragmatism, facilitates the attainment of results provided that agreement on precise objectives is reached. It allows for the transcendence of overly vague perspectives, such as the concept of a universally improved world, without becoming entangled in pursuing a theoretical equilibrium between conflicting principles of action. While this approach favours the adoption of "win-win" means, assessing their potential consequences proves to be a challenge in the absence of a broader reference framework to gauge the benefits, risks, and long-term ramifications compared to other potential means. Consequently, the only relevant yardsticks in such instances become the negotiating capacity and power dynamics among the involved parties.

When considering the intricacy of the current landscape in anticipation of shaping a favourable future, the role of our relationship with scientific knowledge must be duly acknowledged (Stein et al., 2023). As previously indicated, the challenges we face often transcend individual perceptual limitations, necessitating a reliance on scientific knowledge to comprehend their nature and associated risks. The abundance of information must consistently translate into actionable knowledge suitable for decision-making. Presently, one can argue that "cognitive overload" is taking place – an excess of information devoid of the necessary abstraction mechanisms to translate it into new knowledge (Bergeron-Guyard et al., 2014). Therefore, expanding knowledge only leads to improved understanding if one can decode, interpret, and assimilate this information into individual and collective knowledge and skills.

This presents a significant challenge within our interconnected society, particularly within the context of education. The dual role of science, both as a critical means of assessing problems and as a crucible for individual and collective decision-making, constitutes a pivotal element for analysing current trends and potential opportunities (Allen, Metternicht & Wiedmann, 2021).

Pragmatic Targeting

Sustainable development entails delivering results and elucidating the pragmatic approach embraced in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) strategy. Unveiled at the Millennium Summit in 2000, these eight objectives were designed to address the fundamental needs of the most marginalised populations. They delineated targets to be attained by 2015: income, employment, education, nutrition, gender equality, infant mortality, maternal health, disease prevention, environmental sustainability, and global cooperation (Stanujkic et al., 2020). By fostering resource mobilisation, notably through

public-private partnerships, the formulation of specific and measurable targets served as a conduit to concentrate efforts on resolving tangible challenges within a constrained timeframe.

Considering the magnitude of the predicaments, this accord on a minimum achievement threshold may necessitate reassessment. The conclusive evaluation in 2015 evidenced tangible progress in attaining certain objectives, particularly the widespread provision of AIDS treatment, advancements in agricultural productivity, augmented school enrolment rates, and enhanced access to water and sanitation services. Despite enduring significant disparities among nations and at the domestic level, these favourable outcomes, pinpointed during interim appraisals, positioned this strategy as an exemplar to emulate at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012 (Sachs, 2020). This blueprint was embraced to steer collective endeavours toward sustainable development. Subsequently, in 2013, an expert panel was commissioned to identify themes and propose Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), accompanied by targets and indicators, for submission to the United Nations General Assembly. The objective was to integrate the MDGs and SDGs, guiding global actions beyond 2015.

The working group examined the principles delineated in the Rio Declaration, particularly the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (Fraisl et al., 2020). The anticipated targets were required to be action-oriented, succinct, easily communicable, limited in number, globally formulated, and universally applicable while considering national realities about capacities, levels of development, and national policies and priorities. Subsequently, the group delineated areas for intervention that are consistent with the MDGs and introduced novel domains, including energy, industrialisation, infrastructure, sustainable cities and human settlements, production and sustainable consumption, climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, marine resources, seas and oceans, and peaceful societies and competent institutions. Furthermore, the group analysed these domains' interrelationships to prioritise actions that concurrently benefit multiple areas. The process engaged additional national representatives, experts from various countries and United Nations programs and agencies, and representatives of the nine major civil society groups.

National and sectoral consultations were conducted during 2013 and 2014, while an online survey solicited input from global citizens to select six themes from 16 options. This comprehensive effort culminated in formulating the 2015-2030 development agenda, encompassing 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets (Yigit, 2024c). This agenda was collectively endorsed on September 25, 2015, by the 193 member countries of the United Nations and was greeted with a standing ovation from the assembled delegations. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon praised it as a universal, integrated and transformative vision for a better world (Tomuschat, 2021). Notably more participatory than the MDGs in its formulation, this emergent program is also more expansive as it addresses environmental, social, and economic challenges. It embodies the desire of states to uphold multilateral cooperation and pursue collective solutions, a significant aspiration amidst enduring crises and tensions. While laudable, this aspiration must be realised

through tangible actions. Establishing precise indicators for each target constitutes a critical stride toward executing this ambition.

Implementing the SDGs should pique the interest of all nations, not solely those considered the most financially deprived. The assertion that all countries are in a state of "development", regardless of their economic standing, underscores the universal importance of these objectives (Nussbaum, 2021). Therefore, every nation needs to address the task of ensuring a decent quality of life for all its inhabitants, particularly in a sustainable manner. Notably, the obligation to achieve these goals involves more than just national governments, limited civil servants, and international experts. Rather, it extends to encompass all citizens and civil organisations. These entities should endeavour to exert influence on their respective governments to ensure compliance with their commitments. This encompasses both financial support for international programs and the incorporation of these objectives and their corresponding indicators within the framework of each country or region. Such collective action presents an opportunity to foster improved coherence across different levels of decision-making and among the endeavours of all stakeholders, both individual and collective, which can contribute to forming an all-encompassing vision for the future.

How Happy?

Since its inception, economics has been linked to the concept of societal progress and the pursuit of the well-being of the masses. Adam Smith, recognised as the progenitor of modern economics, was predominantly acknowledged for his scholarly contributions to moral philosophy during his lifetime (Smith, 2010). Societal progress and development are assessed and benchmarked using economic metrics, with most governments shaping their policies around such indicators, often focusing on economic growth as the primary yardstick. Although historical circumstances have necessitated a predominant focus on material sustenance for most of humanity, advancements in management methodologies and technologies have enabled an increasing segment of the populace to transcend mere subsistence. This realisation has prompted the emergence of novel methodologies for analysing societies and steering their advancement.

The SDG strategy builds upon the UNDP's series of human development reports. These reports are designed to collate and compare data from diverse nations to inform discussions on development policies. The indicator model is widely utilised due to its dual functionality. It allows for the collective articulation of the vision for the desired future and quantifies the contribution of specific actions towards its realisation. The Human Development Index (HDI) emerged from the collaboration of a team of economists commissioned by the UNDP in the 1990s, featuring the notable involvement of Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen (Sen, 2000). This initiative was a notable response to the mounting critiques of the conventional focus on economic growth as the sole measure of development, typically quantified solely by gross domestic product (GDP).

Since the 1990s, the UNDP has consistently produced reports leveraging the HDI, encompassing per capita income measurements, life expectancy at birth, school enrolment

rates, individual freedom, and national income. Consequently, the HDI underscores the notion that the quality of life is contingent upon factors beyond the direct implications of economic expansion within a nation. By accentuating the significance of infrastructure and public services like healthcare and education, alongside the role of public institutions in effecting tangible enhancements in the quality of life within a given nation, this index presents a more intricate and multifaceted perspective of development, in contrast to one that merely equates it with GDP growth. Nearly twenty-five years of methodological refinement and adaptations to encompass various contributing elements have underscored the HDI's capacity to showcase that progress and development invariably transcend economic growth.

Sen's work presents alternative solutions to the conventional definition of fundamental and universal needs. Instead, Sen advocates for a diverse range of conditions that he deems essential for the complete realisation of individuals within society. These conditions, termed "capabilities," serve as domains of freedom that enable the development of human potential (Sen, 2013). Integral examples of such capabilities encompass health, education, and political participation. Sen refrains from positing an exhaustive and definitive list, thus allowing each nation the autonomy to establish its priorities.

An elaboration of this approach provides a more comprehensive inventory and a minimal benchmark of conditions requisite for social justice, thereby delineating the essence of global development. This delineation entails endowing all individuals with a gratifying and inventive life, facilitating actualising their potential within an existence imbued with significance, dignity, and impartiality. Should the endeavour of formulating the SDGs constitute a pivotal element in establishing this minimal threshold and rallying collective global endeavours, the prospective monitoring mechanisms of the SDGs are poised to enable individual nations to discern their priorities and tailor indicators to suit their respective social and cultural milieus.

The discipline of national accounting is undergoing significant evolution in response to the limitations of relying solely on GDP as an economic indicator. This evolution is rooted in the System of National Accounts, a statistical framework endorsed by major international organisations such as the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank. Its purpose is to monitor and analyse the global economy to inform decision-making. In 2012, the international community adopted a new statistical reference, the System of Environmental and Economic Accounting (SEEA), to complement rather than replace the existing framework system (Mamii & Khomenko, 2009). Its primary objective is to provide clear, concise, and coherent statistics and indicators to elucidate the complex interrelationships between the economy, the environment, and society. Notable SEEA indicators encompass the rate of industry exploitation of natural resources, atmospheric emissions, and water use.

A pioneering feature of the SEEA is its integration of environmental and economic statistics, leveraging readily available data from most nations. This integrated statistical information facilitates comprehensive analyses and equips decision-makers with the tools necessary to develop more effective policies. Collecting data and generating reliable,

comparable analyses to adequately assess progress towards the SDGs presents a considerable challenge, often called the "data revolution." (Allen et al., 2021).

Alternative measures such as Gross National Happiness (GNH) are gaining prominence in assessing societal progress. GNH represents a tool designed to gauge the quality of life and social progress holistically and human-centrally, distinct from the traditional GDP approach (Ugyel, Givel & Chophel, 2024). Bhutan has officially adopted this novel indicator, establishing a GNH commission responsible for evaluating policy decisions and allocating resources accordingly.

Alternative viewpoints offer a fresh perspective on progress, considering individual aspirations beyond consumerism and the market. They articulate principles and values that can be transformed into goals or serve as criteria for evaluating strategies. A potential articulation of these principles includes:

- Reevaluating the role of economic growth in the conception of societal progress;
- Embracing diversity;
- Prioritising the interconnected components of progress while respecting the earth's biogeochemical limits and determining the relationships between the ecosystem, social, cultural, and economic dimensions of progress accordingly.

These principles embody the values of freedom, responsibility, solidarity, and transcendence, recognising a human dimension beyond material needs. They allow us to appreciate the diversity of values that underpin concepts of progress and development objectives. One must understand that more does not necessarily equate to better. Furthermore, focusing on ecological economics one may argue that transitioning to an "economy in society in nature" requires three fundamental changes:

- i. Embracing a worldview that acknowledges our existence on a finite planet and that well-being relies on more than material consumption;
- ii. Replacing the current pursuit of unlimited growth with objectives focused on material sufficiency, fair distribution, and sustainable human well-being;
- iii. Completely redefining the global economy to safeguard natural systems crucial for life and well-being while balancing natural, social, human, and built capital.

Action

Communities and organisations worldwide are increasingly committing to sustainable development. While some are influenced by public pressure or the demands of their customers, others are genuinely dedicated to making a positive environmental impact. From responding to regulations and employee demands to enhancing their public image, various initiatives are driving sustainable development.

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) is a global association of cities and local governments focused on implementing sustainable development (Betsill & Bulkeley, 2021). Established in 1990, the association unites over 1,000 towns and villages from 86 countries. Its objective is to promote local action for global sustainability and aid cities in becoming sustainable, resilient, and resource-efficient

while promoting biodiversity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. ICLEI is also pivotal in developing smart infrastructure and creating inclusive and green urban economies to foster healthy and happy communities. The organisation provides training and networking opportunities for elected officials and mayors, shares resources and experiences, leads campaigns, and finds solutions to support the implementation of sustainable practices. For instance, ICLEI-Europe has designed an integrated and cyclical sustainability management tool for local governments to help them attain sustainability goals and fulfil their commitments.

Hosting green, sustainable, and responsible events is a powerful way for organisations to demonstrate their environmental and social responsibility commitment. By following comprehensive guides on sustainable development, relating to brands and eco-responsible pharmacy, businesses can make a significant impact (Mufson, 2022). Alongside this, adopting a responsible sourcing policy that considers the environmental and social impact of goods and services is crucial. Implementing this can be challenging but essential for creating a positive influence. Embracing corporate social responsibility (CSR) encompasses these efforts and goes even further. Companies adopting CSR voluntarily take responsibility for the impact of their activities on the community and integrate social and environmental considerations into their culture and operations (Sisaye, 2022). The Sustainable Apparel Coalition is a prime example of how multiple stakeholders can work together to minimise their products' environmental and social impact (Coalition, 2021).

Progressive Path Forward

The cornerstone of humanity is the individual who embodies, influences, and promotes ideas, behaviours, and values. He/she wields a modest yet significant impact on society and the world. For instance, advocating for sustainable practices in our daily lives can propel positive change. This final section delves into the power individuals hold in fostering development.

Committing to sustainability is not just a choice but a moral imperative. It entails embracing an ethic of equality, fairness, and solidarity. It also involves recognising our responsibility to contribute to the well-being of others. Sustainable development is rooted in acknowledging humanity's interconnectedness. Understanding this interconnectedness is crucial in a world where our everyday actions can reverberate globally. Moreover, past behaviours have necessitated a change for the betterment of the community (Waridel, 2002). Current challenges call for similar transformative actions on a larger scale.

Voluntary simplicity, often called "joyous austerity" by Dansereau, represents a conscious choice to reduce material consumption and possessions, enhance life satisfaction, and honour its core values (Howe, 1997). Renowned figures such as Leo Tolstoy, John Ruskin, Henry Thoreau, and Gandhi have embraced this philosophy. The decision to embrace voluntary simplicity can stem from various reasons and can be manifested in diverse ways. This lifestyle offers numerous benefits to individuals, allowing them to work less, thereby creating more time for leisure, family, personal projects, and community engagement. Moreover, decreased consumption lessens the environmental

impact by reducing the associated pollution. Therefore, adopting voluntary simplicity not only benefits individuals but also contributes to responsible consumption and ecological awareness.

Achieving sustainable development demands that we confront personal complexity. While it may be daunting to address uncertain issues and contend with the associated risks and solutions, this is an essential aspect of our development. Venturing into the realm of sustainability involves breaking out of our comfort zone and taking action amid the complexities and uncertainties that arise. Embracing our world's rich complexity demands a deep understanding of its interconnected aspects. This includes delving into the workings of natural, social, and economic systems and recognising the intricate relationships between different entities. It is equally important to comprehend the fundamental ideas that shape our thinking and behaviour and how they relate to different forms of development.

Summary

Engaging in dialogue is a powerful tool for broadening perspectives. Fostering conversations among diverse groups can give us crucial insights into different cultures, generations, and economic sectors. This inclusive approach challenges us to critically assess our worldview and cultural assumptions while endeavouring to understand those of others. "Sustainable happiness" presents a powerful framework for our collective well-being (Alam, 2022). It prompts us to consider how our pursuit of happiness impacts others and the environment. By actively seeking ways to enhance the quality of life for individuals and communities, one can strive for enduring happiness without compromising the well-being of others or future generations.

Embracing sustainability demands time to think, educate ourselves, and take meaningful action. One must rethink our consumption patterns, participate in discussions, engage with our political leaders, and assert our values to the companies we support. Various movements advocating for a more sustainable society advocate for slowing down our lifestyles and production to respect the natural environment better. For instance, the slow food eco-gastronomic movement, founded in Italy in 1986, champions the consumption of nutritious food produced in ecologically sound and ethical conditions (Lee, 2019). This appeal for a new approach to time has also permeated the realm of research, as evidenced by manifestos from European scientists advocating for the freedom to deliberate, collaborate, and foster interdisciplinary connections, particularly between the natural and human sciences.

So far, an extensive overview of ongoing global initiatives from various levels, domains, and regions has been noted, signifying a notable shift; these diverse initiatives have garnered attention from multilateral organisations globally, offering a valuable opportunity to assess their collective impact. Taking an objective and scientific approach to the presented issues highlights that progress assessments may vary based on individual perspectives. However, regardless of differing viewpoints, it is crucial to recognise the collective value of these initiatives and understand that our collaborative efforts will define their success.

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