
Research article

Social Justice, Economic Justice, and Sustainable Development: A Human Development Perspective

Idress Mohammed Husien ^{1*}, Abdulrahman S. Alenizi ²

¹ School of Computer Science, Kirkuk University, Kirkuk, Iraq

² The Public Authority for Applied Education and Training (PAAET), Kuwait

* Correspondence: husienidress@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The significance of sustainability derives from its marginal benefits for human development, whereby incomes, through redistributive processes, support and enhance human development outcomes. Human development is conceptualized as the extent to which an individual attains a certain standard of living by satisfying subjective, objective, and factual needs generated by the economic, social, political, and cultural environment. This process involves becoming aware of the means of need satisfaction and adapting to both existing and potential resources. Consequently, human development is realized only when principles such as social justice and economic justice are effectively implemented.

1. Introduction

This paradigm of sustainable development, in which economic and social relations stimulate and situate the wealth of society in a limited, but sufficiently wide, time frame, in order to meet the expectations of future generations, supports the systems of values and societies in finding solutions for the pressing challenges of humanity. Human development assures the connection of the human aspects with the economic forces through which the demands of the people are met. In this view, development is the process by which social justice is finally reached[1-5].

2. Body

2.1 The Evolving Concept of Development

The concept of development has undergone fundamental transformation in response to the evolving expectations of both society and individuals, as well as those of the state and institutions. In contemporary discourse, development refers to what is beneficial to the individual in achieving certain developmental parameters without compromising the natural environment, with support from the community[6-8]. The integration of human development, economic development, and sustainable development within the broader development framework emphasizes the comprehensiveness of an approach focused on creating economic conditions that ensure the prerequisites for human development[8]. Initially, according to Joseph Stiglitz, the comprehensive approach to development implied strengthening markets; however, equally important is the strengthening of government and the identification, as each country reaches a particular stage of development, of the appropriate balance between government and market mechanisms[9]. Our conception of development transcends governance alone. The state no longer possesses the means and tools to adequately satisfy social

needs, due to both a shortage of financial resources and deficient management of available resources. For this reason, alongside markets, government, and individuals, the community emerges as an important factor in generating sustainable development. This community is assimilated with the local economy[10–12].

2.2 The Local Economy and Sustainable Development

The concept of the local economy resides in the necessity for regional economic development—of the local economic community whose objective is to implement economic reform programs targeting both infrastructure development and the enhancement of citizens' welfare. There is no universally accepted definition of the local economy; however, it possesses a certain degree of autonomy from the national institutional economy while combining local specificities and existing economic resources[13]. It creates strategies for resource exploitation by attracting investors for both horizontal development, the addition of new businesses producing goods and services similar to those of existing companies and operating within the same sequence of the research–development–production sales chain, and vertical development extending the range of business activity within the industry to which it belongs. Both forms of development aim to create employment opportunities and ultimately increase the economic welfare of the community. The omnipresent terms within the local economy include: economic resources, local authorities, public–private partnerships, investors, sustainable development, equitable intergenerational exchange, and social enterprises. These terms contribute to shaping the concept of social justice, or at minimum, attempt to configure the pathway toward social justice[14, 15].

2.3 Social Justice: Conceptual Foundations

Social justice is a moral and political construct aimed at equal rights and collective solidarity, advocating for a more just society assured through the redistribution of wealth while acknowledging the perpetual state of injustice that characterizes human societies. Social justice is founded upon the equal rights of every person and the possibility for all human beings, without any discrimination, to benefit from economic and social progress, irrespective of political or socio-economic doctrine. Ensuring social justice extends beyond the level of revenues derived from economic activity; it is equally an expression of rights, dignity, freedom of expression, and economic, social, and political autonomy. As Sen articulates, despite the crucial role of income in the advantages enjoyed by different individuals, the relationship between incomes and the achievements and personal freedoms is neither constant nor automatic nor irresistible[16]. Above income, or at least complementary to it, matters the individual welfare, which encompasses, in addition to income, freedom of expression, freedom to communicate, to relate, and to act within the limits accepted and enforced by the community. John Rawls argues that a society is just by following these principles in the exact order: all social values, freedoms and opportunities, income and wealth, as well as the social bases of self-esteem, must be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of some or all would benefit everyone[17]. Although the distribution of wealth and income doesn't need to be equal, it should benefit everyone, and, simultaneously, positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all. The distribution of wealth and income, as well as positions of authority and responsibility, must be consistent both with basic freedoms and equality of opportunity[18, 19].

2.4 Dimensions of Social Justice

Currently, three dimensions of the concept of social justice may be identified: the symbolic dimension, namely recognition, which does not mean the valorization of group identity but rather the claim of equal status in social interactions; the economic dimension, namely the redistribution of wealth; and the political dimension, namely access to political representation for certain groups [20]. The concept of social justice is applicable through a tripartite relationship among markets, institutions, and needs, thereby strengthening the link between social justice and economic justice.



Figure 1 – The Concept of Social Justice

2.5 The Relationship between Social Justice and Economic Justice

At a scientific level, the two concepts differ in terms of species' content—"social" and "economic"—while sharing the same genus: "human development." The issue of achieving welfare involves both the state and the market. The state, through economic policy levers, can influence the effective allocation of economic resources, particularly through monetary and fiscal instruments that contribute to satisfying individual needs. The market, through competitive mechanisms, can ensure efficient use of economic resources. Thus, the problem of ensuring individual welfare is limited to increasing the effectiveness of the state—specifically, economic policies—in redistributing wealth within the economy, combined with increasing the efficiency of market mechanisms in the production of economic incomes[21]. What maximizes individual welfare? How can the efficiency of resource utilization be maximized, considering both the effectiveness of the process of attracting and using resources to meet individual needs and the overall goal of increasing welfare?

In this regard, we consider the assumption that welfare maximization implies ensuring social justice on one hand, and ensuring sustainable economic development on the other[22, 23]. Welfare can be achieved by reducing the degree of disparity between communities as subjects of the local economy without necessarily reducing disparity between individuals, as this is a consequence of the physico-psycho-socio-economic development of each individual. In this analysis, what matters from the perspective of social justice is the individual's relationship to the formal act of economic policy, specifically, the extent to which support for the redistribution of economic wealth is consistent with attitudes toward labor and community[24].

2.6 Measuring Regional Disparity

In analyzing the degree of economic disparity, we employ the indicator of disparity D , as used by EUROSTAT. The dispersion 'D' of regional GDP for level 2 regions is defined as the sum of the absolute differences between regional and national GDP per inhabitant, weighted by the regional share of population and expressed as a percentage of the national GDP per inhabitant:

$$D = 100 \times \frac{1}{Y} \sum_{i=1}^n \ln \left(\frac{y_i}{Y} \right) \times p_i \quad PD = 100 \times \frac{1}{Y} \sum_{i=1}^n \ln \left(\frac{y_i}{Y} \right) \times P_i$$

Where:

- y_i is the regional per-inhabitant GDP of region i
- Y is the national average per-inhabitant GDP
- p_i is the population of region i
- P is the population of the country
- n is the number of regions in the country

Table 1. Indicator of Disparity, Romania, 1996–2009

Year	Real GDP Growth Rate (% , volume, percentage change on previous year)	D Indicator (%)
1996	3.2	18.863
1997	-4.9	20.755
1998	-2.1	23.611
1999	-1.2	25.389
2000	2.4	30.913
2001	5.7	27.996
2002	5.1	31.281
2003	5.2	30.346
2004	8.5	29.671
2005	4.2	35.067
2006	7.9	36.152
2007	6.3	37.532
2008	7.3	40.173
2009	-6.6	39.163

The data presented above indicate an increasing level of disparity among regions—Romanian counties being assimilated into regions. The causes contributing to these increasing disparities are diverse: low levels of investment attraction to exploit local potential; poor utilization of the workforce; low labor productivity correlated with the relatively low weight of economic goods on markets; poorly equipped technical labor; the prevalence of self-consumption economy and subsistence farming compared to the knowledge economy; and the low level of integration of research and high technology into the economy[25, 26].

2.7 Local Economic Development as a Mechanism for Reducing Disparity

We further analyze the possibility of local economic resources being efficiently allocated within the local economy to reduce disparities among regions over the medium and long term. Most authors analyze the principles, parameters, and policies of local economic development (LED) in relation to the effective utilization of economic resources available in respective local economies. Local economic development is an activity designed and implemented by local actors in the public and private sectors of the community through a set of programs and projects. This process increases the welfare of local members and economic agents[27]. Achieving this goal requires cooperation between public and private sector representatives in the utilization of human, technical, and financial resources of a community, associated in a sectoral or intersectoral structure of activity—private or public—aimed at creating employment[28]. In essence, local development is a development policy, predominantly economic in nature, applied to a territory and concerning the local community. Through factors and local social and economic structures, primarily local small and medium enterprises (SMEs), this policy materializes its objectives related to the utilization

and development of local resources and the creation and maintenance of a stable and profitable business environment[4]. The local economy also depends on the financial resources available to local authorities, including local taxes paid by economic agents and individuals. Enterprises benefit from local economic policies and, through compulsory levies at the local level, primarily finance local government expenditure, demonstrating that local economic development is the result of collective actions by the public and private sectors and the local community. The problem that arises and can be exemplified by Indicator D is how to stimulate local economies that are precarious in economic resources (limited natural resources, aging workforce, poorly qualified or currently underemployed population) to develop sustainable economic activities while benefiting simultaneously from the transfer of financial resources and technical assistance from more prosperous local economies. Under these conditions, the market mechanism alone cannot achieve an efficient allocation of economic resources, especially financial ones[29]. Therefore, the state, through policies and economic institutions, is able to stimulate the business environment by employing fiscal and monetary levers to attract investment, develop local markets using specific products of the local economy, and train a superior workforce through an educational system centered on skills and high utilization of local economic resources. An important source for local economic development is the promotion of entrepreneurship locally and regionally by providing the means to support entrepreneurial activities: institutional and financial support (accessibility to attract financial capital) and the promotion of various forms of association for entrepreneurship development. We consider the identification of motivations that are appropriate to encourage and support entrepreneurship in poorer local economies seeking to develop their economy and, consequently, the wellbeing of individuals:

- At whatever stage of economic development, one can benefit from promoting both types of entrepreneurship: mimetic entrepreneurship, meaning technology brought from abroad, especially through foreign direct investment (FDI), and innovative entrepreneurship, through innovations adapted to the unique circumstances of local economies.
- The adoption of all the principles of entrepreneurial capitalism—the adoption of incentives for people to become entrepreneurial and productive and to use productive means for pursuing personal goals through a combination of power, wealth, and prestige.
- Regulations and institutions must reduce obstacles to such activities, provide financial rewards for success, and offer assurance that these rewards will not be withdrawn.

Local economic development is, as noted, an important prerequisite for social justice, which will also lead to the reduction of disparity between regions. This fact is even more evident when the economic nature of social justice is emphasized. In this respect, the following considerations are relevant:

- Adjustment of economic divergence of local economies by maintaining a low level of taxation to increase interest in entrepreneurship development, stimulate economic initiative, and reduce the shadow economy.
- Reduction of the underground economy by eliminating subsistence economy practices.
- Initiation of measures to stimulate the creation of markets for products of the local economy, especially those produced in households, by creating mechanisms of penetration of these products into the consumption basket of citizens, to increase the premises of monetization of the subsistence economy developed especially in rural areas.
- Creation of technical assistance and research programs to implement advanced technological and research infrastructure in local economies to reduce development gaps.
- Focusing on the individual and his needs as the main subject of the local economy, stimulating his motivation and creating involvement in the local economy.
- Local economic development in consensus with sustainable development principles.

3. Conclusion

By implementing actions centered on human development and entrepreneurship, society will ensure the potential to generate rational economic behavior based on efficient use of resources, awareness of resource depletion, and consequently the possibility of market expansion. To ensure social justice, strengthen economic justice, and reduce economic disparities among regions, the economic process should be based on the capacity to assume a complex of institutional and market measures to stimulate the growth of local economies by exploiting human capital, ecological capital, and the incomes generated by the acts of production and sales. The increase in purchasing power and consumption capacity of the individual, as part of the local economy, will follow the process of creating revenues through markets, supported by structural economic policies based on productivity incentive measures; insofar as the economic goods produced respond to a stimulus of domestic and external demand. This should be in correlation with the exploitation of comparative advantages of the local economy to increase its competitive ability.

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