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Sustainable development in poor countries: economic challenges and strategic pitfalls

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Abstract

The evolution of the world's activities in the long term has seen the advent of sustainable development as an approach and this after having known a path of destructive economic growth of the environment. If in developed countries, awareness was almost instantaneous with the adoption of more proactive policies in this area, developing countries are experiencing dilemmas in several aspects. First of all, it has been found that measures that go in the direction of sustainable development prove to be limiting of the speed of economic growth when developing countries need them so much for their economic development. Either policy measures tend to increase production costs or they limit growth. Then come the dilemmas that follow one after the other. First, in the face of economic logic, developing countries find it difficult to understand development policies (in its true meaning). To this end, it seems that these countries apply all other measures below global ambitions in terms of economic growth (allusion made to the Sustainable Development Goals). Secondly, very difficult choices are put in front of these countries: should we limit the population or consumption? Given the lack of resources, should we protect humans or nature? Faced with the global approach to sustainable development, should we think nationally or internationally? These are all questions to which developing countries must seek answers. It turns out that well-adapted strategies based on local realities must be favored in the first place to have rational and effective policies in sustainable development.

Keywords: sustainable development - economic choice - developing countries - nature - environment

Introduction

Sustainable development is an economic and social process that ensures the needs and fulfillment of current generations without compromising those of the future. This definition known by almost everyone represents as many wishes as fears. Wishes to ensure satisfactory conditions for humanity today with all that this implies of economic and social dignity. Fears in the mind of not being able to bequeath a healthy and conducive environment for the offspring. Between the two, there is the necessary technical mastery which must benefit from economic rationality in the short, medium and long term, given that technical progress plays a major role in the process. It is to this triangular dilemma that each country and the world have mobilized to enjoy economic development that is self-sustaining over the long term. Hence the meaning of sustainability. But it is clear that the economic conditions do not automatically follow the same logic in the different countries. Poor countries find themselves in a rather delicate position because the main ingredient, technical mastery, is far from certain. This paper will therefore try to reflect on the challenges of sustainable development in poor countries facing problems of human dignity, preservation of the environment and technical mastery.

If the rich have already embarked on a long and continuous process to be where they are now with the corresponding endogenous or exogenous conditions, the poor countries meet the challenges on roughly the same path but with a delay of several centuries. If the former who already have enough to eat are thinking about the conditions of their environment (they have already passed the threshold of humanitarian danger) with an eye for future generations, the latter are still struggling for their living conditions and survival with a vision limited on his body (the problems of starvation and malnutrition being). It is noted that the world is going

at two speeds, but the global mobilization is common to all, rich and poor alike. Hence a notorious gap between the two sub-worlds

To see some of the realities of the dilemmas in which poor countries find themselves, we will first see the theoretical definitions of development and sustainable development with its economic, social and environmental dimensions in their context. Secondly, sustainable development will be questioned in its economic and strategic aspect in poor countries. And finally, the economic challenges, the strategic traps will be highlighted in order to draw reflections in the world in full boiling on the Sustainable Development Goals or the famous SDGs

1- Economic development and sustainable development: the theoretical aspects

1-1- From growth to development: what theoretical developments?

Development is defined as “an action of developing, evolution of what develops in the direction of growth and development of an organ or organism.”

In the economic sense, Fabrice Flipo argues that development has designated the setting to music of the productive forces through work and its division. It must therefore be said that development is a process of flourishing in the economic and social sense.

The economic definition of development can be summarized as transformations of economic and social structures that allow long-term support of the standard of living. Even if it is different from economic growth, which is the quantitative increase in production and its added value (the latter being the main source of wealth), logic confirms that the two feed and sustain each other: it there is no development without growth nor growth without development.

In this sense, to understand the how of growth (and therefore of development), it is necessary to refer, among other things, to the division of labor (Adam Smith), to technical progress (Robert Solo), to innovation (J.A. Schumpeter), to the accumulation of capital (Karl Marx)

In the beginning, growth is a matter of the successive combination of work, innovation, technical progress, accumulation and organization. Logics and history have taught that all countries need to go through these phases to achieve growth and development. The latter is then acquired with transformations induced from the former.

The evolution of development has taken on a more political and geopolitical aspect; In fact, the word "development" was born after the Second World War

In the 1950s, the liberal analysis of underdevelopment considered the latter as the expression of the simple backwardness of the poor countries, which therefore had only to copy the development model of the rich countries. In this logic, it was Rostow who highlighted in 1961, the five stages of the growth of countries to develop, including “traditional society”, the prerequisites for development; the “take-off”; the “march towards maturity”; mass consumption. In his approach, Rostow wanted to confirm that all these steps are mandatory and cannot be crammed.

Then come the words of Arthur Lewis on the dualism in which we see a modern, capitalist sector, which is the source of accumulation and productivity gains, and a traditional, subsistence sector, which weighs on the modern

sector because of low productivity gains.

With the evolution of analyses, there was the notion of centre-periphery”. and the explanation of the unequal exchange of Arghiri Emmanuel and Samir Amin...

After all, the underdevelopment very recently called poverty was caused by a bad cumulative cocktail of backwardness, dualism, unequal exchange (recently unequal) and above all a different cultural structure to that which was coupled with the standard course of the economy including rationality, anticipation, protection against risk, etc....

These explanatory analyzes of development are all the more insistent insofar as the problems have worsened over time with famine, food insecurity and malnutrition, weak agricultural performance, very limited industries.....In this imprisoning cocktail, the real question on the part of poor countries is how to think of “sustainability” for something that we do not yet have and that we should first conquer and appropriate?

1-2-Sustainable development: concepts, developments and challenges

The notion of sustainable development is inseparable from the evolution of integrated or separate economic activities in the world. Flipo even argues that the notion has a predominantly diplomatic origin; Since the end of the world war and the progression of the role of the United Nations Organization and its related agencies, the world has evolved with a more or less defined world order within these organizations. And “development” which has become “sustainable development” is one of them. But if each of the countries has its own productive structures with its own identity, its productivity and its economic culture, where the organizations leave it free to do so, the overall movement which could have planetary influences is subject to compromises and diplomacy such as the environment, oil, nuclear production etc..... And it is precisely on the environment that it has evolved a lot with the concern to preserve it in a together and integrated way. Having undergone intensive and continuous redeployment since the Second World Wars, the economies of the world have begun, with population growth, to use in an unrestrained manner the natural resources that humanity will have to use. And the exploitation of non-renewable resources becomes inevitable. There are therefore difficulties in making economic activities flourish without degrading the environment to a greater or lesser extent. After a series of meetings, encounters and summits, the World Commission on Environment and Development, noting progressive imbalances, defined (under the direction of Mrs. Gro Harlem Brundtland) sustainable development: development that satisfies the needs of generations present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, starting with the poorest

Since 1987, therefore, through the Earth Summit in Rio and Agenda 21 or Agenda for the 21st century, many conventions, compromises and negotiations have been made. As an indication, the various benchmarks of Agenda 21 are divided into 4 main areas:

- Social and economic issues such as international cooperation, the fight against poverty, demographic dynamics and public health
- The conservation and management of resources for development (deforestation, desertification, protection of

freshwater and ocean resources

- Strengthening the role of large groups, women, young people, children

- Means of implementation, including resources and financial mechanisms

The theories on sustainable development, unlike those related to development, are much more technical than political.

Three assumptions dominate: dematerialization, the other development the exit from development:

As a first current, dematerialization lays the foundations on the problems of resources and the environment, that is to say on sources, deposits of resources (Solow Rule).

Economic actors and the State must act in such a way as to optimize the use made of resources. Sustainable development is a technical problem that can be solved by appropriate investments so as to make possible a decoupling of economic growth from its ecological content.

The second current the other development objects the first of utopianism of irrationality. First, because most of the time the solutions are yet to come, so they don't reflect reality. Secondly, it is constituted by the rebound effect where the problems solved with economic and environmental measures do not manage to stem the problems and create another one. This current therefore recommends that the solution cannot simply be technical but societal

The third current is that of the exit from development where there is a demand for rupture.

After all this, it turns out that sustainable development, starting from an environmental angle, has covered much more of a technical, economic and social dimension. With the analyzes of international experts, the environmental angle cannot be isolated because the different parameters interact with each other and reciprocally. For example, population growth has effects as vast in the city as in the countryside and facing the pressure calls for integrating the cultural parameters of birth but also the world of public health with, of course, economic and anthropological data.

2- Sustainable development: economic or technical choice?

2-1-Natural economic logic.

History teaches us that when human society left the spirit of gathering, it left the spirit of day-to-day survival. Since the 13th century when the population experienced an improvement in agricultural techniques thanks to the three-year rotation, the question of sustainable management has already come to the fore. Technical innovations, major discoveries followed by the industrial revolution have laid a solid foundation for continuous, progressive and sustained improvement in development. From there, there was first of all the economic rationality which was the basis: that of ensuring the well-being of the population not only today but with forecasts for the future. In order to ensure the well-being of the entire population with the population growth, countries have been obliged to use their capacity and their knowledge to use the factors of natural resources; Even economists have thrown the idea that in the exchanges that have become compulsory between countries, the HOS theory on factor endowments has a strategic and political basis. With knowledge and technical progress, humanity has learned to lengthen life (medicine) or to improve the quality of life thanks to agricultural productivity,

improvements in transport and means of communication, including the development of energy. hydroelectric which ensures the functioning of economic activities All this indicates that economic rationality coupled with a collective political will has made it possible to lay a foundation for sustainable development which was not necessarily or totally linked to the preservation of the environment

Sustainable development is therefore at the beginning an innate and logical question on the part of the human community. Rational reflexes have only reinforced its technical, economic and financial viability.

The concept of sustainable development is therefore not new to humanity: it has evolved only according to the aspects of the concerns t at the level of each country, each continent and the entire planet.

In this logic, rationality and economic efficiency have complemented each other to join the principles of sustainable development. And History has taught us that in addition to the ability to feed and sustain people, sustainable economic and social activities have in most cases reduced economic costs. With or without large-scale investments, distribution to a larger and larger number gives the ability to pay less per unit of individuals

2-2- Challenges and strategic choices

With demographic growth, technical progress and the evolution of the needs of humanity, the world has been forced to use more resources and energy at a more than sustained pace. It is this aspect that has called the world to care in an integrated way to choose the most rational way of living while preserving resources. But this turns out to be a difficult equation because with the imbalance between resources and uses, any choice to give the maximum for today calls for penalizing the future and preservation for the future generations affects the well-being of the current generation. This is the crux of the difficulties of concessions between current international negotiations. Some debates and difficult questions to answer arise in the process.

Limit man or consumption?

For economists and demographers, this debate is not new. Indeed, Thomas Robert Malthus, highlighted that the world must worry about the fact that production does not always grow at the same rate as the population. His concern is that the former grows at an arithmetic pace while the latter evolves at a geometric pace given that resources are always scarce. place in the middle of the problem The debate is then divided into two dilemmas depending on whether the country is already rich or is still poor

- When the country is already rich, the choice between limiting man or consumption is delicate insofar as mass consumption is part of the integral well-being of the population. But consumption, which is high and diversified, needs labor to produce them, even if machines have already begun to replace men. Limiting man amounts to limiting the labor pool, which will reduce production capacity and therefore consumer goods. A demographic transition is not always easy and the aging of the population has an increasingly high cost

- When the country is still poor, limiting consumption is not relevant because food is already scarce and insufficient for everyone. So limiting births turns out to be the easiest choice, but in most cases the choice has become conflicting

without referring to the country's real need in terms of manpower. Birth limitation is therefore done wrongly and through without mastering the future for tomorrow in the sense of future generations

Protect man or nature?

This question amounts to asking the choice between saving life now regardless of that of future generations or dying today to save our offspring.

The human philosophical intelligence had posed the mastery of nature as a way of ensuring a harmonious life. With the degradation of the environment, the concern for nature has become more and more worrying. When we tempt the idea that nature is able to give us or guarantee our life in the long term, the choice must be to protect it. However, the protection of this nature is expensive in money, technique and human mobilization. Moreover, this humanity also needs to be cared for, to be nourished and in good health. We must rush towards rational choice with an opportunity cost: to protect more nature or humanity. The difference between rich and poor countries is a great source of reflection. For the wealthy, combining the two with the level of available resources can go through what is called budget choice rationalization. This involves the use of rebalancing or cost-effectiveness tools with update parameters according to the required periods. With the games of experts and lobbying helping, the State only has to guide the policies to be adopted.

But for poor countries, the economic, social and financial context is quite different: with extreme poverty as a benchmark and the danger to humanitarian life as reality, choosing to protect nature is absurd. Indeed, in front of millions of starving people and in danger of death, allocating millions or even billions of dollars for monkeys, forests and mountains is equivalent to ignoring human rights.

Economically and humanely, the choice between humanity and nature for poor countries is a difficult dilemma to resolve in the system of sustainable development. And the situation teaches that it is better to first use the economic mechanisms that could propel these countries to a fairly acceptable level to be able to easily play the games of sustainable development.

Think national or international?

Each of the countries has its own economic and social particularities due to its geographical, cultural and anthropological conditions. Political economy, which explains the general mechanisms of the economy with the use of history (economic and political), shows that individual behaviors (producers and consumers) act reciprocally to form the dynamism of the market. Added to this is the active role of the State, which guides and acts with policy guidelines. The economic performance of the country and therefore the well-being of the population depends on this dynamism, as Taylor said: the well-being of the population depends on the capacity of the country to produce goods and services. It is this capacity that is different for each country. A country with high productivity using efficient labor factors, modern capital and natural resources in a rational way does better than the others with low productivity and irrational management. For maximum well-being, therefore, each country seeks to maximize its productivity. To do this, it needs its autonomy in economic

policy (budgetary and monetary). However, in the context of mobilization for sustainable development, the strategies are much more international than national and much more global than regional. This is not without consequences for targeting at the national level. From there, taking into account the global organizations, each country is forced to adjust its policy to the detriment of its targeted strategies. And from there, the national objectives are struggling to be achieved. And for poor countries, with conditions of performance and rationality, following international recommendations involves risks on national priorities. For example, how to compare the dimension of the harmful effects of the use of coal by the United States (under the Trump administration) to that decided by Madagascar. Poor countries then find it difficult to play with the large countries with developed economies with policies economic "influenced" from the outside which greatly affects the economic results and their performance

Wealth or standard of living

This dilemma still existed in both theoretical and practical debates. Wealth measured by economic growth embodied by GDP and then GDP per capita favors quantity at the national level. On the other hand, when we talk about development, we are talking more about the quality of life with the structural supports that this implies. The evolution of the measurement of quality of life culminated in the 90s under the influence of Amartya Sen in what is called the Human Development Index or HDI. The latter includes both education, life expectancy and GDP per capita. This means that the HDI brings out the quality of life of the population with economic and social parameters combined. On the other hand, the vision can be misleading: with sporadic actions in the context of humanitarian assistance, the literacy rate can be very high without this constituting efficient and sustainable human capital for the economy. Poor countries then find it difficult to situate themselves between wealth and the standard of living. These cases can be seen in all developing countries where, at first glance, the infrastructure and the living environment in the city are sophisticated without this being guaranteed by a robust and sustainable internal structural system. In general, these are copied life systems, borrowed from the outside with the presence of foreign economic actors who superficially decorate economic life.

3- Economic choices and strategic pitfalls

3-1 Political choices: economic performance versus healthy environment

Because of these different dilemmas, political choices in poor countries encounter major problems of choice between economic performance and the concern to bequeath a healthy environment. In fact, the explanation is economic. Economic theories and history have taught us that the search for the well-being of the population involves the combination of many parameters (factors of production, economic and social policies, etc.). In a long-term consideration, every country must go through successive imbalances to achieve objectives: indebtedness (imbalance between savings and investment), education (to make up for the lack of human capital), technology transfers and learning (to make up for the technological backwardness) etc.

Also, before being able to technically master the

sustainability of the environment, the country must voluntarily go through stages and routes of imbalance, including the exploitation of natural resources because economic performance goes through this.

And the lessons of history have taught us that countries that have known how to use and exploit its natural resources have been able to rise to the very highest level in the world. And once hoisted to a higher level, they seek the sustainability of their development with the use of technical progress learned throughout the process.

For poor countries, already worrying about environmental imbalances at the beginning of the cycle is equivalent to preserving natural resources to the detriment of modern man. The paradox is that the natural resources cared for are exploited by others to the detriment of the local population. It is therefore a dilemma for poor countries to appropriate an appropriate economic policy in a context of global geopolitics.

3-2. Strategic pitfalls: technical mastery and political coherence

Technical mastery and creation before distribution

One of the false notions about sustainable development in poor countries lies in the fact that the objectives rather give an aspect of things acquired than things to be created. However, the control of the environment, the sustainability of energy sources, the management of the environmental cycle and the circular economy must pass through a technical laboratory process. In other words, we cannot talk about sustainable development without first having the techniques necessary to live and support it. Unlike rich countries where sustainable development goes through processes of scientific research and technical progress, poor countries would like to be content with the direct use of methods without appropriating them. However, the sustainable development system requires the creation of techniques, their mastery and their appropriation. This does not exist from start to finish in a poor country. Hence an imaginary and utopian caricature of a sustainable development system. In addition, paradoxically, the distributive optic precedes the creative optic. Like the various Sustainable Development Goals adopted, many goals target access to public services: access to water, sustainable and modern energy services, access for all to quality education,.....There is thus rather a paradoxical vision because the distributive optics dominates the creative optics. However, everyone knows that the growth and development that go hand in hand always necessarily involve the creation of wealth. And more or less, wealth or growth, they must be created before they are distributed.

International mobilization and political incoherence

As the 17 SDGs are part of the international mobilization, poor countries find it difficult to have their place in the initiative, in the process and in the strategies.

Indeed, if everyone accepts that sustainable development goes through development as such, therefore through growth, it is commonly accepted that the process for the well-being of the population goes through the capacity of each country to produce the goods and services. And production implies the implementation of the factors of production including labour, capital, natural resources, etc. The higher the ability to combine these factors, the richer

the country and the higher the well-being of the population. The lower the ability, the more severe the poverty. In addition, performance with productivity is still conditioned by the ability to invest, to save, to implement economic policy. But all of this still remains a colossal challenge for poor countries. And paradoxically, the SDGs do not have within them any classic economic mechanism that will guarantee success.

poor countries with technical mastery. And more seriously still, the strategies of the SDGs are rather international initiatives that are very often out of step with national conditions. Hence a political inconsistency between international debates and mobilizations and the internal dynamism of the economies of poor countries.

Conclusion

The expression “sustainable development” should not be perceived as a new concept. Humanity as a whole has always had the reflex to give itself well-being and to make it last over time. As it has been seen, the period of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Great Discoveries and Industrial Revolution was able to prove that the acquired technical progress served the world cumulatively and sustainably. But the meaning changed when the global context included within it groups of poor countries with difficulties to get by. The economic and social measures proved to be insufficient and ineffective and the society of nations had to lend a hand to help them. And like any external parameter, the compatibility of national concerns and international orientations constitutes a major dilemma. Given that sustainable development is a classic economic process, the major challenges that poor countries must face are to rationalize technical mastery, strengthen its ownership and seek the sustainability of its development. With all this, strategic traps and political difficulties will be avoided and they can experience true sustainable development.

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