



# Chapter 15

## The Socio–Economic Pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals

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### ABSTRACT

*The recent coronavirus pandemic, also known as the COVID-19 pandemic, has proved that the main economic models followed globally are fragile and shown how vulnerable the societies are. This lack of resilience proves that development is a complex process built upon synergies and trade-offs between factors such as good health, human capital, and environmental prosperity. These interconnections are expressed through the concept of sustainable development, which is depicted through the sustainable development goals. In this paper, the connections between society, economy, and the SDGs are examined, forming the socio-economic pillar of the SDGs.*

### INTRODUCTION

In continuation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were characterized as a “historic and effective method of global mobilization to achieve a set of important priorities worldwide” (Sachs, 2012) and to address the three pillars of sustainability: society, economy and environment, 17 Goals and 169 targets were set within the framework of the Agenda 2030, “a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity” (United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015).

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Adopted by 193 countries globally, the 17 set Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) show that inclusive economic growth, preservation and protection of the planet, poverty eradication and inclusivity are inter-linked and that their connection is dynamic and reciprocal.

The term “sustainable” appeared in the late 20th century in the Club of Rome’s “Limits to Growth” (Purvis, Mao, & Robinson, 2019), but the concept of sustainability was introduced in the 17th and 18th centuries by forestry experts (Warde, 2011), (Grober & Cunningham, 2012). Similarly in other scientific fields scientists tried to question the limits the economic system and the environment.

“Sustainable Development” was first institutionalized in the 1987 Brundtland Report as the “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. A concept that describes sustainability well is the “Triple Bottom Line” (TBL). TBL was coined by Elkington (2004) and focuses on how a corporation engages and records its actions in regards to people, planet and economy (Sitnikov, 2013). The TBL description, agrees to the concept that sustainability is based upon three aspects or pillars: Environment, Society and Economy. These pillars are independent, interrelated and must be addressed with equal importance. The 17 SDGs describe what is needed to achieve a balance between economic development, preservation of the natural habitat and social inclusion.

This work shades a light on how the SDGs are simultaneously interconnected with both society and economy and why the synergies created by these two pillars need to be more examined within the sphere of sustainability.

## **SOCIETY**

According to the Cambridge Dictionary society is “a large group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done” and “the state of being together with other people”. (Cambridge University Press, 2022)

A very interesting and more poetic definition for society is given by Dowdall (1925), who argues that society is an interrelation of human action which is intended to be complementary or a number of men regarded as standing to one another and it is based upon a community (Dowdall, 1925).

Ergo, society describes not just a group of people who live together, but a team that shares common values, works towards common goals and functions towards similar goals. To function properly and to ensure its development, a community must be built upon and work towards high values such as respect of human rights, justice, access to health, access to education and equality. In other words, social sustainability must be ensured.

But exactly what is social sustainability and how is it related to the broader term of sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals?

According to Campbell (1996) and Colantonio (2008), social sustainability covers how people build their lives in a society to achieve development goals. Of course, just by addressing environmental issues one cannot achieve a sustainable society (Campbell, 1996). Åhman (2013) refers to the following components that should be considered as fundamental for a socially sustainable community:

- Basic needs and equity, which includes the needed elements to sustain human life (food, housing, health) and the need to tackle social disparities. Regarding the latter, Patridge (2005) argues that equity should be a core element for social sustainability.

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