A Critical Analysis of Social Development: Features, Definitions, Dimensions and Frameworks

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Abstract

The concept of development has evolved over the past two centuries. The main idea of economic development expanded from economic growth to poverty alleviation, sustainable development, human development, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Preliminary findings show that these concepts are mainly focused on the physical and material development, ignoring social development which is very fundamental to development. In recent years, the literatures have begun to emphasise that social development is an important dimension of development and its importance was confirmed globally after introducing SDGs. However, the findings in these works remain inconsistent to what constitutes social development, they lack consensus and clear definition of social development, they focus on the physical dimension of social development and, they emphasise on the physical dimension of social development frameworks. This study aims critically to examine the shortcomings and limitations of existing social development, along with its features, definitions and dimensions. The study also attempts to identify the shortcomings of social development frameworks, and to recommend the direction towards developing social development framework, which will be more comprehensive in nature. The paper employs meta-analysis and content analysis methods through the review and analysis of related literature on development, especially social development.

1. Introduction

Recent works in social development have emphasised the need for a dynamic and more comprehensive way in developing social development model. This is because of the inconsistency of the concept of social development framework itself, along with its features, definitions and dimensions. Furthermore, most of the existing social development frameworks are not fully compatible and sufficient to reflect the dynamic of social development. One of the most significant current debates in developing social development framework is the focus on the physical and material dimension at the expense of non-material aspects. According to Midgley, "social development is the human interactions and the complex phenomena that arise from the specific interactions like a large number of groups and associations including the family, neighbourhood associations, formal organisations, communities, and even societies which also give rise to social networks, values, cultures, and institutions" (Midgley, 2014, p. 4). From this perspective, it can be understood that social development is essentially concerned with not only the material aspect but also the non-material aspect of society and human life. Hence, social development framework should take into account every aspect of social development including material and non-material.

This study aims critically to examine the shortcomings and limitations of existing social development, along with its features, definitions and dimensions. The study also attempts to identify the shortcomings of social development frameworks, and to recommend the direction towards developing social development framework, which will be more comprehensive in nature. The study is structured into four sections including the introduction. The subsequent section two discusses the data and research methods. The third section discusses the institutional background on the evolution of the concept of development focusing on social development. This section also examines social development and its features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks. The section four focuses

on the research conclusion and recommendations.

2. Data and Research Methods

This paper discusses a critical analysis of social development and its features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks, which is evaluative in nature and focuses more on qualitative information gathering, classification and analysis. The paper employs the content analysis methods and meta-analysis through the review and analysis of related literature on development, especially social development from books, journals, reports, papers, conference papers and articles. This study systematically classifies existing social development into four main classifications: features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks. The classification of social development is offered based on several criteria. Basically, social development was analyzed according to its features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks. Features classified under the "features of social development mainly focus on inclusive social development, people's development, etc". Definitions under the "clear operational definition of social development" category are more all-encompassing – focusing on human potential, needs and quality of life. While dimensions under the "emphasis on the physical dimension of social development" category concentrate more on aspects of society and human life. Meanwhile, frameworks under the "emphasis on the physical dimension of social development" category also focus more on aspects of society and human life.

3. Social Development: Features, Definitions, Dimensions and Frameworks

Prior to the discussion of social development and its features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks, it is important here to discuss the institutional background on the evolution of the concept of development over the years focusing on social development. The concept of development has evolved over the years. The main idea of economic development expanded from economic growth in the1950s and 1960s, to poverty alleviation in the 1970s, sustainable development in the 1980s, human development in the 1990s, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000s, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.

In the 1950s and 1960s, development was largely used in the context of economic development, gradually becoming the focus of the newly independent countries (Mohamed et al., 2019). During the period, economic growth became the key focus and the main goal of economic development. However, development economists have found that economic growth is not a single aspect that can be used to economic development. This implied that there was something wrong with the concept of development framework itself, along with its aspects, because economic development was not supposed to be confined only to a number of quantitative changes but should include qualitative changes as well. Hence, economic development during this period focused on quantitative aspects ignoring the qualitative aspects that could not be quantified yet were very important to development.

The debate on the limitations of using economic growth as a yardstick for development led to the redefinition of economic development. In the 1970s, the concept of development was extended to include the idea of poverty alleviation (Ayasrah, 2012). During the period, the reduction of poverty, inequality and unemployment became the main concentrate of economic development. However, development economists failed to provide appropriate answers to their undue emphasis on material aspects of development at the cost of the social conditions of people's life. This was shown by the fact that even though real income dramatically rose in several countries during the period, the self-reported subjective well-being of their populations did not only fail to increase but in fact declined (Chapra, 2008). This implied that the focus on man's material needs at the neglect of the social factors were the reasons for the disappointing concept of economic development.

Hence, several development economists came to the conclusion that real development was no longer viewed purely from physical and material aspects. Furthermore, the continuous exploitation of these physical and material resources, coupled with environmental destruction and degradation in the course of their extraction have rendered them unsustainable. A new narrative began on sustainable development to ensure the right of future generation in these resources was preserved. In the 1980s, the global trend on the concept of development shifted to sustainable development. Hence, sustainable development became one of the key points to redefine development with the recognition of the environmental concerns (Mohamed et al., 2019). During the period, sustainable development emphasised three main components: social, economic, and environmental (Tso & Li, 2012). However, researchers have found that sustainable development focused solely on economic and environmental components, ignoring social component which is very fundamental to development.

The subsequent discussion on this missing dimension contributed significantly to the reformulation of the ideas of making development humane. In the 1990s, human development introduced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the main objective of development and thus placing people at the center of the development agenda. This expansion in the idea of human development is known as social development

(Awan et al., 2012). During the period, the idea of social development became refined, and its importance was confirmed globally by heads of state and governments in the Social Summit of 1995(Mohamed et al., 2019). The Summit provided three basic aspects of social development: poverty alleviation, employment generation, and social harmony. The governments decided, among other things, to create a framework for development dedicated to the eradication of poverty, and to increase the resources spent on education and health. However, the ability of countries to address other important social aspects of the Summit agenda was left behind (Davis, 2004).

In the 2000s, the global trend on the concept of development shifted to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as new guidance for the world on development over the next 15 years. In this new concept, eight goals were spelled out. These goals mainly focused on social development. It was expected that by 2015, the MDGs would have attained the following: the ending extreme poverty, hunger, achieving quality education for all and preventable disease (Mohamed et al., 2019). However, by 2015 much of these goals were not attained because the MDGs focused on poverty alleviation ignoring the other social goals that were not material and physical but were very important to development.

Due to these limitations and weaknesses of MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged as a new concept of development. It was intended to remedy the limitations and weaknesses in MDGs. The sustainable development goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 Goals and 169 targets presented as a new vision for the world after 2015 (Fukuda-Parr, 2016). SDGs mainly focus on three components: economic, environment and social. The introduction of SDGs was not only instrumental in overcoming the shortcomings of MDGs, but also provided a new direction for social development, that was largely overlooked by the previous literature in the areas of development. Prior to SDGs, there were a few literatures that discussed social development, though with different names such as inclusive social development, people's development, etc. The findings in these works remain inconsistent to what constitutes social development, they lack consensus and clear definition of social development and they focus on the physical dimension of social development.

3.1 Features of Social Development

As mentioned above, there is no consensus among researchers as to what constitutes social development. In most of the literature, the common features of social development are: inclusive social development, society's total development, well-being of the people, social transformation and improving people's quality of life. Some works combine more than one of these common features in their discussion. For example, studies by Gore (1973), Hollister (1977), Pathak (1987) and Midgley (1995) view social development as constituting economic development, the well-being of the people and society's total development. According to Gore (1973), social development is the total development of the society in its all aspects: economic, social, cultural, and political. Meanwhile, Midgley (1995) looks at social development as the process of planned social change designed to promote and sustain the well-being of the whole people. In the subsequent study, Midgley (2014) relates social development to inclusive development in a broad multifaceted process represented by eight characteristics of social development. In a similar tone, Pandey (1981) sees social development to include improvement in the quality of the life of the people; equitable distribution of resource and special measures that will enable marginal groups and communities to move into the mainstream. The view of Pandey (1981) is supported by Cox, Gamlath, & Pawar (1997), Mohan and Sharma (1985), Hollister (1977), Paiva (1982), and Billups (1994) who relate social development to realizing the quality of life in addition to realizing the human potential and needs.

Besides the common features, there are views on social development specific to few scholars. For example, Mohan and Sharma (1985) argue that social development is the evolution and transformation through which people and communities optimise their chances, and become empowered to handle their affairs. Pathak (1987) and Todaro (1997) discussed social development in the context of structural change. These scholars see social development as radical changes in institutional, social, and administrative structures. For example, Pathak (1987) sees social development as major structural changes in different aspects of life such as political, economic, and cultural which are introduced as part of deliberate action to transform society. Similarly, Pawar and Cox (2010) are of the opinion that that structural change is the process of social development. Mohan (2010) shares similar idea, looking at social development as post material process of human-societal transformation that seeks to build identities of people, societies, and nations.

Therefore, in addition to the Common features of social development: inclusive social development, society's total development, well-being of the people, social transformation and improving people's quality of life, other features equally important are that social development constitutes equitable distribution of resource, elimination of inequalities, the capacity of people to work continuously for societal welfare and the process structural changes.

3.2 Clear Operational Definition of Social Development

There have been few attempts to define social development but most of these definitions are broad, general, descriptive and philosophical. There is no agreement of what views should be included in operationally defining social development. Each researcher or policymaker implies and derives his or her own definition according his/her study, making operational definition difficult to attaint (Colantonio, 2007). Pawar (2014) classified nearly all the definitions of recognized scholars and researchers of social development and concluded that social development is a planned change process. This definition includes reducing inequalities and problems, achieving human welfare and wellbeing, creating opportunities and empowering people, improving relationships between people and their institutions, and, finally, ensuring economic development (Mohamed et al., 2019). This definition however remains broad and sounds more or less like the features of social development discussed above. Along the same line Pramanik (2019), Baines and Morgan (2004) and (Sinner et al., 2004) provided a general definition of social development that reflects its features and the key themes covered by the concept. According to these scholars, social development includes circumstances based on gender and task; opportunity based on education and health; mobility based on jobs and cities and support based on social protection, taxes and transfers. These views simply identified the thematic areas of social development, namely the basic needs and social protection and, equity and social transformation rather than defining social development.

Other similar studies include Davis (2004), Paiva (1982) and Bramley et al. (2006) who defined social development in terms of two core concepts of social development: social and relationships. They define social as referring to people's welfare. This is common in Europe and is reflected in the millennium development goals. Meanwhile relationships are created between individuals and groups within a society. Relationships are increasingly reflected in social development networks such those in banks. This definition is based on the interactions between people and groups and based on social development to achieve economic equity and social inclusion.

An attempt by Midgley (2014) provides a relatively refined definition of social development, "a process of planned social change designed to promote and sustain the well-being of the whole people within the context of a dynamic multifaceted development process". The definition comprises many aspects of development process beyond the "economic" one although it needs to be cascaded at the operational level.

3.3 Emphasis on the Physical Dimension of Social Development

Most of the discussion on social development, including the definitions, has focused on the physical and material aspects of human life and society, such as food, housing, health, equity, and equal access to key services and education. In addition to the literature cited above, discussions focusing on the physical and material aspects of social development are evident in the works of McKenzie (2004), Sakamoto (2009) Partridge (2005) and Colantonio (2007). In the same vein, but with more focus on urban environments, Polese and Stren (2000) emphasises that social development occurs by balancing the evolution of civic society, where such development will result in a prosperous environment. The two authors emphasised the importance of physical environment (e.g. urban design, housing and public spaces) within the conventional economics discourse.

As discussed above, pre-SDGs studies on social development were inconsistent of what constitutes social development; they lack clear operational definition of social development and; they focused on the physical and material aspects of social development at the expense of other aspects such as culture, morality, ethics and spirituality, which are also important aspects of social norms. It is assumed that the emergence of SDGs in 2015 would address these gaps and more. It is true that social development is clearly spelt out as one of the three components (economic, social and environment) for which the 17 SDGs were formulated to achieve. Yet the three gaps related to features and operational definition of social development and the focus on material and physical aspects still persist even after the introduction of SDGs. The main reason for these three gaps is because although social development is clearly spelt out, the detail related to how to attain it is left to individual local context. In other words, each country is given the liberty to define precisely what constitutes social development. Therefore, there is bound to be a variety of what constitutes social development from the perspective of SDGs, its operational definition and its scope.

Despite the fact that the how to achieving SDGs dimensions and targets is left to individual local context, many literature shows that there are practical difficulties in attaining these targets and in putting the concept into operation. This is because the SDGs were not assumed to be confined only to a number of material and physical aspects of social development but should include culture, morality, ethics and spirituality aspects as well. Hence SDGs focused on material and physical aspects of social development ignoring the non-material aspects that could not be quantified yet were very important to social development. Most of the discussion on social

development has focused on the physical and material aspects such as education, health, poverty, gender equality, decent work and economic growth to attain SDGs. Furthermore, discussions focusing on the physical and material aspects of social development are obvious in the works of Cutter et al. (2015), UNDP (2015), Patole (2018), Oosterhof (2018) and SIDRA (2018). Similarly, but with more emphasis on local environment and the role of local governments, SIDRA (2018) emphasises that social development focuses on behavioral change in order to achieving biophysical environmental goals. The author emphasised the importance of physical environment rather than focused on social development.

But what is glaring is that the targets continue to focus on physical and material development. Apparently, it seems every new development concept that evolves, end up focusing on the physical and material aspects of development. This reminds us that in the 1950s and 1960s [as discussed above], developing and least developing countries were advised to focus on GDP in order to take care of poverty. After implementing the advice, the situation in developing and least developing countries worsened. Statistics on poverty increased from (56%) to (63%) over the decades GDP (Kumar, 2014). This led to Dr Amartya Sen and Dr. Mahbub ul Haq in 1980s suggesting that developing countries need to reverse the equation. Instead of taking care of GDP to take care of poverty, they needed to take care of poverty to take care of GDP (Kumar, 2014). On the same note, is it time that we take care of social development that includes culture, morality, ethics and spirituality in order to take care of economic development?

Experiences of some civilizations and modern countries show that social development can lead to economic development. For example, in the case of Japan, it was destroyed by Hiroshima atomic bomb. The country incurred huge material losses. Yet the strong social culture in Japan was instrumental in helping the people to re-build the country and achieve a dramatic economic development. Di Tella and MacCulloch (2014) in analyzing the social culture, beliefs and economic performance, found that social culture was the key driver of individual effort and of the overall quality of institutions that support economic development in Japan. Similarly, in Tanzania, Haan and Foa (2014) showed that social capital activities instil social discipline that translated into quantitative achievements. On the other hand, Narayan and Pritchett (1997) showed that social capital in Tanzania could be a liability if not invested properly. They proposed that the density of people's networks had a direct and causal impact on poverty. Hence, it is possible for countries and societies to show poor physical and material development but remain advanced in terms of social development. In fact, social development could become an important base for economic development.

In summary, therefore, the focus on the material and physical aspects is still prevalent in the conventional discourse on social development, giving little emphasis to the soft aspects such as culture, morality, ethics and spirituality, which are also important aspects of social development. Even when social development is clearly spelt out in the recent SDGs, the targets to achieve social development are still material.

3.4 Focus on the Physical Dimension of Social Development Frameworks

In most of the literature on development, the common dimensions of social development framework are employment, education, health, justice, poverty, freedom, equity, gender, inequality and access to basic infrastructure and services. As mentioned above, most of these works have focused on the physical and material aspects of society and human life. The few notable works on social development framework are Boyer and Caldwell (2016), Vanags and Jirgena (2012), Biczynska, (2015) and Hajirasouli and Kumarasuriyar (2016) emphasising on environmental aspects. Meanwhile, Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017) proposed social development framework based on sustainable development. The framework composes of four interrelated concepts: equity, safety, eco-prosumption and sustainable urban forms. This study, however, has given little emphasis on social development and much of the dimension is focused on material and physical. Other works on social development framework include Murphy (2012) who identified four overarching social concepts and linked them to environmental imperatives. The targets in his model include public awareness, equity, participation, and social cohesion. Furthermore, Vallance, Perkins, and Dixon (2011) provided a framework of social development that identified sub-targets of the notion of social development. According to these scholars, the model includes equity, employment, education, justice, freedom. Other similar studies include Cuthill (2010) and Hajirasouli and Kumarasuriyar (2016) who proposed social development model based on sustainable development. They identified four key targets: social justice, social infrastructure, social capital as well as equity and engaged governance. An attempt by Cutter and Ullah (2015) categorized SDGs into three dimensions: social, economic and environment. They refined social dimension into eight targets: health, education, gender, inequality poverty, hunger, food security, peace and cities and communities. This study, however, has also given little emphasis on social development and lack emphasis of some aspects which are very important to social development such as culture, morality, ethics and spirituality.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In general, the study has found that most of the existing social development, along with its features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks have been criticized with regard to the inconsistency of what constitutes social development; lack of clear operational definition of social development; focus on the physical and material aspects of social development as well as emphasis on the physical and material aspects of social development frameworks. In recent years especially after introducing SDGs, social development has provided a new direction for social development, that was largely overlooked by the previous literature in the areas of development. Yet the three gaps related to features and operational definition of social development and the focus on material and physical aspects, besides the gap related to frameworks, still persist even after the introduction of SDGs. The main reason for these four gaps is because although social development is clearly spelt out, the detail related to how to attain it is left to individual local context. In other words, each country is given the liberty to define precisely what constitutes social development. Therefore, there is bound to be a variety of what constitutes social development from the perspective of SDGs, its operational definition and its scope.

In summary, the findings of this study show that there are several directions for further research in the field of developmental economics from a more comprehensive perspective. Firstly, the analysis of social development and its features, definitions, dimensions and frameworks help to address a more comprehensive social development framework. Secondly, the study directs future studies to develop a comprehensive social development framework that represents the material and non-material aspect of society and human life. Finally, future research that simply uses quantitative and empirical studies would provide further support for the literature survey obtained in this study.

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