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| **Rising Global Inequalities are a Major Impediment to Sustainable Social Development**  **By Mugure Mwangi** |

1. **Introduction**

Living conditions are vastly unequal in different places around the globe, and they change over time. In some regions, the living conditions change over time, while others change drastically (Roser, 2019, pp. 2). People's narratives play out amidst these global inequalities and changes, and these circumstances play a huge role in determining how educated, wealthy, and healthy people become. Although determination, life choices, and hard work matters, what matters the most is the one thing people have no control about; when and where they are born. This single and random factor significantly determines living conditions. This essay aims at investigating how the rising global inequalities impend sustainable social development. There are different types of global inequalities they include gender inequality, economic inequality, wealth inequality, age inequality, inequalities in health, and racial inequality. Social sustainability happens when the informal and formal systems, processes, relationships, and structures actively support current and future generations' power to formulate livable and healthy societies. The paper follows the argument that global inequalities impend sustainable social development; for example, income inequalities lead to high crime rates, murders, obesity, which require high costs of security and health care, limiting sustainable social developments.

1. **Rising Global Inequalities**

The discussion about global inequalities heated up after Branko Milanovic, a World Bank economist, published his book ‘The Haves and Have Nots’ in 2011 (World Bank, 2012, pp. 1). Inequalities have been on the rise across the world for several decades. Some nations have successfully reduced the number of people living in uttermost poverty; however, economic gaps continue to increase with the very rich continue to gain unprecedented levels of wealth (Inequality, 2019, pp.2). The rise of global inequalities is the aftermath of two centuries of unequal progress because some regions have experienced drastic improvements, while other regions have not. According to the Credit Suisse Global Health Report, the people with less than ten thousand dollars in wealth are 56.6% of the world’s population, and they have less than 2% of the global health. On the other end, the world’s richest 1%, people with more than one million US dollars, hold 44% of the world’s wealth (Inequality, 2019, pp.2). The individuals with over ten thousand dollars are 11% of the global population and own 82.8% of global wealth. Credit Suisse defines wealth as the value of real assets and household financial assets minus debts.

In western research, inequalities were a national question until World War II and decolonization when inequalities were approached beyond the nation-state. Scholars claim that the study of global inequalities is critical because 60-70% of material life chances of individuals depend on the geographical place where they were born and grow up and not on personal achievements (Lillemets, 2013, p.2). This makes the deliberation of the strategic position of a nation in the global context highly essential. Furthermore, the inequality between regions and countries measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is enormous. There are different types of global inequalities: gender inequality, economic inequality, wealth inequality, age inequality, inequalities in health, and racial inequality ( Lillemets, 2013, p.16). These different types of global inequality have been caused by various factors such as colonialism, geography, and population growth, the structure of the economy, climate change, globalization, global value chains, natural disasters, and political instabilities.

Inequality is said to breed inequality, and colonization was the dominance of superior European empires in inferior regions such as Asia and Africa. The main reasons behind the coercive power of colonizers were to gain raw materials and free labor, creating income inequalities in the regions they colonized. Angeles (2007) argues that “income inequality has been higher in the colonies where the percentage of European settlers to total population was higher, as long as Europeans remained a minority. The countries where Europeans became the majority of the population did not suffer from high inequality” (Angeles, 2007, p. 1155). Moreover, colonialism and historical occurrences created an unfair global structure of the economy that keeps wealthy nations’ rich and developing countries poor. Political instability is another major cause of inequality because nations with no governments can decide how to use resources. A good example is Angola has plenty of resources, but because of political instability, the country suffers from low life expectancy and poor economy.

Population growth causes inequalities. After all, an increase in population translates to a lack of enough resources because more people use more resources. Climate change is also a leading cause of global inequalities because developing nations are more affected by climate change. As they either reside in warmer areas where increased warming affects their health and productivity, or they lack the resources for climate protection (Diffenbaugh and Burke, 2019, p. 9808). Globalization is often linked to inequality, with some scholars arguing that globalization increases inequality within and across countries. On the contrary, other scholars argue that globalization has led to the disintegration of national borders promoting economic integration, decreasing poverty, and reducing the inequality gap (Mills, 2009, p.5). Global value chains have changed the division of labor, which has led to income inequalities. That is mainly because of the hierarchical division of labor where those at the bottom get low wages and low profits while those at the top of the hierarchy earn more income. Global value chains have also led to further inequalities because, in modern capitalism, the people receiving low income cannot afford decent housing leading them to dwell in slums under severe conditions. Some government policies also cause inequality; for example, in some countries, people must rely on religion rather than science, denying people the health care services they need because medical care is not provided in the state or region. Ultimately, natural disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, drought, among others, play a massive role in creating inequality within regions and countries.

1. **Sustainable Social Development**

In most cases, social sustainability is overlooked as an element of sustainable development because the focus mostly is on the economic and environmental aspects of sustainability. However, to achieve the best possible sustainable outcomes, the three sustainable development dimensions must be addressed. Social sustainability happens when the informal and formal systems, processes, relationships, and structures actively support current and future generations' power to formulate livable and healthy societies (United Nations, 2010, pp. 3). Socially sustainable societies are diverse, equitable, and democratic, connected, and provide a good quality of life. In simple words, social development is a process in which marginalized groups can become better integrated into social systems to access resources and opportunities on more equal terms (Banks, 2020, p.5). It combines designs of the social world and the physical realm design, systems for citizen participation, social amenities, infrastructure to support cultural and social life, and places and space for people to live.

Two theories are considerably associated with social development; social exclusion and adverse incorporation. Social exclusion theory is based on the ideology that certain groups are disadvantaged because they are discriminated against on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, caste, and descent. Social exclusion is multidimensional, for it includes social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions and dynamic, for it affects people in different ways and to different degrees (Banks, 2020, p.12). It is also relational because it is an aftermath of social interactions that are defined by unequal power relations, and it may lead to ruptures in the relationship between individuals and society, such as lack of social integration, social protection, social participation, and power. Hence, the social exclusion theory dictates that social development must be considered in relation to social, cultural, economic, and political dimensions. The adverse incorporation theory indicates that social inclusion and integration can be problematic, just like social exclusion (Banks, 2020, p.14). The necessity for security often propels adverse incorporation amidst uncertainty; for example, a community can act as a vote bank for political leaders who, in return, will give them informal access to goods or services that are illegal. However, it imperative to note that both theories, adverse incorporation, and social exclusion overlap. They are both process and results of unequal access and power as well as they demonstrate approaches of poverty.

The world's population is increasing every day at a high rate. Americans alone consume twenty-three times the amount of goods and services consumed by third world countries and fifty-three times what the Chinese citizens consume (Kramer and Johnson, 2000, p.75). In eighty nations consisting of almost 40% of the world population, they are threatened by water shortage affecting their agriculture, industries, and health care. Most of the world's fertile land is already in use, and the irrigated land on the basis of global per capita is decreasing due to salination, population increase, and waterlogging. Due to the increased consumption rate, where the urban-industrial countries in the world consume 80% of fossil fuels used yearly, coal, natural gas, and oil reserves will be depleted in less than a century (Kramer and Johnson, 2000, p.75). While most people suggest that the world should switch to alternative energy sources, these alternative energy sources often introduce new problems such as environmental, economic, and social effects. For instance, the massive land usage connected to the hydroelectric reservoir has social and ecological consequences. According to Kramer and Johnson (2000, p.75), a good illustration of alternative energy sources' interrelated problems is the 1995 shelving of thirteen million US dollars Great Whale hydroelectric project in Quebec because of the lobbying of indigenous people to protect their way of life and land.

The above statistics and data clearly outline that the living conditions in the globe facing the existence of the human race are both critical and real. The data also reflects the multi-faceted and interrelated elements of problems, making it compulsory that the long term solutions consider the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of problems (Kramer and Johnson, 2000, p.75). Addressing these problems through sustainable social development provides a better approach for solving the world's most pressing issues. Sustainable social development includes several factors; one is making informed decisions that contemplate long term gains and planning that must incorporate effective citizen participation. Prevention and anticipation are also factors of sustainable social development, including avoiding environmental degradation and developmental stages that include conservation initiatives (Kramer and Johnson, 2000, p.75). Another major factor is the quality of development over quality, which stresses the focus on energy efficiency, product durability, and recycling. Full cost accounting is also an essential factor because it reflects social costs, regular market costs, and environmental costs. Another significant factor for sustainable social development is respecting nature and the future generation's rights, which acknowledges the quality of life currently and in the future while making decisions. Finally, the other important aspect of sustainable social development is living off the interest, including treating natural resources as natural capital. Because natural resources are almost depleted, it accounts for recycling and reusing as sustainability's fundamental values.

1. **Rising Global Inequalities are a Major Impediment to Sustainable Social Development**

Intending to narrow the gap between developed and developing nations, global inequalities have been a core concern in the development field. Nonetheless, the change in the ways global inequalities manifest has led researchers to advance their avenues of scrutiny (Ramos, 2013, p.26). Apart from inequalities being morally unacceptable, there are also bad for economics because they are harmful to growth and development. Hence, the rising global inequalities have epoch-making implications for sustainable social development. To understand this requires appreciating historical and social trajectories as well as economic structures. Picket and Wilkinson (2010, pp.7) claim that global inequalities boost consumerism, making it challenging to control economic activities at a sustainable cost. Evidence from working hours, savings, and spending indicates that unequal environments increase anxiety, and consumption provides temporary relief (Haupt and Lawrence, 2012, pp.5). Moreover, increased consumption by the wealth in society reduces the poor's satisfaction as they realize their inferiority. Furthermore, high consumption is a result of a status competition that is intensified in unequal societies.

The theory of social exclusion emphasizes on unequal outcomes and unequal outcomes that limit sustainable development. When poor people get poor social amenities (health care, housing, and education), they cannot achieve upward social mobility limiting sustainable social development. For example, education inequalities limit sustainable social development. Education inequality is exhibited in most nations worldwide, where students from low-income families and minority races and tribes do not receive an equitable education as their counterparts. Education inequalities lead to stunted economic growth, high crime rates, and financial instability, and each of these issues results in increased costs of and demand for security and government interventions (Stewart, 2014, p.354). Additionally, education inequalities weaken democracy, creating adverse incorporation problems. That is because fundamental principles of democracy suggest that democracy relies on citizens' independent and creative thinking to function. The participation of all citizens in a country requires that the citizens are well informed, and the principles of democracy are taught in schools. Therefore, without fully understanding the role citizens should play and the system, citizens cannot change their living conditions because democracy counts on citizens to vote in the leaders they want. Governments play a massive role in sustainable social developments, and lack of good leaders who have the interest of citizens at heart, sustainable social developments are limited.

A significant result of social exclusion is disparities in income because some groups are discriminated against when it comes to income. Income inequalities offer a good illustration of sustainable social development impediment by global inequality. Income inequalities are due to global value chains and labor division, where the people at the top earn a different from those in the lower sections. Income inequalities have adverse effects on a society, which ruins opportunities for future generations. Besides, income inequalities are highly associated with crime, suicide, obesity, and murder. These problems are of a social magnitude that forces significant taxes by heightening the cost of, and demand for healthcare and security (Meyer and Kibry, 2014, pp.10). The current trends in the globe are unsustainable because, as organizations and institutions profit, the wealth concentration is accumulated by the top wealthy one percent. Therefore, due to the negative impacts of income inequalities, sustainable social developments are limited and impaired.

However, some scholars argue that income inequalities help promote sustainable social developments. That is because evidence suggests that there is a positive connection between the rise of gross domestic product per capita and social health (Biggs et al., 2010, p.268). Literature indicates that a five percent increase in gross domestic product per capita decreases infant mortality by one percent. This shows that as a nation increases its wealth, more resources are directed to public health care activities such as sanitation and potable water. As for the citizens, the downward flow of income inspires spending on quality health care and nutrition, resulting in positive health initiatives (Biggs et al., 2010, p. 269). Nonetheless, critics of this ideology claiming that income inequalities do not certainly affect health and that the correlation of the two may be bogus.

Social exclusion and adverse incorporation may also lead to political instabilities. For example, an ethnic group might feel sidelined and feel the urge to dominate a country's through insurgency. While in some other cases, the ethnic community that is considered the vote bank because they are the majority might decide to create political instability to dominating the country. Inequalities that result from political instability heavily affect economic stability and sustainability. That is because political instability results in a lack of social cohesion within and outside a country. The lack of social cohesion makes it hard for people to work together towards sustainable social development (Stewart, 2014, p.352). As a matter of fact, people manifest self-interests in areas where political instability is dominant because of the lack of a government to protect the needs of citizens and thus results in citizens having to take care of their needs. As a result, the affluent in society end up benefiting because they have the resources to accumulate more wealth at the poor's expense. For example, in Somalia, a country that has been politically unstable for almost three decades, the wealthy benefit from the natural resources of the country, such as black diamonds, which would be used for sustainable social developments. However, political instability could also lead to developing and creating sustainable and innovative policies that can foster sustainable social developments (Stewart, 2014, p.352). Moreover, social cohesion increases economic sustainability, leading to economic growth, which in return increases industrial activities that increase greenhouse gas emissions. Hence, the inequalities created by political instability and the ones created by political stability both impend sustainable social development.

Researchers need to enquire whether the present generations have an ethical obligation of intergenerational decency towards the interests of things to come. If morals are thought of, discussions and approaches are directed differently than if financial benefit is the chief concern (Laurent, 2013, p. 18). However, the individuals who are harmed by others' activities cannot safeguard themselves, uncovers a direct connection between sustainability and global inequalities. The individuals who have the readiness and the ability to hold a bit of leeway over the individuals who do not imply that disadvantaged groups do not just persevere through an unbalanced cut of expenses coming about because of environmental harm; they are bound regardless an underlying impediment (Martuzzi et al., 2010, p.24). Problems, especially medical issues, increment people's weakness and reduce the distraught's odds to rival the unaffected individuals, thereby widening the inequality gap.

1. **Conclusion**

This article aimed at examining how the rising global inequalities impend sustainable social development. The paper discovered that Inequalities have been on the rise across the world for several decades. Some nations have successfully reduced the number of people living in uttermost poverty; however, economic gaps continue to increase with the very rich continue to gain unprecedented levels of wealth. There are different types of global inequality that have been caused by various factors such as colonialism, geography, population growth, the structure of the economy, climate change, globalization, natural disasters, and political instabilities. The essay also found that social sustainability is a process of developing successful places that foster individuals' well-being by understanding their needs in the areas they work and live. It combines designs of the social world and the physical realm design, systems for citizen participation, social amenities, infrastructure to support cultural and social life, and places and space for people to live. Ultimately, the paper discovered that the rising global inequalities impend sustainable social development because global inequalities boost consumerism, making it challenging to control economic activities at a sustainable cost, among other global inequality impacts limiting sustainable social development.

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