

Sustainable consumption and production patterns as a key factor in improving human capital

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Abstract. The promotion of sustainable consumption and production patterns is increasingly recognized as crucial in addressing poverty. This annotation explores the significance of sustainable consumption and production in poverty reduction efforts. It highlights how unsustainable consumption and production practices contribute to poverty by depleting natural resources, exacerbating environmental degradation, and perpetuating social inequalities. The annotation discusses the importance of adopting sustainable practices across various sectors, including agriculture, energy, and manufacturing, to alleviate poverty and promote inclusive economic growth. It emphasizes the need for integrated policies and collaborative efforts involving governments, businesses, and civil society to achieve sustainable development goals while tackling poverty effectively.

1 Introduction

Since the latter part of 2018, the climate crisis has dominated public discourse, evident through large-scale climate demonstrations, youth mobilization, numerous opinion pieces, and proposed solutions in reports and media outlets. Concurrently, there have been protests advocating for increased purchasing power and social justice.

Several months prior, the Support Committee of the Combat Poverty Service decided to focus its 2018-2019 Biennial Report on "Sustainability and Poverty". As with its previous reports, this latest one was crafted through consultations with individuals experiencing

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poverty, their associations, and various stakeholders. It serves as a tool for the Combat Poverty Service, an independent federal institution, to assess the realization of human rights in poverty situations. Consistent with the Cooperation Agreement for Poverty Reduction Policy, consultations were conducted in alignment with the spirit of the General Poverty Report. Detailed reports were produced after each meeting to ensure participants' contributions were accurately captured and to prepare for subsequent discussions.

During a meeting organized by the Service, associations representing individuals living in poverty requested a report on this topic, noting their limited involvement in discussions, platforms, and initiatives regarding the planet's future and its inhabitants. Contrary to assumptions, people experiencing poverty are indeed concerned about ecological challenges and want to participate in shaping the future, recognizing that their survival is already threatened by present-day pressures.

The other stakeholders on the Support Committee also showed keen interest in exploring this subject within the Service, viewing it as an opportunity to address two pressing issues—sustainability and poverty—in tandem. Internal discussions highlighted that sustainability encompasses more than just environmental and climate concerns, referencing the United Nations' definition of sustainable development as meeting present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own. It encompasses ecological, economic, and social dimensions.

The impacts on the environment and resource use have been traditionally expressed in the I=PAT equation, which states that environmental impacts (I) are proportional to population (P), Affluence (A), and Technology development (T). Population growth, particularly in emerging economies, significantly affects consumption and impacts. While addressing birth rates involves moral and ethical considerations, research suggests that improving welfare and gender equity can help slow population growth.

Growing material welfare leads to higher Affluence, and solely addressing technological innovation (factor T) may not sufficiently reduce environmental impacts due to factors like rebound effects and unintended consequences. Therefore, it's essential to also address the growth of Affluence. However, existing urban sustainability literature often focuses on eco-efficient production and infrastructure, neglecting the importance of consumption patterns and lifestyle choices.

From a systems perspective of sustainable consumption and production, consumption patterns and lifestyle choices in cities are equally important. Urban lifestyles influence housing sizes, vehicle ownership, mobility choices, food choices, and diets. Well-being is not solely determined by wealth; social relations, mental and physical health, and community belonging are also crucial.

Urban lifestyles will play a significant role in shaping current and future consumption and production systems. Challenges faced by cities include rapid urbanization, waste generation, air pollution, and inefficient infrastructure. Developing countries focus on livelihoods, while developed countries need to moderate lifestyles and reduce resource and energy intensity.

Smart Cities offer opportunities for more efficient provisioning and access to goods and services. However, the concept needs to address side effects and negative impacts, such as unsustainable practices like AirBnB and Uber. Despite challenges, there are signs of lifestyle leapfrogging in the Global South and growing environmentally aware initiatives in developed countries.

2 Research methodology

Recognizing the limitations of decoupling, there's a call to shift focus towards systemic factors driving relentless production and consumption growth. Effective SCP, therefore, requires moving beyond green consumerism towards addressing social and cultural influences on consumption patterns.

Agenda 21 emphasizes a holistic approach to SCP, advocating for new indicators of wealth and prosperity independent of economic growth. SCP, with its twin objectives of promoting well-being for all and mitigating negative environmental impacts, should underpin the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SCP's broad scope is evident across various thematic areas, from energy production to gender equality, highlighting its interconnectedness with sustainability issues. It's acknowledged as a cross-cutting theme in multilateral environmental agreements and sustainability initiatives, underscoring its complexity and significance in SDG integration.

3 Results and Discussions

The term "sustainability" emerged in the early 1980s, notably with Lester R. Brown's 1981 work "Building a Sustainable Society." Brown highlighted the need for harmony among population growth, societal financial needs, responsible natural resource utilization, and pollution minimization in a sustainable society.

The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines sustainable development as development that meets the present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs. This encapsulates the essence of sustainable development, as elucidated by Gyulai (2008), who distinguishes growth, which entails mere increase in size, from development, which implies improvement.

From an ecological perspective, Costanza (1989) defines sustainability as a condition where ecosystems maintain stability and resilience, ensuring human survival in the long run while enabling individual and familial well-being. It also entails fostering societal and cultural improvement without jeopardizing ecological diversity, complexity, and life-support functions.

The OECD offers another ecocentric definition, defining sustainable development as development that safeguards both human and ecosystem health while satisfying socio-economic needs in a manner that renewable resources are utilized at a slower pace than their regeneration, and non-renewable resources are used at a rate that allows for substitution by renewable sources.

Presently, the principle of sustainable development is interpreted through weak and strong sustainability paradigms. Weak sustainability considers social, economic, and environmental factors equally in decision-making, emphasizing the total value of natural and human capital alongside man-made goods. However, it faces criticism for assuming unlimited substitutability of capital goods and neglecting ecosystem changes.

The once harmonious relationship between humanity and nature has been disrupted, with finite Earth resources strained by exponential population growth, posing a grave threat to wildlife. In regions experiencing population surges, the dire scarcity of water and food threatens to destabilize social structures. The rapid urbanization trend, evident in the tenfold increase in metropolitan populations over the past four decades, with 23 cities boasting populations exceeding 10 million in 2013, exacerbates the strain on freshwater resources

and exacerbates soil erosion, casting doubt on the feasibility of further accelerating food production.

The rampant use of fossil fuels continues to release 90 million tons of pollutants daily into the planet's delicate atmosphere, exacerbating global warming by trapping heat. Urgent, coordinated action is imperative to address the looming climate crisis, yet meaningful steps have been lacking thus far.

If these unsustainable processes persist, humanity risks triggering a significant wave of species extinction solely attributable to human activities. To safeguard the future for generations to come, any future economic growth must prioritize reducing energy intensity.

From the outset, it was evident that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) would serve as the framework for the consultation process. Initiated by the United Nations, the SDGs were recognized as a political tool for crafting a sustainability-based strategy within the framework of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. They are lauded for addressing social, economic, and ecological goals while strongly aligning with human rights principles, which are fundamental to the mandate of the Combat Poverty Service.

The consultation process began with a meeting involving various associations representing individuals living in poverty, enabling them to connect poverty with the SDGs, discuss possibilities and limitations, and share their perspectives. Subsequent meetings included representatives from social and environmental organizations, institutions, administrations, and scientists, with each meeting hosting between 40 and 50 participants from diverse backgrounds.

4 Conclusions

The globalization of the economy has ushered in a corresponding globalization of environmental challenges, transcending national boundaries and necessitating international cooperation. National Environmental Action Plans play a crucial role in defining a country's environmental vision, focusing on the interaction between human, social, natural, and economic resources.

Preserving biodiversity is paramount in the current context, as it underpins essential ecosystem services vital for human life, including access to healthy food, clean water, and fresh air. Protecting biodiversity is not just a moral imperative but a pragmatic necessity for ensuring the sustainability of life on Earth.

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