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## Review Article



# Relationship between Sustainable Development, Economy and Poverty

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## Abstract

Throughout this document, the opportunity is provided to show the relationship between sustainable development and economic growth, focusing on their definitions, their disparity, and their consequences, at the same time it gives us a vision of the evolution of the importance of economic development and of their inability to solve the problem of poverty.

The satisfaction of the needs of the human being, would go through seeking a balance between economic growth, care for the environment, and social welfare, a breakdown of this balance has put into question the traditional model of economic development, in which they raise fundamental questions where the very accumulation of wealth creates poverty.

The bibliographic search carried out has led us to obtain a series of conclusions on the proposed terms, in which a robust social solidarity economy would lead us to the eradication of poverty.

This work takes us to a reflection on the sustainability of natural resources, the viability of the economic development model, and its rate of growth in a context of globalization in which localities are left behind, but without being forgotten, although they have no involvement in models that meet their development needs.

## Introduction

In 1992, the International Community<sup>3</sup> met in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) to discuss the means to implement sustainable development. During the so-called Earth Summit in Rio, world leaders adopted Agenda 21, with specific action plans to achieve sustainable development at the national, regional, and international levels, this was followed in 2002 by the World Summit on Sustainable Development [1], where the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation was approved. The Plan of Implementation is built on the progress made and lessons learned since the Earth Summit and provides for a more targeted approach, with concrete actions, deadlines, and measurable targets.

The Fund for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)<sup>4</sup> is a multi-donor and multi-agency international development mechanism created in 2014 by the United Nations (UN)<sup>5</sup> to support sustainable development activities through

multidimensional and integrated programs, its main objective is to unite agencies of the UN itself, national governments, the academic world, civil society, and companies to face poverty, its number one objective being to put an end to poverty, or in other words, to eradicate poverty in all its forms. In this sense, according to data from the UN itself, the number of people living in extreme poverty decreased by more than 50% (from 1,900 million in 1990 to 836 million in 2015), despite this,

<sup>3</sup>The Earth Summit -organized by the UN- was held in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil from June 3 to 14, 1992, where the Government of 178 countries intervened: <https://www.un.org/es/ga/president/65/issues/sustdev.shtml>

<sup>4</sup>The Sustainable Development Goals Fund (SDG Fund) is an international development mechanism created in 2014 by the United Nations to support sustainable development activities. Its main objective is to unite UN agencies, national governments, academia, civil society, and business to face the challenges of poverty, promote the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and achieve the SDGs. Fostering public-private partnerships for the SDGs is part of the DNA of the SDG Fund [2-4].

<sup>5</sup>United Nations Organization (UN): <https://www.un.org/es/about-un/>



the number of people struggling to meet the most basic needs remains high [1].

The SDGs defined in their goal number eleven is to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. In the article, we find three well-differentiated sections, two of which are questions about sustainable and economic development and a third section in which one of the most relevant consequences such as poverty is analyzed.

For Barkin [5] there are two divergent paths: one towards wealth, and the other towards poverty, when talking about sustainable development, this concept has been adopted and adapted by an infinity of authors. Barkin accepts from this duality of paths the idea of an adequate definition of sustainable development, emphasizing the problem of poverty, an aspect that has been marginalized in most of the proposals on sustainable development. This author gives us a key idea to keep in mind for the development of this article. A strategy to promote sustainable development must focus on the importance of local participation and on reviewing the way people live and work.

For all these reasons, having made a first approach to the satisfaction of the needs of human beings and always taking into account the guarantee of the balance between economic growth, care for the environment, and social well-being, we can affirm that a possible rupture of this balance has made that sustainable development and its consequences are a subject of vital importance and of great relevance.

Given the relevance of the subject and its current significance, its bibliographical review is considered vitally important for the preparation of this document, in which sustainable development has become a fight for diversity, with many organizations and authors who the theme realizes and raises fundamental issues where the very accumulation of wealth creates poverty.

### What do they talk about when they talk to me about sustainable development?

Although there is currently much talk about the concept of sustainable development, its relevance, its importance, and future plans to achieve it, it will be from the year 1972 at the UN Conference held in Stockholm on the Environment when a development model with negative environmental effects, that is, economic growth based on pressure on resources and, consequently, waste generation. This conference preceded the best-known and most famous one in Rio (June 1992), which took place twenty years later.

The concept of sustainable development or sustainability is found for the first time in the Brundtland Report, G. H. [6] "Our common future". Sustainability was at the head of everyone, as a motivator of development, becoming the challenge to be

met by national, regional, and local governments around the world. Thus, sustainable development is a recent concept, as an alternative to the usual development concept, in which special emphasis is placed on the reconciliation between economic well-being, natural resources, and society. In this report, sustainable development is defined as development that meets the current needs of people without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs.

Barkin, [5] defines sustainability as:

*"It is a process more than a set of very specific goals and implies a new way of relating to nature, the economy and society."* (P.25)

According to Artaraz [7], there is no consensus about the meaning of sustainable development, with more than one hundred definitions. This same author defines a three-dimensional theory of the concept of sustainable development, represented in Figure 1:

Artaraz [7] recognizes that economic development, social development, and environmental protection are interdependent components of sustainable development.

According to Gallopín [8], despite the complexity of the concept of sustainability, applying a systemic approach it is possible to discern some of its fundamental and more general characteristics. When studying sustainability, to avoid confusion and ambiguity it is essential to clearly specify the system. Many controversies regarding the precise meaning of sustainability and its implications are related to the fact that value criteria are used, it is critical to clearly specify which criteria are adopted. Sustainability is an attribute of systems open to interactions with their external world [9]. It is not a fixed state of constancy, but the dynamic preservation of the essential identity of the system in the midst of permanent changes. A reduced number of generic attributes can represent the basis of sustainability. Sustainable development is not a property but a process of directional change, whereby the system improves sustainably over time.

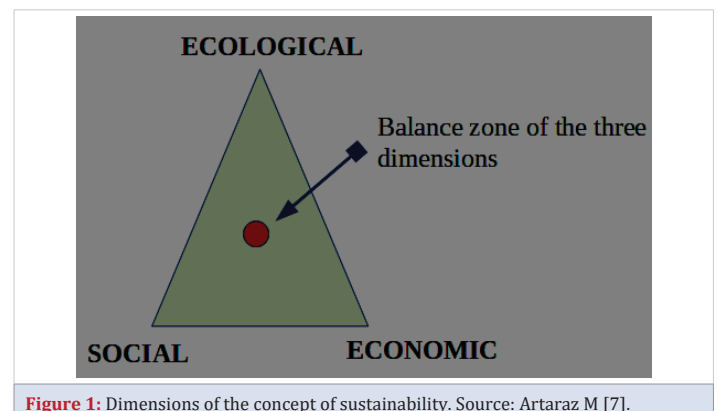


Figure 1: Dimensions of the concept of sustainability. Source: Artaraz M [7].

Montes and Sala [10] carry out an evaluation of the millennium ecosystems and their relationships between the functioning of ecosystems and well-being, as represented in Figure 2:

For Velazco [11] sustainable development is one that is capable of satisfying current needs without compromising the resources and possibilities of future generations, configuring a series of characteristics such as Figure 3:

- Promotes regional self-sufficiency.
- Recognizes the importance of nature for human well-being.
- Ensures that economic activity improves the quality of life for all.

- Use resources efficiently.
- Promote maximum recycling and reuse.
- Find ways for economic activity to maintain or improve the environmental system.
- It places its trust in the development and implementation of clean technologies.
- Restores damaged ecosystems.

For Sachs and Vernis [12] sustainable development is a basic concept for our era, being both a way of understanding the world and a method to solve global problems. These authors point out that the gigantic world economy is causing a gigantic environmental crisis.

According to the authors Rivera-Hernández et al [13], the vision of sustainable development is used by researchers and professionals in the natural sciences, for whom the final objective is the conservation of natural resources, through the rational and controlled use of natural resources., making them guarantee their conservation for the future.

### Disparity between sustainable development and economic growth?

In the most recent era, an accelerated connotation of daily life and its involvement in social groups in which sustainable development and economic growth are closely related can be noticed, without perceiving equity in the standardized and globalized relationship. In this sense, the Commission of the European Communities (1992) explicitly defined the relationship between the environment and the economy in the Fifth Community Action Program on the Environment, when it considered that economic growth is unsustainable.

For Artaraz [7] the traditional economic system presents an evident incompatibility between economic growth and ecological balance. There are major problems of environmental degradation: air, soil, and water pollution, depletion of renewable and non-renewable natural resources, loss of biological diversity, and deforestation, among others.

Escobar [14] in his work “The Invention of the Third World, Construction and Construction of Development” tells us:

*“Development was a response to the problematization of poverty that took place in the years after World War II, and not a natural process of discoveries and gradual treatment of problems by modern sciences and institutions. As such, it must be taken as a historical construction that creates a space in which poor countries are known, defined and intervened”. (P.95)*

According to Zamudio [15], economic growth is one of the objectives of any country, hence its importance, however,

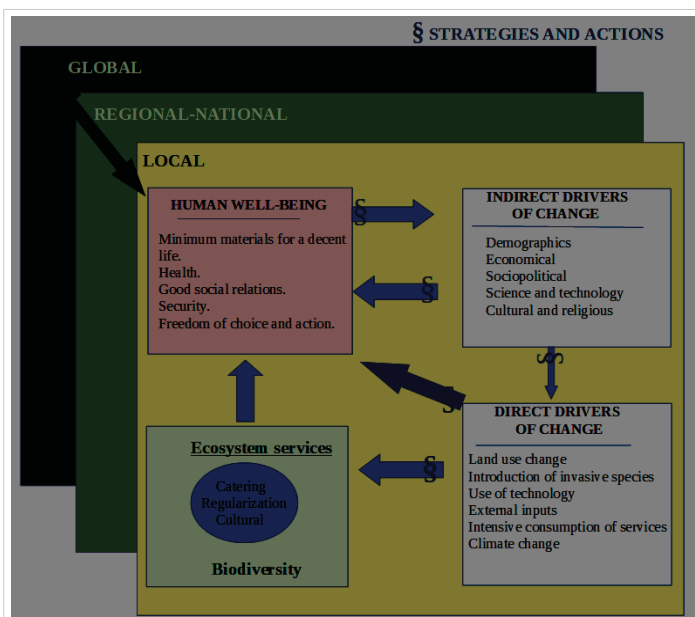


Figure 2: The Relationships between the Functioning of Ecosystems and Human Well-Being. Source: Montes C & Sala O [10].

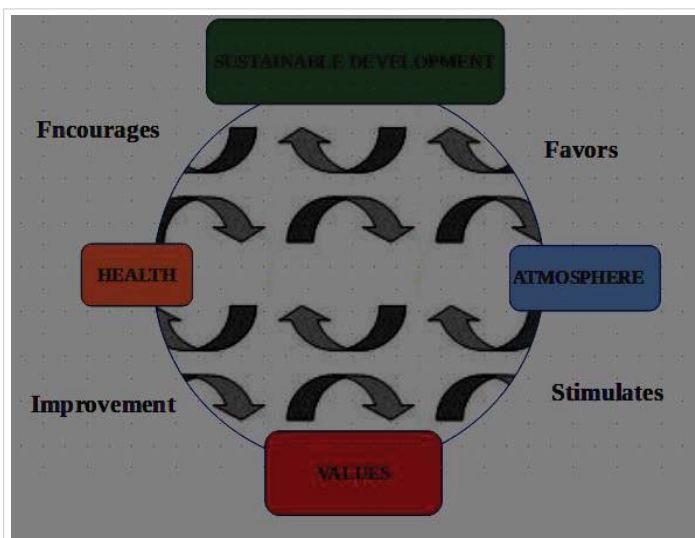


Figure 3: What is sustainable development? Source: Velazco González AR [11].

the increase in the production of goods and services does not contribute to improving the standard of living and depends on the way in which the fruits of economic growth are distributed. To reduce environmental impacts and risks, sustainable development is continually appealed to, but taking into account that the main objective is and should be the well-being of the population, both current and future. This author tells us that the appeal to sustainable development has been to maintain the myth of economic growth, which had been quite questioned in the seventies, and to reassure the population that their environmental requests have been heard.

For Sánchez [16] the model of economic globalization that is being imposed in all corners of the planet limits and even nullifies the freedom of each people to choose the development model that best suits their particular characteristics. Development must strike a balance in addressing closely interrelated objectives, such as changing production and consumption patterns, reducing poverty, and moderating economic growth and productivity, in accordance with available and regenerative natural resources. And replacement.

Espinach-Rueda [17] defines the Social Solidarity Economy through sustainable development as a way to empower people, communities, governments, and companies, among other organizations, so that they have an awareness that allows them to seek social well-being, human and environmental; therefore, safeguarding human security implies that people have quality of life and human and social progress in harmony with nature. In addition, this author adds that human security consists of creating expectations that make it possible to meet basic human needs, measure the foundations of well-being, and that people have opportunities to get ahead.

The authors Crespo & Sabadie [18] point out that the European Union (EU)<sup>6</sup> has been developing since the 1970s the most ambitious environmental political and regulatory framework on the planet, yet the European economy has grown substantially between 2007 and 2018., this fact is demonstrated by observing the positive evolution of environmental goods and services, the decoupling between emissions and economic growth, or the circular economy and its economic and environmental impact, ultimately they conclude that we can reconcile sustainable development and economic development (Figure 4) [19].

What we do know is that the world economy is gigantic and that it is growing rapidly and its income is very unequally distributed both between countries and within each country. Our world is immensely rich and extremely poor at the same time.

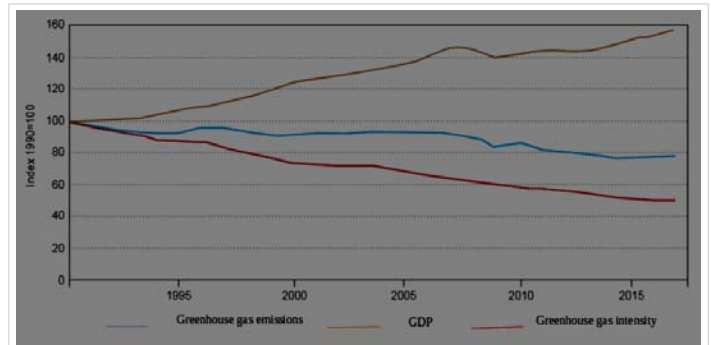


Figure 4: Evolution of GDP (in real terms), greenhouse gas emissions, and greenhouse gas intensity in the EU economy. Source: European Commission [19].

## Poverty as a relevant consequence

Below is a brief bibliographical inclusion of the term poverty, since it is a general consequence of classical development and there are multiple representations and ways to define it, as well as a large number of methods to measure it.

For the working class, it makes them vulnerable and they are exposed to walk through the new poverty, considered one of the present consequences in the social construction of the identity of the subjects, as well as in the reproduction strategies and the ways of life assumed by the subjects; this situation is framed in the postulates of Bourdieu [20]. For this same author, the social phenomenon of the new poverty allows us to know the cultural transformations with the purpose of determining their standard of living.

According to Minujin and Kessler [21] who coined the concept of “new poor”, considered the working middle class a developer of transformations and impacted on social, economic, and cultural aspects, thus they consider the new poor as a hybrid stratum.

The authors Ruiza, Fernández, and Tamaro [22] affirm that each era thinks of poverty in its own way, and they detail that the political philosopher Aristotle<sup>7</sup> (385 BC-322 BC) defines the poor (*hoi pénētes*) as those who lack “*what is necessary*” and considers that extreme poverty is bad in itself and the origin of other evils and that, therefore, seeks ways to contain it. Poverty must be addressed in any society that aspires to be fair, Aristotle realizes that poverty implies a social problem.

On the other hand, highlighting the growing predominance of women among the impoverished population as indicated by Murguialday [23] who defines the feminization of poverty as the growth of the proportion of women among the poor population, a process that causes a tendency to exist that the disproportionate representation of women among the poor will progressively increase.

<sup>6</sup>The European Union (EU). [https://europa.eu/european-union/index\\_es](https://europa.eu/european-union/index_es)

<sup>7</sup>He was a philosopher, polymath, and scientist. <https://www.biografiasyvidas.com/monografia/aristoteles/filosofia.htm>

For the authors Houghton & Khandker [24] poverty is the deprivation of well-being in a pronounced way, that is, the lack of access to basic capacities to function in society and an adequate income to meet the needs of education, health, security, empowerment, and basic rights.

Spicker [25] tells us that the same position in the debate on poverty can cause the term to be among different groups of meanings or even two or three different definitions. It states that the perspectives on poverty have been characterized by two very different approaches: on the one hand, many academics have sought to elaborate a definition of the concept that becomes an obligatory reference. And on the other hand, the multidimensional approach is linked to the participatory method and its response to poverty.

Continuing with Spicker [25], in social sciences, poverty is understood in at least twelve specific senses and included in four:

- Poverty as a material concept: need, a pattern of deprivation, limited resources.
- Poverty as an economic situation: standard of living, inequality, economic position.
- Poverty as social conditions: social class, dependency, lack of basic security, absence of ownership, exclusion.
- Poverty as a moral judgment.

For the authors Zurdo & López de la Nieta [26] the appearance of an enormously heterogeneous social space, which we could call “*new poverty*”, in the process of expansion points to the emergence of a new “*social question*”. Analyzed by the authors from the diversity of discursive positions and social representations about the crisis (and by extension about the situation of poverty and deprivation), also considering the strategies that are articulated from this social space to face it, these dimensions would conform to starting from the complex and dynamic confluence of ideological spaces, social contexts, and prototypical vital attitudes. Finally, they themselves attend to and analyze the attribution of responsibilities that this group of “*new poor*” makes regarding the crisis, with respect to different political and economic institutions, and social actors [27].

The authors Kovacevic & Calderon [28] point out that among the most widely used international measures of poverty are the “*Multidimensional Poverty Index*” of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the definition of “*extreme poverty*” of the World Bank. The UNDP identifies three dimensions (education, health, and standard of living) and considers that a person is in a situation of poverty if they suffer deprivation in 33% of the weighted sum of these.

For Bauman [29], each society has its own poor, there will always be new poor among us. But that concept of poor depends on the way in which we (ordinary people, neither rich nor poor) live our lives, on the situation in which those poor find themselves among us. It is one thing to be poor in a community of producers with jobs for everyone, and quite another to be poor in a society of consumers whose life projects are built around consumerism and not around work, professional skills, or the availability of jobs.

For Martos [30] equal opportunities are more an aspiration than a reality, good proof of this is that the reality of poverty is something that can be inherited and in fact is inherited, eight out of ten people who experience serious economic difficulties in their infancy and adolescence, are reliving them today as adults.

According to Rocha [31], economic crises impact the middle classes, leading them to lose their purchasing power, and transforming their style and way of life, which causes social, economic, and educational transformations. For this author, the working middle class from its new social condition: new poverty, transforms its social status.

For the Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare<sup>B</sup> (2018) the evolution of poverty in Spain as a consequence of the crisis (2009-2018) [32] goes through a series of indicators. In accordance with the Europe 2020 strategy (which includes for the first time an objective to reduce the number of poor people in Europe), it was agreed to measure poverty by taking into account a new indicator called “*poverty or social exclusion*” or AROPE according to its acronym in English. (At Risk of Poverty and Exclusion). This indicator is made up of three sub-indicators: the traditional indicator of relative poverty is joined by the low intensity of employment in households, plus severe material deprivation.

In addition, the Ministry of Health, Consumption, and Social Welfare (2018) defines “*a person at risk of poverty or social exclusion as someone who lives in a home that has all or some of the following characteristics: is below the poverty line, suffers severe material deprivation and/or has low employment intensity*”.

Also note that the reference is always the home, so all members of the same in situations of risk of poverty or social exclusion are considered as such. With all this, the Ministry of Health, Consumption, and Social Welfare, obtained the following results during the years 2009-2018:

- During the crisis, the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion (ARPE) increased by 900,000, although since 2015 the data has improved, although in 2018 it still reached rates of 26.1%.

<sup>B</sup>Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare. <https://www.mschs.gob.es/>

- The poverty rate remains stable at values around 21.5% and the severe poverty rate has decreased since 2016, although 4,238,000 people are still in this situation in 2018.
- The recovery of employment reduces the number of households with low employment intensity, which in 2018 stood at 10.7%.
- The growth of the economy and the consequent recovery of employment anticipate the continuation of the positive behavior of the poverty indicators.
- Households in severe material deprivation is the only component of the AROPE rate that did not improve in 2018, since it increased by 0.3 percentage points, standing at 5.4%.
- By age brackets, the most punished population is that of 16 to 29 years, with an AROPE of 33.8%, compared to 26.1% overall, although it has been decreasing since 2016.
- Child poverty (0-18 years), although it is very high and reaches 29.5%, fell in 2018 to lower values than those reached in 2009.
- Families with children have the highest poverty rates, especially single-parent families since one in two is in this situation.
- University graduates have a poverty rate three times lower than those with only primary education (9.3% compared to 28.8%).
- By nationality, the risk of poverty or social exclusion is 47.7% for those born in the EU and 56% for those from the rest of the world, compared to 23.1% for those born in Spain.
- The difference in AROPE rates between Autonomous Communities (CCAA) exceeds 35 points.
- If the social transfers from the Administrations are taken into account, the poverty rate is reduced by 6.8 points, although the reduction is 8.7 points in the EU (2017 data). However, in 2018 the impact of transfers in Spain on poverty reduction decreased by 1 percentage point.
- The improvement in the indicators of poverty and social exclusion is beginning to have positive consequences in those of equality that are reduced in 2018, standing at lower values than those of 2010.
- The poverty rate of the employed population has risen since 2014, although it has stabilized at 13%.
- Workers with a permanent contract have a poverty rate of 7.3%, compared to 21.3% of workers with a temporary contract.

- Almost 50% of the unemployed have been looking for a job for more than a year.
- The number of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 who neither study nor work is 12.4% (10.5% in the EU), but reached 18.6% in 2012.
- The early school leaving rate (18 to 24 years) in 2018 is the lowest in the series, at 17.9%.

According to data provided in the Living Conditions Surveys<sup>9</sup> [33] prepared by the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2019), whose main objective is to have a reference source on comparative statistics on income distribution and social exclusion, the average income per person reached 11,680 euros, with an increase of 2,3%. The population at risk of poverty or social exclusion (AROPE Rate) stood at 25.3%, compared to 26.1% the previous year and so on successively retrospectively until the start of the crisis.

The World Bank<sup>10</sup> (2020) tells us that poverty is not defined by the gap between those who have more and those who have less, it is also evident in access to drinking water, electricity, sanitation, education, health, and other basic services [34].

For the UN [1] poverty goes beyond the lack of income and resources to guarantee sustainable livelihoods. Poverty is a human rights problem. Among the different manifestations of poverty are hunger, malnutrition, lack of decent housing, and limited access to other basic services such as education or health.

## Methodology

### Study design

Regarding the design of the work, a narrative bibliographical review has been chosen in which information on the concepts of sustainable development, economic growth, and poverty has been contrasted.

In the first place, it is proposed to know the concepts of the terms sustainable development and economic growth and later the definition of poverty as a relevant consequence of both.

Once the objectives have been defined, the keywords are chosen to start the bibliographic search, previously consulted in the Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) classification criteria, whose nomenclature is as follows: O4-Economic growth, O1-Economic development, Q01-Sustainable development, I32-Measurement and analysis of poverty.

<sup>9</sup>The Living Conditions Survey (ECV) has been carried out since 2004. Based on harmonized criteria for all the countries of the European Union, its fundamental objective is to have a reference source on comparative statistics of the distribution of income and social exclusion at the European level.

<sup>10</sup>The World Bank. <https://www.bancomundial.org/es/home>

## Search procedure and documentary bases

The search procedure was then started by entering the keywords in different databases: economic growth, economic development, sustainable development, and poverty. The databases consulted were: Dialnet, Ebsco, CSIS Indices, ING book, Is web of knowledge, Google Scholar, Pro Quest Sociology, Scopus, and Web of Science.

The so-called Boolean operators AND, NOT, and OR were used to make the search give an effective response to the proposed objectives, in such a way that these were useful to obtain the information, all this was done only by searching for the terms chosen in the title and in the abstract in order to narrow down the search and find concrete and relevant information for our work.

**Inclusion and exclusion criteria:** To refine the bibliographic search, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were determined.

**Inclusion criteria:** The different requirements that the selected documents had to meet were:

- Be written in Spanish or English.
- Preferably having been published in the last ten years, however, this criterion was flexible, including documents published in previous years that had special significance, interest, and contribution to our work.

**Exclusion criteria:** We have dispensed with those documents that did not meet the inclusion criteria, as well as those documents that, even dealing with our concepts, did not provide us with a definition of them.

Taking into account these inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 31 documents were collected, which have been used to carry out this work.

The recovered material is classified through the Mendeley Desktop bibliographic reference manager computer program ([www.mendeley.desktop.com](http://www.mendeley.desktop.com)) in the following thematic areas: sustainable development, economic development, and poverty, followed by a critical reading of the recovered documents.

The next step is based on analyzing everything considered relevant with respect to the concepts of the terms considered in our work, highlighting the use of documents on the one hand from institutional sources (UN, World Bank, EU, Ministry of Health and Consumption) and on the other hand documents of authors who have defined the concepts object of our study.

Finally, after choosing, classifying, and structuring all the information found in the bibliographical references, the bibliographical review is written.

## Discussion

After exposing the concepts of sustainable development, economic growth, and poverty, we proceed to discuss the data obtained once the bibliographical review has been carried out.

In the first place, this discussion begins by analyzing the concept of sustainable development from the point of view of different authors who agree on the variability of its meaning. Artaraz [7] affirms that a single definition cannot be given, since it does not exist regarding the meaning of sustainable development, with more than one hundred definitions. Brundtland [6] for his part states that the definition of sustainable development has not been consolidated as a stable concept, but has undergone constant modifications, giving rise to a concept with new nuances. Gallopín [8] highlights the complexity of the concept of sustainable development, stating that this is a process of directional change, through which the system improves sustainably over time.

Next, the relationship between economic development and sustainable development is revealed, finding a palpable controversy in the information obtained between different authors. The Commission of the European Communities (1992) maintains that sustainable development is an incentive to increase efficiency and competitiveness, especially in the world market while authors such as Artaraz [7] allege that the traditional economic system is incompatible with economic growth and ecological balance and Zamudio [15] corroborates that developing an economic system that increases the production of goods and services does not contribute to improving the standard of living. On the contrary, authors such as Crespo & Sabadie [18] indicate that we can reconcile sustainable development and economic development. Sánchez [16] adds that economic globalization limits and even annuls the freedom to choose the model that best suits particular characteristics and Espinach-Rueda [17] postulates that sustainable development provides a social solidarity economy as a way of empowering: people, communities, governments, and companies.

According to Escobar [11], sustainable development was a response to the problematization of poverty, which leads us to dwell on this concept. For his part, Bourdieu [20] understands poverty as a social construction of social identity, and the authors Minujin and Kessler [21] incorporate the concept of the new poor and develop transformations of social, economic, and cultural aspects linking it with sustainable development. Bauman [29] affirms that there will always be new poor among us, the concept will depend on the way we live our lives, if we change our lives through sustainable development we will change our situation as poor. Haughton & Khandker [24] define poverty as deprivation of well-being while the UN [1] defines poverty as human rights problems. The World Bank (2020) adds for its part that poverty is defined by the gap between those who have more and those who have less and is also evidenced by energy and natural resources, where sustainable development comes into play.

## Conclusion

There is no single consolidated definition of sustainable development, but new definitions with new nuances are continually appearing. Sustainable development, like traditional economic development, does not guarantee an improvement in the standard of living. Traditional economic development is incompatible with an ecological balance, which leads us to continually rethink new forms of sustainable development. Globalized sustainable development limits and even cancels the freedom to choose the model that best suits particular characteristics, hence the continuous change in the concept and definition of sustainable development. Although there are indications that sustainable development can reduce poverty levels, it is not proven that this is the case. Sustainable development does not always provide us with a social solidarity economy, hence its powerlessness when it comes to eradicating poverty.

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