

Sustainable Development and the Role of Social Sciences on Vietnam Sustainable Development

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Abstract: In order to satisfy their needs, people are forced to exploit nature, using materials available in nature. But for sustainable development, there is a need to harmonize the relationship between today's generation and future generation. During recent innovation, Vietnam social sciences have contributed greatly to establish perspectives and strategies for sustainable development, built and provided scientific foundation for sustainable development, namely: communication and widespread knowledge about sustainable development; construction and development of human resources in the social sciences for sustainable development; advising, counseling, peer the guidelines and policies on sustainable development; acquisition and exchange of scientific knowledge for sustainable development.

Key words: Sustainable development, social sciences, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Today, sustainable development has become a goal and strategy of most countries in the world. Each country based on their specific conditions set out guidelines and development strategies with the specific goal. To get the right policies and development strategies, there is a need of the contribution of social sciences. Currently, Vietnam is implementing the policies and strategies for sustainable development of its own; in which Vietnam social sciences have contributed practically and effectively.

2. The concept of sustainable development

Today, sustainable development has become one of the theoretical and practical issues, which is very familiar to scholars; it has been discussed many times on the

national and international forums and attracted the attention of social classes.

Originally, “*sustainable development*” was coined in the 1970s and began to attract researchers’ attention for environment and international development through the introduction of “The World Conservation Strategy” (IUCN, 1980). Then, the idea of sustainable development was presented in a series of works, like “Our Common Future” (1987), “Caring for the Earth” (IUCN, 1987). When talking about sustainable development, we often use two definitions in the above mentioned books. In the book “Our Common Future”, sustainable development is thought to meet the needs of the present

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without compromising the needs of future generations. Sustainable development is also identified in the book "Caring for the Earth" as improving the quality of human life while existing within the framework of preserving the ecosystem. Generally speaking, sustainable development is known as a reasonable use of natural resources and environmental protection that today's generation is developed without any effect on the next generation.

Thus, sustainable development is the development ensuring economic growth based on a rational use of natural resources and protection of the natural environment in order to satisfy both the needs of today's generation, not just affects the condition and ability to meet the needs and the environment of future generations. The content of that concept reflects the relationship between man and nature, between man and man. It can be shown that:

Firstly, to develop social economy and satisfy their needs, people are forced to exploit nature, using available materials in nature. In the history of philosophy, there exist two famous theories, namely: a theory that human dominates and masters nature (mainstream theories of Western philosophy) and the other theory sees human lives harmonically with nature (the mainstream theory of Oriental philosophy). Both theories contain positive values as well as a number of shortcomings and limitations.

In reality, human being can never

completely dominate nature; also, human cannot survive or grow unless they exploit and master nature. In the first case, when talking about the relationship between man and nature, in his "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", Karl Marx once said: "Nature is man's *inorganic* body – nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself human body. Man *lives* on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous interchange if he is not to die. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature." (K. Marx & F. Engels, 1995, Vol. 42: 135).

Acknowledging and affirming the great power of human on nature, but with the perspective of dialectical materialism and vision beyond the era, Engels said that we could not totally control the natural world as an invader dominated another country, as people living outside the natural world; he also warned people not to be too proud of victory against the natural world, because any result that people considered a feat to conquer nature can later cause entirely different, unpredictable effect" "(K. Marx & F. Engels, 1995, Vol. 20: 654). Historical development of human society since the big industrial age proved the genuinely correct and scientific prediction on this issue of the Marxism founders.

In the second case, people cannot survive or get rid of the animal world to become

human beings without exploiting and transforming nature. As we all know, the risk of resource depletion and environmental crisis, instead of looking for wiser solutions to ensure its development, protect natural resources and improve habitat, in the past years some people wanted to restore naturalistic conceptions, an extreme form back to herd, the original way of life. In fact, it is just a negative reaction, by dragging the history back to the period of savage men, reflecting the impasse facing habitat destroyed and crisis.

Therefore, a proper and scientific perspective of development is the integration of values, how to solve logically the gaps and contradictions of the above theories. The concept of sustainable development met the urgent demands: to survive and thrive, from an economic perspective, humans have to exploit nature rationally, responsibly to ensure that nature is not destroyed but survives and grows with the development of human beings and human society, the exploitation should not arbitrary, wanton, irresponsible. In other words, sustainable development represents a new level of quality in both human awareness and action, is formed voluntarily on a basis of awareness of nature's objective and inevitable laws, while humans and human society are integral parts.

Secondly, sustainable development resolved harmonically the relationship among human beings (the relationship between today's and

future generation). From the view point of sustainable development, the today's generation can exploit natural resources to satisfy their own needs, but the exploitation has to ensure the resources are not exhausted but supplemented and renewed for future generations' opportunities and necessary conditions to survive and grow. On the one hand, this shows the fairness between generations, the responsibility of the current generation to future generations; on the other hand, it represents the cultural and ethical attitudes of previous generations to the future generations (K. Marx & F. Engels, 1995, Vol. 20: 654).

The above content shows different relations (between man and nature and among human being), reveals human responsibility to the environment - the common house and the duty of every one to their fellows. This is the cultural content of sustainable development.

3. The role of social sciences for sustainable development

Science is a system of knowledge that mankind has accumulated throughout the history. This system is divided into different fields, such as the natural sciences, technology sciences, engineering sciences, social sciences, etc. Accordingly, social sciences are a system of knowledge of society and man. The task of social sciences is to research to discover the laws of the formation and development of human beings and human society, to clarify the relationship among human beings, between

man and society, and between people and the natural world.

There are currently different ways of sorting out the social sciences as well as the relationship between the social and human sciences. Here we use the term “social science” in the broad sense, covering social sciences and human sciences.

It is confirmed that in a comprehensive reform process of the country, social sciences have increasingly contributed to the development of socio-economics in general, to the construction of perspective and sustainable development strategy of Vietnam in particular. It is shown through:

First, social sciences spread sustainable development knowledge. We can say that sustainable development knowledge is the achievement that mankind has accumulated during centuries’ development process. Although the term “sustainable development” has appeared and widely used since the late 1980s, its basic content was outlined by many theories, philosophers long ago. For example, many philosophies and ancient Orient thinkers mentioned the harmony between man and nature in the development process, advised people treat fairly with nature, considered nature the organic body of humans.

As a science of society and man, Vietnam social sciences has continuously spread human knowledge about sustainable development; simultaneously, it further justifies the correctness and the necessity to

apply that theory to the development of Vietnam. Several social sciences’ research in Vietnam in the 1970s warned of environmental pollution and deforestation and warned that without attention to environmental issues or continuing deforestation, the results of economic development cannot compensate for environmental disaster consequences.

Second, one of the important tasks of social sciences is to contribute to research and provide scientific foundation to guideline, develop policies for the national development. In recent years, Vietnam social sciences have actively involved in planning guidelines and strategies for rapid and sustainable development of Vietnam from their perspective to perform this task.

Thanks to the contribution of social sciences, the perspective of sustainable development (later is fast and sustainable) has been continuously added, developed and perfected to match the conditions of Vietnam. It is expressed specifically in the Congress documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

It should be confirmed that realizing the significance and importance of sustainable development, it was proposed in the 1980s to be strategic targets of Vietnam. Gradually, the concept of sustainable development has evolved and increasingly added new content.

Considering development perspective, the 9th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam specified the objectives of the

development, namely "fast, efficient and sustainable development, economic growth is associated with progressive, social equality and environmental protection. (...). Economic growth is associated with the development of culture, gradually improving people's material and spirit life, implementing social progress and justice, protecting and improving environment; combining socio-economic development with defense enhancement" (CPV, 2001: 89, 162).

Noticeably, in the document of the 9th Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party, adding to the content of economic growth associated with environmental protection, the concept of sustainable development also refers to a combination of economic growth and cultural development, gradually improving people's material and culture life to make progress, social justice; combining socio-economic development with defense enhancement. The classical concept of sustainable development mainly refers to the relationship between man and nature, between man and man in relation to nature. But the concept of the Communist Party of Vietnam on sustainable development at the 9th Congress mentions many social relationships, such as the relationship between economic sectors and social sectors, between culture and security - defense besides the relationship between man and nature.

Furthermore, on the basis of reviewing the practical economic - social development of the country, the 10th Congress of the

Communist Party of Vietnam raised five valuable lessons in which the first important lesson is about rapid and sustainable development. The content of this lesson shows in the following main points: (1) rapid development is associated with sustainability. It must be incorporated in both the macro and micro level, in the short term and long term; (2) Quantity growth must be accompanied by quality improvement, efficiency and competitiveness of the economy; (3) While exploring factors developed in width, special attention should be paid to the in-depth developed factors, economic knowledge of development; (4) Economic growth must be tied to cultural development, comprehensive human development, democracy implementation, progress and social justice, job creation, people lives' improvement, legal enriching encouragement with poverty reduction; (5) Environmental protection and improvement must be respected within each stage of development; (6) Economic development must be associated with ensuring socio-political stability, this is premise and condition for rapid and sustainable development (CPV, 2006: 178, 179).

Along with promoting industrialization and modernization of the country, rapid and sustainable development is the permanent view across the socio-economic development strategy of Vietnam today. The 11th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam has stated views on the country's development in the new period, confirming rapid development

associated with sustainable development is the most important content: "Sustainable development is the base for fast development, and vice versa, fast development creates resources for sustainable development. Rapid and sustainable development must always be tied together in planning policies for socio-economic development." We must pay special attention to maintain socio-political stability, strengthen national defense and security, firmly safeguard the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the country to ensure rapid and sustainable development"(CPV, 2011: 99).

In Strategy of Socio-economic Development from 2011 to 2020 passed by the 11th Congress of the Party, the viewpoint of sustainable development continues to be specified, it confirms the priorities to effectively implement the following fundamental tasks solutions: (1) Determining to maintain independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, ensuring national political security and social order, proactively and positively integrating international community, creating peaceful environment and favorable conditions for the development of the country. This is a prerequisite for the rapid and sustainable development; (2) Ensuring macroeconomic stability and the balance of the economy, securing food, energy and efficiency operation of financial institutions; (3) Effectively mobilizing and using resources to ensure high growth rate while improving the quality of growth; (4) Developing culture

and society in harmony with economic development, constantly improving people's material and spirit life, making progress, social justice in each stage and each development policy. Ensuring better social welfare and security, creating equal opportunities for all citizens enjoying development achievements, especially basic services and social welfare; (5) Non-stop promoting people's sovereignty, widely practicing democracy, especially the direct democracy, building a consensus, openness and solidarity society; (6) Tying economic growth to environment protection and improvement.

These are fundamental contents of Vietnam sustainable development strategy. It is the combination of traditional, classic views with the new and specific perspectives of Vietnam. We can draw some conclusions from the rapid and sustainable development strategies of Vietnam:

1. Socio-political stability factor is considered the premise and condition for rapid and sustainable development. The political events in several countries around the world have proven that without political stability, development cannot be reached nor sustainable development.

2. Rapid and sustainable development strategy focuses on improving the quality of development, combining economic development with human comprehension development, implementing democracy, progress and social justice, creating more employment, improving life, encouraging legal enrichment

with poverty reduction, with respect to protecting and improving the environment within each development step. In other words, the strategy of rapid and sustainable development of Vietnam aims all three objectives simultaneously: economic development, social security and natural resources and environmental protection.

3. Vietnam strategy for sustainable development has addressed comprehensively various aspects of development, prominently addressing harmonious relationships, such as the harmony between rapid and sustainable development, between quantity growth and quality improvement, between in width and in-depth development, between economic development and social problem's solution, between economic growth and environmental protection and improvement, etc. Therefore, it can be stated that "harmony" is one of the important content of sustainable development strategy.

4. The central issue, the fundamental goals of sustainable development strategies is people's lives. The content of the sustainable development strategy of Vietnam presented above, either directly or indirectly, ultimately aiming at people, for people. The strategy of rapid and sustainable development has focused on the quality of economic growth, set target of growth towards the comprehensive development of human, implementation of democracy, progress and social justice, jobs creation, life improvement, legal enriching encouragement together with poverty reduction,

with respect to environmental protection and improvement in each development step.

With this fundamental content, the strategy of rapid and sustainable development of Vietnam towards the ultimate goal is obviously to increase the quality of people's present and future life, to better solve people's problems, to ensure that all citizens have a deserved, prosperous and happy life, to make everyone be rich in material life and variable in spiritual life. In reality, the rapid and sustainable development strategy is an effective method of ensuring socialist-oriented development of the country, with the goal of "rich people, strong country, democracy, justice and civilization".

Vietnam Communist Party' Strategy of Socio-economic Development from 2011 to 2020 has defined the main objectives of economic, cultural, social and environmental sustainable development. *In the sphere of economy*: striving to achieve GDP growth rate on average 7-8%/year; GDP in 2020 at constant prices by about 2.2 times compared to 2010; GDP per capita at current prices reached about \$ 3,000; the value of high-tech products and high technology application products reaches around 45% of GDP; reduce energy consumption per GDP from 2.5 to 3%/year; saving practices in use of all resources, especially natural resources.

In the sphere of culture and society: Building a democratic society, discipline, consensus, equitable, civilized; up to 2020, Human Development Index (HDI) achieves

higher average group of the world; population growth rate remains steady at 1%; average life expectancy is 75 years old; implementation of universal health insurance; increasing trained employees over 70%, vocational training accounted for 55% of the total labor force; poverty rate decreases an average of 1.5 to 2%/year; social welfare, social security and community health care is guaranteed; developing education and training, science and technology to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization of the country; building an advanced culture imbued with national identity; prosperous, progress and happy family; comprehensive human development of intellectual, moral, physical, creative energy, sense of citizenship, legal compliance.

In the sphere of environment: continuing to improve environmental quality; by 2020, most people use clean and sanitary water; new established businesses must apply clean technology or devices equipped with pollution reduction, waste disposal; over 80% existing businesses reach environmental standards; improving and restoring the environment in heavily contaminated areas; mitigating the impacts of natural disasters; actively responding effectively to climate change, particularly the sea level rise (CPV, 2011: 103 – 106). These are specific objectives to gradually realize the sustainable development strategy in Vietnam in the early decades of the 21st century.

To effectively implement strategies for

sustainable and rapid development in the new context, we need to continue to create positive changes in awareness, strong innovation in development thinking, consistent with all policies, plans, projects and action programs; organize and implement widespread with joining consensus of the whole political system, the economic community and citizens at all levels.

Third, social sciences build and develop human resources of social sciences for sustainable development of the country. Human resources of social sciences, in broad sense, are those understand social sciences, understand intellectual of sustainable development. In the narrow sense, human resources of social sciences are those specialize in researching and teaching about sustainable development in institutes, research centers, universities etc. Human resources are considered to be one of the most basic capital for the sustainable development of the country, contributing to bring the views and policies of sustainable development into practical life. In fact, over the years in Vietnam, many faculties, institutes and schools have studied sustainable development; many programs, knowledge of sustainable development have been taught.

Fourth, social scientists perform the role of advising and counseling, peer advocates for policies contributing to the sustainable development of the country. Advising, counseling, judgment is inherent function of the sciences in general and social

sciences in particular. In fact, the role of advising and counseling, criticism of social sciences has been increasingly enhanced since the Renovation. Guidelines and policies to develop countries in general, sustainable development in particular have been consulted, assessed, evaluated and criticized by scientists. Thanks to the contribution, the views, guidelines and policies on sustainable development have more and more quality and better match real life requirement.

Fifth, Vietnam social sciences contribute to acquire achievements of the world social sciences while promote and share Vietnam sustainable development knowledge with domestic and abroad scholars. In this respect, social sciences play a bridging role to create opportunities for exchange and learning experience and scientific knowledge about sustainable development between domestic and foreign scholars. Interaction and learning are essential to get specific view consistent with the characteristics and conditions of each country.

4. Conclusion

From the points above, we can confirm that the social sciences have had a tremendous role for the sustainable development of Vietnam since the start of the Renovation (1986) so far. The role of social science is specifically expressed on five aspects: (1) Widely spread and distribute knowledge of sustainable development; (2) Develop and provide scientific foundation for sustainable

development; (3) Construct and develop social sciences human resources for sustainable development; (4) Advise and criticize the guidelines and policies for sustainable development; (5) Collect and exchange scientific knowledge of sustainable development.

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