

Humanity in Sustainable Development

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Abstract: *Humanity is facing many complex issues that need to be addressed, including environmental problems, for sustainable development. However, the awareness and solutions of each stakeholder regarding this issue still vary, leading to limited effectiveness. This not only affects the lives of the current generation but also poses a risk to future generations. Therefore, it is crucial to have deep awareness and unified, effective action.*

Keywords: *sustainable development; humanity.*

Sustainable development has been defined as balanced development among economic, social, and environmental factors, ensuring the satisfaction of the needs of both present and future generations. Sustainable development has been a topic of discussion at many forums and organizations worldwide for decades. This highlights the urgency of the issues humanity is facing and needs to resolve. However, so far, the awareness and actions of stakeholders - people on our planet - seem to have not made the desired progress. Therefore, this remains a topic that needs to be discussed to achieve a high consensus on awareness and decisive, strong action by governments, organizations, and individuals. It should be understood that sustainable development is not an end in itself but is for the sake of humanity, so all decisions regarding sustainable development must place humans at the center, as the fundamental and core element.

We all know that society is a special part of nature, the highest form of material organization in nature. Friedrich Engels (dialectical materialist philosopher, 1820-1895, Germany) believed that humans are the result of a long process of evolution (millions of years) of matter, “the most complex organism that nature has produced.” To survive, humans and society must rely on nature, on material, and the surrounding environment.

Engels believed that nature is the living environment, providing the materials for labor to transform into wealth serving humans. Therefore, humans cannot be opposed to nature but must be seen as a dialectical, sustainable unity, creating a dynamic balance system between humans and nature.

When humans first evolved from animals, they were almost entirely dependent on nature, subject to the “blind” forces they could not control, but this balance system was still established. Only when humans overexploited nature did the system lose balance and sustainability. Through production and labor, humans learned to modify and control natural processes on an increasingly broader scale. The more society develops, the stronger the impact (modification and transformation) on nature. These impacts have grown to the point where they exceed permissible limits, breaking the balance of the human-society-nature system.

Engels stated, “In nature, nothing happens in isolation. One phenomenon affects another and vice versa.” Therefore, “we should not be too proud of our victories over nature. For every such victory, nature takes its revenge on us.”⁽²⁾.

This is entirely accurate because humans and nature form a dynamic system, with its elements interacting with each other. Humans impact nature, and nature, in turn, impacts humans. But the second impact is often “unforeseen” by humans and sometimes destroys all the initial results achieved by humans. Many civilizations, including the *Maya* civilization, might have perished due to these reasons. “And these reminders hourly and momentarily remind us that we do not rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone living outside nature”⁽³⁾.

Thus, human power and dominance over nature are not unlimited and absolute. Because humans conquer nature but still live within it, not as someone outside of it. Therefore, the conquest, modification, and transformation of nature must be within the dynamic balance of the human-nature system. If out of immediate greed we break the balance of the system, humans must pay the price and suffer unpredictable harmful consequences. There are immediate consequences that we can see right away, but there are also long-term consequences that may take thousands of years to fully evaluate their harmful extent.

The fundamental issue here is not merely about recognizing and solving the relationship between humans and nature alone but about understanding the relationship between humans in their interaction with the natural environment.

The unsustainability of the relationship between humans and nature originates from the approach and handling of the relationship between

humans regarding the equal rights to enjoy the products of nature. The right to appropriate nature has led to inequality in the enjoyment of these natural products among humanity. This is the root cause of the overexploitation of nature, simultaneously disrupting the inherent balance system of nature in the process of evolution.

According to Engels, the conflict between humans and nature stems from conflicts within social relationships. Therefore, resolving the conflict between humans themselves is the prerequisite for resolving the conflict between humans and nature, thus achieving reconciliation between humans and nature and among humans. Engels wrote, “To properly carry out this regulation, mere recognition is not enough. It requires a complete transformation in the mode of production existing until now, and simultaneously, in the current social system”⁽⁴⁾.

“Only a society capable of harmoniously coordinating its productive forces according to a unified common plan can allow for the most suitable distribution of industry throughout the country for development”⁽⁵⁾.

In societies where production pursues maximum profit, exhausts natural resources, and destroys the ecological and natural environment, humans have faced severe, irreparable consequences. “Energy crises, food shortages, depletion of natural resources, and degradation of the ecological environment pose enormous challenges to the existence and development of humanity. These are the consequences of an economic and social development process that takes profit as the ultimate goal, views the accumulation of wealth and increasing material consumption as measures of civilization, and considers individual interests as the pillar of society”⁽⁶⁾. This demonstrates the unsustainable nature of the economy, society, and ecological environment that humanity is currently facing.

As long as humans are dominated by the mindset of exploiting nature, unlimited material consumption, and environmental destruction, they will continue to suffer the “revenge” of nature, preventing a good and healthy life for both humans and nature.

For decades, resources have been the primary influence on international political and social life. The domestic and foreign strategies of a nation are related to the search, exploitation, and use of resources. Resource disputes have caused many wars aimed at seizing and redrawing the map of global resources. Many capitalist countries, instead of exploiting their own resources, seek to use the resources of other countries to serve their

development. This further hinders efforts to establish a balanced system between humans and nature.

On the other hand, compared to all other organisms, humans are aware of the laws of nature and can use those laws accurately. However, understanding to live in harmony with nature is different from understanding to conquer, exploit, and appropriate it. Production systems have emerged and changed continuously along with industrial revolutions, clearly illustrating this.

To date, human history has experienced four industrial revolutions with the following main contents:

The First Industrial Revolution, from 1784, took place in Western Europe and North America from the early 18th century to the mid-19th century. This was the initial industrial revolution with the advent of machinery. Humans used water and steam power to mechanize production, marking the beginning of the mechanical production era, replacing the old technical systems.

The Second Industrial Revolution began in the late 19th century (1870) until the beginning of World War I (1914), with the basic achievements being the internal combustion engine (associated with the creation of motor vehicles) and electricity. The scope of the second industrial revolution, based on the scientific achievements already reached, was broader than the first revolution, though its center remained in Europe and North America, where there were strong technical foundations. Humans invented the electric motor and used electrical energy to create assembly line production.

The Third Industrial Revolution began in the late 1960s (1969) when humans invented computers and the Internet, also known as the digital revolution. This period saw machinery along with the application of information technology automating production, replacing most of human functions. This revolution was associated with deep globalization, affecting almost every country in the world. With vast quantities of goods, the demand for raw materials and product consumption increased strongly, leading to tighter cooperation and interdependence between countries and entities.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution emerged from the 2000s, essentially bringing the physical and virtual worlds closer together based on digital technology and integrating all intelligent technologies to optimize production processes and methods. It emphasizes technologies with the most

significant current and future impacts, such as 3D printing, biotechnology, new material technology, automation, and robotics. It creates a merger, erasing boundaries between technological, physical, digital, and biological fields. This is a trend of combining virtual systems and entities, the Internet of Things (IoT), and the Internet of Systems (IoS). The proliferation of technologies like IoT, cloud computing, and artificial intelligence is blurring all boundaries, allowing humans, products, and machines to connect and communicate with each other. The development speed of breakthroughs in this Fourth Industrial Revolution is unprecedented in history. While previous industrial revolutions progressed at an arithmetic rate, the development speed of the Fourth Industrial Revolution is exponential. The time from when technological ideas and innovations are conceived, realized in laboratories, and commercialized on a large scale globally is significantly shortened.

Although science and technology have fundamentally changed human thinking and actions toward nature, the Fourth Industrial Revolution still heavily relies on natural resources. The energy crises of the past centuries and the present reflect that human-created production systems have not overcome the imbalance between humans and nature. In many aspects, it has even worsened the concerns humans have. “If humans, through science and their creative genius, conquer the forces of nature, then those forces of nature retaliate by forcing humans, to the extent that they use those forces, to submit to a true despotism, regardless of the social organization”⁽⁷⁾.

A surprising result from a study published by the UK-based organization Oxfam revealed that the investment activities of the 125 richest people in the world each produce an average of 3 million tons of CO². This figure means that a single person in this ultra-wealthy group emits CO² at a rate 1 million times higher than the combined CO² emissions of 90% of the global population. Consequently, the total annual CO² emissions of these 125 richest people amount to 393 million tons, while the figure for the 7.22 billion people in the world is only 2.76 tons⁽⁸⁾.

Catastrophic natural disasters affecting humans such as wildfires, floods, desertification, saltwater intrusion, sandstorms, earthquakes, rising sea levels, and climate change are appearing more frequently, on a larger scale, and with more complexity, showing the helplessness and deadlock humans face in dealing with the consequences they have created.

Countries, governments, and corporations have developed and implemented many policies for projects aimed at restoring the natural environment, but these efforts seem insufficient. Without unified awareness of the causes of these consequences, the severity of the issues, and unified action, all efforts by individuals, organizations, and nations will become meaningless.

For example, the Copenhagen Conference in December 2009, which attracted the most countries to date, failed to reach a legally binding agreement to reduce global climate change due to the interests of major countries like the US and China. In December 2011, the Global Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa, with 194 countries participating, also failed to reach an agreement on a future climate change limitation treaty. This indicates that addressing this challenge remains a difficult and long-term task for humanity today.

What we need is sustainable development, in harmony with nature, to ensure a healthy living environment for current and future generations, rather than exploiting and seizing natural resources⁽⁹⁾. This is also the main spirit in Vietnam's political decisions aimed at building a sustainable development nation.

Vietnam is one of the countries most heavily impacted by global climate change, so we understand the necessity of establishing development towards sustainability. The decisions of the Party and the Government of Vietnam over many decades have been developed and implemented with this spirit. Vietnam always ties national development issues with sustainable development and identifies people as the center of development strategies. Humans are identified as both the goal and the driving force of development.

At the 7th Congress (1991), the Communist Party of Vietnam introduced views on national development linked with environmental protection in the *Socio-Economic Development Strategy 1991-2000*: "Rapid, efficient, and sustainable economic growth," "Economic growth associated with social progress and equity, cultural development, and environmental protection."

The 8th Congress (1996) emphasized the lesson: "Economic growth associated with social progress and equity, preserving and promoting national cultural identity, protecting the ecological environment"⁽¹⁰⁾.

The 9th Congress (2001) and the 10th Congress (2006) continued to affirm the view: "Rapid, efficient, and sustainable development, economic

growth coupled with social progress and equity, and environmental protection”⁽¹¹⁾.

The 11th Congress (2011) pointed out that rapid development must be linked with sustainable development which is a consistent requirement in the Socio-Economic Development Strategy until 2020, drawing the lesson: “We must truly value the quality, efficiency of growth, and sustainable development. Strengthen the mobilization and effective use of both domestic and international resources”; “Economic growth must be accompanied by social progress, social equity, and environmental protection”⁽¹²⁾.

The 12th Congress (2016) affirmed: “Ensure rapid and sustainable development on the basis of macroeconomic stability and continuously improving productivity, quality, efficiency, and competitiveness. Develop harmoniously between breadth and depth, focusing on depth; develop the knowledge economy, green economy. Develop the economy closely linked with cultural, social development, environmental protection, proactively responding to climate change. Ensure national defense, security, and maintain peace and stability to build the country”⁽¹³⁾. “Rapid and sustainable development (towards the sustainable development goals by 2030 of the United Nations); harmoniously resolve between economic growth and cultural development, implement social progress and equity, and protect the environment.”⁽¹⁴⁾.

The 13th Congress (2021) identified: “Our country’s comprehensive and synchronous development strategy is to promote comprehensive, synchronous renovation, rapid, and sustainable national development; ensure close connection and synchronous implementation of tasks, in which: Socio-economic development is the central task; Party construction is the key; cultural development is the spiritual foundation; ensuring national defense and security is crucial and regular.”⁽¹⁵⁾.

To achieve the goals identified by the 13th Congress: “*Regarding the environment*, by 2025, the proportion of urban population using clean water, hygienic water will be 95-100%, rural areas 93-95%; the rate of collection and treatment of urban domestic solid waste meeting standards and regulations will reach 90%; the rate of industrial zones, export processing zones in operation with centralized wastewater treatment systems meeting environmental standards will be 92%; the rate of establishments causing serious environmental pollution being handled will reach 100%;

maintain the forest coverage rate at 42%, requiring rapid and sustainable development.”

The 13th Congress document identified: “Rapid and sustainable development based mainly on science and technology, innovation, and digital transformation. We must innovate thinking and actions, proactively timely seize, and effectively utilize the opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution associated with the international integration process to restructure the economy, develop the digital economy, digital society, considering this as a decisive factor to improve labor productivity, quality, efficiency, and competitiveness. Maximize the advantages of regions, areas; develop harmoniously between the economy with culture, society, environmental protection, and adaptation to climate change; pay attention, create favorable conditions for policy beneficiaries, people with meritorious services, the poor, the disadvantaged, and ethnic minorities.”⁽¹⁶⁾.

At the COP26 Conference, Vietnam made a strong commitment to the international community to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. Immediately after COP26, Vietnam promptly concretized and began implementing its commitments before the international community. Vietnam has completed the National Power Development Plan for the period 2021-2030, with a vision to 2045; developed a Project on the tasks and solutions to implement the results of the COP26 Conference; the National Climate Change Strategy to 2050; the Action Program on green energy transition, carbon and methane emissions reduction in the transportation sector; the National Action Plan on green growth for the period 2021-2030; and the Action Plan on methane emission reduction by 2030. Several ministries and sectors have been and are developing Action Plans to implement Vietnam’s commitments at COP26 towards the goal of achieving net-zero emissions. COP27 will focus on three main areas: emission reduction, helping countries prepare and cope with climate change, and ensuring technical and financial support for developing countries.

However, establishing sustainable development cannot be achieved in just one country but requires global effort. Therefore, all countries must have a more comprehensive, deeper awareness and act more strongly and decisively to restore balanced and sustainable development for our planet./.

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