
Sustainable development and Sustainable Development Goals: distinct processes and convergent interests

*Desenvolvimento sustentável e Objetivos do Desenvolvimento Sustentável:
Processos distintos e interesses convergentes*

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Resumo: O artigo trata da criação, incorporação e disseminação do conceito de desenvolvimento sustentável no âmbito das relações internacionais. Ao contrário da literatura dominante de RI, considera que o conceito é ambíguo, o que favorece a reprodução da hierarquia dos estados nacionais, numa aparente concessão a um processo de transformação civilizatória e incluyente. O enfoque é de economia política, de modo que há uma parte importante do texto voltada para discussões teóricas de desenvolvimento econômico. Neste sentido, a imbricação das discussões teóricas com aquelas específicas da política internacional no âmbito da ONU, sintetizadas nos objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável, mostra apropriação da ideia de desenvolvimento sustentável como legitimadora de uma visão de futuro improvável.

Palavras-chave: Desenvolvimento sustentável; Objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável; Concepção de desenvolvimento da ONU

Abstract: The article deals with the creation, incorporation and dissemination of the concept of sustainable development in the context of international relations. Unlike the dominant IR literature, it considers that the concept is ambiguous, which favors the reproduction of the hierarchy of national states, in an apparent concession to a process of civilizing and inclusive transformation. The focus is on political economy, so there is an important part of the text focused on theoretical discussions of economic development. In this sense, the imbrication of theoretical discussions with those specific to international policy within the UN, synthesized in the Sustainable Development objectives, shows

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appropriation of the idea of sustainable development as legitimizing an unlikely vision of the future.

Keywords: Sustainable Development; Sustainable Development Goals; UN Development Design

1. Introduction

The concept of Sustainable Development has been a mandatory reference for all organs under the United Nations institutionality (UN). This reference was consolidated by the creation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015. From then on, the signatory countries of the SDGs voluntarily incorporated this concept into their internal policies or began to use it as the most up-to-date representation of social development for development policy purposes. There is also a strong broader impact, reaching private companies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). An updated analysis of the whole process can be found in Menezes (2019).

This identification of the SDGs to the concept of sustainable development is an imbrication of the processes of theoretical and political discussion since both occurred within the UN. However, the process by which the idea of sustainable development reached a position of hegemony in the social debate on development was independent of the process of building the SDGs. This theme is related to the discussion of institutional filtering of supranational agreements concerning internal jurisdiction. There is specialized literature on this, although it does not deal specifically with the theme of environmental conservation policies, and it is focused on the SDGs (ENAP, 2018).

The concept of sustainable development emerged from a normative political discussion of the pertinence and support of economic development that had been taking place since the postwar period until the Stockholm conference, held in Sweden in 1972. The period roughly coincides with what is known as "the glorious thirty years of capitalism" (Fourastié, 1979). After that, there was academic and political discussion about the new development concept (Bonente & Almeida Filho, 2011). At the level of the UN and its organs, the process culminated in creating the World Commission on Environment and Development, 1983, which produced a report called *Our Common Future*, published in 1987, in which the concept of sustainable development was first disseminated.

On the other hand, the MDGs resulted from a historical conjuncture of globalization and global inequality of income and wealth at various levels of aggregation

of the world economy: developed economies and peripheral economies, distribution of income and national wealth, distribution of income in subnational spaces, etc. This deepening of differences in living levels resulted in a summit meeting held in New York in September 2000. Leaders from 189 countries approved the Millennium Declaration, a commitment to work together to build a safer, more prosperous, and fairer world. The Declaration contained eight targets to be achieved by 2015. The SDGs are an extension of these eight targets to seventeen others, incorporating the concept of sustainable development there. However, the process of defining the 17 objectives and 169 goals was distinct from the MDGs.

There is extensive literature on the SDGs in the field of International Relations. A review of the internal positions to the theme can be found in Galvão (2020). The theoretical perspective of this article is not among these positions. The best denomination for it is that it is a political economy approach that conceives the global economy as a hierarchical, unequal organic whole, which tends to reproduce. At the level at which the discussion of the SDGs is established, an interstate system is formulated, also hierarchical, but with relative autonomy to the private sphere (molecular movement of capital) in terms of Harvey (2004). The literature of political economy, in general, does not deal with the institutionality of the UN because it understands that no regulation corresponds to the function of national states. An alternative that was not used in this article is presented by neogramscianos, who understand supranational regulation as indispensable to the expansion of capitalism in the Second World War (Murphy, 1994; 2005).

Another relevant aspect of this approach is that it does not part with the "scientific" debate from the politician, different from what supports Alves & Fernandes (2020). Societies are understood as classes and the State as the central political power, from which there is the primary process of social regulation (exercise of jurisdiction), complemented by other regulation systems (Hirsch, 2010). For this reason, the State is the focus of social dispute, so the international representation, diplomacy, and paradiplomacy do not automatically and directly determine internal policies. Still, it is possible to deal with the theoretical debate on development (economic, human, social, environmental, etc.) by Milonakis & Fine (2009).

The article follows Nobre's thesis (1999) that the formulation of sustainable development is deliberately ambiguous to make the economic, social, and environmental

spheres compatible. According to him, this is a strategy of UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) to institutionalize the environmental theme within the UN. It disguises a hierarchy of dimensions, objectives, and goals, with evident privilege for the economy. Moreover, the focus given to the economy is neoclassical, as Josephsen (2017: 15) maintains, and therefore assumes a harmonious behavior of agents, incompatible with the complexity of International Relations. This set of elements leads to questioning the possibilities of success of the SDGs as a civilizing process.

The article is organized into three sections. In the first, we describe the process of formulating and consolidating the concept of sustainable development. In the second, we describe the process that culminated in the MDGs. In the third section, we describe creating the SDGs, incorporating the concept of sustainable development, and raising reasons for their unification to constitute guidelines of great international reception. Finally, we have summarized some conclusions.

2. The origin and consolidation of the concept of sustainable development within the UN

The thirty glorious years of capitalism, an expression coined by Jacques Fourastié (1979), reflect an active phase of development and growth of the world economy, which includes productive expansion and a new corporate arrangement with institutionalization and international regulation. In this arrangement, the "world of work" was contemplated with what became known as the Welfare State, with health, education, and social security policies (Judt, 2007). This process of the historical development of capitalism lost strength in the 1960s and ended in the 1970s for several reasons, but in what concerns the stand article by the evidence that the excessive expansion of capitalism had perverse environmental and social consequences. The main phenomena of this period seemed to be the acceleration of the use of non-renewable wealth reserves and the intensification of social inequality that was produced in the world, either in terms of national economies or in terms of the portions of national populations that had access to the benefits that capitalism could offer.

One of the most important historical documents to mark this change in social status in the world economy was a study commissioned by the Club of Rome from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT, USA) and called Limits of Growth, or

Meadows's report³³. This study showed in scientific terms that continuing the growth trajectory of the world economy that could be observed from the post-war to the mid-1960s, non-renewable resources would be exhausted in the next hundred years. The MIT study gained vast repercussions and was translated into several languages. International backlash peaked at the Stockholm Conference in Sweden in 1972. The Conference was a recognition by the UN that the theme had global relevance, as it was the first world conference related to the environment. What was mainly under discussion, among several other topics, as a result of the Limits of Growth study, was a possible limitation to the use of non-renewable resources, a proposal known then as "zero growth".

Due to the characteristic of UN's events of being a representation of national governments, the discussion presented contours of a geopolitical debate of the world economy. In parallel to the Conference, there were discussions with organized social movements. There was important criticism of the specific form of life centered on exacerbated consumerism, represented by the American standard of living. There was a reaction from the countries then considered peripheral or underdeveloped, which understood the meaning of the possible freezing, decrease or zeroing of the growth of the world economy as an obstacle to their processes of catching-up development, in terms of Rostow (1961).

The position of zero growth was supported by developed countries, especially those smaller in northern Europe. This Scandinavia region considered it necessary to adopt a development policy alternative to that represented by the USA. There was a standoff with heated positions of peripheral countries. From the theoretical and political point of view, a relevant part of the debate was portrayed by Ecodevelopment's proposition (Strong, 1973). This consisted in the definition of a style of development adapted to the rural areas of the Third World, based on the judicious use of local resources,

³³ The Limits to Growth is a book written in 1972 that modeled the consequences of the rapid growth of the world population considering limited natural resources, commissioned by the Club of Rome. Its authors were Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jørgen Randers, and William W. Behrens III. The research used a computer system (World3) to simulate the consequences of the interaction between the systems of the planet Earth and the human systems. Five variables were examined in the original model, assuming that exponential growth accurately describes its growth patterns: world population, industrialization, pollution, food production and depletion of resources. In 2008, Graham Turner of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO) in Australia, published an article entitled "A comparison of 'The Limits to Growth' with thirty years of reality". It examined the last thirty years of reality with the predictions made in 1972 and found that changes in industrialization, food production and pollution are all consistent with the book's predictions of an economic and social collapse in the 21st century. https://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Os_Limites_do_Crescimento

without compromising the exhaustion of nature, because in these places there was still the possibility that such societies would not engage in the illusion of mimetic growth, that is, the reproduction of the American standard of living in the periphery.

This type of proposition had anticapitalism content by altering/mitigating the consumerist impulse inherent in capitalism. Capitalism only stabilizes itself in growth. It is through the expectations of increased profits that production expands. And this expansion depends on the continuous incorporation of new products into the social standard of living, thus exceeding the organic limits of individual consumption. In a scenario of zero growth or deficient growth, this possibility would not exist. Ecodevelopment was not welcomed adequately by the political forces that hegemonized (and still hegemonize) the world economy.

Later, Ignacy Sachs (1980) appropriates the concept, improving its definition, creating a framework for Ecodevelopment strategies⁴. Part of the model's premise was based on three pillars: economic efficiency, social justice, and ecological prudence. This reformulation softened the anticapitalism content of Ecodevelopment but maintained the importance of environmental concerns in defining new social consumption patterns. Maybe that's why it had less repercussion than it deserved.

Also, as a result of the Stockholm Conference, the UN General Assembly created the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in December 1972 to coordinate environmental activities within the UN. However, his priorities focused on technical issues. Even today, its mission is to address the ecological aspects of disasters and

⁴ Reference to Ignacy Sachs' book as a landmark is common in the literature. However, the author himself, in the introduction to the book, says that the "review" of Maurice Strong's proposals was the result of a discussion process that would have started as early as 1974, with the Declaration of Cocoyoc, Mexico: "A little later, in 1974, the Cocoyoc Declaration formulated a more general [than Strong's] and richer interpretation of the concept of Ecodevelopment" (SACHS, 1980: 12). The declaration is the end point of a seminar organized by UNEP and UNCTAD in favor of development and human-centered needs. After an introduction as a theoretical reflection, the document redefines theoretical elements such as the Purpose of Development, the Diversity of Development and Self-reliance, to end with Suggestions for Action and an epilogue. The Cocoyoc Declaration reveals the difficulty of meeting human needs in an environment under great pressure. It starts with a summary of the lack of progress on issues such as poverty, hunger, illiteracy, health and homelessness, to which it adds problems of resource degradation. Then, it indicates what the development objectives should be (meet basic needs) and recommends actions according to a global economic management based on a new international economic order and on the Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States (retrieved from <https://sites.google.com/site/historiaeducacionambiental/decada-de-los-70/1974>, accessed on 05/25/2020).

conflicts, ecosystem management, environmental governance, harmful substances, and resource efficiency, and climate change.

In 1983, the UN Secretary-General invited the physician Gro Harlem Brundtland, a Master of Public Health and former Prime Minister of Norway, to establish and chair the World Commission on Environment and Development. In April 1987, the Brundtland Commission, as it became known, published an innovative report, "Our Common Future", which brings the concept of sustainable development to public discourse. The idea of sustainable development contemplated the dominant interests in the world economy while also contemplating the concerns of environmental preservation. The concept was consolidated at the second world conference on the environment held in 1992, Rio 92, in which this proposition was consecrated. From then on, sustainable development became an international reference for UN actions on the environment.

Apart from Ecodevelopment, sustainable development has ambiguity and its virtue and the main reason for acceptance (Nobre & Amazonas, 2002; Layrargues, 1997; Baroni, 1992). The most plausible conclusion in this comparison between the two concepts is that sustainable development results from the pressure of the new ecological reality and the need for market forces to assume a new posture, under new clothing, without modifying its operating structure. The process of capital accumulation whose operation is dependent on market logic has not even been shaken, or rather, has even been strengthened. Sustainable development assumes the posture of a neoliberal ecological project, which under the sign of reform produces the illusion of living a time of change, in the apparent certainty that it is a gradual process that will lead to socio-environmental sustainability.

It turns out that the proposal for a "new style of development", translated by sustainable development, which could mean a change, of course, remains in the same way as always. There is recognition of this nature by the actors of the process themselves. In the Brundtland Report text, "most of the technological research done by commercial organizations is dedicated to creating and processing innovations that have market value" (Layrargues, 2016). This paradoxically means that there is no commitment to producing goods that meet the most impoverished societies' needs.

3. The Millennium Development Goals: confrontation of internal positions to UN agencies and agencies

The successive international conferences that marked the 1990s laid the groundwork for building a new global development agenda. By identifying development as an expansion of human capacities, Amartya Sen (1991; 1993) leads to the consolidation of human development. International debates began to favor a broader conception of development based on human life quality, surpassing simplistic interpretations of economic growth.

This process of building a new global development agenda has relevant historical backgrounds. Like the environmental issue, global poverty reduction became a central theme in international relations in the 1970s. Previously, the United Nations summits and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) portrayed joint efforts to achieve the established but ineffective purpose. The UN has become the target of numerous criticisms that claimed a weak structure focused on developmentalism. The rise of Ronald Reagan's conservative governments in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom marked the advance of neoliberal ideology. The central structure of the UN, in this scenario, loses ground in development decisions, enabling international financial institutions (IFIs), especially the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to take on the burden of directing global priorities (Chopra & Mason, 2014; Hulme, 2007).

The overthrow of socialism, emblematically marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, consolidated Neoliberalism as the only ideology of reference for most governments in the world. The advance of macroeconomic stabilization on the other dimensions of national public policies imposed the contingency of social spending and reduced the role of the State. This agenda imposed "reforms" that became known in Latin America as the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 2004). However, this development model proved insufficient to promote the improvement of the social conditions of the most impoverished layers (Chopra & Mason, 2014). In 1990, the World Bank published the "World Development Report: Poverty". It recognizes the persistent challenges across the globe and the need to pay greater attention to social policies, together with ongoing economic reforms. Thus, rethinking the international agenda became imperative at the beginning of the new Century (Hulme, 2007).

Also, in the previous context, during the 1980s, the socio-economic indices of Latin American and sub-Saharan African countries declined to put poverty reduction back as a top priority for international agents. The World Bank (1990) has given industrialized countries the mission of providing resources and assistance to developing countries, especially those on the African continent. The Report advocates the implementation of public policies that provide social protection to the poorest. In exchange for their commitment to fiscal discipline, the globe's peripheral nations would receive international assistance from developed countries (World Bank, 1990).

In 1990, the first UNDP Human Development Report (United Nations Development Programme) was disseminated, and, with it, the conception of human development gained notoriety (UNDP, 1990). Another significant milestone was holding the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, already mentioned in the previous section. With the establishment of Agenda 21, the Conference represented significant advances in the perspectives that link the environment to development. However, sustainable development has been more associated with environmental sustainability over the decade and away from other development dimensions (ECOSOC, 2015).

On the other hand, the end of the Cold War led to a decline in Official Development Assistance (ODA). Therefore, international aid agencies have suffered a fall in their budgets. Given this, the European Union has set up a Reflection Group to articulate new guidelines. It was decided that the Development Assistance Committee (DAC)⁵ would be responsible for drawing up a set of targets focused on poverty reduction but to stress the importance of economic growth. In May 1996, the DAC released "Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Co-operation", a document that deliberated the seven International Development Goals (HULME, 2007). They are played on Table 1.

Table 1: International Development Objectives

Objectives	description
Goal 1	The proportion of people living in extreme poverty in developing countries should be reduced by at least one-half by 2015.

⁵ Committee of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Goal 2	Universal primary education in all countries by 2015.
Goal 3	Elimination of gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005.
Goal 4	The death rate for infants and children under the age of five years should be reduced in each developing country by two-thirds the 1990 level by 2015.
Goal 5	The rate of maternal mortality should be reduced by three-fourths during the period 1990 to 2015.
Goal 6	Access should be available through the primary health-care system to reproductive health services for all individuals of appropriate ages, including safe and reliable family planning methods by 2015.
Goal 7	There should be a current national strategy for sustainable development, in the process of implementation, in every country by 2005, so as to ensure that current trends in the loss of environmental resources _ forests, fisheries, fresh water, climate, soils, biodiversity, stratospheric ozone, the accumulation of hazardous substances and other major indicators _ are effectively reversed at both global and national levels by 2015.

SOURCE: DAC, 1996. Own elaboration.

If, on the one hand, there was a focus on measurable objectives in the IDGs, on the other hand, there was a need for the UN to stress more general agendas to ensure consensus among its various actors. Thus, on April 3, 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan released the report "We, the Peoples: the role of the United Nations in the 21st century". In June of the same year, to boost support for the coordination of multilateral efforts in poverty reduction, the document "A Better World for All" was prepared, a joint initiative of the United Nations, OECD, World Bank, and IMF (Hulme, 2007).

Between 6 and 8 September 2000, at the General Assembly, Resolution 55/2, entitled Millennium Declaration, was adopted. The Declaration represented the convergence of interests of 191 nations and 147 Heads of State and Government in recognizing and overcoming the challenges to be faced in that millennium. It defined interconnected objectives related to peace, security, and development, in the environmental, human rights, and governance dimensions, in addition to highlighting special attention to the African continent (UN Development Group, 2001). The Millennium Declaration points to several key objectives agreed by the Member States, reproduced in Table 2.

Table 2: Millennium Declaration

Key objectives	description
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Peace, security and disarmament.	It supports the need to overcome wars and strengthen the United Nations in its role of conflict prevention and resolution. It emphasizes the importance of adhering to international treaties and support in combating weapons of mass destruction.
Development and eradication of poverty.	It highlights the importance of aid from developed countries to developing countries that are committed to implementing efforts to reduce poverty. Targets are set to increase access to drinking water, primary education, gender equality and reducing maternal and child mortality, as well as combating serious diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS.
Protection of our common environment.	It promotes sustainable development in order to enable the preservation of natural resources for future generations.
Human rights, democracy and good governance.	It affirms efforts to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law. To this end, it aims to boost democratic practices and promote respect for human rights, in particular the rights of minorities, in order to combat violence against women, racism and xenophobia. Moreover, it values popular participation in politics and the freedom of the media.
Protection of vulnerable groups.	It encompasses populations in humanitarian emergencies. With greater concern for children, it decides to protect and guarantee assistance to civilians immersed in the context of armed conflict, natural disasters and genocides. The condition of migrants is emphasized, as support and collaboration is recommended for countries receiving refugees.
Respond to Africa's special needs.	It corroborates the established values of providing socioeconomic assistance to less developed nations. It emphasizes the importance of implementing policies aimed at sustainable development, peacebuilding and poverty eradication, in accordance with the obstacles experienced by the African continent.
Strengthen the United Nations.	It encourages states to commit themselves to strengthening the UN and the effective performance of the Secretariat and deliberative bodies. It fosters cooperation between the United Nations and other multilateral bodies, national parliaments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society.

SOURCE: UN General Assembly, 2000. Own elaboration.

The lack of measurable goals in the Millennium Declaration maintained the need for more specific purposes, which later became the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Even after the Assembly, further revisions on the objectives were made until the formal definition of the MDGs. The agreement was chosen between the OECD's Proposals, represented by DAC, IFIs, defined by the World Bank and IMF, and the UN, represented by UNDP⁶. This group follows the writing of the objectives, and each participant required their political preferences. The MDGs were signed in the document "Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration"

⁶ UNDP actively participated in the processes of formulating and monitoring the projected targets, in monitoring results in countries and producing reports on the MDG panorama in the world. It became secretary of the Millennium Project and incorporated the Millennium Campaign, both instituted in 2002 by the UN, in order, respectively, to build a concrete action plan and propagate the MDGs (UNDP, 2016a).

on September 6, 2001, by the UN General Assembly (Barcellos & Carvalho, 2015; Hulme, 2007; Hulme, 2009).

The MDGs brought together eight main objectives, 21 targets, and 60 indicators. Concerning 1990, the objectives should be achieved by 2015, taking place over 25 years. The enumeration of these objectives was through a pact between developed and developing countries in order to establish the national and international priorities that would guide states in the period (UNDP, 2016a; UN Development Group, 2001). The MDGs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Millennium Development Goals

Goal 1	Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
Goal 2	Achieve universal primary education
Goal 3	Promote gender equality and empower women
Goal 4	Reduce child mortality
Goal 5	Improve maternal health
Goal 6	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
Goal 7	Ensure environmental sustainability
Goal 8	Global partnership for development

SOURCE: UN, 2020a. Own elaboration.

While objectives 1 to 7 target developing countries, Objective 8 designates targets for developed countries to commit to granting financial and trade aid to developing countries to achieve the other seven defined objectives (UN Development Group, 2001; UNDP, 2016a).

Fukuda-Parr and Greenstein (2010) argue that the approach used in evaluating progress in the absorption of the MDGs, systematized by quantified targets and restricted by a deadline, is inconsistent with its purpose of creation⁷. UNDP and World Bank report focused too much on achieving or not achieving targets without examining trends in the improvements observed (Fukuda-Parr & Greenstein, 2010). By removing the idea of human rights and expanding human capacities, the MDGs go back to a simplistic narrative based on a practical understanding of development, that is, merely associated with material acquisition (Fukuda-Parr, 2013).

⁷ For the authors, the MDGs were planned from a different perspective, as global political commitments to establish normative priorities (Fukuda-Parr & Greenstein, 2010).

After the publication of the first reports on the MDGs situation in the world, it became clear that the objectives took on an overly global character that made it difficult for low-income countries, especially sub-Saharan Africa, to achieve the targets. Moreover, with the global financial crisis of 2008 and the recession in 2009 centered on developed countries, the situation for ODA was not favorable. With this, states began to direct economic aid only to the world's most vulnerable countries (UNDP, 2016a).

There was a firm intention at the United Nations to direct some vigor to the results of the MDGs. According to the 2016 UNDP report, "From the MDGs to Sustainable Development for All," the scenario was poverty reduction and improved social indices. However, the economic growth of certain nations tended to conceal local gains as if they were collective. Nevertheless, the document recognizes Chinese competence in much of the progress and reveals that many countries have not been prosperous in achieving the targets (UNDP, 2016b). Examining the countries' domestic plan also raised questions about completing the targets. The criticism points to the absence of analyses concerning inequalities within countries. Proposing a reduction of poverty indicators without considering internal disparities made room for governments to concentrate their efforts on the wealthiest classes, indicating illegitimate advances (Ohchr, 2008).

The MDGs has also become the target of criticism regarding the fact that the goals are too generalizing and disregard each State's specificities. Besides, because they were quantitative targets, they ignored the quality of what was done to reach the target numbers. Another issue referred to the absence of a comprehensive approach to the policies and strategies needed to achieve the objectives (Barcellos & Carvalho, 2015).

The MDGs were shaped under an orthodox logic of development and based on technical solutions. Thus, traditional political and financial dynamics were maintained, and power relations were ignored in actual support of global poverty (Fukuda-Parr, 2013; Hulme, 2009; Ohchr, 2008). Ha-Joon Chang (2010) argues that the MDGs started from the perception that developing countries could eradicate poverty with the help of rich countries. This idea is expressed by objective 8 of "developing a global partnership for development", whose goals relate to increasing loans and reducing agricultural and textile tariffs under exports from developing countries. There was, therefore, an incentive to open trade in rich countries so that developing nations could expand their direct sales without creating possibilities for the production of higher added value goods (Chang, 2010).

In 2016, UNDP and the World Bank jointly produced a report on the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs, with the UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)⁸, responsible for carrying out analyses of the objectives at the national level. The Report examines the MDGs situation in selected countries, participating in the diagnosis and committed to the goals (UNDP & WBG, 2016). It should be recorded that, except Colombia and El Salvador, no other Latin American country appears in the Report, which points to a region's departure concerning this agenda.

In September 2013, the then UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, proposes greater agility in work aimed at achieving the MDGs. Then, presents the report "A Life of Dignity for All" (UN, 2020a), in which

... calls on countries and the international community to 1) do everything possible to achieve the MDGs, 2) adopt a post-2015 agenda that is universal and based on sustainable development, 3) embrace a more coherent and effective response to support this new agenda, and 4) provide clarity on the roadmap to 2015 (UN, 2013b, p. 2).

In the final document, states reaffirm their engagement with the MDGs and decide to hold a Summit in September 2015 to establish a new set of goals, based on the MDGs, to build a post-2015 agenda (UN, 2020a).

4. The SDGs as a normative recommendation of development policy and its limitations

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were established in September 2015 through Resolution 70/1, adopted within the United Nations General Assembly framework. The resolution was based on the proposal to create the SDGs made by the UN Open Working Group (OWG), presented in September 2014 (Kroll, 2015).

The SDGs show a decades-long commitment from countries worldwide and the United Nations to achieve a normative reference for civilizing development, although they are formally unfolding the MDGs. From contemporary records, the first international

⁸The CEB (Chief Executives Board for Coordination) carried out a series of reviews (MDG Reviews) on the progress of the MDGs at the domestic level of each country, which will be the basis for the content exposed in "Transitioning from the MDGs to the SDGs". The report conducts an examination of the status of the MDGs in selected countries, who should be interested in participating in the diagnosis and committed to the objectives. They were: Colombia; Niger; Tanzania; Burkina Faso; Laos; Yemen; Pakistan; El Salvador; Ghana; Indonesia; Kyrgyzstan; Philippines; Bangladesh; Congo; Pacific Islands; Benin; and Nepal (UNDP & WBG, 2016).

conference on financing for development, held in Monterrey, Mexico, in 2002, at the initiative of the then Mexican President, Vicente Fox, appears at the origin of the First International Conference on Financing for Development. The UN member states attending the event recognized the importance of seeking poverty eradication and sustainable development (ECOSOC, 2015; Hulme, 2007; UNDP, 2016a).

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10) took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. The concept of sustainable development is now understood by integrating three objectives: poverty eradication, change in consumption and production patterns, management of natural resources. At the 2005 World Summit, commitments to the Millennium Development Goals' full realization (ECOSOC, 2015) were reaffirmed.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 approved the document "The Future We Want", which established the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Rio+20 decided to set up the 30-member Open Working Group (OWG) to develop a set of objectives for sustainable development. The OWG was created in 2013 at the General Assembly and prepared a document following the recommendations drawn from the Conference. Thus, sustainable development returns to the center of global policies (ECOSOC, 2015; Kroll, 2015; UN, 2020a).

Based on the OWG proposal, the Heads of State and Government and Senior Representatives of the UN General Assembly, from 25 to September 27 2015, ratified the resolution "Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". According to the different national realities and internal priorities, the document highlights all nations' commitment, developed and developing, to adapt to the defined objectives. Poverty began to be understood in its multidimensionality, and its eradication is understood as a fundamental requirement for sustainable development. We sought to balance and integrate the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of global challenges, analyzed together to promote sustainable economic growth (OWG, 2014; UN General Assembly, 2015).

The resolution listed the 17 objectives and 169 goals to be part of the new UN development agenda, which based on 2015 should be achieved by 2030 (Table 4).

Table 4: Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 1	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
Goal 3	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
Goal 6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
Goal 10	Reduce inequality within and among countries
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Goal 12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
Goal 13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
Goal 14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
Goal 15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
Goal 16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Goal 17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

SOURCE: United Nations, 2015. Own elaboration.

The OWG participation guaranteed the process of formulating the SDGs greater representativeness by favoring the more active participation of all nations of the globe, especially those often left on the sidelines. If, on the one hand, the MDGs were signed under the interference of financial agencies such as the World Bank and IMF and developed countries, in particular the OECD, on the other hand, the SDGs showed at their origin a greater engagement of the various nations of the globe. The OWG represented an innovative system for the UN General Assembly, as, to provide a diversity of perspectives, groups of countries shared the majority of seats (Körösi, 2015).

According to Tancrede Voituriez (2019), the Sustainable Development Goals are not merely a logical follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals. There is a chronological evolution, but they differ profoundly. While development agencies proposed the MDGs through a vision from the North on how development should occur in the South, the SDGs was discussed between different North and South countries. Voituriez argues that the proposal to create the SDGs is part of some Latin American nations, which correspond to middle-income countries previously neglected by the MDGs. While not reaching the development of rich countries, these countries also lacked access to economic aid for developing countries. Thus, they demanded a plan to strengthen their presence in international relations and defend their interests.

The most evident change in the SDGs with the MDGs refers to their universal character. That is, it broadens the focus to all developing and developed countries. As Kroll (2015, p. 13) illustrates, "if the MDGs were the telescope through which rich countries viewed the developing world, the SDGs are the mirror in which they see their own policies and performance reflected". The SDGs requires central countries to grant funds to developing countries and act to foster political changes in their territories and weigh on how they produce and consumption they experience. Achieving sustainable development becomes a key concern for developed countries (Kroll, 2015).

The distinction between the MDGs and the SDGs is also in the continuous participation of civil society in formulating the latter (Chasek et al., 2016). Other actors besides states and agencies have gained relevance in formulating the goals. This participation was made possible by the OWG, the result of Rio+20 decisions; by UNDP, which disseminated relevant information on the subject and provided several consultations on the incorporation of objectives to shape interstate negotiations; and the UN Secretary-General, who led initiatives for public participation (Honniball & Spijkers, 2014).

The form of public participation was changed from the "Major Groups"⁹ to create new formal tools for direct involvement, mainly through the Internet, to promote greater

⁹ Major Groups were created from the Earth Summit (Eco-92), under the notion that the participation of different sectors of society would be an essential condition for sustainable development. Thus, Agenda 21, adopted by the conference, identified nine categories, whose participation would be boosted by the United Nations: women; children and youth; Indian people; NGOs; local authorities; workers and unions; business and industry; scientific and technological community; farmers (UN, 2020b). However, the Major Groups meant only a continuation of negotiations focused on developed countries. The enumeration of categories proved to be quite reductionist (Sémit, 2015).

transparency and inclusion (Sémit, 2015). The UN held a series of thematic consultations, including the online survey "My World", which included more than seven million participants (Kroll, 2015).

Although the MDGs inspired them, the SDGs have overcome the imposition of binding treaties understates. They were configured as aspirations to be followed by governments, which are granted the freedom to institute their national targets (Largentaye, 2015). The resolution made by the OWG confirms that the SDGs should be understood as guidelines for action, according to the capacities of each country and following sustainable development (OWG, 2014).

The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) strives to state that the SDGs are based on a different perspective from the one that created the MDGs. The Report indicates that the post-2015 agenda has a universal scope, comprising five main pillars. The first, "leave no one behind", means that the goals are shared and must be accepted by all. The second pillar, "put sustainable development at the core", is the necessary change in consumption and production patterns to enable global prosperity in the future. The third, "transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth", implies the diversification of economies sustainably and inclusively, focusing on young people and women. The fourth, "build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all", concerns the guarantee of peace, justice, and freedom throughout the world. Finally, the fifth pillar, "forge a new global partnership", demands a new spirit of solidarity and cooperation, based on understanding the mutual benefits involved in achieving the objectives (UN, 2013a).

Themes previously neglected by the MDGs, such as social protection, climate change, governance, human rights, gender equality, and women's empowerment, are now systematically incorporated into the development agenda. The view is widespread that tackling the social problems of the globe is a requirement for promoting sustainable development. The SDGs present the goals aimed at essential services, such as water, energy, education and health, economic elements such as production, industrialization and job creation, and environmental preservation (Largentaye, 2015; UN General Assembly, 2015).

The SDGs brings the idea that shared goals are inseparable. Thus, all major global issues must be understood together, not in isolation. The idea that all states, governments, agencies, and all civil society and private sectors should be held accountable for the

effective overcoming of the problems faced across the globe. Thus, sustainability takes on the task of mobilizing all actors in efforts to achieve the goals. The mission given to developed countries to become a leader in the fight for the restoration of the environment stands out. With this, the new agenda established emphasizes the commitments to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and the need to prioritize the transition in the domestic field to renewable energies. Also, it encourages support mechanisms for developing countries to gain access to technology and funding to move towards sustainability (UNDP, 2016b).

Therefore, the formation of the SDGs is revealed as a result of global demands for the establishment of a new development agenda that understands global problems in an interconnected and sustainability-based way. The process that gives rise to the SDGs is committed to the principle of universality in seeking to bring together the perspectives of the nations of the North and The South and establish the agendas of civil society groups. The environmental issue is of vital importance, mainly because it gives developed countries the task of moving resources for change in their territories towards sustainable development. In comparing the SDGs with the MDGs, one can see the reasons that led both to opposite developments. The SDGs were better succeeded in including larger agendas and actors and, therefore, seem to fulfill the mission of "leaving no one behind".

4.1 Ambiguities persist

The fact that the SDGs are more comprehensive and have gone through a much broader discussion process than the MDGs does not remove from them the content of ambiguity that emerges from the very concept of Sustainable Development. The issue that the SDGs regulations do not propose to address is the possibility of achieving a set of objectives that seems to us contradictory. There is already established literature on the intrinsically unequal character of capitalist development (Chesnais, 1998; Chang, 2003; Osorio, 2009; Harvey, 2016; 2004; Reinert, 2016). There is also literature based on empirical studies on the evolution of inequality at the global (between national), national (among individuals, groups, and social classes), and subnational (between regions internal to national economies).

From these studies, Thomas Piketty (*The Capital in the 21st Century*, 2013) gained prominence, which had enormous social and political repercussions in the world. Work empirically configures the historical thesis of the economy's critical field that sees capitalism as a social system that generates inequality, engendering concentration of

income and wealth. The novelty is to show empirical evidence for a set of economies developed in long temporality. Besides, in an innovative way, the study shows that inequality reproduces and deepens trendily since the 1990s. This is about the capital-work perspective of social classes and the income and wealth (wealth) of individuals.

It seems to us that the political repercussion of Piketty's book has much to do with a myth created by the post-World War II development debate, especially from the 1950s, that identifies economic development with progress. This identification was subjected to intense criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, in different aspects of economics and politics, but survived by its ideological nature. Part of this criticism was translated by Ecodesenvolvimento (Strong, 1973; Sachs, 1980); and somewhat incorporated in the concept of sustainable development without theoretical and empirical support, only a normative environmental and social reference. The formulation of the UN development objectives (the MDGs and SDGs) was approved without addressing this fundamental aspect. A more detailed discussion of this point would require a piece of an article.

5. Conclusions

In this article, we argue that the identification of the SDGs to the concept of sustainable development is a political evolution of the theme of development that would have overcome the shortcomings of the 1950s, a period in which there was reductionism in focusing only on the conditions of growth of the economy (national and global). We show that the process by which the concept of Sustainable Development achieved a position of hegemony in the social debate on development was independent of the process of building the SDGs, which appear as an unfolding of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established by the UN General Assembly in 2000.

This conclusion's importance lies in drawing attention to the lack of theoretical and political support that global objectives may be of interest to all the countries of the world, at least in this historical court of dominance and almost total hegemony of capitalism. We understand that the historical process of development of capitalism in the post-World War II period shows contradictions of global goals, since capitalism is constituted as an organic system on a world scale in which the development of a group of countries makes use of the underdevelopment of others. The idea that groups are immutable is not implicit in this statement, only that they reproduce as such, allowing mobility on the margin. The rise of China and South Korea has shown this kind of

mobility since the 1990s, just as Japan ascended in the 1960s/1970s. However, cases are rare and dependent on unforeseeable circumstances.

Contradictions show that setting unique global goals, even with flexible goals, can act as an ideological curtain to the deeper determinants of the global economy's development. After all, history has corroborated the idea that capitalism produces and reproduces inequalities!

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