

Sustainable Development and Social Cohesion in Algeria: What Perspectives?

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Abstract: The Interest given to sustainable development seems to be more developed during the past two decades, with increasing alarming voices for the degradation of the environment because of the fierce economy. In order to face the environmental degradation, governments around the world are invited to complete certain responsibilities regarding environment, which are not easy to respect under the pressure of many challenges, especially social cohesion, which requires a reduction of inequalities by offering individuals solutions for access to decent living conditions in housing, health and employment. In Algeria, actions toward sustainable development have been the object of several programs, both national and international partnership, contributing to environmental preservation. On the social front, several serious problems are existing and need to be resolved urgently, which remains problematic. Thus, the social dimension recedes and still far from being among those of sustainable development. These demonstrate a lack of articulation between social policy and sustainable development that can ensure social cohesion. In this paper, through the case of Algeria, we try to answer the following question: Can social cohesion be maintained while aiming sustainable development?

Key words: social policies; sustainable development; social cohesion; social equity; Algeria

JEL codes: I38, Q01, D63, A13, N37

1. Introduction

The Interest given to sustainable development seems to be more developed during the past two decades, with increasing alarming voices for the degradation of the environment because of the fierce economy. Thus, the issue of sustainable development is the problem of reconciling economic growth, social cohesion and environmental protection. In order to face the environmental degradation, that put a lot of questions about the conditions of a development model compatible with social equity and environmental protection; governments around the world are invited to complete certain responsibilities regarding environment, which are not easy to respect under the pressure of many challenges, especially social cohesion such a challenge requires a reduction of inequalities by offering individuals solutions for access to decent living conditions in housing, health and employment.

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Sustainable development is a global concern related to industrial and economic policies often inadequate. The implementation of a sustainable development strategy in developing countries, as in Algeria, seems to complicate the situation of these countries by making development more costly, and therefore we need to rethink the economy in terms of environment, and not the reverse (Brown & Lester, 2003).

In Algeria, actions for sustainable development have been the object of several programs both national and international partnership, contributing to environmental preservation. On the social front, several serious problems are existing and need to be resolved urgently, which remains problematic. Thus, the social dimension recedes and still far from being among those of sustainable development. This one must take into account the maintenance of social policies in a “process aiming to ensure improved individual and collective welfare, particularly by promoting the access to: education services; health; food; income; freedom; social cohesion; fair repartition of wealth, group participation in decision-making” (Kan, 2013).

Indeed, the situation in Algeria demonstrates a lack of articulation between social policy and sustainable development that can ensure social cohesion. Hereinafter, and through the case of Algeria, we try to answer the following question: Can social cohesion be maintained while aiming sustainable development?

2. The Requirements of Sustainable Development and Its Practices in Algeria

Since the early of 1990s, the Algerian government has taken significant steps in the field of sustainable development, such as the adoption of a structural adjustment program and economic recovery program, as well as the development of institutional, financial and legal mechanisms to ensure the integration of environmental affairs in decision-making processes. In addition, the Supreme Council for the Environment and Sustainable Development as well as the National Economic and Social Council were established too.

In order to support sustainable development, and especially in the field of the environment, Algeria has adopted three instruments: (1) institutional and legislative reinforcement; (2) controlling polluting activities and subjecting them to the international standards; (3) introducing the ecological tax, which can prompt clean production based on the principle of Polluter-Pays, adopted since 2003 in the Algerian legislation.

In Algeria, public interventions to achieve sustainable development cover many domains as in which concern the environment. In the field of water pollution, the drinking water supply networks and sewage networks had been rehabilitated in more than ten cities with a population exceeding two millions, and also the rehabilitation of twenty four water purification stations. To all this, it can be added the partnership initiatives with the European Union in the aim to improve the water resources management.

Moreover, it has been taken a range of actions toward air pollution. Those actions include: (1) the determination of some types of fuel which are total pollution free to be used; (2) the energetic transition to a new sources use as electric power or solar energy; (3) generalization of the use of both liquefied petroleum gas and the unleaded gasoline. Then, since 2009, and for example, about 40000 cars had been tuned to be able to use liquefied petroleum gas distributed in more than 160 stations spread all across the country.

To resolve the problem of the industrial wastes, it was implemented a special program to update the waste collection and evacuation system, funded exclusively by a credit with the value of US\$ 26 million granted to Algeria by the Islamic Bank. In addition, 50% of industrial units have been equipped with anti-pollution systems.

In the field of sea pollution and coastal regions, the Maghreb program for combating pollution caused by fuel, which was funded by the Global Environment Fund, had provide all the necessary anti-oil pollution and

laboratory research equipment.

In which concern the protection of the archaeological and cultural heritage, there were adopted a program for the restoration of historical areas and rehabilitation of historic gains in 18 wilaya.

There were also an interest given to education in its connection to the environmental awareness, and in this sense education system, Radio and television had adopt a series of programs to treat publicly the question of environmental preservation and its challenges.

3. The Algerian Reality of Social Cohesion

Following Beauvais and Jenson (2002), social cohesion as a concept can get many definitions, and they sum up them in five definitions:

(1) A socially cohesive society is one in which the members share common values which enable them to identify common aims and objectives, and share a common set of moral principles and codes of behaviour through which to conduct their relations with one another.

(2) Absence of general conflict within society and of any serious challenge to the existing order and system.

(3) Social cohesion within a society (or a transnational community like the European Union) refers to the harmonious development of society and its constituent groups towards common economic, social and environmental standards. This may be achieved through the solidarity redistribution of finances and opportunities between groups and places.

(4) A cohesive society contains a high degree of social interaction within communities and families.

(5) It is generally presumed that a strong attachment to place, and the intertwining of people's identities with that of places... contribute to social cohesion. ...The danger is that people may come to exist in small worlds.

Furthermore, the term social cohesion is often associated with other concepts such as the following:

(a) Social inclusion/exclusion:

For kabeer (2000) *"the intersecting nature of different forms of exclusion and inclusion results in the segmentation of society, and in clusters of advantage and disadvantage, rather than in a simple dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion. There are various ways in which these segments can be characterised. For instance, we can think in terms of privileged inclusion, secondary inclusion, adverse incorporation or problematic inclusion, self exclusion and 'hard-core' exclusion"*. From this statement, social cohesion can be considered as the existing of an inclusion situation within a society, but partially because of the simultaneous existence of exclusion (Dassetto, 2004). This leads us to underline the real meaning of those two concepts.

Regarded as a situation, social inclusion represents the individuals' enjoyment of social rights in the field of social participation, and access to social protection, to assistance and care (Sayed, 2002). Considered as a social process, it involves public measures that tend to improve the possibilities of access of all citizens to social activity, public institutions, social protection and support programs and services and care. However, social exclusion as situation is a widespread dissatisfaction felt by individuals because of a social handicaps accumulation; and as social process, it refers to the rejection of individuals or group of individuals from getting access to opportunities and social rights (Avramov, 2003).

(b) Social integration:

At an individual level, the social integration is the linkage degree of a person to the others in a determined group, based essentially on the density of formal or informal interaction and coordination, eventually existing

within such a group (Hendron, 2008). Since that, the social integration of an individual may affect all the society behaviour, because of changes that may occur in this society organisation caused by the shape of interaction among individuals (Durkheim, 2007).

According to Januszewska and Rullac (2013), social integration is to be observed at four levels, designing four types of it:

- Normative integration: the reflect a sense of community norms and values;
- Cultural integration: the synchronisation of the lifestyles and behaviour patterns of members of the society;
- Communicational integration: the common system of common system of communication within the society, which enables cooperation and social participation by members of different ethnic groups;
- Functional integration: a system of interdependence formed by a set of cooperation and participation in the life of society.

(c) Social security:

McKay (2000), considers that social security is often regarded as “*a range of measures adopted by the state to protect citizens against a set of specific economic and social risks*”, while Dixon (2000) conceptualized the social security as “*a mechanism that keeps society’s failure above an acceptable level of subsistence, to ensure that they do not remain a real or potential public threat*”.

The ILO adopts the notion of social protect rather than social security, and defines it as “*the set of public measures that a society provides for its members to protect them against economic and social distress that would be caused by the absence or a substantial reduction of income from work as a result of various contingencies (sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age, and death of the breadwinner); the provision of health care; and, the provision of benefits for families with children*” (Garcia et Gruat, 2003). Therefore, the main aim of a social security “policy” (a set of measures and mechanisms) is to give individuals protection means in the case that they are not able to face hazardous life circumstances due to their physical incapacities or financial deficiency.

However, and in most cases, social security as a public policy is blamed on two levels; the first concerns the establishment of a law that can lead to a court in the matter of redistribution of the wealth of the nation, while the second lies in the efficiency of such a policy to positively affect major economic variables. For the first point, concerning the equity in sharing the national income, the principal problem is how to identify and determine people who are really in need of government subvention and at what degree (Bourdieu, 1972). For the second point, the question asked here is can social security participate to boost economic growth by inciting people to more consumption, which can have a positive effect on the level of investment and employment.

Social cohesion in each country is the product of different dynamics that may occur in the society, and it can be approached through several phenomena.

Many societal changes is currently held in Algeria, and with a very accelerated rhythm. These changes affect practically all segments of the society, especially young people who represent the largest class of Algerian society. Since they become more and more numerous with needs that are rapidly increasing, and social instability, a large layer of this youth was excluded and marginalized within the society. This situation has prompted the authorities to implement a series of policies in order to achieve the reintegration of youth through economic and community instruments, but what about their efficiency (Charifet Benmansour, 2011). Indeed, the current situation in Algeria reverberated limit such policies and their inabilities to play their role in the integration of marginalized people without exclusion for young Algerians, because the problem of unemployment always arises and it is the first

obstacle in their integration into society. This is the case, although a first reading in the unemployment rate shows that they tend to decline; 11% in 2011 to 10.6% in September 2014 according to statistics from the ONS, a decline that seems to be the result of a diversity of employment creation devices (ANSEJ, Anjem, CNAC ... etc.).

Marginalization and exclusion also affects academics and graduated individuals, which means a loss of potentialities and a vainly investment in education, due to the inadequacy of educational systems with the programs of the employment and the aspirations of these academic graduated people in respect of the labour market (Helly, 1999). Although the creation of employment in Algeria is experiencing a marked improvement, the majority of jobs created are temporary and fictitious, which lead to say that the success of programs and employment policies in Algeria remains relative compared to the mobilized funds for this purpose. According to the ONS, statistics show the existence of disparities in matter of unemployment by sex, by age and by intellectual level.

In which concern women, their situation in Algeria has experienced a very remarkable improvement because of the public will and all the measures adopted in its favour, such as the eradication of any kind of gender discrimination in the law texts, but it was not enough to meet the economic needs of women in rural areas because the woman is still marginalized, such as in education where the rate of illiteracy among women remains high despite its decline in the last few years, 22% in 2008 and 14% in 2014. In addition, and in the field of child and women's health, the mortality rates remain very high in some areas that suffer from weak gynecology services in the public sector due to a lack of specialized doctors.

There is another class of society also suffering from marginalization and exclusion: the persons with disabilities. Those people have to face two main types of exclusion; family exclusion and labour market exclusion. These exclusions make impossible their integration in the society, especially when many specialists insist on the fact that an early psychological, physical, and education support is necessary for them to become active and productive individuals (De Haan, 1999). The inclusion of persons with disabilities is the only condition to allow them more personal development, new jobs opportunities, and a financial independency (this independency diminishes public spending toward this layer).

The other point that deserves to be studied and analysed, when it comes to social cohesion, is the reintegration of prisoners. In this sense, the diversity of programs of rehabilitation of the penitentiary's detainees is in order to enable them to acquire the professional skills facilitating a flexible access to the labour market for them. In addition, a psychic preparation and a professional accompaniment must be provided in upstream and downstream of their sentences.

4. Social Cohesion and Sustainable Development: What Harmony for Algeria?

Algeria has translated its interest in the principles of sustainable development by signing the Kyoto Protocol, which commits it to take a range of measures to enact new laws, as well as modifying the laws already exist. All these measures are for the strict application of the sustainable development standards through three dimensions: good governance; effective performance; and access to full coordination to achieve fair and durable sustainable development (Hermassi M. S., 2004).

In spite of the multiplicity of mandatory legislation and regulations measures to achieve sustainable development, the reality in Algeria raises another problem represented in the deep gap that exist between the positive willing of the government and the concrete execution of those measures. The main reason for this is the

non-predisposition of the stakeholders concerned to adopt a sustainable development in the absence of means and adequate potentialities for it, which leads to a deviation between the predesigned programs and their real achievement.

Algeria interests in achieving sustainable development in three main fields, but it appears disproportionately. Environmental is regaining the great share allocated in the government programs than the other economic and social dimensions, so that such a situation led to an absence or a weakness in social cohesion in Algerian society.

Developing countries had been prompted to adopt sustainable development strategies due to two important reasons. The first is due to their commitment to implement the agreements concluded between them and the sponsoring organisms, and the second is the advantages and assistance destined exclusively to developing countries to implement sustainable development on their territories and in accordance with the specific millennium agenda goals.

The aid provided by the signatory organs to the Kyoto agreement, primarily concerns the environmental side, which led to a variety of environmental programs with lot of projects in detriment to other dimensions where aids and credits are intangible and with small financial value.

So in front of this situation, it emerged some inequalities in the application of the dimensions of sustainable development. While taken measures helped environmental aspects, they had affected negatively the economic side, where increased production costs result in of new environmental commitments (environmental taxes, cleaner production equipment, waste).

This situation has affected negatively medium and small enterprises, causing considerable losses for them, which led to the closure of some or declining performance of others. In the absence of coordination between different sectors in order to avoid economic deteriorating situation, a remarkable decline had been recorded in which concerns the economic and social situation, having a negative impact on the social integration among the various segments of society.

To reach the coordination and the harmony between sustainable development and social cohesion, it is strictly necessary to reduce disparities and inequalities (Dubet, 2000), that constitute the major challenges for the Algerian government, namely:

(a) The socio-economic inequalities:

Socio-economic inequalities still exist, despite the different procedures and measures taken by the state to eliminate or reduce the gaps of revenues, unemployment, housing problems, school opportunities inequality, and discrimination (gender and cultural minorities).

(b) Regional disparities:

The regional disparities are gaps between different regions of a country, like north and south regions, or urban and rural ones ...etc. Although the decreasing trend in inequalities, the reality shows that there are disparities between regions, such as illiteracy among women in rural areas, lack of permanent income, poverty, reduced school enrolment rates.

5. Conclusion

In Algeria, historically, many factors have acted negatively on social cohesion, which are French colonization, the liberation war, political instability after national independence, the advent of multiparty politics and its repercussions, and the situation of violence and insecurity due to overpoliticization of the status of religion.

Today social cohesion in Algeria appears fragile and should be consolidated. Challenges to be retained in this sense start with the elimination of socio-economic inequalities and regional disparities that present constraints to social cohesion. By evoking disparities, we often reference to poverty, unemployment, the situation of women, and health.

If social cohesion is the social dimension of the sustainable development, it must be supported at the same level as economic or environmental sides, and if in Algeria the social cohesion is suffering from the lack of effective and efficient public policy toward it; it is urgent to target a complete coordination between the exigencies of social improvements within the society and the obligations of sustainable development agendas.

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