

# Investigating the Ethics of Sustainable Development in Restructuring the World Economic System

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## Abstract

It is almost unthinkable in the current global arrangement for any single nation, economy, or region to assume a unilateral pursuit of total and enduring development. This paper attempts to review the idea of sustainable development as a policy instrument and some of the ethical principles which form the basis of one of its requirements. The position under review in this article is that, in order to achieve any meaningful development and its sustainability, there must be a restructuring of the current global economic system.

**Keywords:** Development, Economy, Justice, Obligation, Sustainability

## 1. Introduction

The “Sustainability” discourse has attracted enormous contributions from ethical debates and analyses. Proponents of sustainable development have had a significant part of their submissions as a reflection of various ethical theories, principles and ideologies. Besides sustainable development, several issues that bother on individual and societal existence remain problematic, all requiring philosophical and ethical considerations. In the same vein, the clarion call for sustainability is born out of rigorous ethical rumination and convictions of diverse scholars on the subject matter. This paper attempts to review the idea of sustainable development as a policy instrument and some of the ethical principles which form the basis of its position and acceptance. The position under review in this article is that, in order to achieve any meaningful development and its sustainability, there must be a restructuring of the current global economic system. It is almost unthinkable in the current global arrangement for any single nation, economy, or region to assume a unilateral pursuit of total and enduring development.

This paper questions the very basic ethical assumptions of “sustainability” in relation to the above requirement, thereby exposing the divergent interpretations of the morality of the idea. In its investigation, the paper highlights the extremes inherent in the positions put forward to support or refute the tenets of sustainable development, as it relates to the responsibilities of the “affluent” economies in ensuring a “global sustainable development”.

## 2. Sustainable Development: Conceptual Brief

It will be pretentious to attempt to define or describe everything that the concept “Development” could mean or imply in a single essay as this. Although a familiar concept, the difficulty in defining it was also emphasized by Alfred North Whitehead. However, the concept shall be thoroughly presented to ensure a common ground of understanding as the paper unfolds. Development is a phenomenon and reality that pervades the essence of man. Every society lays claim to it and longs for it. To properly define the scope of the meaning of development that shall be considered henceforth, it is pertinent to state that development in human society and among human beings is our focus. This is to exclude from the onset, the unconscious biological and natural changes that occur within the biosphere.

Development is a many sided process but never a state of affairs. At the individual level, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility, and material well-being (Walter 1982, 3). The development of the individual is largely a product of the public or collective conventions and world-view of the social group in which a person is accommodated. At least, he is ‘socialized’ into a social group, and his development is the degree to which he has or he is capable of internalizing these communicated norms. The individual is not an isolated island; therefore the indices of individual development highlighted above are expressions that exist in interpersonal relations whose “language game” is a structure put in place by the society. That is, the development of the individual is largely contextual – socially dependent.

At the group level, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships (Ibid.). Both the human and the non-human “others” that man relates with constitute his ‘Environment’. Development could mean a process of change from one state to the other for the purpose of achieving a goal. It could be the successive stages, landmarks and conditions in the process of realizing an end. In characterizing development, the latter state is presumably better, higher, more perfect, more complete and

advanced than the former.

The International Encyclopedia of Communications considers development as “purposive changes”, undertaken in a society to achieve what many regarded as generally as different (improved) state of social affairs (Gail et al 2000). The concept of development is often seen as a derivation of a much older idea of progress, which has its roots going back to ancient Greece. This notion presents “development” as a continuous process; an unending pathway towards a better livelihood. Therefore, it casts as problematic, the manner in which the dominant economic ideology stratifies the world’s societies into “developed”, “developing”, and “underdeveloped”. Whereas the word “developing” sounds progressive, its other bed fellows carry the tone of staticity (Ehusani 1991). But it will be mistaken to conceive “development” as a static state of affairs. Ehusani holds that “it is not a goal or state to which one can drive in a definite way, but it is the continuous ‘match forward’ of the human family towards perfect fulfilment” (Ibid.). He further argues for the progressive conception of development and submits that no society has been able to provide for its citizens all that is necessary for perfect human fulfilment. “Not the countries of Africa where poverty and diseases are a daily scourge, and certainly not the United States of America which now groans under the violent reign of narcotics. The truth is that no land and no people are ever fully developed, but are expected to be always advancing towards new frontiers which are to be discovered along the way” (Ibid.).

Development in human society is a conscious process which derives from man’s desire to live a better life and his vehement pursuit of this status. The process of development is the successive consequences of the relationship between man and his environment. It is an unfolding of his potentiality to study, understand and live by the realities of his environment. Much of human history has been a struggle for survival against natural hazards and against real and imagined enemies (Walter). One could state therefore, that development is the degree and manner at which man is able to understand and solve his existential problems as they unfold.

Today, economic development, that is, the dynamic progression or upward movement in the material welfare of the human person has come to dominate the discursive terrain of development. Economic development is occupying the central position in most developmental concerns and policies. To this effect, consideration for other spheres of human existence is to the extent at which they promote the economy. Hence, development has come to mean: elimination of poverty, disease and ignorance; increase in national wealth in such a way that every person will have enough. The chief aspect of development going by this idea, is the degree of access to the wealth of the society and the means of production. It is a systematic transformation of the conditions of life of the majority of people in a beneficial manner to enhance their attainment of individual and collective well-being. However, for the most part of history, man did not seem to be overly concerned with the specific direction of development (progress), for the most part assuming that every change or progress was good. It was discovered that the necessities of each age dictated the course of its development. In so far as specific and general problems were solved when they did arise, a form of development was presumably achieved – the end justified the means. The implication of this is that for the most period, we had a parochial and myopic understanding and solutions to problems. Consequently, in most cases, the effects of the so-called inventions and progress were at the same time harmful to humanity.

The point being made is that man was not adequately discerning in making use of the resources and options available to him as he tried to solve the problems that threatened his survival. For example, in pursuit of economic development, he abused the biosphere, in his way to economic ascendancy; he violated the peaceful cohabitation of his fellow men (slavery/slave trade). The blind pursuit of economic growth had brought the current calamitous condition upon man. Environmental degradation, social breakdown, moral decadence, psychological turmoil, cultural erosion, insecurity and economic depression are few of the problems that threaten the very existence of man.

Sustainable development as an idea is a strategy by which communities seek economic development through approaches that also benefit the local environment and quality of life. It has also become an important guide to many communities that have discovered that traditional approaches to development are creating, rather than solving societal and environmental problems. Where traditional approaches can lead to congestion, sprawl, pollution and resource overconsumption, sustainable development promises to offer real, lasting solutions that will secure our future.

The response to these crises led to idea of “Sustainable development”. This idea provides a framework, under which communities can use resources efficiently, create efficient infrastructures, protect and enhance quality of life, and create new business to strengthen their economies. The idea of sustainable development is conceived to help create healthy communities that can sustain present generation as well as those that follow via the judicious use of economic, environmental and cultural resources. The concept of sustainability emphasizes the ideas of “directing”, “maintaining”, and defining a suitable framework for a desired development, which will involve the least risk and loss to humanity. Sustainability requires that the real incomes rise, that educational standards

increase; that the health of the nation improves, that the general quality of life is advanced (Pearce 1989). All these benefits are to be realized with little or no damage to the potentials of both the present and future generations. Sustainability, as it relates to growth and development, is a review of traditional meaning and approaches to development.

According to Sukhatmoy Chakravarty (1990), this concept appeals to many people, especially to those who are bored with yesterday's talk of ever-increasing consumption over time, and to those countries which have seen very little increase in consumption per capital because of population growth, unbalanced urbanization and accompanying threats to their natural resource endowment (Olav 1991). Unlike the Rio Earth Summit (1992), which attempted to address environmental issues without paying enough attention to the basic needs of the present generation, development scholars are of the opinion that we can only make limited progress unless we tackle both human and environmental problems, and balance them in a way that integrates economic, social and environmental issues. For its global character and for its holistic outlook, the idea of sustainable development can form the basis for a new development consensus. To support the holistic stance of this idea, Mark Rowe (2002) defines sustainable development as a solution that tackles environmental, social and economic issues together.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 expressed major concern on global trade systems among others. Poor countries require access to investment capital, technologies, and markets. Aid is needed to support poor country budgets and to build capacity. This Summit offered the real opportunity to galvanize the international community around the links between globalization and local development, trade and development, environment and poverty, local, national and international governance. Understanding such connections is of paramount importance for both poverty reduction and sustainable development.

### 3. Moral Questions: Issues Arising

Do citizens of relatively affluent countries have obligations grounded on justice or other virtue to share their wealth with poorer people elsewhere? Is there any justice in the following the declaration that:

*Current events have brought into sharp focus the realization that ... there is a close inter-relationship between the prosperity of the developed countries and the growth and development of the developing countries... International cooperation for development is the shared goal and common duty of all countries (UN 1974).*

### 4. Examining the Ethical Framework of Sustainability

Peter Singer, in his work: "Famine, Affluence and Morality", claims that

*Constant poverty, a cyclone, and a civil war have turned at least nine million people into destitute refugees; nevertheless, it is not beyond the capacity of the richer nations to give enough assistance to reduce any further suffering to very small proportion (Mackinnon 1998).*

He explains that there are many parts of the world in which people die from malnutrition and lack of food; of which neither individuals nor governments can claim ignorance. In his opinion, the way people in relatively affluent countries react to a situation like this cannot be justified. Hence, he sets out to justify what he considers as the right response to the sufferings of the destitute by advocating a change of moral conceptual scheme, and with it, the way of life that has come to be taken for granted in these societies. Singer based his argument on the following assumptions:

- I. Suffering and death from lack of food, shelter, and medical care are bad.
- II. If it is in our power to prevent something very bad from happening, without sacrificing anything morally significant, we ought, morally to do it (Ibid.).

As general moral principles, they imply an obligation to prevent what is bad, and to promote what is good. And this is required of us only when we can do it without sacrificing anything that is, from the moral point of view, comparably important.

The principle, Singer claims, takes no account of proximity or distance; it makes no distinction between cases in which I am the only person who could possibly do anything and cases in which I am just one among millions in the same position. This is so because of the principles of impartiality, universalizability and equality which characterize morality. Instant communication and swift transportation have betrayed the excuses given by those who would like to keep their moral responsibilities limited. Therefore, from the moral perspective, the development of the world into a global village has made an important, though still unrecognised, difference to our moral situation (Ibid.).

It is thus clear that neither our distance from a preventable evil nor the number of other people who, in respect to that evil, are in the same situation as we are, lessens our obligation to mitigate or prevent that evil. The outcome of this argument is that our traditional moral categories are upset. The traditional distinction between

duty and charity cannot hold anymore. Relieving the suffering and mitigating against massive deaths of the poor is an act born out duty and not charity especially when we possess the capacity to do so. Nor is it the kind of act which philosophers and theologians have called supererogatory- an act which it would be good to do, but not wrong not to do.

The above position, while certainly not a commonplace in Western moral standards, has been a long standing moral position at other times and in other places. For instance, Thomas Aquinas, writing from the ‘natural right’ perspective maintains:

*now, according to the natural order instituted by divine providence, material goods are provided for the satisfaction of human needs. Therefore the division and appropriation of property, which proceeds from human law, must not hinder the satisfaction of man’s necessity from such goods. Equally, whatever a man has in superabundance is owed, of natural right, to the poor for their sustenance (D’Entreves 1948).*

Ambrosius corroborates, and it is also to be found in the *Decretum Gratiani*: “The bread which you withhold belongs to the hungry, the clothing you short away, to the naked; and the money you bury in the earth is the redemption and freedom of the penniless.” (Ibid.)

Immanuel Kant, distinguishing between the two senses of obligation- conditional and unconditional- will certainly regard Singer’s position as a form of conditional obligation. For Kant, only the unconditional obligation is the moral obligation, because morality must be necessary and universal; that is, it must be absolutely binding, and on everyone alike; regardless of persons, and situation (Ed Miller 1998). But the conditional obligation involves “its” and “in-order-that” and therefore gets mixed up with all sorts of particular circumstances, changing desires, personal inclinations, and so on.

Kant would not charge the affluent citizens and countries with the obligation to prevent suffering and death on a global scale more than he would charge the less affluent. But can we talk of morality without recognizing relevant circumstantial differences in some occasion? The financial incapacity of the individual could be a limiting situation that sometimes imposes a restriction on our moral obligations. This is certainly not the case in the application of the maxim “do not steal”. In the same vein, according to Kant, “the consequences or results of actions have nothing at all to do with their rightness or wrongness” (Ibid.). This is not to say that in deciding what we ought to do, we should never take the consequences of our actions into account. But it is our duty that we should act, not for the sake of the consequences.

However, the idea of sustainable development, either as a social policy or an ethic, is presently gaining the attention it deserves, because of the enriching utilitarian consequences it promises. Several requirements of obligations and responsibilities involved in this idea seem to find their immediate justification in the intended and desired consequence- the welfare of humanity. Perhaps, the single moral standard here is human welfare, as Mill puts it, the welfare of the whole of sentient creation (James 2000). It has been argued by some thinkers, that what is important is that people be as well-off as possible; and this standard is to be used in assessing actions, policies, social customs, laws, rules and motives.

Because of the multi-dimensional approach, in which the idea of sustainability pursues and values human welfare, it could readily be justified by a version of utilitarianism called “Multiple-Strategies Utilitarianism”. By this principle, it is asserted that the ultimate end is the general welfare, but diverse strategies may be endorsed as means of achieving that end (Ibid.). Mrs. Foot and Professor Williams have corroborated the content of the idea of sustainability, which is based on the desire for the human welfare, by arguing that the basis of morality is to be found, not in the categorical requirements of values independent of the agent’s desires, but in his desires themselves (Foot 1972).

A sensitive aspect of the idea of sustainable development, which is the focus of this paper, is on the responsibilities or obligations of Northern industrialized countries to the Southern developing and underdeveloped countries. It has been argued in many quarters that the development of every region and its sustainability depends largely on the global cooperation at restructuring the capacities to achieve any substantial development. If the ‘Developed’ nations are obligated to redistribute wealth, for the purpose of global progress, the kind advocated by the proponents of the idea of sustainable development, which kind of obligation is likely advocated here?

Certainly, relatively affluent countries have some interventionist obligations, founded on humanitarian principles requiring those who are able to help those who, without help, would surely perish. But obligations of justice might be more demanding than this, it will require greater sacrifices on the part of relatively affluent economies and a further justification by its advocates. “Obligations of justice, unlike those of humanitarian aid, might also require efforts at large-scale institutional reform” (Beitz 1975). In advocating for the obligations of justice, the United Nations General Assembly’s Declaration on the establishment of a New International Economic Order, suggests that:

*It is this sort of obligation which requires wealthy countries to substantially increase their contributions to less developed countries and to radically restructure the world economic system (Ibid.)*

In his work cited earlier, Peter Singer, attempted to justify the humanitarian obligation of the affluent nations and their rich citizens by grounding it on moral principles. The remainder of this work shall be an assessment of the obligations of justice within the framework of global or international economic community.

In his article: "Distributive Justice", Robert Nozick contends that a valid theory of justice must include three parts. A description of how people legitimately acquire holdings, a description of how a people legitimately transfer holdings; and a description of how past injustices should be rectified (Varian 1975). A distribution is just if it arises from another just distribution by legitimate means. Nozick's theory is a procedural theory; where the justice of a distribution is entirely dependent on the path used to reach it. "Justice in holdings is historical; it depends on what actually has happened" (Ibid.)

As a justification for his consideration of historical facts in evaluating distributional equity, Nozick says:

*Most persons do not accept current time-slice principles as constituting the whole story about distributive shares. They think it relevant in assessing the justice of a situation to consider not only the distribution it embodies, but to ask whether someone did something so that he... deserved to have a lower share (Nozick 1993).*

At some points, Nozick interprets how distribution came about in the explicit sense of how patterns of production were arranged. On the entitlement view, production and distribution are not two separate questions. Likewise, Rawls and welfare economics devote very careful consideration to the interaction of production and distribution. For instance, the whole point of 'Difference Principle' in Rawls is to take account of production.

The work of Nozick cited above, is invariably, a pointer to the present global wealth distribution, and the historical accounts of what actually transpired between various regions of the globe. History records that, there was never a fair competition amongst the nations. Some people and races have been physically, psychologically and intellectually assaulted, and their freedom and future were severely altered.

Man had always exploited his natural environment in order to make a living. At a certain point in time, there also arose the exploitation of man by man, in that a few people grew rich and lived well through the labour of others. A stage was reached by which people in one community called nation, exploited the natural resources and the labour of another nation and its people. One of the common means by which one nation exploits another, which is relevant, for example to Africa's external relations is exploitation through trade. The whole import-export commercial relationship between Africa and its trading partners is one of unequal exchange and of exploitation (Walter).

Beyond the issue of trade inequality, is the actual ownership of the means of production in one country by the citizens of another (Ibid.). Under colonialism, the ownership of resources and means of production was completed and backed by military domination. Unfortunately, in many African countries today, the foreign ownership is still present and even solicited. Although the armies and flags of foreign powers have been removed, their dominance on the economic destiny of the host nations is still highly entrenched.

All of the countries named as 'underdeveloped' in the world are exploited by others; and the underdevelopment with which the world is now preoccupied is a product of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation (Ibid.).

The bigger problem is that the people of Africa and other parts of the colonized world have gone through a cultural and psychological crisis and have accepted, at least partially, the European version of things (Ibid.).

The point is, as Third World nationalists argued that:

*By using the colonies as sources of raw materials and markets for finished goods, and by establishing intra-imperial free-trade blocs that prevented colonial administrations from using protective hard barriers to nurture industrial development, the imperial countries had actually impoverished the Third World in order to enrich the First (Rapley 1977).*

This is not in anyway an attempt to blame the whole of the predicament and evils that pervade the Third World on their past interaction and contacts with the First World. Many of the Africa's crises for instance, could be linked to the political structure of the majority of its nations.

Rather, the aim of this historical recap is to establish the fact that redistribution of global wealth and a restructuring of global economic system are both just and necessary. There have been injustices in the past, and because the past, the present and the future constitute a continuum, hence, the construction of the present and a sustainable future will involve a rectification of the ills of the past as implied the Nozick's ethics. This rectification however, is to the extent that another form of injustice does not creep into the system.

According to Hal Varian, the problem of rectification is central to the issue of justice. "We are interested in the question of justice because we live in an unjust world; injustices have occurred in the past and are occurring now. The question is what should we do about them?" (Varian) Also, proponents of end-state principles, such as John Rawls, are attempting to answer this question: we decide what a perfectly just state is and then try to move

toward it (Ibid.).

For Nozick, the idea of rectification is limited to situation where an injustice has occurred. He claims that not all processes of allocation or distribution involves or has something to do with justice. This becomes clearer when we consider processes that include large random elements-acts of God, depression, accumulation of fortunes that may be transferred to new generations. Nozick proposes no mechanism to correct any kind of randomness. He contends that if a process can be radically affected by turns of fortune that are arbitrary from a moral point of view, it seems unreasonable to attach great moral significance to the outcome of such a process (Ibid.).

In essence, Nozick's entitlement theory of justice is a strong commitment to the inviolability of fundamental human rights. Nozick asserts that any principle of justice as the maximum principle, which relies on a patterned redistribution of goods and wealth is using people as a means to promote the welfare of the worse-off, and in that wise violate the social contract (Adeigbo 1994). If a set of holdings is properly generated, no redistribution is needed.

Obviously, the present global economy is lopsided because of the past injustices done by some people to others. Hence, the First World economy could be said to lack the principle of just acquisition of holdings and principles of just transfer of holdings as explicated by Nozick. Therefore, the redistribution of wealth and means of production on a global scale advocated for in the idea of sustainable development is in this case justified by theory of justice put forward by Robert Nozick in his several works on distributive justice.

John Rawls argues that justice consists in mutual interests. We cannot expect others to respect our interests unless we are prepared to respect theirs (Benn 1972). The duty of justice and fair dealing according to Rawls, would emerge from the reciprocal recognition by a community of rational egoists, that they had similar (and competing) interest and that no one could count on getting his way against all the rest. Hence, Stanley Benn raised the question as to whether it follows that a state or group powerful enough to get its way against all other states would have no obligation to deal justly with them (Ibid.). In our context, the question is whether the industrialized and rich countries have an obligation to deal justly with the poor, underdeveloped countries?

According to Adeigbo, "justice is done when people are given their due or reward, something they can claim as a moral right which is protected tenaciously by law" (Adeigbo). Talk of due, reward, desert or entitlement implies merit. A burden born by a person or a group of persons may likewise be the merit for the benefit thereof; otherwise, it may be a punishment. Justice is therefore backward looking in terms of determining who gets what, when and how in the sense that we have to examine what people have done or not done in order to determine what they get, when and how they get it. Justice for Rawls is,

*A set of principles required for choosing among the various social arrangements which determine the division of advantages and for underwriting on agreement on the proper distributive shares. These principles are the principles of social justice. They define the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperations (Rawls 1971).*

These principles override other distributive consideration, such as prudential and self interested calculations and the demands of custom (Adeigbo).

A just social arrangement, according to Rawls would consider the principle that those who have been favoured by nature with talents, wealth or other social advantage may gain from their fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out (Ibid.). In other words, justice demands that the wealth from the gifted land be used to improve the situation of disadvantaged people. For Rawls, it is not a right for individuals or group of people to be rewarded for native or natural endowments (James). They have them only as a result of what Rawls has called the "natural lottery".

However, it sounds plausible to hold that majority of our attributes, responsible for enterprise and ambitions depend directly or remotely on some of our natural endowments. No wonder, Ronald Dworkin argues that Rawls goes too far in treating all characteristics that make people more or less productive as morally arbitrary and thus fails to allow for the justice of rewarding enterprise and ambition.

Rawls theory of Justice reflects contractarian principles, and this has motivated criticisms of his theory of justice. These criticisms contend that it is wrong to take the nation-state as the foundation of contractarian principles; instead, such principles ought to apply globally (Beitz). Contractarian principles, they insist, usually rest on the relations in which people stand in a national community united by common acceptance of a conception of justice. It is not obvious that contractarian principles with such a justification suppose any redistributive obligations between persons situated in different national societies.

In view of increasingly visible global distributive inequalities, famine and environmental deterioration, it can hardly be denied that the question of global justice poses a main political and ethical challenge for the foreseeable future. Hence, any theory of justice that does not accommodate the global integration and pattern of distribution will be more or less irrelevant in this age and thereby tagged naïve.

Rawls, later in his work, reinterprets the original position as a sort of international conference:

*One may extend the interpretation of the original position and think of the parties as representatives of different nations who must choose together the fundamental principles to adjudicate conflicting claims among nations each living under the normal circumstances of human life, they know nothing about the particular circumstances of their own society...this original position is fair between nations, it nullifies the contingencies and biases of historical fate. (Rawls)*

This Rawlsian conception of international justice does not involve the idea of rectification like that proposed by Nozick in his entitlement theory. Rawls' theory of justice implies the creation of an entirely new distributive order that is devoid of any form of injustice, either for the purpose of rectification or well being of the public. His thesis becomes more appreciated when we consider the abuse of self-defeating nature of policies like *Affirmative Action*, or as it is sometimes called *Reverse Discrimination*.

Affirmative action programs were begun by the Federal government and courts of the United States in the 1960s as a means to correct the injustices of the racist and sexist discrimination. In the 1970s, many schools for example, in the United States had preferential admission policy. Though they were heavily attacked, and they are fast disappearing today. The critics complained that such policies are not less unjust than the old discredited forms of discrimination. Moreover, they would say it is unfair for a person or group of persons to be penalized or made to suffer, in the effort to make up for the injustice or wrong of their past generations. This would amount to using persons as mere means for a purpose whose object is irrelevant in moral consideration.

We use others as mere means if what we do reflects some maxim to which they could not in principle consent (Mackinnon). In Kant's view, acts done on maxims that coerce or deceive others, which cannot in principle have the consent of others, are wrong. When individuals, institutions or nation-states act in ways that can only be based on such maxims, they fail in their duty. They treat the parties who are either deceived or coerced unjustly. To avoid unjust action, it is not enough to observe the outward forms of free agreement and cooperation; it is also essential to see that the weaker party to any agreement has a genuine option to refuse the fundamental character of the proposal.

The above could be a framework, under which the increasing agitation for global cooperation and a move towards open and global economic policies and practices could be evaluated. None of the regions should be used as mere means either to correct the evils of the past or to further the advancement of the other. The idea of sustainability is therefore a call for the global cooperation, based on mutual consideration for others. Richer nations should stop the manipulation of poorer countries. Developed economies should cease the exploitation of the weakness of their developing counterparts.

It is obvious that there is no nation-state that is self-sufficient in the contemporary world. There is high degree of economic interdependence among the various economies. In recent years, the character of global economic interdependence has become much more sophisticated. There could be an end to exploitation and marginalization if all parties in the global economic order are given, or possess equal bargaining power and opportunity. A situation, whereby some people feed on the famine of others, and keep sustaining the poverty of others by granting funds that pretend to solve the problems of famine, poverty, diseases and other human problems. For instance, several billions of dollars have been donated by foreign governments and international bodies to various parts of Africa, nevertheless, the continent continues to go down the ladder of development with increasing unemployment and mortality rates, diseases, famine, poverty, illiteracy and political instability to mention a few. A record of the World Bank claims that, of the thirty poorest countries of the world, twenty-one are African. The average income level in sub-Saharan Africa in 1993 was \$520 per capital, and the average growth rate per capita was negative (-0.8% per year from 1980 to 1993) (World Bank 1996). This implies that the standard of living was better in the 1980s than 1990s.

This form of inequality does not end at the international scenario. Typically, in many countries, including the United States, a relatively small number of rich people own the majority of property and have the most wealth (Presbey). It also occurs along the gender classification. This task ahead of us might become a reality if we begin to adopt and implement the "formula of the end in itself". The formula runs as follows:

*Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means but always at the same time as an end (Mackinnon).*

When we want to work out whether a proposed act or policy is morally required, we should not, according to Kant, try to find out whether it would produce more happiness than other available acts. Rather, we should consider whether the act or policy is required by, or ruled out by, or compatible with maxims that avoid using others as mere means and maxims that treat others as ends in themselves.

Onora O'Neill, in his article: "Kant Approaches to Some Famine Problems", corroborates the above assertion as follows:

*On a Kantian theory, the basis for judging action should be its fundamental principle or policy, and superficially similar acts may be judged morally very different (Ibid.).*

He exemplifies that, more lavish use of food aid might seem to treat the needy more generously, but if in fact it will damage their medium of long term economic prospects, then it is not aimed at improving and securing their access to subsistence.

The problem of gender discrimination also reflects the situation in which a group of people is merely used as a means. This is a basic problem that has attracted very little attention, probably because of the male dominated societies in which we live. For example, the women of Sikandernagar, a village in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, work three shifts per day. They resume domestic work at 4:00am. From 8:00am until 5:00pm, they work as labourers on the farms for a meagre wage. In the early evening, they forage for branches, twigs and leaves to fuel their cooking fire, and for grass to feed their livestock. Finally, they return home to cook dinner and do evening chores. These women spend twice as many hours per week working to support their families, as do the men in their village. Unfortunately, they do not own the land on which they labour, and every year, for their efforts, they find themselves poorer and less able to provide what their families need to survive (Jodi 1993). The main point here is that women are largely discriminated against, marginalized and victimized. Despite their increasing contribution to social growth, the society at all levels is hesitant in giving them their due. A proper conceptualization of sustainable development will involve justice done to the women fold and thereby closing the gender gap in development.

I have so far attempted to investigate the moral justification for requiring a restructuring of the current world economic order using the Rawlsian and Nozick's ethical theories. From the above, the idea of sustainable development accommodates both the obligations to justice and beneficence. Kant, like Mill, speaks of justice as a perfect duty and of beneficence as an imperfect duty. But he does not mean that beneficence is any less a duty, rather, he holds that it has to be selective. No matter what the distinction might be, these duties are explicitly expressed in the content of the idea of sustainability.

## 5. Conclusion

The bulk of this paper has been a critical examination of a moral justification for the call to restructure the current global economic system. It discovers that fairness in allocation of resources and equitable access to the factors of production and distribution will grant everyone access to sufficient nourishment and a sustainable well-being. Having investigated the moral questions underlying the idea, the paper concludes that the obligation to restructure the current world economic system is primarily intrinsic and instrumentally expedient.

However, it should be noted that the requirement to restructure the present economic order and the redistribution of the factors of production should not be limited to the superstructure of international trade relations. Rather, it must be consciously and systematically pursued by all national governments. The universal status of the moral principles examined above makes it mandatory for peoples and nations to review the processes, institutions and the structures of their current economic order.

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