

Introductory Editorial

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The 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) proved to be important in orienting international development cooperation strategies in recent years, by placing poverty reduction at the top of international priorities and setting a time-bound term to improve the living conditions of the world population. However, in 2015 the MDGs were not fully accomplished, and more effort was still needed to complete the job. The 2015 agenda to reach Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 was more ambitious and more comprehensive, combining in a nest conceptualization the three intertwined dimensions of social inclusion (the MDGs legacy), environmental sustainability (linked to the challenges of climate change and the process of the Conference of the Parties or COP) and economic development, so as to ensure structural transformations.

Therefore, a paradigm based on the complementarity of social-economic development and environmental sustainability is the ambitious mark of the 2030 agenda, which is universal in aspiration and coverage, with goals for all countries, including the high income economies.

However, the very ambition of the agenda can become its weak point, reducing it to an over-proliferation of fragmented and silo mentality-based targets and indicators, rather than focusing on the interaction of social, economic and environmental cross-cutting dimensions.

At the same time, if the responsibility for achieving the desired SDGs is first and foremost national, the international political agenda today places as fundamental a perspective that is very different from that anchored to the nation states. The current Covid-19 pandemic is showing how interconnected the countries are, economically but also in other ways, like global health issues. It shows that countries' domestic decisions are no longer of purely national interest, but also affect others. This means that all countries would need to work together and agree on common objectives and common directions to achieve them.

More, the Covid-19 pandemic shows that issues that have traditionally been mere national are now global because they are beyond the grasp of any single nation. Crises endure because we lack the proper policy mechanisms to address such Global Public Goods, starting with health. Just to mention a few examples: the Doha round of WTO negotiations are still pending issues and disappeared from the political agenda; the reform of international financial institutions is stranded in a situation of uncertainty; the decision to postpone COP-26 in Glasgow until the end of 2021 raises fears that governments may repeat the same mistakes made after the 2008 financial crisis, when recovery plans led to

increased CO2 emissions. The current phase of globalization presents the under-provision of global public goods, just when a significant effort would be needed to address the immediate (Covid-19) and long-term (climate change) main challenges. How we respond to Covid-19 may offer us lessons for the long-term crisis which is already looming before us, the climate crisis and, in both cases, it is clear that urgent, decisive action can turn a crisis around.

In every relevant crisis, there are dangerous risks and great opportunities to shift the world towards urgent and needed changes. The fundamental questions connected to the relationship between economic development, socio-economic inequalities and ecosystem balances resurface like the Gordian knot that cannot or will not be courageously resolved with a radical change. In front of our eyes there is a real risk of missing an extraordinary opportunity for a coordinated turning point, not only to emerge from today's emergency, but also to create the conditions for the economic, social and environmental dimensions to be much more resilient than they are today and capable of mitigating the negative impact of world-wide crises and, if possible, their repetition.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlights the deep interconnections between the three pillars of development, but also the need for action on the governance front at the national but also global level.

Pre-existing conditions can make a person vulnerable to potentially fatal diseases such as Covid-19, as well as heart attacks and strokes, and certainly weaken the exercise of full ownership of active citizenship rights by vulnerable people, communities and groups. The disruption of ecosystem balances, the loss of traditional habitats for various animal species and the anthropization of space can "naturally" lead to these outcomes, even without inconveniencing conspiracy or human intentionality in the spread of viruses. Deforestation, in Africa as in Asia and Latin America, and the colonization by human settlements of former forest areas bring wild animals into direct contact with the human species, and the trade and consumption of the meat of forest animals that carry the virus, such as bats, through the wet markets, quickly spread epidemics.

In general, the situation in the countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia is very critical, on the health, social and economic level and, therefore, also on the political one. The Covid-19 pandemic and the relative measures to contain its spread have held back the world economy and exposed countries with fragile economies that are highly dependent on the performance of the world economy to serious repercussions. Low- and middle-income countries - usually at the mercy of commodity prices, tourism and the volatility of remittance and foreign investment flows, as well as trade - are now facing the interaction of a health crisis that the Covid-19 emergency is exacerbating with a direct negative impact on all other diseases and illnesses, a food crisis and chronic malnutrition that lock-down tends to aggravate, an economic and social crisis of systems based on the informal economy and dependent on world economy integration. In addition, the closure of international borders, the disruption of flights and supply chains and export bans limit countries' ability to procure personal protective equipment (also taking into account the fact that tariffs are applied to health products which, under these conditions, become unsustainable for many countries), diagnostics (recalling the problem of the limited availability of test

kits on international markets) and essential food products, which weakens the already reduced capacity of vulnerable national systems to cope with disease and famine.

If necessary, the Covid-19 pandemic, in addition of course to its dramatic impact on the lives of many people, shows us unequivocally how mutual effects and feedbacks structure and link the different dimensions of development. Economic, social and environmental dimensions that cannot be analyzed in isolation and neglecting the existing interactions. For this reason, development studies are naturally oriented to adopt a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary perspective that has the ambition to overcome the silo mentality and to connect knowledge to read reality in its complexity. Development is a combination of quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the nested - rather than additive - concept of sustainable development: economic growth, social development, environmental sustainability.

The opposite view, unfortunately prevailing in terms of policies and approach to problems, is that of the silo mentality, implying the risks and the dangers of the so called “tunnel vision”: orientation to focus exclusively on a single goal, point of view, specific problem.

The contributions of the authors in this issue of the e-journal should be understood as the result, first of all, of the choice to bring together different themes or dimensions of sustainable development, referring to different countries and continents – where development is always place-based and the context has a specific relevance –, analyzed through the use of different methodologies and techniques of analysis.

Ali A. Soliman is the author of the article focused on the relationship between fiscal policy – analyzing both the public revenue side and the public expenditure side – and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals first and then the Sustainable Development Goals. Financing is explicitly addressed in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as part of the means of implementation under each of SDG 1-16 and, more specifically, under SDG 17, which is aimed at encouraging the mobilization of resources and their effective use in achieving sustainable development objectives. Nowadays, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the global economy is projected to contract sharply, experiencing its worst recession since the Great Depression, and a key challenge for many countries – including Egypt – in the near future will certainly be that of a fiscal space that is likely to be limited. The risk of a probable contraction of financial resources in the immediate future adds, therefore, to the need to consider whether and how the Covid-19 should impose a profound rethink on priorities and modes of intervention in order to avoid the objective of simply “go back to normal”, where normality appears to be a fundamental part of the structural problems of development. It is no coincidence, in fact, that the 2020 Financing for Sustainable Development Report outlines measures to address the impact of the unfolding global recession and financial turmoil.

Returning again to the global framework represented by SDGs, the official indicator list as refined by the 2020 Comprehensive Review, which were approved by the 51st Statistical Commission in March 2020, includes 231 unique

indicators (with twelve indicators repeated under two or three different targets). The SDG Indicator 16.6.1 refers to the degree of implementation of the national budget, in terms of actual primary government expenditures, as an indicator of government's ability to deliver public services and achieve development objectives. The article by Ali A. Soliman elaborates on this point and analyzes how Egyptian government revenues and expenses changed over time in quality and quantity and how these changes affected the mixed achievements of MDGs. The author is clear in his judgment: over the years, a large increase in government expenditure was not matched with a commensurate increase in revenue; the resulting increase in deficit was largely financed through borrowing from the local banking sector and, as a result, the government was forced to decide whether it should curtail spending on essential programs or to service its debt, while the option of raising general sales tax has a regressive re-distribution impact, completely inconsistent with the objectives of equity and redistribution of SDGs. The conclusion is severe with regard to the past, when the author says that Egypt has not been able to realize most of its accepted Millennium Development Goals due to the difficult situation of the state budget and, at the same time, offers policy guidance to orient government choices to better align with the SDGs framework.

Pierre Kamdem analyses the determinants of international migrations in Cameroon. If Egypt is a middle-income country located in North Africa, with a population estimated at 102 million people and has a set of problems that hinder development, Cameroon is a Sub-Saharan middle-income country with a population of over 25 million people, endowed with rich natural resources, including oil and gas, minerals, high-value species of timber, and agricultural products, such as coffee, cotton, cocoa, maize, and cassava. In particular, the author analyzes the dynamic change of migration factors in Cameroon and considers the prospects for the near future, putting forward some recommendations for optimizing the quality of migratory departures, in order to further enhance the impact of migration on the development of the country. The link between migration and development is clear in Cameroon as well as at global level. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized for the first time the contribution of migration to sustainable development, and migration is a cross-cutting issue relevant to all of the SDGs, with 10 out of 17 goals containing targets and indicators that are relevant to migration or mobility. In fact, the Agenda's core principle to "leave no one behind" addresses directly and abundantly the situation of migrants. The SDGs' central reference to migration is made in target 10.7 to facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies.

Official international data show that international migrants have increased from 153 million in 1990 to 271.6 million by mid-2019. The data also indicate that, as the world population grows, the share of the migrant population grows even more. The Global Compact for Migration, ratified on 19 December 2018 by the United Nations General Assembly, is the first agreement at global level that attempts to provide an internationally coordinated response to facilitate

“orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”. Over the years, significant differences of views emerged between and within countries that led to a radicalization of positions and sharp contrasts on international migration. Therefore, the analysis of a case study such as that of Cameroon offers many useful indications, which go beyond the specific case study. A particularly topical issue today, because the Covid-19 pandemic is having a disruptive effect on the specific living conditions of international migrants.

In fact, the picture that emerges today is of a particularly vulnerable migrant population, exposed to the risk of discrimination in access to health services and social and labor protection measures that are being prepared at international level, with a possible resurgence of xenophobic pressures. In pointing out the possible critical developments of the situation, it should be remembered the pre-existing structural problems, linked to the difficult migrants’ inclusion/integration process, but also to the incentive for the migration of health workers, which today makes the situation in the countries of origin more critical, while migrants, blocked by lock-down measures in their host countries, often find themselves bearing very high costs as a result of the current crisis.

The section dedicated to articles by PhD students and young researchers of the network of the International Doctoral School on the SDGs collects four interesting contributions.

The first, written by Vatana Chea, a demographer and population economist from Cambodia, is an article on Cambodia, a Southeast Asian country upgraded to the middle-income group in 2016 based on the fact that GNI per capita for 2015 was \$1,070, that is above the threshold of \$1,025 for low-income countries, with a population of 16.7 million of people. The author analyzes an important topic related to the link between migration and development, which is addressed by the 10.c target of the SDGs, that is remittances (the target being: “by 2030, reduce to less than 3 per cent the transaction costs of migrant remittances and eliminate remittance corridors with costs higher than 5 per cent”). The specific area of investigation of this article is the impact of remittances on poverty and inequality in Cambodia, by using monthly per capita consumption to measure household welfare. The method adopted by the author is based on the estimation of the so-called counterfactual, a key concept of any experimental and quasi-experimental econometric technique of impact evaluation. Vatana Chea applies one of the earliest models in econometrics to deal with selection bias, introduced by James Heckman (1976), a two-step procedure combining the estimation of a probit equation (similar to what is done for propensity score matching, except that the probit should contain one or more instruments for participation) to calculate fitted values, which are then used as a regressor in OLS estimation for the outcome variable. The results from the Heckman two-step estimation of per capita consumption of remittances and non-remittance-recipient households are compared to the results from alternative methods and shows how dependent are remittance-receiving households on the transfer of remittances to improve their welfare. The fact that the global shock triggered by the Covid-19 pandemic has

significantly impacted Cambodia's economy in 2020 at a time when the country also faces the partial suspension of preferential access to the EU market under the "Everything but Arms" initiative and is also expected to reduce drastically the flow of remittances sent by migrants back home to low- and middle-income countries makes the article of great interest also in relation to future prospects.

An economist, Mauro Oscar Lua Delboy Céspedes is the author of the article focused on Bolivia, a Latin American middle-income country, with a current population estimated of 11.7 million of people, and the topic discussed is school enrollment rate. Unfortunately, new data published by the UNESCO on the world's out-of-school children reveal little or no progress for more than a decade, with about 258 million children, adolescents and youth out of school in 2018: around one-sixth of the global population of this age group. The data reinforce concerns about the prospects of reaching global education targets by 2030, which is one of the key components of the SDG 4 (to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). Therefore the topic proposed by the author is very relevant in the framework of the development debate and the specific method adopted - which is the impact evaluation of the spatial component on Bolivian school enrollment rate as a way to identify its main determinants - should be highlighted and recognized as a promising area of investigation. In fact, it is clear that in many cases, including but not limited to education, the outcomes of policies do not depend solely on the specific actions and the attributes of the individuals, but on the structure of the system, their position within it, and their interaction with other individuals. The Covid-19 itself is spread via interactions, and different types of interaction patterns between and within countries give rise to different disease dynamics. As highlighted by Michael Ward and Kristian Skrede Gleditsch in *Spatial Regression Models* (Sage, London, 2008), the role of interactions and their structures is almost completely absent from most empirical analyses in social sciences, and spatial analysis can help researchers take dependence between observations into account and deal with spatially clustered phenomena. The estimation of regression models with spatially lagged dependent variables help take spatial dependence into account, avoiding the risk to underestimate the real variance in the data. And the author can explicitly show that the spatial component affects directly the school attendance rate in Bolivia, with a negative impact of rural percentage of population on education being the proxy of a significant spatial dependence. Here too, unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic is amplifying and greatly worsening the picture of development problems linked to the issue of education at global level, making the risk of marginalization and exclusion of the most vulnerable groups of children one of the highest social and economic costs of this current crisis. Taking into account the geographical segmentation of development problems is an important *caveat* for Bolivia and not only.

Anass Abouelkhaira and Yasser Y. Tamsamania are two Moroccan economists who authored an article focused on an empirical analysis linking exchange rate regime choice and economic growth as referred to a panel of 30 African

countries. The SDGs framework aims to encourage sustained economic growth – one of the three pillars of the whole approach – by achieving higher levels of productivity and through technological innovation. In particular, there are 12 Targets and 17 Indicators for SDG 8, which is “to achieve full and productive employment, and decent work, for all women and men by 2030”. At the same time, SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development), especially target 17.4, emphasizes the need of “attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt to reduce debt distress”. With reference to these strategic areas, the authors analyze a technical financial aspect, the exchange rate regimes, in order to find out which are most favorable to economic growth. In methodological terms, Abouelkhaira and Tamsamania apply the random effect technique to a dataset in which the behavior of countries are observed across time (cross-sectional time-series data). The rationale behind random effects model is that the variation across countries is assumed to be random and uncorrelated with the predictor or independent variables included in the model, taking into account the influence of the different exchange rate regimes across countries on the dependent variable, which is economic growth. The estimations, even though several alternative econometric specifications (with the usage of instrumental variables method and running various tests), confirm the absence of currency neutrality in the case of African countries and an outperformance of intermediate regimes in promoting economic growth in the case of countries experiencing positive terms of trade shocks and benefiting from FDI inflows. The opening of capital account appears as incompatible with intermediate regimes, and external indebtedness does not favor economic growth regardless of the exchange rate regime adopted.

These results are relevant in the context of what is expected to be the worst economic recession since the Great Depression, with an estimated decline by more than 4 per cent of GDP per capita at global level in 2020 and 1.6 billion workers in the informal economy – mainly in Africa and Asia – who are at risk of losing their livelihoods due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In Africa, informal workers account for 86 percent of all jobs; specifically in sub-Saharan Africa, they contribute 38 percent of GDP and up to 60 percent of Nigeria's GDP. The pandemic is expected to spread more slowly in Africa than in other parts of the world, but it will probably stay in the region longer, probably for several years. As in other regions, there is considerable variation in exchange rate regimes across sub-Saharan Africa and over time, including pegs, intermediates, and floats. The choice of an appropriate exchange rate regime is a subject of ongoing debate in international economics, as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemics in addition to the very heated political debate about the common currency for the Franc Zone (CFA).

Karine da Silva Araujo, a Brazilian agronomist from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, analyzes the importance of natural plant fiber production chains for the sustainable development of poor regions in Brazil. Brazil is an emerging upper-middle income economy, with a population of over 210 million and a very

high level of economic inequality, which has been high since at least 1928, as a result of an impressive concentration of income among the rich, so that Brazil has always ranked among the first positions at world level in the Gini coefficient index of inequality assessment. Even though millions of people were lifted out of poverty during Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's presidential terms from 2000 to 2010, through economic growth alongside social development to fight poverty, with strong government action expanding social coverage targeted to the poor to reduce poverty, inequality and hunger for the first time in contemporary history (including the famous conditional cash transfer program introduced in 2003, the so called *Bolsa Família* program), a very high level of inequality persists.

The article analyzes a specific and concrete case of intersection between the economic, social and environmental pillars of the SDGs, which is the potential of natural fiber chains, a production process involving many family farmers in small farms in the poor rural regions in the North and Northeast of Brazil, that integrates perfectly with the agro-climatic conditions of the areas, without damaging the environment. Through a concrete case study, by using available data published by the main statistical institutes in Brazil, the author shows how economic development cannot be pursued without considering the social and environmental dimension, just as there is no way to make homogeneous policies for a country the size of Brazil, with different biomes, soil types, climate, vegetation and water resources beyond cultural differences, and she strongly recommends a coordinated cooperation between all stakeholders – at sub-national, federal and global level, involving private and public sectors – to promote an effective and long-lasting international networking partnership capable of effectively supporting sustainable development of the natural plant fiber economies, respecting eco-systems, cultures and different identities. Read from a more general perspective, the article suggests that it is urgent to address some of the structural causes of inequality in Brazil, such as insufficient nested investments in social, economic and environmental policies to support fragile and vulnerable eco-systems.

This is dramatically topical, in the context of the current Covid-19 pandemic: Brazil ranks second worldwide in the total number of officially confirmed Covid-19 cases and deaths; understanding the possible socioeconomic and ethnic health inequalities is particularly important given the diverse population and fragile political and economic situation, as new studies are being published in Brazil that would confirm the thesis of increased mortality in the North region (regional effect) and in the Pardo (*Moreno*) and Black (*Preto*) populations (ethnicity effect): that is a further confirmation of the strong social and territorial heterogeneity present in the dynamics of development, in any context.