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Addressing social issues to meet the requirements of sustainable development in Vietnam

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Abstract

In the context of rapid and sustainable development, Vietnam is grappling with many social challenges that necessitate comprehensive and effective solutions. Among the most pressing issues are income inequality, rising unemployment, disparities in access to healthcare and education, and the urgent need to ensure social security for all population segments. To effectively tackle these challenges, Vietnam needs to enhance its social security policies, promote innovation across various sectors, and encourage the active participation of all stakeholders in society. Strengthening state governance is also critical in this endeavor. A pivotal aspect of achieving holistic and sustainable prosperity lies in establishing a robust social development framework that harmonizes economic growth with social progress while prioritizing equity and social advancement. This research employs qualitative and quantitative methodologies to rigorously evaluate existing outcomes, identify underlying limitations, and propose actionable solutions. By addressing these current social issues head-on, the aim is to pave the way for sustainable development in Vietnam, ensuring that growth benefits all members of society and contributes to a more equitable future.

Keywords: Human well-being, social development, happiness, sustainable development, Vietnam.



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1. Introduction

Social issues stem from a complex interplay of various factors, including economic conditions, ideological frameworks, political systems, cultural influences, and the impacts of international integration. Together, these factors shape the development paths of individuals and communities, ultimately influencing the overall quality of life. In recent years, globalization and global economic integration have been key drivers of transformation in many nations, including Vietnam. The country has achieved remarkable progress, marked by stable economic growth and improved living standards across different population segments. However, alongside these achievements, Vietnam grapples with persistent challenges that must be systematically addressed to realize its ambitious goals of rapid and sustainable development. These interconnected challenges often result in unequal access to resources and opportunities, thereby deepening social inequalities. This paper seeks to offer a set of targeted recommendations aimed at tackling these social issues, fostering both swift and sustainable socio-economic progress in Vietnam, and building a solid foundation for a more equitable and prosperous society. The proposed recommendations will not only focus on immediate solutions but will also prioritize long-term strategies that promote inclusive growth and strengthen social cohesion. In doing so, this paper contributes to the ongoing dialogue on navigating the complexities of social issues in Vietnam's evolving socio-economic landscape.

To address the key phenomena and gaps identified in existing research, this study will focus on the following research questions:

- What are the current achievements and challenges in addressing social issues to meet the requirements of sustainable development in Vietnam?
- What solutions can be proposed to effectively tackle social issues in alignment with Vietnam's sustainable development goals?

2. Literature Review

Addressing social issues to meet the demands of rapid and sustainable development is a topic of critical importance that has garnered significant scholarly attention both domestically and internationally. This is particularly relevant in the context of developing countries, where economic, social, and environmental challenges are highly interwoven and require comprehensive solutions. In Vietnam, the intersection between social issues and economic growth is especially pronounced, as sustainable development is fundamentally contingent upon the effective resolution of these key social challenges. Without addressing issues such as poverty, inequality, and access to essential services, economic progress may not be evenly distributed, leading to disparities that hinder long-term development goals. Ensuring that the development process is both inclusive and equitable is paramount, as it ensures that all sectors of society are positioned to benefit from economic advancements, thus fostering social cohesion and reducing the risk of marginalized groups being excluded from the broader trajectory of national prosperity. This approach not only strengthens social stability but also aligns with global frameworks for sustainable development, emphasizing the need for inclusive growth strategies that leave no one behind.

Globally, the concept of sustainable development was formally shaped by the United Nations' Brundtland Report, published in 1987, which underscored the interconnectedness of economic development, environmental protection, and social progress (UNDP, 1978). This landmark report established the foundation for a holistic approach to development, emphasizing that long-term economic growth must be pursued in tandem with the protection of natural resources and the promotion of

social equity. In this context, the book *Economic Development and Social Opportunity* offers a detailed examination of India's economic development and its associated social opportunities. The book provides an in-depth analysis of the socio-economic challenges and opportunities faced by India, addressing critical issues such as inequality, poverty alleviation, and social infrastructure. By employing statistical analysis and quantitative methods, the author offers valuable insights into the country's most pressing socio-economic problems, such as the response to pandemics, the quality of education, the distribution of resources, and the implementation of economic policies. The work contributes to a deeper understanding of how economic development strategies can be shaped to ensure more equitable social outcomes, while also considering the broader implications of policy decisions on the nation's long-term growth and sustainability. Critical social issues like resource conflicts, gender inequality, and economic disparity are thoroughly examined, along with strategic recommendations for India (Drèze & Sen, 2002). The work *Development as Freedom* expands the concept of development to include social factors, emphasizing that true development is not solely measured by GDP growth but also encompasses access to healthcare, education, and the reduction of inequality (Sen, 1999). The report *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up* also highlights the role of social equity and inclusiveness in ensuring sustainable development (Sen, Fitoussi, & Stiglitz, 2010).

The book *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future* focuses on the study of social inequality and its impact on society's future. The author argues that economic inequality creates social imbalances and weakens the development potential of the economy. Stiglitz asserts that reducing inequality is crucial for ensuring social welfare alongside sustainable socio-economic development. This book also presents proposals and solutions aimed at mitigating social inequality and enhancing fairness within society (Stiglitz, 2012). The book *The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality* explains the causes and consequences of wealth disparity globally. It provides evidence of poor wealth, income, and health distribution worldwide, analyzing the factors contributing to this inequality. Deaton also offers policy recommendations to reduce disparities and improve health and economic development in developing countries. The book focuses on health-related issues, including lifespan disparities, infectious diseases, and health challenges faced by the poor (Deaton, 2013).

Alongside this theme, the book *The Age of Sustainable Development* is regarded as a seminal work on sustainable development, offering crucial insights into its nature and direction. It addresses contemporary global challenges such as economic inequality, climate change, poverty, and issues related to energy, environment, and politics. This document also proposes suggestions and solutions to promote sustainable development, including national and global policies. Sachs asserts that achieving a sustainable world requires a shift in mindset and approach, encompassing policies, technology, finance, community involvement, and education. This book is an essential resource not only for those interested in sustainable development but also for individuals involved in or managing projects related to it (Sachs, 2015).

In *Sustainability and Sustainable Development: Historical and Conceptual Review*, Mebratu (1998) traces the evolution of the sustainability concept, with particular attention to the social challenges that emerge in parallel with development efforts. The study provides a comprehensive historical context, showing how sustainability has grown from an environmental focus to encompass broader socio-economic dimensions. Stern's (2004) article, "The Rise and Fall of the Environmental Kuznets Curve," explores the complex and often non-linear relationship between economic growth and environmental

degradation. Stern argues that economic growth alone does not automatically resolve environmental or social challenges, challenging the assumption that higher income leads to improved environmental outcomes.

Similarly, Jackson's (2009) *Prosperity Without Growth? The Transition to a Sustainable Economy* critiques the prevailing narrative that economic growth is the sole measure of societal progress. Jackson emphasizes the need to rethink how progress is defined within sustainable development frameworks, advocating for approaches that prioritize social well-being alongside environmental sustainability. Leach, Scoones, and Stirling (2010), in their paper *Dynamic Sustainabilities: Technology, Environment, Social Justice*, delve into the complex interconnections between technological innovation, environmental sustainability, and social justice. They argue that sustainable development requires addressing inequalities in access to technology and resources while balancing environmental concerns.

Raworth's (2012) seminal work, *A Safe and Just Space for Humanity: Can We Live Within the Doughnut?* Introduces the concept of *Doughnut Economics*, which frames a sustainable future as one that respects both ecological boundaries and human needs. This model underscores the importance of balancing environmental limits with ensuring social equity, making it a crucial framework for sustainable development. In a similar vein, Biermann et al. (2012), in their article *Navigating the Anthropocene: Improving Earth System Governance*, emphasize the need for robust governance structures to tackle social inequalities and promote sustainable development, calling for public policies that enhance global cooperation on sustainability challenges.

Escobar's (2017) *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* further adds to this discourse by highlighting the importance of cultural diversity in development strategies. Escobar argues for incorporating the voices and needs of local communities into development processes, advocating for an approach that respects autonomy and local knowledge. Schroeder, Anggraeni, and Weber's (2019) study, "The Relevance of Circular Economy Practices to the Sustainable Development Goals," builds on these ideas by linking circular economy practices with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in fostering social equity and creating new employment opportunities. Together, these works highlight the multifaceted nature of sustainable development, where economic growth, environmental protection, and social progress must be carefully balanced to achieve a just and sustainable future.

In Vietnam, research on social issues and sustainable development has gained substantial traction since the early 21st century, especially amid deep economic integration and rapid growth. Numerous studies highlight the multifaceted nature of sustainable development. For example, Nam's (2008) research, *Sustainable Rural Development in Vietnam* stresses the importance of prioritizing social and environmental factors alongside economic growth. Thanh's (2012) work, "Economic Development and Inequality in Vietnam," investigates the relationship between increasing income inequality and economic progress, warning that widening wealth gaps could obstruct the country's sustainable development objectives. Similarly, the book "*Social Security and Sustainable Development*" (Tam, 2018) emphasizes the vital role of social security in sustainable development strategies, advocating for a strengthened welfare system to ensure inclusivity and social equity.

Recent studies such as *Urbanization and Sustainable Development in Vietnam* and "*Economic Growth and Social Issues*" also assert that social factors must be integrated into sustainable development strategies. They indicate that in the context of rapid urbanization, social issues such as migration,

unemployment, and income inequality have emerged as significant challenges to achieving sustainable development (Thien, 2020; Doanh, 2021). The work *Urban Governance and Sustainable Development in Major Cities* warns that without effective management of social issues, the rapid development of urban areas will lead to many negative environmental and welfare consequences, emphasizing that social cohesion, reducing inequality, and access to basic services are critical determinants of a nation's sustainability (Dinh, 2021).

Although numerous studies have addressed various aspects of social issues concerning sustainable development, most works in Vietnam primarily focus on economic and environmental aspects, while social issues such as welfare, inequality, and access to healthcare and education remain insufficiently researched. This creates a gap in research, necessitating greater attention and more comprehensive solutions to ensure that development is not only rapid but also sustainable in the long term. This paper aims to fill that gap by focusing on addressing social issues, thereby contributing to the establishment of a sustainable development model for Vietnam.

3. Research Method

Research on rapid and sustainable development must be grounded in various theories, integrating insights from fields such as philosophy, economics, sociology, environmental science, and governance. The theory of sustainable development serves as a primary foundation, emphasizing a harmonious integration of three pillars: economic, social, and environmental. These three elements interact dialectically to ensure long-term development, meeting present needs while safeguarding conditions for future generations (Elkington, 2006).

One fundamental theory of sustainable development is the *Human Development Theory* proposed by Amartya Sen. According to this theory, development should not be measured solely by economic indicators but must also consider factors that enhance the quality of life, such as education, healthcare, and human rights. This concept is intricately linked to addressing social issues in the context of rapid development, where the goal transcends mere economic growth to encompass the enhancement of social welfare. Sen offers a critical perspective on conventional development paradigms, particularly those that emphasize Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth as the primary measure of economic progress and societal advancement. He argues that such a narrow focus on GDP overlooks the more fundamental aspects of human well-being and development. Instead, Sen advocates for the *capability approach*, which prioritizes the expansion of individuals' substantive freedoms and the genuine abilities they have to pursue lives they value and have reason to value (Drèze & Sen, 2002). This framework suggests that true development should not merely aim to increase income or wealth but should focus on enhancing people's capacity to make meaningful choices, participate fully in society, and achieve well-being. By broadening the scope of development to include non-economic factors, Sen's capability approach offers a more comprehensive understanding of progress that emphasizes human empowerment and the role of agency in improving quality of life.

Similarly, John Rawls' *Social Justice Theory* (1971) provides a significant contribution to the discussion of equity and fairness in the distribution of resources and rights within a society. Rawls' central argument revolves around the notion that social institutions should be structured in a way that ensures fairness and equality, particularly for the most disadvantaged. He asserts that unjust social arrangements can be seen as a form of coercion or even violence, stating: "Unjust social arrangements

are themselves a kind of extortion, even violence, and consent to them does not bind.” This powerful assertion underscores the moral responsibility of societies to rectify structural inequalities that perpetuate harm and limit individual freedoms. Both Sen and Rawls share a common concern for justice and human dignity, each advocating for frameworks that promote greater fairness, well-being, and empowerment in the process of development.

This analogy underscores the moral and political concerns of the era, linking political violence with social justice. Rawls’ influential work has firmly positioned social justice at the heart of political philosophy, arguing that economic advantages should be fairly distributed, particularly to protect disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Bufacchi, 2007). As Vietnam pursues sustainable development, achieving social equity remains a critical factor in ensuring long-term social sustainability (Kuhumba, 2017). In addition, the work *Governance for Sustainable Development* stresses the need for comprehensive governance frameworks to achieve sustainable development goals. Effective governance requires collaboration across sectors and levels, engaging government agencies, businesses, and civil society. This approach is particularly relevant for Vietnam, where robust policies are essential to managing resources efficiently, enabling rapid development while ensuring sustainability over the long term (Biermann et al., 2012).

Based on the theoretical framework outlined above, it is evident that addressing social issues plays a fundamental role in achieving sustainable development goals. Within the unique geopolitical, economic, cultural, and social landscape of Vietnam, particularly during its period of international integration, the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently emphasized a people-centered approach to sustainable development. This approach underscores the necessity of addressing key social challenges to enhance the quality of life for all citizens, promote democratic governance, and foster social equity. By prioritizing social welfare, the Party aims to ensure that the benefits of economic growth and development are equitably distributed across all segments of society. This human-focused strategy aligns closely with global sustainable development frameworks and is rooted in Vietnam’s broader national objectives. It seeks not only to elevate economic standards but also to improve access to education, healthcare, and essential services. The ultimate goal is to narrow the wealth gap and provide every individual with the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their socioeconomic background. These efforts are encapsulated in the Party’s guiding vision of building “a prosperous people, a strong country, democracy, equity, and civilization”. By prioritizing both economic and social development, Vietnam aims to create a harmonious society where growth is inclusive and sustainable, ensuring that no one is left behind as the nation progresses toward its long-term goals.

In 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam articulated a clear stance that, while economic development serves as the material foundation for advancing social policies, the ultimate purpose of economic activities is to achieve broader social objectives (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1986, p. 86). This perspective highlights the importance of a holistic and integrated approach that combines economic and social policies, with a focus on human development as a core element of socialist construction. The emphasis was on ensuring that economic growth directly contributes to enhancing the well-being of citizens and fostering social progress. By 2016, during the XII Congress, the Party’s approach evolved to reflect the changing global landscape and Vietnam’s deepening integration into the international community. The Congress underscored the need for “rapid and sustainable development” in alignment with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. This marked a significant shift, as

the Party called for a more balanced development model that not only drives economic growth but also prioritizes cultural development, social equity, and environmental protection (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016, p. 87). The updated viewpoint reinforces the necessity of an inclusive, multidimensional approach to development, recognizing that true progress requires aligning economic advancement with sustainable social and environmental goals. This evolving perspective underscores Vietnam's commitment to ensuring that development is both rapid and sustainable, benefiting all citizens and safeguarding future generations. To build a prosperous, civilized, and sustainably developed nation, balancing economic advancement with social progress, reducing wealth disparities, and addressing social inequalities is essential. Creating a compassionate and united society one that fosters mutual support and strives for humane values is crucial. This stands in contrast to a cutthroat competition where the "big fish eat little fish" for the selfish gain of a few, ensuring that development benefits all members of society.

Moreover, it is essential to clarify that "the fundamental characteristic and important attribute of the socialist orientation in Vietnam's market economy is the integration of economy and society." This integration unifies economic and social policies to ensure that economic growth is always accompanied by progress and social equity. Progress and equity should not be postponed until a high level of economic development is reached, nor should they be "sacrificed" in pursuit of mere economic gains (Trong, 2022, p. 27). In 2021, the Communist Party of Vietnam reiterated the importance of "harmoniously resolving social relations, controlling social stratification, and promptly addressing social risks, conflicts, and tensions to ensure social order and safety." The Party also emphasized the protection of people's legitimate rights, improving laws and policies for those who have made contributions, and strengthening social welfare and security. The focus is on meeting basic needs in housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and employment while developing a comprehensive social security system. Sustainable poverty reduction, ensuring minimum living standards, and adapting to an aging population are also critical priorities, along with enhancing population quality during the golden demographic period (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 148-151). These principles reflect the Party's and the State's strategic approach to international integration and development.

Thus, the integration of economic, social, and environmental theories, social philosophy, and governance will provide a solid theoretical foundation for researching and proposing solutions to social issues within the context of Vietnam's efforts toward rapid and sustainable development.

To address the research questions, the authors will employ specific methods such as:

Document Analysis Method: This method involves systematically collecting, reviewing, and interpreting a wide range of documents, policies, and reports related to sustainable development and social issues in Vietnam. It includes the examination of official government publications, such as national development plans, legislation, and policy frameworks, which provide insight into the state's strategic priorities and approaches to sustainable development. Additionally, reports from international organizations, such as the United Nations, the World Bank, and regional development institutions, are critical in assessing Vietnam's progress toward global sustainable development goals and identifying areas where further efforts are needed. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both domestic and international, also produce valuable reports that highlight grassroots perspectives, assess the effectiveness of policies on vulnerable populations, and provide recommendations for improvement. By engaging with these diverse sources of information, the document analysis method helps build a comprehensive

understanding of Vietnam's ongoing efforts and challenges in achieving sustainable development. This method enables researchers to identify trends, evaluate policy outcomes, and critically assess the alignment between Vietnam's national goals and international commitments. Through this holistic approach, the method supports the development of more informed, evidence-based solutions to address pressing social issues and enhance sustainable development strategies.

In-Depth Interview Method: Conducting in-depth interviews with experts, scholars, and policy managers to gain insights into perspectives and solutions for addressing social issues. Interviews may also involve groups directly affected by social issues to gather diverse and authentic opinions.

Case Study Method: Investigating successful examples both domestically and internationally regarding the resolution of social issues within the context of sustainable development. Selecting localities or sectors that have notable achievements in sustainable development for in-depth analysis.

Statistical Method: Utilizing statistical data related to economic, social, and environmental factors to identify trends and relationships between social issues and sustainable development. Statistical data can be sourced from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, international organizations, and previous studies.

Synthesis Analysis Method: Collecting data and materials from various sources such as government reports, international organizations (UNDP, WB), non-governmental organizations, and academic studies. Key focus areas include economics, environment, and social issues (poverty reduction, gender equality, education, healthcare, labor). Synthesizing the analytical results from diverse sources to obtain a comprehensive and multidimensional view of social issues and sustainable development. Comparing approaches to addressing social issues domestically and internationally, drawing lessons that could apply to Vietnam.

The combination of these methods will provide a more comprehensive and profound insight into your research, ensuring the scientific rigor and practical relevance of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The achievements in addressing social issues to meet the requirements for sustainable development in Vietnam

During Vietnam's international integration, the country has maintained stable economic growth, laying a strong foundation for addressing social issues. A notable achievement from 2012 to 2020 was the faster income growth in rural areas compared to urban regions, which significantly narrowed the income disparity between these areas and across different regions nationwide. By 2020, the average monthly income of ethnic minority groups reached 2.3 million VND, representing 54.5% of the national average, with the trend continuing upward. Although full income equality remains a distant goal, the income gap between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% of the population has steadily decreased from 9.3 times in 2012 to 8.07 times in 2020. By 2023, Vietnam's Gini coefficient, an index measuring income inequality, stood at 0.374, indicating a moderate level of inequality and showcasing Vietnam's efforts to reduce the wealth gap (Loi, 2024). Moreover, stable employment has been a key factor in maintaining low unemployment rates. In urban areas, unemployment has consistently remained within the range of 3% to 4%, while the national unemployment rate has been kept between 2% and 3%, positioning Vietnam among the countries with the lowest unemployment rates globally (Loi, 2024). These economic and social advancements reflect the country's commitment to fostering inclusive growth, balancing rapid

development with efforts to address social inequalities.

From 2010 to 2015, the poverty rate in Vietnam decreased by an average of 2% per year, falling below 4.5% by 2015. Notably, in the poor districts, the poverty rate dropped rapidly by an average of 6% per year, from 58.3% to 28%. Despite adopting a multidimensional poverty standard and raising the income poverty threshold in the 2016-2020 period, the poverty rate continued to decline significantly. In the 64 poorest districts nationwide, the poverty rate fell from 58.33% in 2010 to 23.42% by the end of 2020. By 2023, the national poverty rate was only 3.4%, reflecting significant progress in the fight against poverty (Tri & Vinh, 2024). Efforts to reduce multidimensional poverty helped Vietnam achieve the Millennium Development Goals a decade ahead of schedule, becoming one of the 30 pioneering countries to adopt a multidimensional poverty standard, highly regarded by the international community. In 2017, Vietnam successfully achieved its goal of universal preschool education for 5-year-old children, marking a significant milestone in the country's education system. By 2020, this achievement was not only maintained but fully met the national standard, with 100% of districts implementing universal preschool education. The target of universal education from preschool through lower secondary school was also accomplished ahead of schedule. Currently, all 63 provinces and cities across Vietnam uphold the standard for universal primary education, reaching a 100% implementation rate. This reflects Vietnam's strong commitment to ensuring educational access for all, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and societal progress.

Health insurance and social insurance have also emerged as critical pillars of Vietnam's social safety net, providing essential support to individuals facing risks such as illness, workplace accidents, occupational diseases, maternity, unemployment, and retirement. The widespread coverage of health insurance helps reduce out-of-pocket healthcare costs, promoting greater equity in access to healthcare, particularly for vulnerable populations. Vietnam continues to expand its healthcare infrastructure by constructing and upgrading hospitals, enhancing healthcare services in coastal and island regions, and fostering the growth of the private healthcare sector. By 2022, the number of individuals enrolled in household health insurance will reach 24.72 million, underscoring the government's efforts to extend health coverage and ensure that all citizens, regardless of their economic status, can access essential health services. These developments demonstrate Vietnam's ongoing commitment to improving the quality of life for its people through education and healthcare. From 39.7 million people covered by health insurance in 2008 (equivalent to 46.1% of the population), by 2023, more than 93.3 million people were enrolled, achieving a rate of 93.35% of the population, nearing the goal of universal health insurance (Loi, 2024). Simultaneously, the grassroots healthcare system plays an active role in managing and caring for the health of the community, promoting equity in accessing healthcare services. Currently, 99% of communes, wards, and towns nationwide have health stations, with 92.4% of commune health stations staffed by doctors. This aims to create significant changes in the awareness and actions of ministries, local governments, and citizens regarding grassroots healthcare.

Protecting and caring for people's health is an essential means to ensure that all citizens are healthy and fit, thereby actively participating in production activities. This not only contributes to achieving economic growth targets but also ensures sustainable social welfare for the present and future. For this reason, the Party and the State of Vietnam have consistently affirmed that investing in healthcare is investing in people, with the goal of economic development going hand in hand with the comprehensive improvement of people's lives.

The advancements in providing basic social services during Vietnam's integration into the global economy reflect significant progress in the country's pursuit of social equity. According to the Human Development Index (HDI) report for 2016–2020, Vietnam's HDI reached 0.706 in 2020, representing a notable increase of 0.024 points since 2016, with an average annual growth rate of 0.9%. This progress indicates steady improvements in life expectancy, education, and income levels, which are key components of the HDI. As a result, Vietnam transitioned from Group 2 (medium human development) to Group 3 (high human development) in the global HDI classification. However, despite this transition, the country remains at the lower end of the high development category, highlighting room for further improvement. Regionally, Vietnam's HDI ranking improved slightly, placing it 7th out of 11 countries in Southeast Asia (General Statistics Office, 2022). This regional standing illustrates both Vietnam's upward trajectory and the competitive environment within Southeast Asia in terms of human development. While the country's progress in human development is commendable, this context also underscores the ongoing challenges that must be addressed, particularly in areas such as education quality, healthcare access, and income distribution, to continue improving human development outcomes. Vietnam's success in further elevating its HDI will depend on its ability to deepen reforms in these areas while sustaining economic growth and promoting social equity.

4.2.Social issues facing the requirements for sustainable development in Vietnam

Vietnam's scientific, technical, and technological capabilities still face many limitations, along with other resources that have not yet been fully utilized. Economic development is not commensurate with the country's advantages and potential, while socio-cultural aspects are affected by the negative impacts of a market economy, globalization, and international integration. All these factors influence Vietnam's sustainable development, particularly regarding social issues.

Regarding the average income gap, although there has been some narrowing between the richest 20% and the poorest 20% of the population, income inequality is still increasing in less developed regions. The poverty rate has decreased, but the gap among different population groups has not improved as expected. The quantity and quality of basic social services in remote areas remain low, making it more challenging for residents to access essential services. On the other hand, the unemployment rate and underemployment are gradually declining, from 4.3% in 2010 to about 3.1% in 2019, reaching 3.22% in 2021. The coverage rate of health insurance has also increased rapidly, from 60.9% in 2010 to 91% in 2021. The average life expectancy is 76.3 years, with 17.2 healthy years after the age of 60, ranking 42nd out of 183 countries.

Currently, Vietnam has made significant efforts to ensure gender equality through laws, strategies, and policies. This is evident in most areas, from politics and economics to culture and society. The proportion of women participating in the National Assembly for the 2021-2026 term reached 30.26%, an increase of 3.54% compared to the previous term, making Vietnam one of the countries with female representation in the National Assembly exceeding 25% in the Asia-Pacific region (Thu, 2023).

Regarding unemployment and informal labor, there are currently about 4 million people engaged in self-subsistence work in agriculture. At the same time, some young people have not completed their studies or vocational training, leading to a lack of skills and the inability to join the workforce. As of 2023, the labor force in rural areas still accounts for 62.7%, indicating that informal labor remains widespread. This informal workforce is not protected by labor-related laws or policies, as well as labor market and

social welfare policies. The labor market is still slow to develop and lacks sustainability (Thanh, Tri, & Thang, 2024). Although many policies aimed at developing the labor market have been implemented, their effectiveness has not met expectations, especially in providing care and support for the informal labor group. Improving this situation is essential to ensure comprehensive and sustainable development for Vietnam's workforce.

Regarding the development gap and the disparity between rural, mountainous areas, and cities, survey data shows that from 2002 to 2022, this gap has significantly narrowed but remains quite wide. Wealth disparity is evident in all aspects of life, from economic and spiritual culture to opportunities for labor market participation, employment, and access to education and healthcare. Notably, the disparity in asset ownership and housing among social classes is becoming increasingly pronounced, with wealthier and more affluent groups benefiting more and faster than poorer and near-poor groups. In terms of educational equity, the dropout rate among children, particularly among ethnic minority children in difficult areas, remains high. The enrollment rate for ethnic minority children is lower than the national average, while support policies for ethnic minority students have not adequately met actual needs. Although education and training are considered a top national priority, Vietnam has yet to provide free education for all. However, the country has made significant strides, such as eradicating illiteracy and achieving universal primary education since 2000, as well as universal lower secondary education since 2010. Currently, the literacy rate among people aged 15 to 60 is 97.85%, and 90.8% of newly literate individuals continue to pursue education to avoid falling back into illiteracy. Additionally, the proportion of the workforce receiving vocational training continues to rise, especially among skilled laborers, meeting the new demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. These efforts reflect Vietnam's determination to improve the quality of education and narrow the development gap among regions (Tri & Thanh, 2023).

Regarding equity in healthcare, despite investments and upgrades, overcrowding in central hospitals persists, making it difficult for people in rural and mountainous areas to access advanced healthcare services. While the grassroots healthcare system and preventive services are prioritized for development, they still do not fully meet the needs of a segment of the population. The quality of healthcare services for the poor is often lower than that for higher-income groups, leading to inequality in access to medical services. The private healthcare system is developing slowly and does not ensure fairness between public and private healthcare, creating barriers to providing quality medical services for all citizens. These issues need to be addressed to ensure that all individuals have equal rights in healthcare access.

4.3. Solutions to address social issues to meet the requirements for sustainable development in Vietnam

From the consistent and unified approach of the Party and State to the tangible achievements in social progress and equity, Vietnam's development stands as an example of the "progressive, humane, and modern" society the nation aspires to build. The XIII National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam reaffirmed the critical importance of managing sustainable social development, emphasizing that social progress and equity must be pursued in conjunction with "synchronized and comprehensive objectives for economic development, social progress, equity, and environmental protection." This comprehensive vision reflects the Party's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all aspects of development contribute to the well-being of society, while also safeguarding the environment for future generations.

To achieve these multifaceted goals, the Congress highlighted the importance of the rational allocation of resources, ensuring that investments in social development initiatives are both effective and equitable. This involves fostering a coherent institutional framework and implementing policies that promote sustainable social development. In doing so, Vietnam aims to harmonize economic growth with social and environmental objectives, ensuring that progress in one domain does not come at the expense of another (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p. 147-148).

In this context, realizing social progress and equity requires focusing on several key directions and solutions. These include improving access to education and healthcare for all citizens, promoting social welfare programs that address the needs of vulnerable populations, and reducing income disparities. Additionally, it involves strengthening the legal and institutional structures that support social protection, ensuring that marginalized groups are included in the benefits of development. By enhancing public participation in decision-making processes and promoting transparency and accountability, Vietnam can foster a more inclusive and equitable society. Lastly, environmental sustainability must remain a central consideration, with policies that ensure economic growth does not deplete natural resources or harm ecological systems, creating a foundation for long-term, sustainable development.

Firstly, improving the social security system should focus on building a diverse, rich, and practical network that aligns with international standards while ensuring human rights and placing people at the center. The goal is to enhance the quality of life for vulnerable groups, narrowing the gap in living standards and access to social resources through solutions that promote equal opportunities. The diversity of social groups, with their varying needs, requires special attention to the aspirations of each group, while also listening to expert opinions during the policy-making and implementation processes. The social security system policies need to be redesigned in conjunction with workforce training, expanding coverage, especially for workers in the informal economy, in the context of flexible adaptation to the digital transition and the future of the digital age. A mechanism is needed to promote a robust, comprehensive, and effective social security system through collaboration among the State, businesses, and citizens in innovation and development. At the same time, it is essential to foster the creativity and proactivity of social welfare participants in both contributing to and benefiting from the system, making it sustainable and responsive to long-term social needs.

Secondly, continuing to build and implement national target programs plays a crucial role in addressing urgent social issues. These programs operationalize the planning and implementation of the Party and State's guidelines and policies to tackle social issues related to various fields such as economics, politics, culture, security, and national defense. They allow for the concentration of resources and leadership to address significant social problems within a specific timeframe. National target programs have a clear systemic nature, from defining objectives and target groups to mobilizing necessary resources and establishing timelines for implementation. This enhances management efficiency, from planning and coordinating to executing and evaluating outcomes. These programs not only reduce administrative burdens but also open up possibilities for mobilizing resources from the people and fostering international cooperation. By focusing on social issues, they require close coordination between government levels and the community. The broad participation of citizens and support from foreign partners have and will continue to enhance the socialization process in management and program implementation. In the coming time, it is essential to strengthen decentralization in management to clearly define the roles and functions of various government levels while integrating programs and projects for maximum

effectiveness.

Moreover, it is essential to cultivate a vibrant cultural environment that enriches the cultural and spiritual lives of citizens. This involves addressing the cultural consumption disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as among different regions and income groups. Additionally, efforts should be made to harmonize the preservation of traditional cultural identities with investments in cultural development, particularly in ethnic minority regions. Furthermore, enhancing cultural, sports, and recreational facilities within industrial and export processing zones is crucial for improving the overall quality of life for workers.

Thirdly, to continue improving social policies and social security policies that align with the level of socio-economic development, it is crucial to review the effectiveness of existing policies, especially those for ethnic minority communities. The social and social security policy system should be built based on the characteristics and specific conditions of each region, as well as the culture of each ethnic group, to ensure appropriateness and effectiveness. At the same time, socializing social welfare activities will help expand the welfare network, ensuring benefits for a larger number of people and narrowing the income gap between the Kinh majority and ethnic minority groups.

Sustainable poverty reduction needs to be approached from a multidimensional perspective, where the review and assessment of poor households must be conducted transparently and publicly. Measures to motivate the poor to become self-reliant are very important, ensuring they can access and effectively use loan capital. Successful poverty reduction models within the community should be replicated, and monitoring and evaluation efforts should be strengthened to ensure that programs are implemented according to their objectives. Notably, the national target programs for socio-economic development for ethnic minorities must align with their living conditions and culture. Simultaneously, training and skill enhancement for the workforce must be connected with market demands, ensuring practicality and the ability to meet employment needs. Close coordination among schools, families, and businesses in career guidance is a key factor. For ethnic minorities, especially those of working age, participation in vocational training needs to be strongly promoted, with curricula suitable for their levels and understanding. Policies to support labor export should also be effectively implemented to expand job opportunities for citizens. Additionally, the role of socio-political organizations in advising, supporting, and providing employment information for migrants should be emphasized to help them quickly stabilize their lives in new locations.

Fourthly, to continue building institutions and resources for managing the social sector, it is essential to strengthen the state's oversight and control over all self-managed social institutions to ensure they operate by legal regulations. This helps maintain stability and sustainability in managing social activities. At the same time, it is necessary to establish coordination mechanisms among state institutions, socio-political organizations, and self-managed social organizations to develop and enhance the role of self-managed entities. These institutions can gradually take on and support social work, sharing responsibilities with the state and socio-political organizations.

Additionally, it is important to strengthen the management apparatus and train personnel responsible for social affairs, ensuring that this team has the capacity and expertise to address social issues effectively. In particular, training social workers at the grassroots level—such as villages, communes, and businesses is crucial. They are key actors capable of detecting and addressing problems at their roots, contributing to the development of a high-quality workforce to comprehensively and promptly tackle

social challenges.

Furthermore, to enhance resources for the social security system, it is necessary to apply diverse and effective integration measures to optimize resource utilization in implementing social security policies. First, the state needs to focus investments on areas with low access to social services, especially remote and mountainous regions, to improve access for people and children. Additionally, mobilizing more social and international resources is essential to address urgent social issues. At the same time, barriers in the institutional framework for utilizing resources for social development programs must be removed, particularly for national target programs such as sustainable poverty reduction, rural development, and socio-economic support for ethnic minority regions and particularly difficult areas. These efforts will significantly contribute to ensuring social security and sustainable development nationwide.

5. Conclusions

Addressing social issues plays a fundamental role in Vietnam's journey toward sustainable development. Nearly 40 years of international integration have brought significant transformations to the country, from achieving impressive economic growth rates to increasingly evident prosperity in the lives of its citizens. Indicators of quality of life continue to improve, the poverty rate has significantly declined, and the social security system is becoming more comprehensive, ensuring social equity and care for vulnerable groups. Vietnam aims to become a modern industrial nation by 2030, achieving high middle-income status, and rising as a developed country with high income by 2045. To achieve these important milestones, enhancing state management capacity, building a comprehensive social security system, and promoting sustainable growth models are urgent tasks. This requires not only a focus on economic development but also ensuring harmony with social factors, environmental protection, and improving the quality of life for all citizens. In this process, the proactive participation of the community is a core factor, allowing all social strata to benefit from social and economic advancements. When the entire society comes together, every citizen has the opportunity to access education, healthcare, and essential social services, which creates a solid foundation for a stable and developing society. Encouraging community involvement in the development process not only ensures equitable distribution of development benefits but also helps strengthen social consensus, creating internal strength for Vietnam to progress swiftly and steadily on the path to becoming a comprehensively developed nation. Only by addressing social issues comprehensively and sustainably can Vietnam confidently advance on the path of stable and long-term development, creating a bright future for generations to come.

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