

## The Four Propositions for Sustainable Human Development

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The concepts of environmental sustainability and human/social development are commonly referenced in politics, business, and social sectors worldwide. Although they are often associated with each other, these two ideas have largely been conceptualized, researched, and measured separately. Historically, great distinctions have been made between the disciplines of environmental sustainability and human development, which has contributed to communication barriers between the fields and research that has been narrowly focused within each discipline. Thus, large gaps exist in our understanding of how to balance human development and environmental sustainability. In order to develop practical policy guidance, a new theoretical framework is needed.

In order to fill such policy gaps, the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict, and Complexity (AC4) and the Agirre Lehendakaria Center for Social and Political Studies (ALC) have been collaborating to build a new framework for sustainable human development (SHD). Broadly defined, SHD is the resulting synthesis of human development and environmental sustainability. It generally emphasizes equitable human and social development, maintaining environmental integrity, and ensuring that these conditions also be attainable for future generations.

Previous work in this field has tried to promote, measure, and ultimately begin to connect human development and environmental sustainability. Indices such as the Human Development Index, the Global Peace Index, and the World Happiness Report comprehensively measure various aspects of human well-being. Meanwhile, indices like the Environmental Performance Index, Environmental Vulnerability Index, Sustainable Society Index, and the Environmental Sustainability Index assess socio-economic and ecological components of sustainability. Although these indices enable us to observe and measure characteristics of human development and environmental sustainability, they lack a unified theoretical framework. Rather, existing indices and measures were developed in response to a variety of international, national, and programmatic development agendas. This leads to inconsistencies in their theoretical backgrounds and broader goals.

An important advance in our understanding of SHD was made by Juan Jose Ibarretxe Markuatu's 2012 report, *The Basque Case: A Comprehensive Model of Sustainable Human Development*. This work offers a detailed framework of this synthesis as it exists in the context of the Basque Country. Ibarretxe's model investigates the pursuit of SHD under the extreme circumstances that have historically characterized the Basque social, political, and economic landscapes. *The Basque Case* demonstrates how economic growth, human development, and environmental sustainability can be integrated in a holistic, context-specific model of SHD. The Basque model presents a sophisticated understanding of how social

cohesion, innovative practices for economic development, and a commitment to ecological sustainability can be effectively integrated for sustainable human development. We determined that analyzing the impact of various external events and conditions, vertical structures of governance, and internal mechanisms and strategies for conflict resolution would advance this model further.

At AC4, we synthesized the results of extensive interdisciplinary reviews, assessments of sustainability-related indices, and an analysis of *The Basque Case* to propose a new unified framework to guide future research and policy development. This framework is known as the **Four Propositions for Sustainable Human Development**. We hypothesize that the following four propositions are essential to pursuing SHD:

- 1) SHD involves the prevention of deprivation of basic human needs.
- 2) SHD involves the promotion of individual agency, equity, and the opportunity for people to define and pursue individual values alone and within social groupings and organizations of varying size and scope.
- 3) SHD involves the safeguarding of public, social, and environmental goods over time and across locations.
- 4) SHD involves resolving conflicts between competing interests and needs through the creation of cooperative social, political, economic, and environmental institutions.

In order to move this hypothesis forward, we are conducting further research to test and expand upon the Four Propositions. As we learned from our reviews and synthesis of existing measures, one of the key knowledge gaps in the field surrounds the type of institutions that enable constructive engagement around basic needs, the pursuit of subjective values, and environmental conflict. To further explore this, we are building statistical and computational models to test aspects of Proposition 4 and their relationship to indices associated with Propositions 1-3. By using theoretical, statistical, and computational models to refine our hypothesis, we will expand the Four Propositions into a unified, comprehensive theory of SHD that will provide relevant, effective research and policy guidance in the future.

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