

## Sustainable Development: A Path to Economic Development in Iraq

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### Abstract

This study evaluates the impact of sustainability practices on the economic indicators of countries. The research sample consisted of 200 individuals, including professors and students from the College of Economics at the University of Baghdad, who served as the basis for collecting the necessary data to measure the research variables. This methodology employs a mixed approach that combines quantitative data from questionnaires with secondary data from national and international reports. The most significant results indicate sustainable development practices, such as improving certain environmental practices, investing in renewable energy, enhancing education and health, and supporting economic indicators. This study recommends establishing a comprehensive development strategy, increasing investment in renewable energy, and promoting innovation and economic diversification.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, economic growth, Iraq, renewable energy.

### INTRODUCTION

Historically, oil has been the single most important source of revenue and growth in Iraq. However, a single resource has made Iraq's economy fragile and vulnerable to fluctuations in global oil prices, and has hindered the diversification of its economic base. "The growth of the Iraqi economy has been inconsistent, with periods of rapid growth followed by sharp declines" (Al-Tamimi, Al-Azzawi, 2021, p. 45). The country has also faced significant challenges, which have left infrastructure damaged, hindering further development.

In contrast, sustainable development is a comprehensive approach that seeks to achieve a balance between the economy, social justice, and the environment. The United Nations Sustainability Goals (SDGs) provide a development framework with 17 goals and 169 subtargets that address different aspects of sustainability (United Nations, 2015). These include ending poverty and hunger, ensuring health and education, gender equality, and promoting clean energy. Therefore, sustainable development can be considered a strategy for building a resilient and diversified economy that can withstand external shocks and promote inclusive growth. Al-Saadi and Al-Hayani (2020) argue that "sustainable development is essential for Iraq to achieve economic stability and improve the quality of life of its citizens" (Al-Saadi, Al-Hayani, p. 78). At the environmental level, there is a scarcity of drinking water, spread of desertification, and pollution. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which are the country's lifelines, are threatened by overuse and pollution. According to Al-Ansari (2019), "the degradation of water resources is a major concern with serious implications for agriculture, health, and economic development in general" (Al-Ansari, 2019, p. 123). Social sustainability is particularly important at the social level given the country's history of conflict and displacement. Economic sustainability in Iraq is closely linked to the need to reduce the dominance of a single sector and to support non-oil pluralism. According to Al-Saadi and Al-Hayani (2020), "Economic diversification is essential for Iraq to achieve

sustainable economic growth and reduce vulnerability to external shocks” (Al-Saadi, Al-Hayani, 2020, p. 102). By balancing the economic, social, and environmental sectors, Iraq can build a resilient and diversified economy that can foster inclusive growth. While a country faces significant challenges, it also has opportunities to leverage its resources and strategic location. This promotes economic diversity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability, which are essential to Iraq’s long-term well-being.

Accordingly, this study deals with sustainable development in Iraq and its economic role. This paper is divided into three sections. The first section deals with sustainable development, the second section deals with development, the third section is devoted to practical aspects, the fourth section deals with practical aspects, and finally, the conclusions and recommendations of the research are presented.

### **Research Problem**

Iraq faces significant challenges in achieving sustainable economic development due to its dependence on oil, political instability, and environmental degradation. Despite these challenges, there is a lack of research on the role of sustainability in supporting economic growth and lasting stability. We aim to address this issue by exploring the potential of sustainable development practices that contribute to real economic development in Iraq.

### **Research Objective**

It specifically aims to:

1. Explore the current state of development in Iraq, including its dependence on oil.
2. Evaluate the impact of sustainable development practices on Iraq’s economic growth.
3. Develop key policies and strategies that can promote effective sustainable development.
4. Develop proposals for policymakers and stakeholders to promote economic development through sustainable practices.

### **Research importance**

1. The results will provide a clear picture for policy makers and stakeholders to activate and implement effective policies that promote sustainable economic development.
2. By highlighting the importance of sustainable development, the study can contribute to the efforts of a diversified Iraqi economy and reduce its dependence on oil.
3. This study emphasizes the social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development, which are essential for improving the quality of life and safety of Iraq's natural resources.
4. The study will contribute to the academic literature on sustainable development, especially in the context of developing countries facing major challenges.

## **Research hypothesis**

To answer the question posed in the research problem and reach the research objectives, the research hypothesis was formulated as follows: Sustainable development affects economic development in Iraq.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study used a descriptive analytical approach. The aim is to describe and analyze existing phenomena or events. The main focus of the approach is to understand events and phenomena and the interactions between them and to analyze them to reach deeper explanations and understanding of them. Data from Arab and foreign research and websites will be relied on. The researcher will also conduct applied research by adopting a research form and analyzing the results.

## **RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Section One: Theoretical part**

#### **The concept of sustainable development**

This is a multifaceted concept that seeks to respond to needs without compromising the rights of future generations. This definition, first presented by the Brentland Commission in 1987, has been adopted and expanded. Sustainability aims to balance these three pillars to ensure long-term prosperity and well-being.

1. The economic dimension focuses on promoting growth and stability while ensuring that resources are used efficiently and fairly. This includes promoting sustainable patterns of production and consumption, reducing poverty, and improving economic opportunities. Achieving sustainable economic growth requires transitioning to a low-carbon economy and adopting the principles of a circular economy.
2. The social dimension emphasizes the importance of social justice, inclusiveness, and wellbeing. This includes ensuring healthcare, education, enhancing social cohesion, and reducing inequalities. A recent study by the United Nations Development Program (2020) indicated the need for strong support programs to support vulnerable groups and ensure that no one is left behind (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p. 15).
3. Environmental dimensions related to the protection and rehabilitation of natural ecosystems, conservation of biodiversity, and treatment of environmental degradation. This includes reducing pollution and resource management. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2019), urgent and ambitious actions are required to avoid the most severe impacts of climate change (IPCC, 2019, p. 14).

Sustainable development is, therefore, multidisciplinary in nature and requires an integrated path with economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This comprehensive perspective is essential for developing effective policies and strategies.

#### **Sustainable Development aims:**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 interconnected goals aimed at achieving relative well-being and addressing a wide range of social, economic, and environmental issues by 2030. These goals build on the success of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and are more comprehensive and diverse, covering a broader range of issues and interests. (UNDP, 2020)

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They are divided into five main areas known as the 5Ps:

1. **People:** This area focuses on improving the quality of life for all individuals by reducing poverty, promoting health and education.
2. **Planet:** addresses environmental issues such as preserving clean water and sustainable energy, and combating climate change.
3. **Prosperity:** aims to achieve sustainable economic growth and create decent jobs for all.
4. **Peace:** seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure justice and build strong institutions.
5. **Partnerships:** Emphasizes the importance of collaboration between governments, businesses and civil society to achieve shared goals. The 17 goals include:
  - **No poverty:** End all forms of poverty by 2030.
  - **Zero hunger:** Ensure access to sufficient and nutritious food
  - **Good health and well-being:** Promotes good health and well-being for all.
  - **Quality education:** Ensure inclusive and equitable education
  - **Gender equality:** Achieving gender equality and empowering women
  - **Clean water and sanitation:** Ensure the availability and quality of clean water and sanitation.
  - **Affordable and clean energy:** Provides access to affordable and sustainable energy.
  - **Decent work and economic growth:** Promote sustainable economic growth and decent work for all.
  - **Industry, innovation, and infrastructure:** Build resilient infrastructure and foster industrial innovation.
  - **Reduce inequalities:** Reduce gaps between countries and individuals.
  - **Sustainable cities and communities:** Make cities safe, inclusive, and sustainable.
  - **Responsible consumption and production:** Promotes sustainable consumption and production patterns.
  - **Climate action:** Take urgent action to address climate change and its impact.
  - **Below water life:** Protecting oceans, seas, and marine resources.
  - **Life on land:** Managing forests and combating desertification to preserve biodiversity.
  - **Peace, justice, and strong institutions:** promoting peaceful societies and providing access to justice.
  - **Partnerships for goals:** strengthening global partnerships for sustainable development.

The goals provide a comprehensive and integrated approach to achieving a sustainable future, as each goal is interconnected and progress in one area can positively impact others. Collaborative efforts are required to ensure a just, prosperous, and sustainable world.

## **Section Two: Economic Development**

### **The concept of economic development**

This comprehensive mechanism aims to improve the well-being and quality of life of a particular community or region. This process includes the implementation of policies and strategies to promote poverty reduction and establish social justice. It is not just growth but also about ensuring that the benefits of growth are distributed fairly and sustainably.

The basic components of this development include creating a supportive infrastructure; supporting education, skills, and technological innovation; and creating an appropriate business environment. Investing in supportive infrastructure greatly supports activities by reducing costs and improving efficiency (World Bank, 2022, p. 15). In addition, enhancing educational opportunities and workforce training programs can create a more skilled workforce, which is essential to drive innovation and productivity (OECD, 2021, p23)

### **Economic development aims**

These goals are multifaceted and aim to enhance the overall well-being and quality of life of a particular community or region. One of the primary goals is to promote economic growth, which includes increasing the production of goods and services to improve the standard of living. However, it is essential to ensure that this growth is inclusive and sustainable (International Monetary Fund, 2022, p. 12) Another key goal is to reduce poverty and inequality by creating jobs and providing opportunities for all segments of the population, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups (World Bank, 2021, p. 18) It as well as transportation, energy, and communications systems to facilitate economic activities and enhance productivity (OECD, 2022, p. 24). In addition, enhancing education and health services is a critical goal, as a skilled and healthy workforce is essential for continued success (United Nations, 2023, p. 30) Finally, environmental sustainability to prevent long-term environmental damage (Global Environment Facility, 2021, p. 15)

### **Types of economic development**

They can be classified into several types, each with distinct characteristics and strategies. The most important of these are:

- **Industrial development:** Focus on promoting industrial sector growth This type of development often involves government policies to attract investment, improve infrastructure, and provide incentives for businesses to establish in specific areas (World Bank, 2022, p. 20).

**Agricultural development:** Focuses on modernizing and optimizing the agricultural sector to increase productivity and food security. This can include investments in technology, irrigation systems, and training for farmers (FAO 2021, p. 15).

- **Human capital:** Focusing on improving the skills and health of the workforce through education and healthcare initiatives. This type is essential for building a skilled workforce that can drive innovation and economic growth (OECD 2022, p. 25).

- Urban development: urban infrastructure, housing, and public services. This type of development aims to create liveable and economically prosperous urban areas (United Nations, 2023, p. 30).
- Rural development aims to improve rural conditions economically and socially, often through the development of local industries, small businesses, and community services. To reduce migration and promote a balanced regional economy (IFAD 2021, 18).
- Sustainable economic development: This approach seeks to ensure that development is economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable (Global Environment Facility, 2021, p. 22).

### Third section: The applied aspect

#### Research materials

To accomplish and test the hypotheses, we relied on the questionnaire, as the first part included general information about the sample members through five questions, and the second part consisted of two main sections: the first section included questions explaining the first variable, which is sustainable development, and included three dimensions, as each dimension included five questions, and the second section included questions explaining the dependent variable and included 10 questions, so that the total number of questions in the questionnaire was 30, and the five-point Likert system was used to answer the questions.

#### Research community and sample

The field of study was represented by professors and students at the College of Administration and Economics, University of Baghdad because of the importance of this community in being knowledgeable and sufficiently understanding the study variables addressed by the researcher.

We distributed 200 direct questionnaires at the college, and (168) questionnaires were received, representing (84%) of the sample size. We excluded (18) questionnaires because of invalidity (9%). And (150) valid questionnaires were used, representing (75%) of the sample. This is shown in an explanatory table.

**Table (1): Distribution of forms**

Questionnaire	Number	Percentage%
Distributed forms	200	100
Returned forms	168	84
Analysis-valid forms	150	75

Reference: by authors.

#### Internal Construct Validity and Reliability of the Instrument:

Internal construct validity refers to the degree to which the items and scales within the questionnaire accurately measure the concepts or theoretical constructs that they are intended to assess. In other words, it is the extent to which the questionnaire measures what it claims. Different measurement techniques such as factor analysis, reliability, and correlation can be used to assess the internal construct validity of a sample questionnaire. These methods help in determining whether the scale has good internal consistency (i.e., the items are well correlated with each other) and whether the scale is appropriately related to other variables that should be related to according to the theory. The scale should have high internal consistency, which means that the responses to different items should be related. Scores were positively correlated.

• Therefore, establishing internal construct validity requires careful consideration of how the items and scales were developed, how they relate to external criteria, and how consistent they are across time and contexts. A questionnaire with strong internal construct validity provides confidence that the measurements reflect the true state of the measured construct. As the analysis shows:

**Table (2) Internal construct validity**

M	Domain	correlation	Sig	Phrases	Sample
				30	150
	<b>Sustainable Development</b>	0.9010	0.00		
	<b>Economic Development</b>	0.8820	0.00		

Reference: by authors.

The first correlation was 0.9010, which was considered very strong. This indicates a strong and direct relationship between the measured statements.

The strength of the second correlation was 0.8820, which is also very strong. This indicates a strong and direct relationship between the measured statements.

The significance level was set at 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that the test was highly statistically significant.

• Reliability: Using several methods, the most important of which is

**- Cronbach's alpha scale:**

Commonly used to estimate reliability, the Cronbach's alpha calculates the average intercorrelation between all parts of the items in the scale. Specifically, it estimates the proportion of variance in the overall score, which is due to the true variance in the construct being measured rather than the error variance. The coefficient ranges from zero to one.

A value above 0.7 is generally acceptable for research purposes, while values between 0.6 and 0.7 may be acceptable depending on the nature of the study and the specific items being measured. Values less than 0.6 indicate poor internal consistency. Very high alpha coefficients may indicate redundancy in the items and indicate that some items may be removed to improve the effectiveness of the scale.

The process of calculating Cronbach's alpha involves calculating the mean of the elements of the diagonal of the variance matrix divided by the sum of the squared standard deviation of each element multiplied by the number of elements minus one. As follows:

$$\alpha = (n / (n - 1)) * ((\sum \sigma_x^2) / (\sum s_{xy}))$$

Cronbach's alpha is a basic measure for assessing internal consistency, as it demonstrates the reliability of the scale and its ability to effectively capture the intended construct.

**Table (3): Alpha Scale**

Topics	stability	honesty	phrases
<b>Sustainable Development</b>	.87	.88	15
<b>Economic Development</b>	.93	.89	10
<b>Mean</b>	.90	.885	

Reference: by authors.

The questionnaire appears to achieve a good level of reliability and validity for all axes, with reliability values for all axes ranging from .87 to .93 and validity between .87 and .91. The questionnaire was considered reliable and valid for use in sampling and data collection.

### Repetition reliability method

Repetition reliability, also called test-retest reliability, is a type of reliability assessment that examines the stability or consistency of a measurement over repeated administrations of the same instrument. This approach assumes that there are no significant changes in the construct being measured during the time interval between testing occasions. The process typically involves administering the questionnaire to a group of participants for the first time and again after a specified period of time, usually ranging from days to weeks or months. The researchers determined the correlation coefficient between both time points to determine the level of agreement between them. Higher correlation coefficients indicated stronger reliability. Test-retest reliability is particularly useful when researchers aim to demonstrate the temporal stability or repeatability of a measurement, particularly if the construct being measured is relatively stable. This method is suitable for measuring attitudes, personality traits, and cognitive abilities, which are thought to be enduring characteristics.

However, several factors can affect test-retest reliability, including memory effects, practice effects, maturation effects, and situational differences. Memory effects refer to the participants remembering their previous answers, leading to artificially inflated associations. Practice effects occur when participants become familiar with the task and perform better in subsequent attempts. Maturation refers to the natural changes that occur between testing occasions, affecting the construct being measured. Situational differences include differences in environmental conditions, instructions, and participant motivations, which can lead to inconsistent results. Researchers should carefully consider these potential sources of bias and monitor any extraneous variables that may have influenced the results. They can use strategies, such as counterbalancing, randomizing, changing the intervals between tests, or using alternative forms of the same test to reduce the influence of confounding factors. Despite its limitations, test-retest reliability remains a valuable tool for assessing the consistency of measurements over time. The questionnaire was tested twice on 14 academics over a given period (12 days); these were the test extracts.

**Table (4) Reliability**

No.	Topics	Scale	%
1	<b>Sustainable Development</b>	.900	.013
2	<b>Economic Development</b>	.886	.012
	<b>Mean</b>	.893	.012

Reference: by authors.

The alpha coefficient for sustainable development is 0.900. This indicates that the scale used has very high reliability. The scale exceeded the minimum acceptable limit (0.70), confirming the robustness and stability of the measurements.



The economic development coefficient is 0.886. This also indicates that the scale used has very high reliability. This confirmed the robustness and stability of the measurements.

Average: The modified Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.893. This indicates that the overall average of the two scales has very high reliability.

### Testing the research hypothesis

The research is based on the main hypothesis, from which three sub-hypotheses branch out:

H1: Improving environmental practices leads to increasing economic productivity and sustainability in Iraq.

H2: Investing in renewable energy contributes to increasing economic growth in Iraq.

H3: Improving education and health levels leads to increasing economic productivity in Iraq.

First hypothesis:

H0: Improving environmental practices does not affect increasing economic productivity in Iraq.

H1: Improving environmental practices increases economic productivity in Iraq. It produced the following extracts:

**Table (5): Extracts of the first sub-hypothesis test**

Increase economic productivity	Model indicators						Levels		
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig	Durbin-Watson	B	T	Sig
Constant	0.887	0.32	0.30	11.43	0.00	2.2	2.571	3.302	0.00
Improving environmental practices							0.363	3.692	0.00

Reference: by authors.

Conclude:

R: Extent of the association between improving environmental practices and increasing economic productivity. The value of R = 0.88, i.e. a strong association.

R2: Change in "economic productivity, " explained by improving environmental practices, by 32%

Adjusted R2: Shows the adjusted change, which reached 30%

F: Tests the effect of improving environmental practices on "economic productivity F = 11.4. (i.e., there was a significant effect).

B: Value of directional slope of relationship. It reached 2.571 to improve environmental practices.

T: The value of t for improving environmental practices is 4.966, Sig is 0.00, that is, there is a significant effect of improving environmental practices on "economic productivity" and produces an effect model:

$$y = 2.571 + 0.363x + \varepsilon$$

Where changing environmental practices to a degree increases economic productivity by 0.363.

### Second hypothesis

H0: Investing in renewable energy has no significant effect on economic growth in Iraq.

H1: Investing in renewable energy has a significant effect on economic growth in Iraq.

**Table (6): Results of the second sub-hypothesis test**

Economic growth	Model indicators						Levels		
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig	Durbin-Watson	B	T	Sig
Constant	0.83	0.27	0.26	16.7	0.00	2.34	1.82	6.501	0.00
Renewable energy							0.14	3.242	0.00

Reference: by authors.

R: indicates that the amount of correlation between the two variables R=0.83 here is 0.832, that is, there is a strong correlation

R<sup>2</sup> shows the change in economic growth "explained by investment in renewable energy by 27%.

The Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> shows the adjusted change and reached 26%.

: F tests the effect of investment in renewable energy on "economic growth". F=16.7 here is 16.76, Sig. is 0.00, that is, there is a significant effect.

: B The value of the directional slope reached 3.22 for investment in renewable energy.

T: The value of t for investment in renewable energy is 6.501 and the value of Sig is 0.00, that is, there is a significant effect.

We get the equation:

$$y = 1.828 + 0.14x + \varepsilon$$

That is, increasing investment in renewable energy by a certain degree raises economic growth by 14%.

### Third hypothesis

H0: There is no significant relationship between improving education and health levels and enhancing economic productivity in Iraq.

H1: There is a significant relationship between improving education and health levels and enhancing economic productivity in Iraq.

**Table (7): Results of testing the third sub-hypothesis**

Economic productivity	Model indicators						Levels		
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig	Durbin-Watson	B	T	Sig
Constant	0.80	0.29	0.28	21.11	0.00	2.2	1.44	4.96	0.00
Education and health levels							0.293	4.595	0.00

Reference: by authors.

The study concludes that improving education and health levels has a significant impact on economic productivity. The following conclusions were reached:

R indicates the extent of the association between improved education, health levels, and economic productivity. R=0.80, indicating a strong association.

R<sup>2</sup> shows the change in "economic productivity, " explained by improving education and health levels, with a value of 29%.

: Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> explains the adjusted change and reaches 28%.

: F tests the effect of improving education and health levels on "economic productivity A value of 11.4, i.e. there is a significant effect.

: B The value of the directional slope for education and health levels is 1.445.

T: The value of t for improving education and health levels is 4.966, and the value of Sig is 0.00, that is, there is a significant effect. We conclude the model:

$$y = 1.445 + 0.293x + \varepsilon$$

i.e. increasing education and health levels increases economic productivity by 29%.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to what was discussed in the theoretical framework to explain the concept of research variables as well as presenting the most important results of the scientific analysis, we conclude the conclusions and recommendations as follows:

### Conclusions

- 1- There is a significant relationship between improving environmental practices and increasing economic productivity. As improving these practices increases economic productivity in Iraq, R = 0.88.
- 2- There is a significant effect between investing in renewable energy and economic growth, the value of R = 0.83.
- 3- There is a significant effect between education and health levels and economic productivity, the value of R = 0.80.
- 4- Sustainable development in its dimensions contributes to economic development in Iraq.

### Recommendations

The study presented a number of recommendations that can be explained as follows:

1. Implement strict legislation aimed at reducing pollution and improving environmental quality.
2. Provide financial incentives for companies that adhere to environmentally friendly practices.
3. Develop government policies that encourage investment in alternative energy.
4. Develop the necessary infrastructure to exploit alternative energy sources.
5. Increase the budget for the education and health sectors. In addition to developing educational curricula and improving the quality of health services.
6. Establish an integrated system to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development programs.
7. Conduct periodic studies to evaluate the economic impact of sustainable development.
8. Provide incentives to companies that take the initiative to adopt environmentally friendly technologies.
9. Encourage local community participation in sustainable development initiatives.
10. Develop community awareness programs on sustainable development.

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