

AN ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM OF SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: AMARTYA SEN'S IDEAS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR INDONESIA

PENDEKATAN KAPABILITAS AMARTYA SEN SEBAGAI PARADIGMA ALTERNATIF PEMBANGUNAN BERKELANJUTAN DI INDONESIA

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Abstract

The dominant development paradigm in developing countries has long been shaped by conventional economic models that emphasize Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and market efficiency, often neglecting the dimensions of ecological justice and citizens' substantive freedoms. This article examines the capability approach developed by Amartya Sen as a conceptual alternative that positions human freedom and environmental quality as integral components of development. Employing a conceptual research method grounded in recent literature, this study proposes an integration of the capability framework and ecological justice as both ethical and practical foundations for sustainable development in Indonesia. The findings demonstrate that Amartya Sen's capability approach functions as a strategic development model for achieving sustainable environmental development by reorienting policy priorities from mere economic efficiency toward the systematic expansion of ecological and human capabilities, particularly among vulnerable groups. The application of this model requires the formulation of relevant development indicators, the strengthening of inclusive public participation, and the protection of community-managed territories as core instruments of a long-term, equitable, and sustainable environmental development strategy.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Amartya Sen, Capability Approach, Ecological Justice, Environmental Policy

Abstrak

Paradigma pembangunan dominan di negara-negara berkembang telah lama dibentuk oleh pendekatan konvensional yang menekankan pertumbuhan Produk Domestik Bruto (PDB) dan efisiensi pasar, seringkali mengabaikan dimensi keadilan ekologi dan kebebasan substansial warga. Artikel ini mengkaji pendekatan kapabilitas yang dikembangkan oleh Amartya Sen sebagai alternatif konseptual yang menempatkan kebebasan manusia dan kualitas lingkungan sebagai komponen integral pembangunan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian konseptual yang didasarkan pada literatur terkini. Studi ini mengusulkan integrasi kerangka kapabilitas dan keadilan ekologi sebagai dasar etis dan praktis bagi pembangunan berkelanjutan di Indonesia. Temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan kapabilitas Amartya Sen berfungsi sebagai model pembangunan strategis untuk mencapai pembangunan lingkungan yang berkelanjutan dengan mengalihkan prioritas kebijakan dari efisiensi ekonomi semata menuju perluasan sistematis kapabilitas ekologi dan manusia, terutama di kalangan kelompok rentan. Penerapan model ini memerlukan perumusan indikator pembangunan, penguatan partisipasi

publik yang inklusif, dan perlindungan wilayah yang dikelola masyarakat sebagai instrumen inti dari strategi pembangunan lingkungan yang jangka panjang, adil, dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: *Pembangunan Berkelanjutan, Amartya Sen, Pendekatan Kapabilitas, Keadilan Ekologis, Kebijakan Lingkungan*

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has emerged as a central theme in global discourse, particularly within developing countries that face substantial challenges in balancing the demands of economic growth with ecological sustainability and social justice. Over the past few decades, the dominant approach in development economics has tended to emphasize Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, investment expansion, and market efficiency (Algaed, 2021); (Ferraz et al., 2025). This paradigm is grounded in the assumption that economic growth will automatically lead to widespread societal welfare (Petrakis, 2020); (Pelsa & Balina, 2022). However, such a model often neglects substantive dimensions such as environmental quality, ecological justice, and citizens' substantive freedoms to participate meaningfully in the development process. This oversight is exacerbated by growing environmental degradation such as massive deforestation, air and water pollution, and large-scale land conversion which not only disrupts ecosystems but also threatens basic human access to vital resources (Coyle, 2017); (Adrangi & Kerr, 2022). These challenges are not limited to theoretical discussions at the global level but are also evident in the practical development landscape of Indonesia.

In the Indonesian context, this conventional approach is manifested in various national strategic policies that prioritize natural resource exploitation to drive economic growth, with inadequate consideration for environmental and social consequences. The result is growing ecological vulnerability across multiple regions, especially in coastal areas susceptible to climate change and other ecological pressures. Notably, 42 million people in Indonesia live less than 10 meters above sea level, rendering them vulnerable to coastal flooding and saltwater intrusion (Koons, 2024). The agricultural sector, which employs approximately 29% of the national workforce, has experienced significant damage from floods and droughts, affecting nearly 10% of agricultural land between 2015 and 2019 and impacting 19.6 million people (Othering & Institute, 2025). Meanwhile, forest cover has declined dramatically, from 87% in 1950 to just 48% in 2022, primarily due to the expansion of cash crops and palm oil plantations (Gunawan et al., 2024); (Landrum, 2025).

In addition, Indonesia is facing a serious water and sanitation crisis. While 92% of the population reportedly has access to clean water sources, only about 45% are connected to piped water systems, and only 86% have access to improved sanitation, with sewer coverage remaining at a mere 1% (Komarulzaman et al., 2016); (Umami et al., 2022). These conditions have led to severe public health challenges and have widened socio-ecological inequalities. The dominant framework, which prioritizes market efficiency, natural resource valuation, and technical tools such as carbon taxes and emissions trading, has proven insufficient in addressing ecological justice and human freedoms in a comprehensive manner. It often overlooks how environmental degradation such as coastal reclamation, mining, and large infrastructure projects directly restricts the living capabilities of poor and marginalized communities. This reflects a development model in Indonesia that remains overly exclusive and fails to provide adequate public freedom and transparency in decision-making processes (Gumelar & Qomar, 2025).

In response to these limitations, Amartya Sen's capability approach offers a more holistic and human-centered alternative paradigm for understanding development (Fukuda-Parr & Cid-Martinez, 2019); (D'Amodio, 2020). This approach fundamentally departs from conventional income-based and resource-based measurements of development by defining development as the expansion of individuals' substantive freedoms and real

opportunities to achieve functionings they have reason to value. In Sen's perspective, well-being is not solely determined by the amount of resource or income peoples possess, but rather by what they are effectively able to do and to be within their social, economic, and environmental context (Nussbuan & Sen, 1993); (Anand et al., 2005). This approach therefore places human agency, choice, and freedom at the center of the development process, including the freedom to live in a healthy, secure, and ecologically sustainable environment. (Kuhumba, 2017). At the global level, this approach has influenced a shift in the development paradigm, as shown by Fukuda-Parr, (2003) who highlighted the move from merely providing services to fostering empowerment and real freedoms. Furthermore, the capability approach has proven effective in revealing social inequalities overlooked by traditional indicators, as demonstrated in the studies by Hobson & Fahlen, (2009), and Kumar & Pathinathan (2013), both of which underscore that true well-being is defined by individuals' real freedoms within the social spaces where they live and thrive.

Sen's thinking broadens the notion of rationality in economics by reframing development as the expansion of human freedom, not merely as economic enhancement. This freedom encompasses political, economic, and social dimensions, including institutional transparency and protection, all of which are interconnected in enabling meaningful lives (Mariani, 2023). To realize inclusive and sustainable development, the state must ensure public participation, the right to voice opinions, and the application of freedom-based principles throughout all policy stages. Sen asserts that genuine justice can only be achieved when individuals have real opportunities to fulfill their potential and aspirations (Gumelar & Qomar, 2025). His framework merges economic analysis with philosophical depth, recognizing human diversity and the importance of social contexts, thereby redefining development as a process of creating the conditions necessary for individuals to flourish holistically (Yahiaoui, 2025).

Nevertheless, existing scholarship has rarely addressed the explicit connection between capabilities and environmental concerns. In Indonesia, ecological impacts such as mining exploitation, massive deforestation in Merauke releasing hundreds of millions of tons of CO₂, marine pollution causing chronic illnesses, and coastal degradation destroying the livelihoods of fishers and smallholder farmers have led to a severe erosion of basic capabilities. These include access to water, food, safe housing, and healthcare (Lekatompessy et al., 2019); (Csevár, 2020). Recognizing this conceptual gap, the present study aims to formulate an alternative environmental economic paradigm grounded in Amartya Sen's capability approach, explicitly positioning environmental integrity as a structural component of human freedom.

This article fulfills its objectives of formulating an alternative environmental economic paradigm grounded in Amartya Sen's capability approach by systematically integrating the concepts of human freedom, ecological integrity, and justice within the framework of sustainable development. Through a critical analysis of conventional development paradigms and a conceptual synthesis of the capability approach with ecological justice, this study demonstrates that environmental integrity is not merely an external supporting factor of development, but a structural and indispensable component of human freedom. The discussion confirms that environmental quality directly determines individuals' real opportunities to achieve basic functionings, such as health, livelihood security, social participation, and dignity. Thus, the proposed paradigm is operationalized through the formulation of development indicators, the strengthening of inclusive participation, and the protection of community-managed territories as concrete institutional pathways for realizing capability-based and environmentally sustainable development in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a conceptual research design. This method is chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of Amartya Sen's thinking within the framework of the capability approach, as well as its potential as an alternative paradigm in environmental economics, particularly in the context of developing countries such as Indonesia (Csevár, 2020). The primary focus of this research is not on the collection of empirical data, but on systematic conceptual construction and theoretical synthesis derived from existing scholarly literature. This choice is justified by the normative and theoretical nature of the research objective, which seeks to formulate an alternative development paradigm rather than to measure empirical relationships or test statistical hypotheses. A conceptual approach is therefore considered the most appropriate method to critically examine, refine, and integrate Sen's capability framework with the principles of ecological justice at the level of theory and policy orientation (Hong & Pluye, 2018).

The sources of data for this study consist of both primary and secondary literature. Primary sources include the original works of Amartya Sen such as *Development as Freedom* and *The Idea of Justice* as well as writings by Martha Nussbaum and other scholars who have contributed to the development of the normative, freedom-based, and multidimensional formulation of the capability approach, particularly in relation to human well-being, agency, justice, and the role of social and environmental conditions in shaping individual capabilities. Secondary sources encompass peer-reviewed academic articles, reports from international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and various publications that critically examine the application and limitations of the capability approach within the contexts of development and environmental sustainability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relevance of the Capability Approach in the Context of Environmental Economics

The capability approach developed by Amartya Sen positions human substantive freedom at the center of the development process (Sen, 1990). In the context of environmental economics, this approach is highly relevant as it offers a broader ethical and normative framework than conventional economic paradigms, which are predominantly oriented toward efficiency and growth. Sen challenges the assumption that development is merely about increasing income or accumulating resources. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of individual freedom to live a life one has reason to value, including the freedom to live in a clean, safe, and ecologically sustainable environment (Sen, 1990); (Sen, 2010).

Within this framework, environmental degradation is viewed as a form of capability deprivation because it strips individuals of their basic rights and opportunities to survive and flourish. For instance, water pollution that harms public health, deforestation that eliminates local livelihoods, and flooding caused by land-use conversion that destroys human settlements all represent constraints on substantive freedoms. Consequently, the capability approach allows for a more human-centered analysis of environmental issues and redirects the development focus toward the restoration and protection of ecological rights as an essential component of the right to development.

To further clarify the practical relevance of Amartya Sen's capability approach within the context of environmental governance in Indonesia, the following table presents selected environmental policy sectors, their associated impacts on core human capabilities, and the resulting environmental and social outcomes. **Table 1** demonstrates how Amartya Sen's capability approach is directly applicable to various environmental policy sectors in Indonesia and highlights the resulting impacts on human well-being and ecological

sustainability. The table illustrates that environmental degradation across sectors such as forestry, coastal management, mining, water governance, and climate policy systematically constrains fundamental human capabilities, including health, livelihood security, participation, and cultural freedom (Ferrol-schulte et al., 2015); (Triyanti et al., 2023); (Sunarya, 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that environmental problems in Indonesia are not merely technical or economic in nature, but represent structural forms of capability deprivation rooted in unequal access to and control over natural resources. By linking specific policies to their impacts on human capabilities, the table provides an empirical-analytical bridge between the normative framework of the capability approach and the concrete realities of environmental governance in Indonesia. This analytical linkage also clarifies how environmental injustice translates into social vulnerability, particularly among Indigenous peoples, small-scale fishers, and rural communities (Hayward & Joseph, 2018); (Landa & Bueno, 2022); (Galappaththi et al., 2021); (Nahuelhual et al., 2025).

Table 1. Relevance of Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to Environmental Policies in Indonesia and Their Impacts

Environmental Policy Sector	Policy Example in Indonesia	Affected Capabilities (Sen)	Capability Impact	Environmental & Social Outcomes
Forestry and Land Use	Expansion of palm oil plantations and forest conversion (e.g., Kalimantan & Sumatra)	Capability to secure livelihood, health, and environmental security	Loss of traditional livelihoods, increased vulnerability to disasters, reduced health quality	Deforestation, biodiversity loss, land conflicts, increased carbon emissions
Coastal and Marine Management	Coastal reclamation and industrial fishing zones	Capability to live with dignity, access to food, and cultural identity	Marginalization of small-scale fishers, loss of access to marine resources	Coastal ecosystem degradation, declining fish stocks, erosion of local culture
Mining and Extractive Industries	Large-scale mining concessions (nickel, coal, gold)	Capability for safe living, health, and economic security	Exposure to pollution, displacement of communities, decline in agricultural productivity	Water and soil contamination, ecological destruction, social conflict
Water and Sanitation Policy	Limited access to piped clean water and sanitation infrastructure	Capability to live a healthy life and avoid preventable disease	Increased disease burden, gendered labor burdens, reduced productivity	Water pollution, poor sanitation coverage, widening health inequality
Climate Change and Disaster Risk	Climate adaptation programs and disaster mitigation policies	Capability for resilience, security, and intergenerational well-being	Unequal access to adaptive resources, high vulnerability of coastal and rural communities	Recurrent flooding, drought impacts on agriculture, food insecurity
Community-Based Resource Management	Recognition of adat forests and community-managed territories	Capability for participation, cultural freedom, and local self-determination	Strengthened local agency, improved livelihood stability	Improved forest conservation, reduced conflicts, stronger social cohesion

Source: Author's Processed Data (2025)

Limitation of the Conventional Environmental Economics Paradigm

The conventional paradigm of environmental economics, rooted in neoclassical economic theory, addresses environmental issues through instruments such as the economic valuation of natural resources, the internalization of externalities, and market-based incentive mechanisms. This approach assumes that environmental degradation can be corrected through appropriate pricing policies, such as carbon taxes, emissions trading schemes, or quota regulations (Goodstain & Polasky, 2017); (Duli, 2025). While these instruments may offer technical solutions for improving efficiency, they have proven insufficient in addressing the structural roots of ecological crises particularly in developing countries where social inequality and institutional weaknesses are pronounced (Udemba, 2021); (Xaisongkham & Liu, 2025); (Cuesta et al., 2023); (Gyamfi et al., 2024).

One of the main shortcomings of the conventional approach is its tendency to reduce environmental value to mere economic metrics. Complex ecosystems, which serve social, cultural, and spiritual functions, are often reduced to numerical values within cost-benefit analysis frameworks (Flyvbjerg & Bester, 2021); (Liu et al., 2023); (Lucchesi et al., 2024). This commodification of nature not only overlooks the rights of communities who depend on and coexist with their natural environments but also masks power asymmetries between dominant actors (e.g., corporations and states) and local communities who bear the brunt of environmental degradation. In many instances, market mechanisms exacerbate inequality, as actors with greater financial and informational resources are better equipped to leverage environmental policy instruments than vulnerable groups (Gümplová, 2021); (Aysan et al., 2023).

Another critical flaw lies in the assumption that both markets and states operate rationally and effectively in managing natural resources. In practice, environmental policies are often designed using technocratic logics without meaningful participatory consultation, which in turn generates social resistance (Fagbemi & Kotey, 2025); (Wang & Su, 2024); (Irshad, 2024). For example, carbon-based conservation projects have frequently displaced Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands under the guise of "environmental protection," despite the fact that these communities have historically stewarded ecosystems sustainably (Miles, 2021); (Urzedo & Robinson, Catherina, 2023); (Cubas-Baez et al., 2025). By failing to account for ecological and social justice, conventional approaches inadvertently create new forms of exclusion and ecological colonialism.

Moreover, conventional frameworks neglect to incorporate non-economic factors that significantly influence environmental resilience, such as power relations, land tenure structures, and political legitimacy (Froese et al., 2022). For instance, environmental degradation caused by illegal mining or large-scale land clearing in Indonesia is not merely the result of weak economic regulation, but is also rooted in corruption, legal inequality, and poor governmental accountability (Tegnan et al., 2021); (Nasir et al., 2023). Without considering these sociopolitical contexts, conventional models tend to be normative, inapplicable, and ultimately ineffective in transforming real-world conditions (Diesendorf et al., 2024).

In light of these shortcomings, there is a pressing need for a more inclusive and reflexive paradigm that is responsive to the realities of socio-ecological inequality. The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen, offers a compelling alternative by shifting the focus from economic efficiency to substantive justice. Through this lens, environmental policies are not only assessed based on their success in meeting emission targets or economic valuations, but also in terms of how effectively they expand the freedoms and capabilities of citizens to lead dignified lives within healthy and just environments.

Integrating Capabilities and Ecological Justice in Development

The integration of the capability approach with the principles of ecological justice offers a significant conceptual contribution to the formulation of a more humane and sustainable development paradigm (Seckler & Volkert, 2021); (Wienhues, 2020). Within this framework, justice is understood not merely as the redistribution of economic resources, but as the assurance of each individual's capability to attain a valuable life one that is fundamentally dependent on supportive ecological conditions (Dai et al., 2024); (Vågerö et al., 2024). Environmental degradation such as pollution, biodiversity loss, or climate disruption is not merely a technical problem, but a structural barrier to the realization of basic capabilities such as health, safety, and social participation (Balasubramanian & Sangha, 2021); (Cappelli, 2023).

This approach expands the scope of ecological justice by acknowledging that different social groups have unequal relationships with the environment. In many cases in Indonesia, Indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, and coastal communities suffer the direct consequences of resource exploitation but possess minimal political voice in decision-making processes (Townsend & Townsend, 2020); (Schäfer et al., 2025). The capability approach demands that development take into account the diversity of local contexts and the unique needs of these groups. Thus, ecological justice requires not only environmental protection but also the redistribution of power and equitable political recognition (Bockstael & Berkes, 2017); (Seckler & Volkert, 2021).

For instance, many Indigenous communities in Indonesia such as the Dayak, Baduy, or Marapu of Sumba have long practiced sustainable environmental stewardship grounded in local wisdom (Ngongo & Ngongo, 2021); (Asteria et al., 2024); (Ibrahim & Surya, 2025). However, modern development policies often neglect these practices, replacing them with top-down, centralized, and universalist approaches (Hapsari, 2018); (Sopaheluwakan et al., 2023). The integration of the capability approach provides an opening to recognize and incorporate such local knowledge systems into the design of public policy, as human capabilities cannot be separated from the cultural and ecological ecosystems that shape human identity (Bockstael & Berkes, 2017); (Dorji et al., 2024).

Moreover, capability-based ecological justice emphasizes the importance of safeguarding the interests of future generations. The notion of intergenerational justice becomes critical in the context of climate change and the large-scale exploitation of natural resources (Menton et al., 2020); (Dijk, 2021). Development policies that prioritize short-term economic gains jeopardize the ability of future generations to access clean water, healthy air, and a stable climate. Hence, this integration encourages a shift from exploitative development to regenerative and long-term sustainable practices (Gigineishvili et al., 2023); (Teixeira et al., 2025).

In this way, the capability approach, when integrated with ecological justice, provides a robust theoretical and normative foundation for developing a model of development that not only seeks economic efficiency but also expands human freedoms and dignity in relation to the natural world. This paradigm radically challenges the traditional view of the environment as merely an economic instrument and redefines it as a fundamental precondition for a meaningful human life.

Policy Implication for Indonesia

The capability approach proposed by Amartya Sen carries significant strategic implications for the formulation of sustainable development policies in Indonesia. By placing substantive freedom at the core of well-being, the state must go beyond relying solely on macroeconomic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as the primary benchmarks of success (Sen, 1999). Instead, policy directions should be reevaluated to ensure that all development initiatives particularly those involving natural resource exploitation and large-scale infrastructure contribute to

expanding the actual capabilities of citizens, especially vulnerable groups, to live dignified lives in healthy, just, and secure environments (Fayard et al., 2021); (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2022); (Wasito, 2023).

One of the key implications is the need to reformulate development indicators. Indonesia's current Human Development Index (HDI), which serves as a primary national benchmark, remains heavily centered on three dimensions income, education, and health while largely excluding explicit measurements of environmental quality and ecological rights (Noormalitasari & Setyadharma, 2021); (Nst et al., 2024). As a result, development performance may appear statistically successful despite persistent environmental degradation, such as declining air and water quality, deforestation, and increasing exposure to ecological disasters. From the perspective of the capability approach, this represents a fundamental limitation because human well-being cannot be accurately assessed without accounting for environmental conditions that directly shape individuals' real freedoms and life opportunities. Environmental quality determines essential functionings such as the ability to live a healthy life, secure sustainable livelihoods, and reside in a safe habitat. Therefore, alternative indicators such as the Environmental Quality Index, Ecological Footprint, and capability-sensitive development indices must be systematically integrated into national and regional development planning (Biekša et al., 2022); (Peng & Zhang, 2022); (Khezri et al., 2023). Empirically, this need is evident in several Indonesian regions where economic growth and HDI scores have increased alongside worsening environmental conditions, such as in parts of Kalimantan and Sulawesi where mining and plantation expansion have improved income indicators while simultaneously degrading water resources, increasing disaster risks, and undermining local livelihoods. Hence, the measurement of well-being must transcend formal economic dimensions and capture real-life conditions such as access to clean water, breathable air, green public spaces, and resilience to ecological disasters as core components of human capability expansion (Clausen & Barrantas, 2022); (Custodio et al., 2023).

Another critical implication is the expansion of public participation in environmental and development-related decision-making processes. The capability approach underscores the importance of political freedom and the right of citizens to engage in determining the development pathways that directly impact their lives (Seckler & Volkert, 2021); (Banik, 2022). This calls for a revision of current public consultation procedures, which are often symbolic, so they can evolve into genuine deliberative mechanisms that include local communities, Indigenous peoples, and women as primary actors in environmental policymaking (Delgado & Perez-Aleman, 2021); (Sam & Zibima, 2024); (Carmona et al., 2024).

In addition, fiscal policy and local development budgets should be reoriented toward strengthening citizens' ecological capabilities, rather than merely financing capital-intensive infrastructure projects (Armoro & Musa, 2025). In practical terms, this reorientation can be implemented through the optimization of existing Indonesian fiscal instruments such as Dana Desa (Village Funds), regional budgets (APBD), and national climate financing schemes under the State Budget (APBN). For example, a portion of Dana Desa can be earmarked for community-based ecosystem restoration, mangrove rehabilitation in coastal villages, clean-water infrastructure, and sustainable agriculture training, thereby directly enhancing the ecological capabilities of rural populations. In several flood-prone areas in Central Java and South Sulawesi, the allocation of village funds for drainage improvement, rainwater harvesting, and climate-resilient farming has strengthened farmers' capabilities to secure livelihoods and reduce disaster risks (Sujai et al., 2021); (Rahman et al., 2025). Furthermore, social protection schemes such as Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), food assistance programs, and climate-responsive insurance for farmers and fishers can be integrated with climate adaptation policies to ensure that vulnerable households do not lose their basic capabilities due to droughts, floods, and ecosystem degradation (Fitritinia et al., 2023); (Krismiyaningsih et al., 2024). Through

these integrated fiscal mechanisms, ecological capability strengthening is translated into concrete improvements in health, livelihood security, water access, and adaptive capacity, thereby linking environmental sustainability directly to social justice and poverty reduction (Ruiz-Mallén et al., 2022); (Biru et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the capability approach encourages institutional reform to ensure that natural resource governance is transparent, accountable, and decentralized. Institutions such as the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK), the National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas), and regional governments must begin to formulate evidence-based policies that prioritize the expansion of substantive freedoms over the accumulation of capital. Regulatory frameworks that recognize ecological rights and protect community-managed territories such as customary forests, traditional fishing villages, and small-scale farming systems must be enforced not as subsidies, but as long-term, equitable development strategies (Nuari & Hermawan, 2021); (Nugraha et al., 2023); (Ungirwalu et al., 2025).

Finally, this approach highlights the necessity of integrating social justice and ecological justice. Effective policies must not only protect the environment but also improve the living conditions of those most affected by environmental exploitation (Menton et al., 2020); (McCauley et al., 2024). By adopting the capability approach, Indonesia can design a more human-centered and sustainable development roadmap one in which development is defined by the expansion of living space, human choices, and dignity, in a harmonious relationship with nature.

CONCLUSION

Economic development in Indonesia has long been driven by macroeconomic growth targets while systematically neglecting ecological sustainability and social justice. This growth-oriented model has contributed to persistent environmental degradation, widening socio-ecological inequalities, and the erosion of community rights, as reflected in cases such as deforestation in Kalimantan, coastal degradation affecting small-scale fishers in Java and Sulawesi, and mining pollution in several eastern Indonesian regions. These realities demonstrate that economic growth without ecological and social safeguards undermines the very foundations of human well-being.

Amartya Sen's capability approach provides a powerful alternative framework by redefining development as the expansion of substantive human freedoms rather than merely the accumulation of income or capital. In the Indonesian context, environmental degradation directly translates into capability deprivation—restricting people's ability to access clean water, secure sustainable livelihoods, maintain health, and live with dignity. Therefore, environmental protection must be positioned not only as a technical policy objective but as a core human rights and development imperative.

The integration of the capability approach with ecological justice underscores that development cannot be considered successful when it marginalizes vulnerable groups while benefiting economic elites. Concrete policy implications include reformulating Indonesia's Human Development Index to incorporate environmental quality, strengthening participatory environmental governance, protecting customary forests and community-managed territories, and aligning fiscal instruments such as *Dana Desa*, social protection schemes, and climate adaptation funds with ecological capability enhancement. Cases of community-based mangrove rehabilitation, climate-resilient farming, and disaster-responsive social assistance illustrate how the capability framework can be operationalized within existing policy structures.

In conclusion, the capability approach is not only theoretically robust but also critically relevant for guiding Indonesia's sustainable development agenda. By embedding ecological integrity, social justice, and human freedom at the core of policy design,

Indonesia can move toward a development trajectory that is not only economically productive but also socially inclusive and ecologically resilient.

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