

## Human capital, collective strategies and civic engagement of companies for sustainability

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**Summary:**

Companies opt for collective strategies when the relational solution appears to be one of the most favorable responses to the ongoing changes that are disrupting their environment. Operating in this collaborative mode can help companies in their commitment to projects aimed at sustainable development. These projects lead to their collaboration according to approaches that combine the economy, the social and the environmental. Concretely, it is a question of committing to new sustainable models according to environmental and social concerns. The purpose of this work is to demonstrate that the notions of sustainability and corporate citizenship are closely linked. It also aims to show that sustainable actions, resulting from the collaboration of companies according to collective strategies, constitute an argument of their citizenship which underlines their commitment to set up sustainable economic models. Finally, this work examines the repercussions of these collective strategies aimed at sustainability on the performance of companies, especially in the Moroccan context.

In this sense, our modest contribution proposes to analyze the link between collective strategy and corporate citizenship in a collaborative mode, the study is part of the perspective of exploration and understanding and aims to provide a platform likely to shed light on empirical research on innovative sustainable development practices by Moroccan companies in the future.

**Keywords:** collaborative strategy; Sustainability; citizenship; Moroccan company; Sustainable development.

## **Introduction**

Recent developments and damage to the environment have convinced of the importance of the globalization of sustainable development issues and the necessary changes that are imposed on all countries (Aubert, 2012). Obviously, some environmental degradation due to the intensity of economic growth and industrial production is irreversible. These degradations hit hard the individuals who depend on the natural environment and strongly affect their social and economic conditions. This is why there are certain situations of social and/or economic irreversibility, such that when certain thresholds are reached, it makes it practically impossible to return to a stable situation (Habib and Baltz, 2008).

The answer to the reduction of non-renewable resources implies a redefinition of the framework in which today the objectives of economic growth fit. It is a matter of reconciling economic progress and respect for the environment in order to adapt to the depletion of these resources (Giraud, 2015). This perspective announces solutions to the various ecological problems but according to a behavior that is consistent with civic engagement. This allows companies to mobilize according to responsible behavior (Daniel, 2013). Currently, companies, through an appropriate management mode, can serve sustainable development and move towards overall performance (Barmaki and Aitcheikh, 2016). These companies integrate this new deal as a favorable opportunity to stimulate innovation, a source of sustainability and longevity. This helps companies to commit to respecting the social responsibility charter (Essabri, 2017). This is how they create a new horizon conducive to competitive strategies by adapting them according to their needs (Van Hoorebeke, 2009).

But recent crises have created conditions that are likely to put pressure on companies to engage in sustainable development, like the 2008 crisis which created a growing desire to protect the environment (Daniel, 2013). Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis has confirmed this convergence towards sustainability. This requires solutions that take the form of responsible, or rather civic, behavior so that concrete actions are consistent with this orientation (Egil, 2015). This is a development perspective that necessarily requires managerial and organizational innovations in order to make it operational. The result is almost a new paradigm representing a break, especially at the strategic and managerial level, of which only innovative companies can integrate its requirements (Van Hoorebeke, 2009). But there remains a strategic investment at the heart of productive and commercial operations to deal with the fear that industrial development will be halted by the depletion of certain resources, particularly energy (Verchère, 2011).

Consequently, it is appropriate to examine the notion of corporate citizenship by assessing its role in the design and implementation of practices associated with sustainable development. It is a question of reflecting on the importance of collective and sustainable actions for the development of corporate citizenship by examining their role in operationalizing the notion of sustainability. This work aims to answer the following questions:

- 1) *What is the link between human capital, collective strategies and corporate citizenship commitment to sustainability?*
- 2) *What is the impact of these strategies combined with sustainability on business performance, especially in the Moroccan context?*

According to this vision, the purpose of this work is to explain, in a first section, the role of human capital in the civic engagement of companies for sustainable development, and in a second section, the role of collective strategies in the development sustainable actions. The third section will focus on the effect of these collective actions and sustainable practices on business performance, reflecting on the relationship between citizenship, sustainability and business performance in the Moroccan context. And finally, the fourth section will be reserved for a discussion.



## 1. Sustainability and the role of human capital in corporate citizenship

The end of the 20th century saw the emergence of corporate citizens, they appeared as organizations willing to take into account their socio-economic environment (Lange, 2011). In this sense, economic studies have shown that there are sustainability concerns alongside economic concerns (Daniel, 2013). These studies reflect the idea that these companies are interested in development according to economic and ecological concerns.

**Table 1: Integration of sustainable development in companies**

Entreprise et intégration de principes de DD d'après les auteurs	Auteurs
In the American context, the idea of social enterprise mainly refers to commercial economic activities serving a social purpose.	Defourny, 2004
The company acts in a social field by seeking a certain legitimacy. That is to say that it undertakes to respect the values of society and to make its decisions within the framework of compliance with the dominant values of society.	Capron et Quairel-Lanoizelée, 2004
This citizenship reflects a social responsibility that must be integrated into the internal management of the company and therefore into its intangible valuation.	Fray, 2005
This responsibility represents a conception of the relationship between the company and its environment, and constitutes a true societal representation of the company.	Saulquin et Schier, 2007
This embodies how the company puts its societal values into practice	
The company that balances these dimensions will have the ability to apply the concept of sustainable development.	De Bry, 2008
CSR is now becoming an inherent component of their activities in such a way that no company can escape its requirements.	
It is both a lever for creating value and a factor of attractiveness which becomes a management objective and a legitimate response to the expectations of partners.	Laperche et Uzunidis, 2011
Innovations, such as renewable energies, can encourage the introduction of new practices that are more respectful of the environment. This is likely to solve several problems facing the economy today.	
L'importance de l'image de l'entreprise justifie l'intégration de ces enjeux dans la stratégie générale de l'entreprise et ses processus décisionnels	
The European Union is starting to formulate incentives to also encourage small and medium-sized enterprises to introduce CSR	Aubert, 2012
It is possible that these shares are intended for shareholders if they expect the latter to commit to respecting the environment or promoting social progress.	Loneux, 2012
Social enterprises regularly experiment with new programs, most of which are complementary to their core business	Dardour, 2012
The concept of a corporate citizen is based on the idea that its activity is linked to the society in which it operates in order to improve its well-being.	Toko et Souleymanou, 2013
Take up the challenge that refers to the difference between the economic world and the social and/or societal world	Swaton, 2015
Environmental and social concerns appear to be decisive variables to take into account for today's companies	
In countries like France or Germany, it is the State that encourages companies to adopt responsible behavior by pushing them to integrate implicit CSR, since the behaviors deployed are not necessarily called CSR strategies.	
The European Commission discusses the importance of voluntarily including social and environmental concerns in the commercial activities of companies	
The factors necessary to achieve these objectives are ecological awareness, quality of management and control of the environment.	Issor, 2017

Source: made by ourselves

Consequently, the notion of sustainability represents responsible behavior that brings together the interests of society and those of the company. From this perspective, the environmental and social aspects are also presented as aims of the action in the same way as the economic objective (Mathieu and Soparnot, 2009). But certain organizational particularities, such as size, degree of innovation and employee training, are determining variables in terms of corporate citizenship and its effective commitment to sustainable development (Essabri, 2017). Thus, to stimulate the development of corporate citizenship, it is necessary to develop human capacities. This is why human capital theory defends the thesis that education is an indispensable element for sustained and sustainable economic growth (Zirari and Laamire, 2021). Furthermore, according to this theory, individuals can improve their productivity through investment, especially in education. It is a question of investing in education to promote the involvement of companies in sustainability, since it turns out that the development of human capital is a key factor in favor of corporate citizenship. Thus, following the example of the relationship between education and economic growth (Aghion and Cohen, 2004), reflection should be placed on the relationship between education and the involvement of companies in sustainable development strategies. This is necessary because the implementation of these strategies presupposes a competence of managers relating to sustainability and therefore to the field of corporate citizenship. According to Daniel (2013), the relationship between education and business involvement in sustainability highlights the role of learning sustainable development practices and their essential integration into the basics of education. In this sense, it is human capacities that improve the economic system and therefore the well-being of the population. This education can play a vital role in the transmission of good practices and values relating to sustainability. Human capital is required today as a key factor in the success of a company or more broadly of an economy. It plays a crucial role in the behavior of companies and their management (Mezene et al., 2019). It follows that managerial techniques can tip the balance towards greater well-being so that the comfort of individuals becomes a necessary condition for the smooth running of activities. Commitments to operationalize sustainable development must require treatment that promotes the role of this well-being in the process of developing intangible capital. This is why it is important to take into account its involvement in corporate citizenship actions. These approaches can constitute a framework where communication, exchange, collaboration and individual initiatives reign, which has a positive impact on the dynamics of activity within the company.

## **2. Collective strategies and their role in sustainable actions**

Each company has an interest in opting for collective strategies when the relational solution appears to be one of the most favorable responses to the changes in progress. These changes that are disrupting the business environment are leading them to operate in collaborative mode. However, collaboration is permitted when the independence of each of the partner companies is maintained, despite the conclusion of an agreement binding them to each other (Garrette and Dussauge, 1995).

Currently, many countries are adopting initiatives aimed at responding to various concerns, particularly ecological and social. It is a question of reducing the consumption of resources and strengthening the ability to adapt, in order to control environmental risks according to more sustainable practices. This requires the company to undertake actions which undoubtedly require a different vision, in order to acquire the conditions for the exercise of citizenship which can be done through sustainable actions and in a collective way (Toko and Souleymanou, 2013). This vision must anticipate the necessary skills needs, in particular behaviors in terms of sustainable development (Mezene et al., 2019). Thus, thanks to collective action, the actors express their desire to bring to life a sustainable and viable development project capable of activating the necessary resources in terms of knowledge, qualifications, innovations and complementarity of skills (Maillefert and Robert, 2020). It is a collective dynamic according to strategies around initiatives aimed at sustainability, and whose objective is to develop and coordinate the actions of companies, with a view to carrying out common projects (Essabri, 2017). Aiming to achieve goals within the framework of sustainability, companies must think differently and find alternative solutions from a technological, organizational and managerial point of view. The object is the control of the environment which cannot be done without reducing polluting emissions and facing the abusive consumption of resources (Barmaki and Aitcheikh, 2016). To this end, companies considered to be the most sustainable are often recognized for their high capacity for innovation.

This certainly stems from the need to maintain the health of both individuals and the planet, through orientation towards the objective of sustainable development (Saulquin and Schier, 2007). However, as the implementation of a sustainable development strategy is often hampered by the difficulty of identifying and developing appropriate solutions, this highlights the importance of the capacity to innovate. Thus, with these constraints pushing companies to innovate, sustainable development becomes a driver of technological, organizational and managerial innovation. Moreover, these projects can result from the collaboration of companies seeking coordination according to the resources to be used to agree on a common sustainable

action. Indeed, the field of sustainable development is a field of collective action that takes place in an environment where several modes of collaboration can be developed (Essabri, 2017). This engages resources and mechanisms that must be designed collectively in order to sustain sustainable actions. This brings sustainability into the realm of collective action.

Indeed, collective actions aimed at sustainability are likely to foster the conditions for the creation of value through collaboration. It is a question of identifying forms of plural and collective actions. These models depend on the nature of sustainable innovation, which can be social, organizational, managerial or technological. The objective is that these collective practices lead to new forms of sustainability according to an implementation capable of identifying new sustainable models (Maillefert and Robert, 2020).

However, the commitment to collaboration is a process that multiplies the opportunities for cooperation. It creates significant potential for the development of externalities through the coherence and connection of sustainability issues at the corporate level. The latter, depending on the importance given to these actions, can structure, perpetuate and anchor these models in the process of sustainability. But this connection necessarily depends on the ecosystem of these companies, which may or may not attribute major issues to the success of collective actions (Maillefert and Robert, 2020). The objective is to act simultaneously and collectively to promote access to a healthy environment that preserves the planet and its resources (Egil, 2015). These actions reflect interactions that require cooperation and coordination efforts between the companies involved in this process. When these projects become operational, they generate a positive effect given their results thanks to a positive signal sent to the various stakeholders.

This is why it is necessary to manage these multiple concerns while being aware of the improvements to be made in the environmental and social field. The active participation of companies is evident in the development of initiatives playing a leading role in identifying opportunities to prevent ecological risks (Martinet and Reynaud, 2004). In order to control these environmental issues, it is necessary to ensure the participation of all the actors concerned in order to develop strategies and take decisions allowing progress towards a fairer and more sustainable world. Obviously, this depends on the maturity of the company with regard to its own conception of sustainable development and the attitude of the leaders. The objective is to jointly achieve a collective interest that encompasses the interests of society. But this development perspective depends on divergent and even potentially conflicting issues (Lange, 2011). In this respect, Hattabou and Louitri (2011) emphasize the importance of the influence of stakeholders interested in sustainable development.

These practices appear as a variable that changes the game in relation to the upheavals that the environment is experiencing. This is why it also seems necessary to insist on the importance of clarifying the strategic objectives of these actions (Dionne-Proulx and Larochelle, 2010). At the same time, this could be the cause of the multiplicity of forms of commitment to actions that aim at the same time for collaboration and sustainability (Daniel, 2013).

The gain resulting from these strategies leads to the revision of business development strategies (Issor, 2017). The latter find themselves obliged to deploy an adaptive capacity to integrate new ecological and social criteria into the decision-making process. But these projects aimed at the transmission of practices related to sustainable development correspond to a paradigm shift in which emerges a logic of cooperation, partnership and pursuit of common interests (Fray, 2005).

### **3. Role of citizenship and sustainability in business performance**

#### **3.1 The imperative to rethink business performance**

Sustainable development can become a means of performance when it makes it possible to identify new economic opportunities for the company. The essential challenge is to include the parameters of sustainability so that they are a lever for creating value. To this end, companies can respond to environmental and social challenges, but their essential motivation always remains economic. On the other hand, socially responsible companies are not only concerned with economic objectives, but integrate environmental protection and the improvement of social well-being into the consideration of their performance (Laperche and Uzunidis, 2011).

This is why for a large majority of companies; the implementation of CSR improves their image and their sustainability in such a way that the integration of social and environmental concerns can have beneficial effects on their performance. (Laperche and Uzunidis, 2011). Moreover, according to an opportunistic vision, CSR becomes a vector of communication and even an opportunistic means of performance which involves taking initiatives in this area for utilitarian reasons or according to a win-win logic (Saulquin and Schier, 2007). In this respect, when CSR is considered an obligation, it leads to a procedural vision of performance, insofar as managers will opportunistically put in place practices that fall within the framework of partners' expectations (protection of the environment, male/female parity, etc. (Saulquin and Schier, 2007). In this sense, the manager can adopt an adaptive behavior when he evaluates the interest of a strategy in the field of sustainable development according to its usefulness for the company (Martinet and Reynaud, 2004).

It is an integrated approach that makes sustainable development one of the objectives that gives meaning to the company's activity. However, the main challenge is to participate in the

ecological transition, which cannot be carried out without taking care to promote social progress (Aubert, 2012). Hence the idea that efficient managerial systems are part of a logic that first targets economic and financial performance, and then they can focus on other aspects of this performance. Consequently, it is obvious to be interested in the question of the relationship between collective actions and performance in general.

The answer that can be provided will essentially depend on the content of the collective actions of companies, and more particularly on the way in which CSR is perceived and put into practice. In this sense, CSR practices provide a coherent redefinition of a more global performance specific to each firm (Saulquin and Schier, 2007). This is the reason why the creation of value traditionally adopted by the economic vision, resulting from the neoclassical theory, is called into question by the contractual approach of the firm (Dionne-Proulx and Laroche, 2010). It is then possible to distinguish practices motivated by intentions aimed at sustainability, for environmental and social motivations, from practices that are not intentionally sustainable for economic and utilitarian reasons (Daniel, 2013). Proponents of the utilitarian vision of the issue of sustainability have a procedural vision which consists in using it as an argument allowing management by the new expectations of stakeholders. In this case, durability becomes an intermediate performance lever.

However, strategic performance, that is to say long-term performance, is the only guarantee of the sustainability of the company, hence the importance of including in its assessment considerations other than economic and financial ones (Issor, 2017). It is therefore a sustainable performance. In this sense, companies voluntarily integrate this sustainable development into their management in order to ensure global and sustainable performance (Barmaki and Aitcheikh, 2016). It is a long process of maturation that depends on the economic context in which the company operates, the managerial vision of its leaders and the forces exerted by its various partners (Saulquin and Schier, 2007). On the other hand, the performance can make it possible to evaluate the implementation by the company of the practices which structure its commitment to sustainable development. The gain will be reflected in the planet's ability to preserve its resources and support human activities in a sustainable manner (Verchère, 2011).

### **3.2 Citizenship, sustainability and performance in the Moroccan context**

The corporate citizen presents a decisive solution to undertake sustainable solutions. But it is also committed to another promise, namely that of being economically efficient (Loneux, 2012). On the other hand, it is important to contextualize the concept of corporate citizenship in order to take into account the specificities of the Moroccan economic context and begin the path of development in its different dimensions. Indeed, it is crucial to contextualize the concept of

corporate citizenship to better help the country's economy to create a more developed, competitive economy that is a source of performance. Hence the urgency of creating the right conditions for this development, which constitutes a factor of competitiveness and performance in the Moroccan context (Toko and Souleymanou, 2013).

Consequently, companies, according to appropriate management methods, can serve sustainable development and achieve their objectives by moving towards overall performance. It is a question of giving all the actors interested in sustainability the ability to acquire new ways of thinking and acting in order to promote the financing of economic growth that reconciles economic sustainability and ecological sustainability (Aubert, 2012). In this regard, international cooperation can be a potential channel for the dissemination of sustainable development in Morocco (Essabri, 2017). For example, companies in the building and construction materials sector and those whose activities are in the mining or oil refining sectors carry out highly polluting industrial activities. They consume a lot of raw materials, especially water and energy. In addition, their activities present a high risk of accidents for the teams operating in the production sites. On the other hand, they have the material, human and financial resources to integrate sustainable development into their management (Barmaki and Aitcheikh, 2016). This is why, at the institutional level, in July 2009, the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM) developed an initiative with the objective of promoting sustainable practices within Moroccan enterprises. It is precisely a Label in terms of social responsibility which invites companies to recognize the full compliance of their strategies and activities with all the principles and objectives of sustainable development (Essabri, 2017).

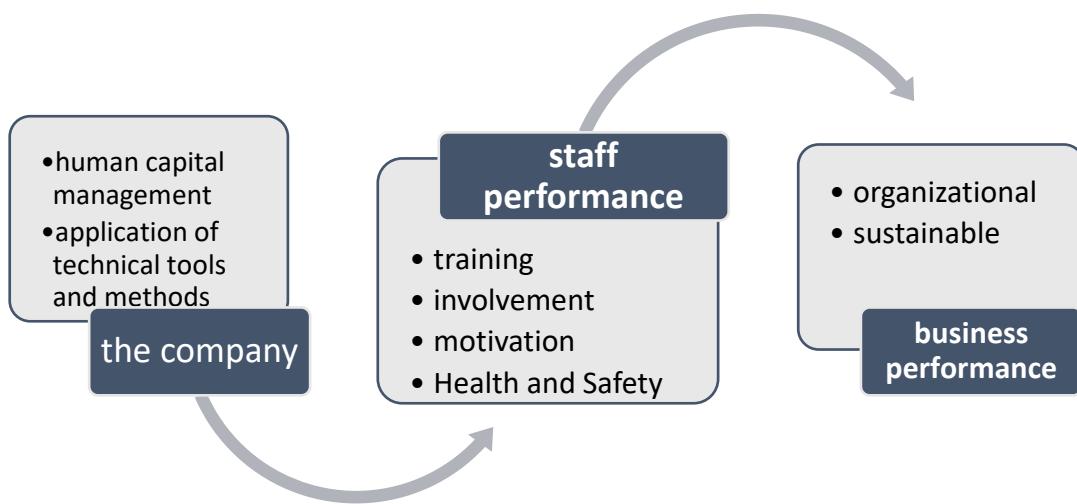
Consequently, it is useful to rely on practices that promote learning to bring out the dynamics of companies, with a view to collective construction. The latter benefits from the accumulation of past experiences by making improvement a process sought by companies. Thus, the construction of a shared vision will be the image of future collective work, it is a source of creativity, enthusiasm and collaboration. This vision will, in fact, make it possible to initiate convergent initiatives between the various partners towards a collective dynamism.

Such a vision nourishes the dynamics of collaborations and directs energies by making them converge towards a desired future. Clearly, this vision could be the basis of a collective commitment to be built. For this, it is necessary to direct behaviors and to converge energies and initiatives towards collaborations. The aim is to form a more or less reproducible model to be used in the event of new collaborations, which makes it possible to avoid the appearance of conflict situations leading to the failure of collaborative projects.

#### 4. Discussion

Admittedly, the notion of performance refers to the ideas of profitability, profit and growth. But it also calls on certain theories or managerial practices, in particular practices relating to the management of human capital. The latter refers to the ability to determine the growth and sustainability of a business. Obviously, its performance can be developed by the human potential held by its actors.

**Figure1:** relationship between the performance of the company and the performance of its individuals.



Source: made by ourselves

Thus, a good performance of this capital improves the chances of having a good performance of the company. In other words, improving the performance of individuals certainly improves the performance of the company, likewise, the latter certainly has a positive effect on the performance of each of its actors. This shows that there is a close relationship between the performance of the company and the performance of its individuals. This performance results, on the one hand, from the application of technical performance methods and tools, and, on the other hand, from a relational approach which consists in building a context favoring the commitment and cooperation of all actors. The conjunction of the two approaches, technical and relational, is essential to achieve the targeted objectives. Taking into account well-being at work constitutes a source of performance of individual potential, and therefore a source of economic and social performance. Thus, the quality of life in general constitutes a capital source of efficiency and performance, given that to accomplish his daily tasks effectively, the

individual is obliged to engage with all of his individual potential, which requires favorable working conditions.

The commitment of companies from the point of view of sustainable actions comes down to taking an interest in their practices which illustrate this commitment, such as investments for motivations linked to the environment or social justice. Consequently, the existence of these concerns evokes the existence of a convergence that promotes the creation of value while respecting social well-being and the environment (Fray, 2005). Under these conditions, the main objective remains the creation of value, but for all stakeholders. It will therefore be essential to understand the motivations of companies in order to grasp the meaning they give to their practices. The motivation of eco-sensitive companies is not the standards imposed by regulations, but they adopt sustainable development as a potential factor allowing their sustainability and even their performance. This is why it is possible that sustainability could be part of the objective of profitability and the sustainability of the company (Essabri, 2017). Consequently, it is clear that the different approaches to this responsibility reflect several visions of performance (Saulquin and Schier, 2007). The company concerned about its environment is obliged to appropriate sustainable development and integrate it into its management. Obviously, it seeks overall performance, a performance that encompasses economic, social and environmental aspects (Barmaki and Aitcheikh, 2016).

**Table 2: Integration of sustainable development in the company**

Sustainable strategy	Sustainable practices
Investments for environmental and social justice motivations	Technical methods and tools
Eco-sensitive companies	Relational approach
Cooperation of all actors	Well-being at work
Creation of value while respecting social well-being	Individual potential: involvement
Quality of life in the company	Training
Appropriate sustainable development and integrate it into its management.	Motivation
participatory governance	Social cohesion

Source: made by ourselves

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On the other hand, if sustainable development is not part of the company's objectives, it can only be achieved with governance whose objective is the company's image, durability and viability (De Bry, 2008), like research in economics which has shown that social cohesion is a sure source of performance for companies (Toko and Souleymanou, 2013). However, sustainable development can also be considered as a source of constraints and costs for businesses.

The latter are obliged to meet its requirements at a cost in the social and environmental field (Essabri, 2017). This is the reason why, in France, companies are increasingly encouraged to include in their annual reports all the elements likely to provide information on the way in which they take into account the social and environmental consequences of their economic activities (Laperche and Uzunidis, 2011).

This highlights the importance and specificity of the motivations that drive companies for these sustainable practices. This vision differentiates sustainable practices from unsustainable ones, distinguishing between their social and environmental or purely economic dimensions. But it is always possible to adopt another vision, namely the consistency of the different dimensions of performance.

## Conclusion

The operationalization of the concept of sustainable development makes it possible to bring it into the productive and current activity of the company. This development can take the form of responsible behavior that invites companies to get involved in development strategies based on issues that are closely linked to issues relating to sustainability. Since these requirements will surely increase in the future, it is necessary to develop structural transformations that regulate the relationship between nature and humans. It is obvious that sustainability will become a subject of great importance, particularly influenced by other actors such as civil society and local communities (Laperche and Uzunidis, 2011). In addition, other actors, such as consumers, may decide to play their role of citizen vigilance in the context of their consumption. Thus, the choice of a product is therefore no longer considered solely as the response to a need but as an action promoting a fairer economy (Daniel, 2013). This engages the responsibility of the actors in the face of these challenges that must be met collectively. And this because ecological sustainability, economic viability and social equity cannot be satisfied with the sum of individual initiatives as the dominant economic model conceives (Essabri, 2017). Hence the importance of collective strategies aimed, in addition to sustainability, at collaboration and coordination between actors.

However, the overall improvement of the conditions of the population requires sustainable practices that create a commitment to development that is both respectful of the planet and meets the multiple needs of society. This sustainable development will be a collective elaboration of actions aimed at a commitment to sustainability. Thus, by combining the individual interests of companies and collective actions for sustainability, it is possible to initiate a development that could become in the eyes of the actors a more desirable development that initiates their commitment.

Also, this requires new economic regulations that can together constitute a paradigm to strengthen the foundations of a fair and united economy. This conception of development embodies issues that encourage civic and solidarity engagement. This citizenship reflects close ties between society, individuals and businesses. These links are largely impacted by the social and institutional environment (Swaton, 2015). These initiatives are developing a development that can gradually build an economy at the service of people and the planet. Consequently, it is a question of developing the company on a profitable basis which preserves the balance between the aspirations of the shareholders and society. This is necessary in order to contribute to the development of an economic model according to a logic that guarantees the balance between the factors of sustainability and the requirements of optimal growth.

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