

Prospects and Challenges of Sustainable Development in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Despite attempts by African governments to achieve Sustainable Development, there is a growing perception that Africa may fail in achieving the goals. This perception is fueled partly by the evidence that while the world is undergoing rapid change, which is driven prominently by technology and globalization, Africa remains unprotected and at risk of being exploited without due recognition of, and remuneration for, its resources. Additionally, there is the continued escalating trend in poverty and the diminishing strength of the environment to meet current and future needs of African countries. Given the fact that sustainable development appears to be contradicting in between the opposing imperatives of growth and development on one hand, and ecological sustainability on the other, the trend in sustainable development on the African continent has generated some skepticism about whether the goals are achievable in Africa. The lack of a logical literature that documents the challenges and prospects of Sustainable development in Africa underpins the uncertainty of achieving the goals in Africa. Hence, this paper assessed the challenges of sustainable development in Africa, and the way forward.

Keywords: SDG, Africa, Agriculture, Poverty, Economy, Development

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, there has been a paradigm shift in defining development and the way it is approached. This paradigm shift resulted in the adoption of Sustainable Development (SD), a concept which was highlighted in the Brunt land Report of 1987 and at the Stockholm Conference of 1972 [1]. The shift was borne out of the global links between environmental problems and socio-economic concerns, and also as a result of the fact that earlier conceptions and approaches to development appeared to focus largely on economics and physical wealth despite the multi-dimensional and complex nature of development. Focusing on economics and physical wealth in the pursuit of development has proven to be

unsustainable not only from the environmental perspective but also from the economic, social and employment perspectives because it is resource-intensive, hence the need to pursue SD [2].

According to [3], the idea of Sustainable Development (SD) dates back more than 30 years ago, and it was coined by the World Conservation Union (Association of African Universities, 2009). The Bruntland Report defines Sustainable Development (SD) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.” The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [3], also defines SD as

the development path along which the maximization of human well-being for today's generation does not lead to the decline in the well-being of the future generation. These definitions suggest that SD considers the needs of the future and current generations in tandem, and it is rooted in the pursuit of the welfare and well-being of the people. SD is motivated by the negative externalities that are responsible for natural resource depletion and degradation; it requires screening public goods that are essential for economic development, and it also stresses the importance of retaining the flexibility of the environment to respond to shock [4]. In order to achieve SD, African governments have launched several strategies. In Ghana for instance, the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS I and II) and the National Environmental Policy (NEP) were designed. In Tanzania, the National Development Vision (NDV) 2025 was designed. In Egypt, there was the National Strategy for Solid Waste Management (NSSWM). Across the entire continent, there has been an increased number of SD initiatives being implemented in some 28 countries; these initiatives manifested in the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in 2001, the establishment of the

Conceptual Definition of Sustainable Development

The number of definitions for SD is suggestive of the debate over its definition since its coinage in the 1980s. [6], add that the many different interpretations of SD are confusing, and the literature is rife with several attempts to define the term. The debates have erupted between those who prefer the Three Pillars Approach- emphasizing the social, ecological, and economic dimensions of sustainable development or a more dualistic typology-emphasizing the relationship between nature and humanity [7]. [8], contends that pursuing both ends of what is 'sustainable' and 'development' are difficult to pin down, and so it is a wonder how we can avoid compromising future generations' needs when we cannot foresee what these needs will be. Given these difficulties, it is not

New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the establishment of Regional Economic Councils (RECs) in the sub-region [4].

In spite of these attempts by African governments towards SD, there is a growing perception that Africa could fail in achieving SD. This perception is fueled partly by the evidence that while the world is undergoing rapid change, which is driven prominently by technology and globalization, Africa remains unprotected and at risk of being exploited without due recognition of, and remuneration for, its resources [5]. Additionally, there is the continued escalating trend in poverty and the diminishing strength of the environment to meet current and future needs of African countries. Given the fact that SD appears to be contradicting in between the opposing imperatives of growth and development on one hand, and ecological sustainability on the other [6], the trend in SD on the African continent has generated some skepticism about whether SD is achievable in Africa. The lack of a coherent literature that documents the challenges and prospects of Sustainable development in Africa underpins the uncertainty of achieving SD in Africa. This paper therefore evaluates the challenges of SD in Africa, and suggests way forward.

surprising that the conceptual constraints tend to rather reflect the political and philosophical position of those proposing the definition more than any scientific view [4], which may influence policy options towards the implementation of SD programs. Such difficulties in defining the term lead to the phenomenon of cosmetic environmentalism where the tag of sustainability is stuck on what may be unsustainable, and hence gives way to questions of determining what is environmentally benign [5]. Irrespective of these conceptual constraints, the international community appears to embrace the idea that SD is an imperative. This belief finds expression in the words of [6] that, "the world cannot continue to act, produce and consume unsustainably, this is the time to act especially on water,

energy, human health, agriculture and

Achievements and Challenges of Sustainable Development in Africa

Economic growth and poverty

reduction: Economic sustainability

requires countries to be on a broad-based

quality economic growth which focuses

on reducing poverty and inequality,

supporting investment, and building an

efficient social services system towards

SD. By 2012, the International Monetary

Fund (IMF) estimated that “with a Gross

Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of

35%, Sierra Leone was the fastest growing

economy in the world and that over the

ten years, six of the world’s fastest

growing economies were in sub-Saharan

Africa”. These six African countries

include: Angola, 11.1%; Nigeria, 8.9%;

Ethiopia, 8.4%; Chad, 7.9; Mozambique,

7.9%; and Rwanda, 7.6% (UNECA, 2012).

Additionally, forecasts by the IMF also

suggests that seven African countries are

likely to be among the top ten over the

next half decade, 2011-2015 (Ethiopia,

8.1%; Mozambique,7.7%; Tanzania, 7.2%;

Republic of Congo, 7.0%; Ghana, 7.0%;

Zambia, 6.9%; and Nigeria, 6.9%). Given

the current prospects, there is a strong

likelihood that Africa will surpass Asia in

growth in the next decade [7]. This is

further supported by evidence that from

1990-2002, the average real GDP in Africa

grew by 3.3% and from 2003-2004, the

average real GDP growth was 3.8%. Central

Africa had the highest growth rate (4.2%);

North Africa (3.9%); East Africa (2.9%);

and West Africa (2.4%). After the initial slump

in growth from 1991-1992, Africa’s

growth began to improve peaking in 1996.

(UN, 2010). Available data suggest that

“government debt in sub-Saharan Africa

was around 70-80% of GDP ten years ago

but that has been halved to about 45-40%

of GDP currently; Foreign Direct

Investment (FDI) in sub-Saharan Africa,

which is now a diversified portfolio of

investment in the banking, tourism,

textiles, communication and other sectors

has improved since the late 1990s

translating into 2.4% of GDP” [5]. At the

turn of the Millennium, “Africa’s GDP was

\$600 billion; today, it is \$2.2 trillion-

adjusted for inflation, Africa’s GDP has

doubled in 10 years” [7]. It has been

biodiversity”, if SD is to be achieved.

argued that “currently, many African

economies are strongly growing in

comparison to the industrialized world,

with a continental economic growth of 6%

in 2012; sub-Saharan Africa is now in a

position to compete with other energy

markets in some labor-intensive areas”

[8]. In Cote D’Ivoire, for instance, “the

service sector accounts for about 50% and

rising; this is expected to grow by 13.7%

in 2013, and in June 2011 the country was

restored to eligibility status of the African

Growth and Opportunity Act (AGO) after

it was suspended in 2005; beyond 10.5%

in 2012, economic growth is expected at

9% in 2013 and 10% in 2014 and beyond”

[7]. It can be deduced from these

statistics that African countries are

making great strides towards building

robust economies for the current

generation, but more importantly for

future generations. Even though the

statistical figures put Africa in a positive

light, how has such efforts directly

translated into poverty reduction,

infrastructural development, and

improved sanitation? These are critical

questions that demand immediate

answers if the perceived economic growth

on the continent will have any meaning.

These questions appear difficult to

answer given the fact that only 10% of

Africa’s trade is within the continent [9].

Africa exports only 18% of manufactured

goods and imports 65% [10]. The level of

private sector investment currently

stands at 5-8%, but that needs to be

drastically increased [11]. Africa’s share

in the \$130 trillion global trade has

remained a minimal 3% over the years and

intra-trade is a meager 10% [12]. On the

global platform, of the 1.2 billion living in

extreme poverty, 25% are from sub-

Saharan Africa [13]. The World

Commission on Environment and

Development identified that one of the

issues that is fundamental to overcoming

the challenge of SD is the overriding state

of poverty on the African continent [13].

The Millennium Assessment suggests that

not only does the level of poverty remain

high, but inequality is growing.

Consequently, the [4] concludes that the overarching SD challenge in Africa is poverty eradication. This is a barrier that

African government must remove if the pursuit of SD is to be achieved.

Demographic Characteristics and Education

How to manage the demographic dynamics of Africa's population is critical to the achievement of SD in Africa. Populations in the region have been growing steadily over the past decade compared to the world average. The pattern with regard to biodiversity shows escalating use of natural resources, rising pollution levels and climate change, and it must be borne in mind that these feedbacks can trigger aggravation of the initial problems [6]. Some aspects of Africa's current demographic characteristics will put the continent in an advantageous position if managed properly. For example, Africa has the world's fastest growing population- and the youngest, with more than half under 20 years old. While population growth might be positive, there is a corresponding challenge with the nature of the population growth dynamic. Several reports highlight the problem of youth unemployment on the continent; with a rapid growth in population in the past 50 years, each generation is much

larger than its predecessors and there are twice many people under the age of 28 as over it; this implies that employment must grow at a faster rate, but it is estimated that about 71% of sub-Saharan Africa's working age population lacks full time employment [10]. Additionally, Africa's population is largely rural-based and therefore heavily dependent on agriculture for their livelihood; rural areas are home to some 80% of the total population, which includes 70% of the continent's extreme poor and undernourished [10]. The [7] report argues that progress towards universal primary education has been a steady success in some African countries. Such countries include: Burundi, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, and Tanzania. However, progress is still needed in related aspects like infrastructure, quality of education, completion rates, enrollment in secondary and tertiary education and teaching capacity.

Environment, Health and Sanitation

For SD to be attained, there must be conscious efforts towards friendly environmental practices. This must be practiced in tandem with improved health and sanitation. The race to reducing infant and maternal mortality is being won in the region. For instance, Mozambique has achieved a reduction of over 70%; Malawi, 68%; and Niger, 64%; maternal mortality rates have also fallen and the fight against malaria has also improved significantly through the distribution of insecticide-treated mosquito nets in sub-Saharan Africa [6]. By the year 2000, malaria was killing over twenty-nine thousand people in Ethiopia and as part of efforts to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the government introduced a program to deliver two mosquito nets to every family at risk, alongside a reduction in the cost of malarial drugs by half; within 3 years of implementation, deaths from malaria

were cut in half [7]. In Rwanda in 2003, access to healthcare stood at just 7% of the population; but when a health insurance scheme was established, with the small scheme subsidized by foreign aid for those who could not afford it, the scheme saw access to healthcare rise to 85% by 2009 [8]. Progress is being made to halving the proportion of Africa's population without sustainable access to clean drinking water. They are however some harsh environmental conditions that tend to affect livelihoods. One such condition is climate change, which has been identified as one of the leading human and environmental crisis in the 21st century [6]. The institute suggests that Africa is already facing considerable water stress as a result of insufficient and unreliable rainfall that changes pattern and causes flooding. Climate change also negatively impacts on agriculture on which three-quarters of Africa's

population depend for their livelihood. It is also argued that in some African countries like Egypt, deteriorating air quality is linked to industrial emissions and traffic density, and suspended dust is the major air pollution problem in the country; In Zambia, sulphur dioxide is particularly a problem in Kitwe due to the smelting of copper and roasting of cobalt among other industrial activities; In

Uganda, most of the imported cars are second-hand. While Nigeria has seen a steady economic rate of approximately 7% every year for the last decade, it is also faced with other discouraging statistics. For instance, the country has some of the worst human development indicators in the world; nor is it on track to meet most of the health and education MDGs [6].

Agriculture

Reports suggest that Africa's SD agenda cannot be achieved without Agriculture taking its rightful place in this process. [3], argues that agriculture contributes a significant share to the continent's GDP and the majority of Africa's labor force is employed in Agriculture. In Nigeria for instance, there has been a boost in access to fertilizer with a privatized company Notore, where farmers currently receiving subsidized fertilizer have increased from 20% to 94%. Doreo Partners gives farmers training, credit, seed and fertilizer and helps them to market the product [5]. Farmers in Osun State receive a new strain of Cassava as part of the government's push for the crop; hence, there is growth in Nigeria's Cassava industry after a decade effort resulting in flour makers including 10% Cassava in bread and government offers 12% tax rebate to companies that comply [7]. Again, agriculture provides employment for some 70% of Africa's labor force and contributes 50% of export earnings and 35% of GDP in most countries [8]. Even though Agriculture is believed to be one of the mainstays of Africa's achievement of the SD, there are enormous challenges that have to be overcome if Africa can fully tap into agriculture's potential. Food prices have risen in Africa mainly because Africa imports most of its food and so global price changes affect food prices in Africa [3]. The problem of hunger in Africa is rooted in an inability to produce enough food to feed its growing population [3]. Perhaps the reason for Africa's inability to produce more to feed itself is that the rudimentary and labor-intensive tools, equipment and low level of inputs used in African agriculture results in low productivity, making the

sector unattractive, especially to youth; African agriculture is still largely subsistence, and receives less than 4% of all commercial credit [4]. Currently, "there are a lot of talk about agriculture being a strategic element in Africa's growth, but how many financial institutions are willing to give loans to farmers to embark on expansion; in Uganda for instance, only 4% of the total loans given by banks goes to Agriculture, while 64% of the population in Africa is engaged in Agriculture, contributing to 34% of GDP" [6]. In a study by the African Studies Center (ASC), Leiden University, it was found that grain production in Africa has remained static since 1961, and that total domestic cereal production has dropped from 83% to just 67%; while 5 out of 12 countries selected for the study had a positive trade balance, in terms of agricultural commodities in 1961, however none do so now [8]. Other constraints identified regarding the poor performance of African agriculture include: inadequate infrastructure, unstable markets opportunities, small markets and lack of current market information, uncertain policy environment and poor competitiveness of African products on the international market [6]. It has been argued that the continent is the most food-insecure place on the planet, and this is compounded by escalating food prices, which could trigger social and political unrest [5]. It is worth mentioning that the phenomenon of food insecurity is partly blamable on foreign land purchase for agriculture [6]. The evidence suggests that most of such land acquisitions are not for growing crops for domestic markets, but rather part of food and energy security goals for

the home state of the investor. For example, African countries that lease large tracts of land to foreign investors have some of the highest undernourished people in the world including Democratic Republic of Congo (76%), Ethiopia (46%), Kenya (32%), Madagascar (37%),

Mozambique (38%), Sudan (21%), and Tanzania (35%). As a result of this, some of these countries imposed restrictions on food exports in response to the massive spike in agricultural prices and the internal food security issues created [9].

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, Sustainable development can be achieved in Africa. However, there is need for major policy shifts and implementation of policies. Similarly, it is noteworthy to state that SD is strongly interlinked and this has far-reaching implications for policies and processes. Hence, SD must be viewed as an integrative concept across fields, sectors

and scales, and governments must move from concepts to action. It is therefore imperative for African government to look beyond narrow policy implementation process and rather focus on implementing programs and projects that have strong linkages that will ensure the attainment of SD in Africa.

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