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A CRITIQUE ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

The search for sustainable development was prompted by the multiple negative effects of 'development', which became widespread due to mankind's wanton pursuit for scientific and especially technological advancement at 'all cost'. This was then seen as the key to global economic and technological dominance. The unrestricted drive unleashed numerous negative consequences on people, land and biodiversity. This led to the UN inauguration of the World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Report) and other similar bodies to look for ways to halt mankind's avoidable race to self-annihilation; which led to the popular Rio Earth Summit of 1992. These, and works of other organizations and individuals coined the term sustainable development. It redefines development with a different attribute, which redirects human activities and gives man a road map to save the earth and ensure continuity of life on the planet.

What is Development?

To 'develop' is to cause somebody or something to grow gradually; to become or make something larger, more advanced or more organized. While development is the action or process of developing or being developed, Hornby (2000). Dictionary definitions of the verb 'to develop' suggest that it means to change gradually, progressing through a number of stages towards some sort of state of expansion, improvement or completeness or a state in which the subject's true identity is revealed, Wilber and Jameson (1979).

Development was seen more in the changing and shaping of the object, phenomenon or society towards the ideal or more favourable conditions. This some writers contend must pass through some stages as obtained in the economic development of western societies. As such they emphasize more on economic and structural development. The process of development was originally conceived in terms of economic growth in the sense that it was assumed that development means a high national income accompanied by a market economy and a specialized society, in which most people work not to meet their own immediate consumption needs but to produce particular goods and services need by others and purchase in cash. In other words development was seen in terms of the structure and growth of the national economy and degrees of development (or underdevelopment) were most often measured in terms of national income. The two most common indicators of development were per capita income (national income divided by the size of the population) and the average annual rate of growth in National income. Conyers and Hills (1992)

DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE

By this definition the world was divided into two - the developed and the underdeveloped or developing countries often referred to as the third world nations. The criteria used were most often not very clear, but; the former group enjoying

average per capital incomes ten to twelve times larger than those of the latter group, Brookfield (1975). For this definition and indicator, development strategies were shaped to increase per capital income of the developing nations most of them former colonies. In fact, the term development become synonymous with economic growth through technological advancement, and become the dream of most people. Development is a term that evokes powerful images. It speaks the collective aspirations of people throughout the world for a life of meaning and dignity. It aspires the hope that what the rich nations have achieved, the poor may one day obtain. Middleton (Ed) (1997). This is not surprising because, Economic growth involves increases over time in the volume of a country's per capital gross national product (GNP) of goods and services. Such continuity increases can raise average living standards substantially and provide a stronger base for other policy objectives such as national defense, various kinds of capital investments, or public welfare services. For Rostow, growth proceeds from a traditional society to a transitional one (in which the foundation for growth are developed), to the 'take-off' society (in which development accelerates), to the mature society. Hence economic growth is usually distinguished from economic development, the latter term being restricted to economies that are close to the subsistence level, Britannica (1988).

With time the adverse effects of uncontrolled rapid industrialization and technological advancements manifests. They attribute to growth such undesirable side effects of industrialization as traffic congestion, the increase pollution of air and water, the despoiling of the landscape, and a general decline in man's ability to enjoy the 'real' amenities of life; as such the definition of development was forced to include other attributes.

'Our first concern is to redefine the whole purpose of development. This should not be to develop things but to develop man. Human beings have basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, health, education. Any process of growth that does not lead to their fulfillment - or, even worse, disrupts them is a travesty of the idea of development, Cocoyoc Declaration (1977).

This is the turning point from economic and structural development of the society to include growth not only of the economy but also in environmental conservation and sustainability, a situation that was earlier ignored especially during the industrial revolution to the beginning of the twentieth century. In other words, development was given a necessary prefix - Sustainable Development.

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT?

'Sustain' mean to keep somebody or something alive or in existence. And sustainable as that which can be kept going or maintained, Hornby (2000). Sustain also mean, to prevent from falling, collapsing or given way, especially for a time, to keep going to provide with nourishment etc. Experts on environmental assessment defined sustainable development as 'development that does not cost the Earth, Glasson, Riki and Andrew (1999).

Tyler (1993) sees sustainable economic development as forms of economic growth and activities that do not deplete or degrade national resources upon which present and future economic growth depend, while Sustainable - Earth economy as economic system in which the number of people and the quantity of goods are maintained at some constant level, which is ecologically sustainable and meets at least the basic needs of all members of the population.

The 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (usually referred to as the Brundtland Report, after it's Chairwoman) defines sustainable development as 'development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (UN World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). This is the most widely used definition.

In the economic planning and development of industries, settlements etc. the questions to ask are: 'is what we are doing really progress? Can we sustain what we are doing? Should we sustain what we are doing? What kinds of growth are useful and sustainable and what kinds are harmful and unsustainable? If we end up eliminating or killing off large numbers of our own species and millions of other species, is that success? In what ever we are doing we should be seeing the world as an integrated, interconnected, interdependent whole rather than as a fragmented collection of parts. We should be building societies and personal relationships that emphasize cooperation over competition and domination. Protecting earth's biodiversity by interfering with non-human species only to meet important needs. Achieving sustainable use of potentially renewable cropland, forests, and grasslands by using these resources more slowly than they can be reviewed and by placing primary emphasis on sustaining the fertility of Earth's topsoil', Tyler (1993).

The main characteristics of sustainable development are that: it maintains the quality of life, it maintains continuing access to natural resources, and it avoids lasting environmental damage. It means living on the Earth's income rather than eroding its capital' DEO (1990) and Glasson et al (1999).

That; the world should be good to live in and to make a living in, for all of us, for our children and for theirs. Some part of the environment should be kept natural, animals and plants should be protected from extinction and people should be able to live in a clean and healthy environment. These four principles are a prerequisite for sustainable development and apply globally (Carbon 2000).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Aina and Salau (Eds.) 1992) observed that the challenge of sustainable development in Nigeria is the building of a Nigeria which in the context of a rapidly changing world still emphasizes the values in her national objectives while simultaneously ensuring ecological integrity and sustainability. 'Sustainable development in our view must be judged according to the presence and expression of the following key elements:

- i. Ecological integrity and sustainability;
- ii. Equity and distributive justice at all levels;
- iii. Socially and culturally relevant economic productivity and technological development;
- iv. Popular participation and collective autonomy, and
- v. The prevalence and institutionalization of human and democratic rights'.

In reality it was found that there are no clearly formulated policies in Nigeria aimed at coordinating and monitoring the relationship between environment and economic development. Rather, there are a number of scattered and weakly articulated programmes, roles and legislation which when reviewed and analyzed may help to reveal the directions as well as the limitations of environmental and natural resources management strategies in Nigeria. But unfortunately, the environmental and economic development planning in Nigeria is characterized by over emphasis on economic growth and gross under funding of the environmental sector. Environmental protection and conservation which defines a different relationship with natural and natural forces are often seen as not being in harmony with 'progress' and economic growth as perceived by these interest. Aina and Salau (Eds.) (1992).

This is not to be so, we should go for economic development - industrialization, urbanization and the subsequent building of factories, roads and on the land, sea, and air.

While we pursue economic development we must remember that sustainable economic development emphasize greatly on conservation of the environment. Because conservation is very essential to human survival. If for example, all apparently worthless rosy periwinkle plants had been destroyed, an important drug used in treating leukemia would not have been discovered, Britannica (1998).

Economic development and social development must be placed in their environmental contexts. Boulding (1966) vividly portrays that the economic goal of increased GNP, using more inputs to produce goods and services, contains the seeds of its own destruction. Increased inputs demand more resources. The natural environment is the 'sink' for the wastes and the 'source' for the resources. Environmental pollution and the depletion of resources are invariably the ancillaries to economic development; Glasson et al (1999).

DEVELOPMENT REDEFINED

These adverse consequences of wanton, economic development through unplanned industrialization and urbanization has led many writers to redefine economic development in a much different perspective, taking human welfare as the most paramount achievement, that is; sustainable socio-economic development. It was Goulet (1991), for example, who distinguished three basic components or core values in this wider meaning of development which he calls: life-sustenance, self-esteem and freedom. Life-sustenance is concerned with the provision of basic needs. A major objective of development must be to raise people out of primary poverty and to provide basic needs simultaneously. Self-esteem is concerned with the feeling of self-respect and independence. Developing countries seek development for self-esteem, to eradicate the feeling of dominance and dependence, which is associated with inferior economic status. Freedom refers to freedom from the three evils of 'wants, ignorance and squalor', so that people are more able to determine their own destiny.

Subsequently the questions to ask about a country's development are therefore: what has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have decline from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result 'development' even if per capital income doubled, Seers (1969). Countries are considered to be engaged in development planning if their governments were making conscious and continuing attempt to increase their rate of economic and social progress and to alter those institutional arrangements which are considered to be obstacles to the achievement of this aim, Waterston (1965).

That development should contain within it two key concepts; the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which over riding priority should be given, and; the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organisation on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs. More specifically, sustainable development require, in the word of Brundtland's report:

- A political system securing citizen participation in decision making, —
- An economic system that is able to generate surpluses and technical knowledge on a self-reliant and sustained basis.
- A social system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development, —
- A production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development,
- A technical system that can search continuously for new solutions, —

- An international system that fosters sustained patterns of trade and finance, and a
 - Flexible and self-correcting administrative system.
- The report also emphasizes that: what matter is the sincerity with which these goals are pursued and the effectiveness with which departures from them are corrected (WCED 1987, p.65).

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CRITICIZED

Despite all the issues highlighted by the proponents of sustainable development, the notion is not lacking in oppositions. Some writers have suspicious views and some are much more towards an antithetical stance. To O'Riordan (1988) it was "a good idea which cannot sensibly be put into practice". But to Skolimowski (1995), sustainable development "struck a middle ground between more radical approaches which denounced all development, and the idea of development conceived as business as usual. The idea of sustainable development, although broad, loose and tinged with ambiguity around its edges, turned out to be palatable to everybody. This way has been its greatest virtue. It is radical and yet not offensive.

Arguing for sustainable and equitable development, Badshah (1996) pointed out that there has to be some potential for society to improve their quality of life. The task before contemporary societies therefore is to identify those components that constitute an improved quality of life for the people of their own societies without jeopardizing the interests of other societies or pre-empting the choice of options for future generations.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development is an economic growth that can be kept, nourished and sustained for future generations. That kind of industrialization, urbanization or modernization that does not degrade the environment, land, sea and air and does not deprive man or damage his own life sustaining elements found in, on and above the earth's crust. The cost of this growth or achievements, and its sustainability should not compromise the future! Sustainable development, according to one definition, demands that we seek ways of living, working and being that enable all people of the world to lead healthy, fulfilling, and economically secure lives without destroying the environment and without endangering the future welfare of people and the planet, Wikipedia (2004).

That development should not just be economical or technological structured, or even environmentally friendly, it should also be humane. Man's basic needs should never be left out especially their judicious and even distribution, sustainability and possible future assurance. That should be the focus of growth in all spheres in this present age. In other words, development is essential to satisfy human needs and improve the quality of human life. At the same time, development must be based on the efficient and environmentally responsible use of all society's scarce resources, natural, human and economic.

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