

Chapter 2

Need for Sustainable Development: Theoretical and Practical Concerns for Sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

Since 2015, the efforts to promote sustainable development turned into a new face after the 17 Sustainable Development Goals were embraced by the 193 nation states, in the world, to be implemented up to 2030. Despite this impressive milestone, the concept of SD is not explored sufficiently. This chapter reviews and discusses need for SD in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) where poverty is rampant and livelihood security is deprived. The chapter argues that SSA needs SD. This can be achieved through a balance between the environment, society, economy and institutions, concurrently with interventions to eliminate abject poverty and improve livelihood security. Additionally, SSA should address the challenges that impede the efforts to promote SD seriously with considerations that the communities are heterogeneous and inequalities in different forms are lingering. The future research should investigate, among others, appropriate strategies and interventions to balance the environment, society and the economy for SD.

INTRODUCTION

In the past seven decades since the end of the Second World War in the 1945, efforts to bring about development in Africa and other developing regions have been increasing. Since then, developed country scholars have been writing about Africa's development. In addition, different development strategies and approaches have been designed and implemented. However, Africa's development is not improving considerably relative to the developed countries. This raises a number of questions including: first,

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what is the meaning of development in the African perspectives? Secondly, does Africa use appropriate theories, principles and approaches of development? Third, how strategies and interventions that Africa implement respond to the question of development?

In recent years, the quest to bring about world development has advanced to having global development strategies and approaches that should be adopted by all nations in the world. The efforts have not come without having world reports like the World Development Report, Human Development Report, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the most recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Although SDGs have been embraced recently in 2015 (Osborn et al., 2015), the concept of ‘Sustainable Development’ emerged in the development discourse in the past four and a half decades since the 1970s. Thus far, the body of literature about SD has substantially grown (Kates et al., 2005). However, a number of questions remain without answers particularly regarding Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Some of these questions include: first, How the concept of Sustainable Development (SD) critical in SSA; second, how theoretical underpinning about SD relevant for SSA; third, why efforts to promote SD have been disappointing in SSA compared to other regions in the world?

This chapter is guided by these questions. The chapter discusses some challenges for implementing SD in SSA. These include poverty and economic inequalities, climate change, environmental degradation, globalization, among others. Throughout, the chapter demonstrates whether or not SSA needs SD and under what conditions. The chapter is organized into nine sections. The first section introduces what is covered in the chapter including questions guiding the discussion. The second section dwells on the background information. Origin and definition of SD are discussed in the third section. The fourth and fifth sections cover theoretical underpinning and issues related to SD measurement. The sixth section is devoted to discussing the challenges that affect SD initiatives in SSA. The seventh and eighth sections present solutions and recommendations as well as future research directions respectively. Finally, the chapter charts out conclusions.

BACKGROUND

One of the buzzwords that are featuring highly, today, in the literature of development studies and social sciences in general, is ‘Sustainable Development’ (SD). The term Sustainable Development is difficult to define mainly because it encompasses two vague concepts; ‘sustainability’ and ‘development’. This chapter deals with ‘Sustainable Development’ concept instead of dealing with ‘sustainability’ and ‘development’ concepts separately. A synthesis from literature affirms that the content of SD remains elusive and the discussion about it is increasingly becoming rhetoric rather than a clear guide to action to improve people’s wellbeing. Being vague implies that the SD concept is viewed differently by different authors. For instance, some including Nayar (1994), Giddings et al. (2002) and Perdan (2011) view it as an approach to development. Others, including Sneddon et al. (2006) take it as a guiding institutional principle, or as a concrete policy goal and sometimes as focus of political struggle.

An observation from the Centre for Environmental Education (2007), Giddings et al. (2002) and Robinson (2004) posit that SD focuses either on three dimensions including social, environment and economic dimensions or emphasizes on the dualistic model showing a relationship between humanity and nature. Although some writers consider the three dimensions separately including the corresponding interventions, others focus on interactions between the three dimensions and sometimes adding institutions as another dimension of SD. This implies that, with time, the dimension of SD is expanding.

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