

## THE CHALLENGE OF ENTROPIC SOCIETY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

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### Abstract

Africa is a continent enmeshed in serial entropy the creation of entropic institutions. Although the concrete basis of life is entropic and a finite process, the level of disorder in the continent has eroded the socio-economic and political fabric of the people. Different measures have been put in place to address biophysical problems associated with this negative entropy through institutions of sustainable development governance. However, sustainability regime faces serious challenges not just from without, but from within. The reinvention of neoliberal wheels as sustainable development instead of limiting this developmental shortfall is redefining processes, changing the how, when and what policy makers do to stem damages inflicted on the biosphere. The paper analysis the challenge of sustainable development governance framed within the general approach of political ecology linking environmental change to policies and institutions. We note that there are contradictions and challenges inherent in Africa's quest of transiting to a post fossil fuel future. Poverty and need are major impediments to Africa's development as lopsided policy process in an ecologically finite world is bringing the continent to its biophysical limits. For that, Africa faces multiform tension between green economy and sustainability with deleterious consequences for the green development trajectory. We sum that the major challenge Africans are now with is not just how to formulate appropriate policies but how domestic sources of fund for green development can be explored such that their weak economic foundation is not completely eroded.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, NEPAD and Governance

### Introduction

Africa is home to about 10% of the world population with over 80 percent of the population living in rural areas and is engaged in agriculture with over 30% of the World's Poor as Africans (UNDP, 2007). In Africa, poverty is reversing the gains of economic growth made in the 1990s. Africa has faced severe changes in the last three decades in the political and economic space as political pluralism gave way to political monopoly. Political pluralism has gained foothold in the continent but failed to limit the incidence of poverty and deprivation witnessed across Africa. Confronted with a miasma of deleterious economic inadequacies, most states in sub-Saharan Africa adopted IMF/WB structural adjustment framework that failed to reverse the dwindling economic fortunes of Africa. Olukoshi (2002) commenting on the parlous state of economic stagnation notes that this represented the final nail in the coffin of the post-colonial model of accumulation and social contract that was built into it (Olukoshi, 2002). Neoliberalism instead of creating enabling environment for business brought with it a reversal of the gains already made in sustainable economic growth and human development. Thus, neoliberalization of African economies of the 1980 catalyzed the emerging trend towards regional integration.

The New partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is therefore Africa's boldest initiative focused on placing the continent on the appropriate path towards achieving sustainable



development. The initiative is not only supposed to be Africa-owned but is also an African-driven project in content and direction. NEPAD initiative has recorded significant progress in promoting good governance in almost all spheres. It has led to huge transformations of both urban and rural societies. NEPAD has promoted vertical and horizontal integration of business across the continent within national and sub-regional bodies and between regional and international business partners. As result of NEPAD intervention, the FDI in most countries have increased consolidating market capitalism. However, market capitalism promoted political exclusiveness invariably increasing the degree of inequality in societies fuelling conflicts across the continent more.

Another by-product of the consolidation of market economy is the increase in production as well as the evident degradation of ecosystem owing to increases in the exploitation of natural resources. Environmental maladies in the form of climate change become more pronounced as consequences of the changing relationship between man and nature. For sure, in Africa, there has been profound development at great cost to the environment. The fragile ecosystem- the vital life support system – was sacrificed as the price to be paid for development. Indeed, in most nation-states in Africa, environmental pollution was synonymous with development and was even something desirable.

### **Conceptualization**

#### **Sustainable Development**

Sustainability and development are two antithetical concepts with the same epistemology. They are 'nebulous', 'fluid' and 'ambiguous' concepts with various definitions emerging over the past two decades. The word 'sustain' is to support; 'uphold the course of' or 'keep into being'. It may also be taken to mean to provide with the necessities of life which includes food, shelter and healthy living. Sustainability believes it primary goal of mankind to provide for the wellbeing of all while ensuring ecological capital are not constrained to provide for the need of future generation (WCED, 1987). The concept of development is often tied to economic rationality viewed along ethnocentric model of modernization.

Even then, modernization theory is not static but is in a flux. It is evolving and is being transformed by institutions it created redefining and reinventing processes at every epoch to meet challenges of its liberal precursor. Sustainable development as the offspring of classical economics is the convergence (neo)liberal orthodoxy and developing countries' biocommunitarian perspective. It is a marriage of two philosophical extremes with overarching problematique of agroecological/ biophysical transformations at its heart while sustaining the interest of haute finance and big businesses.

Caccia (2001) puts it in context as a balancing act between the economy and the environment- meaning the economy is an entity separate from the environment, where the later inevitably loses out. But according to Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) '*The environment does not exist as a sphere separate from human actions, ambitions, and needs*'. Clearly, sustainable development concerns the natural sciences, economics and politics and it is also a cultural issue. Culture sustainability is an integral part of sustainable development- a reference to how we understand and appreciate natural resources and each other. Culture, according to UNESCO (2010), is a source of identity, innovation and creativity; it is also a set of distinctive spiritual and material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group. It is a complex

web of meanings, relationships, and beliefs and values that frame people's relationship to the world. Even though, founded on the values particular to one society or another, it implies we recognize the complex interdependence of human needs and the natural environment. It also implies development goals be conceived not just in terms of individual interests or self interested nations but also according to a shared vision of the planet.

Hopwood et al. (2005) argue from the point of view of governments and business with sustainable development conceived as continued economic growth made more environmentally sensitive in order to raise living standards globally and break the link between poverty and environmental degradation. Here, economic growth is seen as part of the solution with technology enriching a world that is more ecologically stable- a recipe for an acute case of Jevons paradox (Jevons, 1906). Brick and Douglas, (1997) share Hopwood et al. (2005) sentiment but see SD from only the business perspective as business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise and its stakeholders while protecting, sustaining and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future. However, the role of business community of using sustainable development as a way to paint environmentally destructive practices green was criticized as it is a rationalization for economic growth without due concern for environmental or social imperatives (Corporate Watch, 2006; Greenpeace, 2010). Similarly, Pearce and Warford (1993) defined sustainable development from the economic perspective as "increasing the wealth of the present without decreasing that of the future. In this way, the economists paid more attention to economic wealth than natural and environmental capital.

The WorldNet acknowledges sustainable development as synonymous with particular political agenda. It is perceived as a social movement "*a group of people with a common ideology who try together to achieve certain general goals*" (WorldNet, 2003). However, most people who are the most vocal supporters of sustainable development political agenda that are often branded as belonging to the left wing of the political spectrum. Conversely Lipietz, (1995) while accepting its political undertone sees it more as an ideology deployed by developed countries for the purpose of imposing stricter conditions and rules on development aid and international trade.

### **Governance**

The idea of good governance encompasses all facets of the habitability and productive capacity of ecosystems which includes the civil society organizations. These range from political accountability, transparency to rule of law amongst others. Governance to Sharma et al., (2011:4) entails the capacity of the government to design, formulate and implement policies which are development oriented and committed to improvement of the quality of life of the people. It also denotes the capacity of government and bureaucracy to cope with emerging challenges of the society. Good governance to them also refers to the ability to deliver goods to the various stakeholders by making the various agents of political system work for the betterment of citizens especially the marginalized section of the society. Elimination of malgovernances through the processes and the rule of law is another aspect of good governance. Governance is a process of decision-making as is of implementation also with focus on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementation. The most consequential common affairs of interest to public and private institutions in any nation are the

issue of the planet's ecosystem. The ecosystem is a community of interacting organisms and the physical environment they live in. They are the productive engines of the planet—the source of food, water, and other biological goods and services that sustain us (WRI, 2001).

Climate governance is all about the manner in which decisions are made in secret or in public about managing the ecosystem. In a way, it is also about whom has “a seat at the table” during deliberations on issues pertaining to the climate and how the interests of affected communities and ecosystems are represented (WRI, 2002). Hence climate governance has to do with how decision-makers are held responsible for the integrity of the process and for the results of their decisions.

One of the most visible aspects of this global climate governance is a large set of international environmental treaties, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Kyoto Protocol on greenhouse gases, Cartagena protocol on Biosafety, the Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the Montreal Protocol to protect the stratospheric ozone layer. Multilateral bodies such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization are also taking on greater environmental significance in an increasingly globalized and interdependent world economy. The European Union and of late African Union and other regional bodies are entering directly into international negotiations on behalf of its member states also play a growing significant role.

Thus, it is the totalities of structures committed to ensuring decisions on environmental issues are delivered to the people. It encompasses the way we exercise authority over the environment including the timing or overall strategy of management actions with biophysical limitations of the ecosphere. It also includes deciding on financing and enforcement; and determining how the benefits from these actions will be allocated.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first is the general introduction and conceptualization of key variables. The second part is on sustainable development governance in Africa. This is closely followed by a critical appraisal of the challenges of sustainable development governance in Africa. The fourth section is on suggestions on the way forward bringing us to conclusion on the ultimate decarbonization of the biosphere.

### **Sustainable Development Governance in Africa**

There is growing consensus amongst scholars of how dysfunctional political institutions and governance bear much of the blame for Africa's disappointing economic performance thwarting the successful pursuit of sustainable development. Impediments to sustainable development in the continent are also traceable to environmental degradations caused by biophysical rent extraction of the political elite in consort with their transnational benefactors. Indeed, Africa has become dangerously more unsustainable in several aspects such as desertification, deforestation, loss of biodiversity and climate change which has affected the vulnerable population. Thus, the question raised at international fora is how to achieve environmental sustainability with reasonable economic growth that can lead to poverty alleviation and social inclusiveness at all levels (Local, national and global). The major challenge in achieving sustainable development, therefore, is the want of institutions capable of translating the concept of sustainable development into practice.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) acknowledges these challenges of implementing sustainable development in Africa. JPOI recognizes the NEPAD as providing a

framework for sustainable development on the continent. It also addresses the regional dimension of sustainable development and provides for a range of measures in pursuing the implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the summit at the regional and sub-regional levels, through the regional commissions and other regional and sub-regional institutions and bodies (See <http://www.un-documents.net/johannesburg-declaration.pdf>). It further calls for the Regional Economic Commissions (RECS) to promote the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development into their work in a balanced way; to facilitate and promote a balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in member states.

### **The Challenge to Sustainable Development Governance in Africa**

Africa seeks to attain the UN target of achieving Millennium Development Goals but drive towards achieving the targets has been undermined by the enormous challenges. These challenges are also interwoven with the failure of sustainable development. The challenges are as follows:

#### **Challenge to Political Governance**

Despite progress made towards achieving sustainable development in many quarters in Sub Saharan Africa (SSA), democratic governance remains the central problem. The key challenge faced is of how to overcome neo-patrimonial character of the state in Africa where there is the lack of openness in rendering services to the people with most leaders more interested in retaining power and keeping the ruling elite happy at the expense of the people. In this setting, corruption, nepotism, rent-seeking and centrism thrives. The leaders due to their rent-seeking proclivity are more inclined to implementing adjustments and reforms that sustain 'pursuit of profit' than in promoting a healthy environment for sustainable domestic policy.

Indeed, the leaders are more interested in fuelling divisive politics, and use identity politics to enshrine the bifurcation of the state along ethnic lines. In this situation, the socio-political landscape has been unstable. The leaders lack the political will to initiate tough but necessary measures that will enhance the socio-economic well-being of the people. Driving from this, most of the states are enmeshed in socio-economic crisis and relied on Breton-wood institutions to overcome observed policy implementation shortfall. However, neoliberalism in

Africa is accompanied by lack lustre performance and further downward spiral of the markets. The central governance deficit the policy of the Breton wood institution seeks to address rather was further magnified as more complex challenges manifest in the form of climate change. Unfortunately, NEPAD the soi-disant African home grown solution to the above problem has not been entirely free from Western imperialism that is in terms with coming to the rescue of Africa. Rather is a much weakened object incapable of engineering any meaningful development in Africa, simply because it has remained an instrument in the invisible hands of finance capital. Ownership of NEPAD has marred effectiveness of the initiative as drivers of development. According to Olukoshi (2002) the real meaning and significance of local policy like NEPAD rest less on its geographical origin and more in its local anchorage. To him, ownership if it is to be meaningful should be organically linked to the generation and sustenance of consent and ultimately, legitimacy and that ownership cannot be exclusive monopoly of the elite but that it must have popular anchorage. Thus, as a top-down

strategy NEPAD is neither inclusive nor is it really integrative in the real sense of the world but is only a pact between the political elite and local middlemen of transnational elite.

For sure, there is no conscious effort to build structures and practices and to consolidate the modest progress recorded. Even though most states are now building democratic institutions, the principle of separation of power has not been fully incorporated to the political practice. There are no checks and balances between the arms of government. The legislatures in most states lack the teeth and bite and are deficient to checkmate the excesses of the executive. Similarly, the judiciary in Africa function more like career civil servants that can be hired and fired by the executive. And with the belief that he who pays the piper dictates the tune the courts now function as rubber stamping institution to uphold the excesses of the executive.

### **Human Rights**

In Africa, the political process and party politics is a product of violent contestations with many participants denied their fundamental human rights. Clearly, Africa faces a myriad of complex human rights challenges. Violent conflicts still affect parts of the continent most times making it difficult for government to implement policies and mobilize the populace behind national sub-regional and regional development projects. In light of this, it is particularly challenging to create the necessary condition for sustained and effective delivery of the dividends of democracy. National deficiencies aside, there is weak regional framework for promoting and enforcing human rights. AU, the regional independent body charged with overseeing the implementation of African charter on human rights is not only weak but is not equipped to discharge its functions. Thus, human rights abuses are still rampant in some states with the police ill-equipped and understaffed to cope with the challenges. Additionally, institutional debilities and lack of capacity have made the police ineffective in policing the state. There is also the challenge of courts and judiciary that are deflated by corruption bordering on incompetence deriving from their inability to comprehend the authority vested on them by the constitution. Under this dispensation, the vulnerable group bears the brunt of institutional debilities and is prone to human rights abuses. With weak institutions and non-existent courts, economic growth has now become a class project making it far more difficult for integrating the poor to the politics of participation and democracy.

### **Economic Governance**

Much has been made of NEPAD initiative as the economic framework that speaks to the sustainable development in the continent. Conceived as a strategy for private-sector led development that will usher in a new dawn of economic growth where foreign investors will play an important role in leading the continent to the promised economic El Dorado. Yet, what the initiative has succeeded in achieving is bundling the whole continent for the price of one. For the price of one, the marketization agenda of the Breton-wood institution started in 1980s now have regional arm empowered for the mobilization of the populace behind the contraction of their continent's manufacturing base. This has left most economies across Africa with strong and unpleasant ordure resulting in reversal of the little ray of light experienced across Africa in the early 1990s.

To preserve neoliberal ideological purity, African elite are recruited into the fray and failed to dine with long spoons with the devil. Instead, Africa experiences a gradual derailment

of developmental process resulting in the amplification of inequalities, poverty and the general reconfiguration of the social space. Because neo-liberalism advocated by NEPAD largely ignored the specificity and historicity of African states and the need to adopt different strategies for different African states, it became a veritable tool for class hegemony. Thus NEPAD is not an 'open sesame' to peace, prosperity and economic transformation in that it perceived the market as being better at allocating resources and managing the economy more efficiently than government.

Another economic headache for sustainable development in Africa is the lack of balance between the three pillars of SD. Under the present arrangement, the economic concern has higher priority over the equity and environment concerns- an attribute of its precursor. Balancing the economic environment and social concerns make real progress towards sustainable development and ensure that MGDs are met. The challenge to attaining MDGs is the want or commitment to sound public finance management, accountability and the integrity of the monetary and finance management, accountability and the integrity of the monetary and financed system.

There is also the absence of regional watchdog to guard against the excesses of the executive and the failure of other national institutions of government, such as the legislature and civil society in general, to control the executive to make them accountable. Even where some of the institutions in some countries have achieved desired results, these best practice initiatives are not shared amongst NEPAD stakeholders.

There is weak institutional linkages and partnership on sharing information and experience. Clearly, appropriate integration tools that will ensure inter-linkages and approaches (vertical and horizontal) that show case win-win solutions and help to change the prevailing perception have not been adopted.

### **Institutional Effectiveness**

Over the past two decades, African countries sought to consolidate their efforts towards sustainable development despite the economic difficulties the region is experiencing. Many have embraced access to clean and productive environment as fundamental human rights and thus adopt forward looking responses in national, sub-regional, regional and international institutions participate in tackling hunger, underdevelopment, governance problems and environmental degradation, generally. However, most of these institutions have overlapping mandates and sometimes engage in activities that is contrary to the objectives of sister institutions.

Institutional effectiveness of most of the organs of governance lack legal authority, staffing, and political support with limited budgets and as such failed to address national, regional and imbalance and inequalities in global environment governance. For this reasons, existing institutional machinery are weak and are not better coordinated to ensure that it can confront the sustainable development challenges. The poor still do not have a voice in governance and projects initiated by the institutions delivering services. Even the governments of most states in Africa are often marginalized from multilateral negotiations and policy making due to deficiency in negotiating regimes and the lack of support for capacity building and access to technical, human and financial resources. This explains the dominance of policy making by

industrialized countries whose priorities continue to dominate developmental projects across Africa.

At national level, development dimension of governance is still scattered in different ministries and there is little joined up policy making whereas the environment ministry wherein some environmental policies are initiated still rank very low in the political hierarchy. As a result, national environment agenda is not given the priority it deserves which explains the failure of many countries to fully integrate sustainable development tenets into their national socio-political strategies.

A wide gap still exists in the accountability of national, sub-regional and regional institutions especially where they fail to deliver on agreed obligations and duties. Most of the institutions engaged in service delivery in Africa are not held accountable for their failure and are most susceptible to interference from industrialized countries— an attribute of their reliance on foreign donors and sponsors whereby who pays the piper dictates the tune. Of particular note, participation in most of the initiatives of these institutions has been low. NGOs are not adequately mobilized to monitor and evaluate shortfall in projects, especially in rural areas. Institutional decentralization of most of these organizations is weak and has taken special measures to ensure participation of women youth, ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups. This and other similar reasons have weakened governance and have militated against Africa's ability to transit to a post fossil society.

CSOs play crucial role of strengthening local capacity to cope or support local action. The number of CSOs that engaged in providing the people an alternate channel for their voices to be heard in Africa is limited in number. Nevertheless, some of the CSOs operate exclusively as service providers, abandoning their policy advocacy role. Some CSOs are known to have been partisan and opportunistic in their outlook while in some countries their watchdog role is often undermined by government reprehensive laws and restrictions.

### **Social Development Governance**

Social sustainability governance in Africa has not really tallied with tangible achievements on the economic growth front. Income distribution has limited the prospect for social governance as vast majorities of the people are still poor, progress in reducing poverty is highly skewed limiting the prospect for translating any gain in the form of economic growth into social development structures that will impact on the ordinary people. Indeed, most economies are faced with the challenge of growing their economies in a manner that creates wealth, good health, education and other social services. Growth in most cases has been limited to extractive industries. Most countries are also faced with growing number of jobless resulting in civil unrest. In fact, political instability is the major factor in the region's weak capacity to generate jobs; climate change is increasing the vulnerability of African countries to natural disasters threatening economic growth and social development. HIV/AIDS scourge has exacerbated economic exclusion. Africa's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) paid sufficient attention to important area such as trade, employment, social protection and gender.

The inadequacies have been accentuated by the failure of those behind implementation of NEPAD who are aware of the potentially positive impact that identification of social dimensions would have on the fight against social crises in Africa. Even though many African countries have consented to NEPAD principle failed to align it with their national development.



Indeed, many countries have not effectively mainstreamed regional Plan into their own socio-development strategies. Most of these countries failed to determine the social, political and economic factors which may hinder or support the social policy formwork. Another major challenge is the lack of institutional capacity to coordinate social policy provision within the countries, sub-regional and regional agencies. This contributed to weak capacities of government in monitoring and evaluating policies thereby diminishing the role of the state in being accountable and responsible to its citizens. Increasingly, adequate attention is not paid prioritization of social programmes that will engender economic growth which will have a ripple effect on social development in the allocation of resources on the national budget. Because of the paucity of fund, most states are continually struggling to identify effective development options, overcome persistent poverty, domestic social inequality and at the same time, implement feasible growth strategies.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, achievement of sustainable development is generally conditioned by its successes and failures in improving social dimension as it has potential to address a variety of social crises gripping the continent. Social dimensions have the potential to derail productive capacities and divert investments and resources from productive sectors. The health systems are weak and under-resounded to achieve universal access. The quality of education is still an issue. Even though school enrolment has improved, public spending has not matched increase in student population resulting in debilitating structures. The numbers of teachers is not only insufficient but are poorly remunerated. Agriculture, the mainstay of the rural people has been hampered by natural and human-induced disasters. Political unrest and armed conflicts are constraints on agricultural development.

All said, as the trend towards green transformation is gaining grounds there is the demand on the state to play an important role in setting the agenda and providing leadership necessary for accelerating and strengthening national, sub-regional and regional integration. State leadership will ensure Africa take part in shaping all forms of socio-economic and political interactions across Africa. Greening of the economy will open the continent to foreign investors but at the expense of the environment. How to balance the three pillars of sustainable development in a way that none of the pillars is imposed over the other therefore become a challenge states must contend with. Generating appropriate policy and domestic sources of fund for this development policy such that economic foundation is not eroded become a major task for achieving sustainable development.

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