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Building on Sand! Can Environmentally Unfriendly (Economic) Development Sustains?

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Building on Sand! Can Environmentally Unfriendly (Economic) Development Sustains?

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Abstract- This paper aims to show the closer link exists between the natural environment and economic development. It argues environment is a foundation for economic development. It is obvious that nature provides us with natural resources by which we humans can satisfy our desires. But, the problem is, humans go beyond a limit, and intervene in nature. The concentration of carbon dioxide has increased since the pre-industrial era primarily due to the combustion of fossil fuels and deforestation. Environmental degradation and environmental change have, therefore, threatened people's health, physical security, material needs and social cohesion. Therefore, improper exploitation of natural resources and unlimited intervention in the natural environment jeopardizes the sustainability of any development.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Naturally, humans are endowed with the capacity of mastering nature and its habitats, and nature supplies humans with resources by which they can satisfy their needs. But, irrational, egoistic and unlimited human interventions in to the natural environment results in disturbing nature and its order. In other words, unethical human interventions in to nature make nature a dangerous place to live in. And, this attracts attention from scholars, politicians and environmental activities. For instance, environmental activists and scholars such as Callicot (1994) and Leopold (1949) argue that the western environmental thinking which is anthropocentric mainly and largely responsible for the destruction of biodiversity and environmental degradation that the world is experiencing these days. For these scholars, the problem is deeply rooted in the Christian tradition. In other words, in Genesis 1:26-28 you may read the following verses:

> *Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground…So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*

This indicates man has more value than other creatures in this world. In other words, man has more value than the other beings created by God. So, man is next to God in the hierarchy of values.

However, Leopold (1949), in his book entitled "A Sand County Almanac" argued that the ecosystem has intrinsic value. This is to note that "you can't exploit nature as you want." You can't advise humans not to use any resources from nature. But, the feasible thing is to use and exploit nature in a very sustainable way. In this way the idea of sustainable development comes in to fore. The World Commission on Environment in its Brudtl and Report (1987), defines sustainable development as follows:

Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

According to this report, although natural resources are means by which human beings fulfill their needs, there is a limit by which man can't go. In other words, every man has a certain responsibility towards nature in which his/ her activities shouldn't endanger the interest of future generation. This responsibility can be manifested by "not to endanger nature and not to disturb the natural order."

Besides, international environmental conferences such as the 1992 Johannesburg environmental summit, Rio 20+, the Kyoto protocol, the Copenhagen UN's environmental summits and The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21 or CMP 11) held in Paris call every nation should bear the responsibility of protecting the natural environment. Part of this, Ethiopia launched green economy policy and climate Resilient Economic Growth in the year 2011 (Bass et al, 2013).

Above all, various studies show that the earth's carrying capacity decreases dramatically in the last 40 from 1961-2010 years (Steffan, 2005), and is expected to degrade significantly in the coming 500 years (Cohen, 1995). This is due to the increasing number of human population has directly affecting the carrying capacity of the earth (see the figure below).

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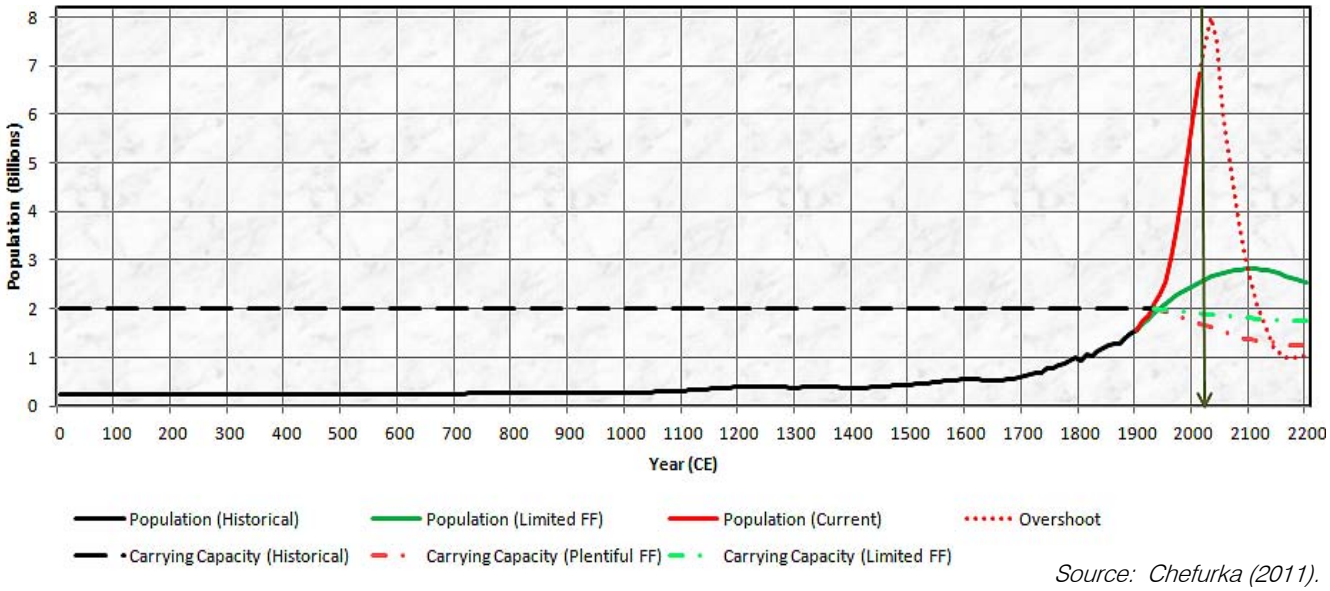

Source: Chefurka (2011).

Figure 1: Trend of population growth in relation to earth's carrying capacity

II. Understanding Sustainable Development

Before defining what sustainable development is, it is better to have a clear understanding of its constituting terms: So, what is development? What does it meant by sustainability?

There is no universally agreed and binding definition of development. Different organizations, international institutions and scholars have defined the term differently. For instance, Todaro & Smith (2012) stated that in strictly economic terms, traditionally, ''development meant achieving sustained rates of growth of income per capita to enable a nation to expand its output at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population.'' But this definition is too narrow and out dated.

While other scholars such as Sen (1999), argues that the "capability to function" is what it really matters for status of being poor or non-poor. For Sen, economic growth isn't an end in itself. Development has to be more concerned with enhancing the lives citizens lead and the amount of freedoms they enjoy. This is new trend and paradigm shift in the definition of development. Other international organizations such as UNDP define development as human development consists of education, health, and adjusted real income per capita as the component of indicators of development (Todaro & Smith, 2012).

But, whatever the debate is, there is one working definition at least most scholars agree, if not all. That is "Development is the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capabilities by raising people's levels of living, self-esteem, and freedom (Ibid: 775)."

If this is all about development, the next question is 'what does sustainable mean?' Unlike development, scholars agree on the meaning of the term 'sustainable.' According to Merriam-Webster dictionary (2017), the word 'sustainable' means 'to exist, to continue.' So, what is sustainable development? Despite various definitions are available regarding this term, United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), coined a definition of sustainable development which is probably the most known in all of sustainability literature. It defines the term as follows:

[Sustainable development] is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.

Here sustainable mean development that continues for a long period of time. Behind this definition, there is one clear meaning. Any development, mainly economic development, continues/ or sustains so long as It wisely use natural resources at its hand. Unless otherwise, if you don't use your natural resources wisely, nature will stand against you-"ecological debt." In other words, these days it is common to see wild fire, desertification, raising sea level, melting of Arctic Snows, excessive flooding and so many natural calamities. These are the manifestations of unrestrained human intervention in to nature.

However, the 2002 Johannesburg Earth Summit on Sustainable Development incorporates three pillars/approaches to sustainability to the existing definition of sustainable development as part of further modification to the term (Holmberg, 2012). The pillars are:

a) Economic Approach

This approach to sustainability is supported by a group of 77 developing countries that the developed countries should invest in protection of the environment

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while the developing countries shall invest their capitals in some other areas other than protection of the environment. This is for the fact that developing countries can't afford the costs to protect the environment.

b) Environmental Approach

This approach calls for a strict and clear environmental rules that forced countries to protect the environment. Traditional approaches to development create problems to the natural environment. This position was propagated strongly by the European Union.

c) Social Justice Approach

According to this approach to sustainability, sustainable development is all about social justice and protection of the environment. It asserts ecological stability plays great role in overall human welfare. It calls for social stability, security and equality. This approach was propagated by Japan, Canada and Norway.

These three new elements of sustainability connote that the sustainability shall be in all aspect of life. Environmental sustainability is not enough in itself. Sustainability has to be holistic, all-encompassing and comprehensive. For the purpose of one, we shouldn't in danger the other. All these 3 pillars are interdependent one with the other, unless in the absence of one, we can't talk sustainability in its robust sense.

III. Environment-a Foundation for (Sustainable) Economic Development!

Before the *Brundtl and* Commission, "development" was clearly associated with industrialization, urbanization, and increase in per capita measured solely by economic terms (Todaro and Smith, 2012). In other words, environmental protection was perceived by many as an obstacle to development. However, World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), pinpointed that dichotomizing ''environment' from ''development" is wrong. Rather, these two terms are inseparable-two sides of the same coin. We can't think one without the other. Thus, a paradigm shift is made from the old dichotomy to "environment and development," and then to "environment for development, accordingly.

Though, past development discourses consider protecting environment as a hindrance to development, the reality is the opposite. A healthy environment helps development to sustain (Rahnema, 1997). Contrary to this claim, some argued that, naturally, development is destructive, violent and anti- nature (Shiva, 1991). In other words, development and nature are two opposite concepts. Meaning, if you develop, you go against nature; if you protect nature, you hinder development. So, how is it possible to sustain development while protecting nature?

The following Box clearly summarizes the relationship between environment and development. According to the Box, environment is the foundation for development. Any economic development is deeply rooted on the environment. The environment is the source of all the resources we need to satisfy our desires. But use wisely, and not by threatening nature.

Box 1. Environment as the foundation for development

Development is the process of furthering people's well-being. Good development entails:

- ✓ *increasing the asset base and its productivity;*
- ✓ *empowering poor people and marginalized communities;*
- ✓ *reducing and managing risks; and*
- ✓ *Taking a long-term perspective with regard to intra- and intergenerational equity.*

The environment is central to all four of these requirements. Long-term development can only be achieved through sustainable management of various assets: financial, material, human, social and natural. Natural assets, including water, soils, plants and animals, underpin the livelihoods of all people. Sustainable development provides a framework for managing human and economic development, while ensuring a proper and optimal functioning over time of the natural environment.

Sources: World Bank, (2006).

Besides, the MDG-7 calls to ensure environmental sustainability (UN, 2009). It suggests countries need to integrate environmental protection agenda in to their policies and programs. It noted the way we are acting, the way we are exploiting nature is not right unless it is too threatening to sustain the stability, biodiversity, health and productivity of the ecosystems.

IV. Economic Growth and Protecting the Environment: Two at Once- A Contradiction?

''There is tradeoff between economic growth and environment due to the desire to high growth and excessive use of resources that cause environmental pollution (Haq, 1999). In other words, the income and consumption level of the poor is directly proportional to level of environmental degradation (Mensah & Castero, 2004). Poor countries are technologically backward. They need a lot of natural resources to secure certain economic growth. This would results in environmental degradation (Awan, 2013).

The existing global system makes life difficult to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). In this regards, Awan (2013) and Haq (1999), claims that the so called economically advanced nations which develop at the expense of the Least Developing Countries (LDCs) shall

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protect the environment. This position is similar to the economic approach of the Johannesburg 2002 summit. This duty can be demonstrated in different ways. Among others: inventing new environmentally friendly technologies and transferring to the 3rd world countries (Awan, 2013); and, a paradigm shift in the notion of development is needed-'the current quantity of growth should be replaced by quality' (Haq, 1999). These are among the mechanisms by which environment can be protected without jeopardizing economic development.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

There is close and direct link between the natural environment and sustainable (economic) development. Climate change, global warming, greenhouse effect, drought, poverty, conflicts, flooding, wild fire and so on are some of the hazards results from irresponsible and egoistic human intervention and exploitation of the natural environment which disrupts its natural order and ecosystem. These environmentally linked problems are increasingly affecting the planet and its inhabitants. Thus, governments, policy makers, environmental activists and any other concerned bodies shall take actions before the worst day comes. We shall build green economy and invent ecofriendly technologies unless the planet would pay us equivalent what we are doing against it (-ecological debt).

Green Energy in the Blue World!!!!!!

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"The environment is where we live; and development is what we all do in attempting toimprove our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable." World Commission on Environment (WCED, 1987).

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