

How Can Environmental and Ecological Perspectives be Highlighted in Developmental Programmes?

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Abstract: The increasing urgency of environmental and ecological challenges necessitates their integration into developmental policies, particularly in Africa, where biodiversity loss, climate change, and resource mismanagement threaten economic stability and social well-being. This paper examines the role of natural capital in fostering sustainable development, arguing for a paradigm shift that incorporates ecological considerations into economic planning. Using a multidisciplinary approach, the study explores the interdependence of ecosystems, human livelihoods, and economic growth, emphasizing the need for structural reforms that promote environmental sustainability.

The analysis highlights the economic vulnerabilities of Africa, particularly in sectors dependent on natural resources, such as tourism and agriculture. It underscores the necessity of transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy, advocating for investments in green infrastructure, climate-smart agriculture, and sustainable land and water management. Furthermore, the paper discusses the significance of inclusive governance, focusing on environmental rights, equitable decision-making, and legal frameworks that enhance environmental justice. Special attention is given to the empowerment of women and youth, recognizing their critical role in advancing sustainable policies and fostering community resilience.

Ultimately, this study supports a green growth agenda as a viable pathway to long-term prosperity. It calls for integrated policies that align economic expansion with ecological conservation, ensuring resilience against future environmental and economic shocks. By advocating for stronger institutional frameworks, enhanced regional cooperation, and increased international investment in sustainability initiatives, this paper contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable development in the Global South.

Keywords: Sustainable development, natural capital, environmental governance, green growth, climate resilience, Africa

Introduction

Since the Rio Summit in 1992¹ (Rio Declaration), Africa has been building its ecological future, as demonstrated by the commitments made by most countries at the various international agreements and summits on

environmental protection (Jean Claude Kouagou, Les défis et les opportunités du développement durable en Afrique, July 6, 2023).

According to African Union estimates, the economic impact on

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Africa's tourism and travel sector alone could amount to US\$50 billion (almost seven times more than the 2008 economic crisis), not to mention the widespread job losses that the AfDB estimates at between US\$25 and US\$30 million (AfDB, Africa 2020 Economic Outlook, supplement). As the management of national parks and other conservation assets relies heavily on tourism revenues, the potential implications for the maintenance of this essential ecological infrastructure are enormous, including its impact on the livelihoods of the many communities that depend on it (Ostfeld, 2009). Biodiversity loss and the rise of zoonotic pathogens (Zohdy *et al.*, 2019). The Coevolution Effect as a Driver of Spillover.

A number of responses have already been envisaged as a way out of this crisis, responses in terms of public health, budgetary and monetary policies, and structural policies. In this perspective, it is necessary to consider natural capital as an asset in order to integrate biodiversity into the economic choices of governments and companies.

The analysis, proposed for Africa, aims to provide important reflections on the interdependence of people, health, livelihoods and well-being, and the various economic sectors on the one hand, and natural capital on the other. This analysis will be placed in the context of Africa's economic development models and increasing globalisation. It will begin by taking stock of the extent to which natural capital and biodiversity are taken into account in the current economic

strategies of governments and companies, and their sectoral extension. It will then highlight the interactions between man and nature in intra-African value chains, the resulting value creation and poverty reduction. And finally, it emphasises the integration of these three considerations into an economic policy scenario and ecological reconstruction strategy.

The global economic crisis has highlighted the volatility of markets in an increasingly interconnected world. These short-term economic crises are compounded by long-term challenges, such as climate change, which have long been identified as a threat to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and in particular, to continued progress beyond 2015.

For the immediate future, this initiative also responds to the call for a "green and fair economic recovery", including the African Union's green stimulus program and related policy advice. This study aims to indicate ways in which environmental and ecological perspectives can be brought to the forefront of development programmes.

Implementing More Ambitious Policies

Adapting to New Development Realities to Achieve Green Growth

Despite these promising developments in terms of public health, budgetary and monetary policies, and structural policies, progress has been uneven across Africa. Poverty and food security are persistent

problems. Lack of access to energy, education and infrastructure continues to hamper business growth and economic development. Limited access to skills, markets and technology means that most businesses are not sufficiently equipped to compete in an increasingly globalized marketplace (Chalox & Simand, 2021).

Among the socio-economic challenges, demographic growth and change are putting pressure on the sustainable use of Africa's resources. In 2011, the world's population exceeded seven billion for the first time in human history (UN). Africa is experiencing rapid population growth, with annual growth rates well above the global average (African Union Action Plan for Green Recovery 2021-2027). This has consequences in terms of food security, job creation and pressure on natural resources.

As for environmental challenges, Africa's key resources are geographically unevenly distributed. Africa is a continent of environmental extremes and contrasts, as shown by the rainfall gradients across the continent. This poses a challenge to effectively manage water as a resource, given that Africa has 63 river basins that cover some 64 per cent of the continent's land, contain 93 per cent of its water resources and are home to 77 per cent of the population.²

Land degradation, deforestation, excessive use of water resources, and the discharge of untreated pollutants into fragile ecosystems, are increasingly

jeopardizing the capacity of natural resources to satisfy sustainable growth (e.g. MA 2005). All these factors pose a threat to human health and food security on the continent. There is a real opportunity to ensure that the needs of future generations are met through climate-smart investments now.

A transition from investment in fossil fuels, and in particular coal, to renewable energies would be increasingly economically viable, as renewable energies are now cheaper than new coal and create more jobs per dollar invested.

Key Opportunities

Sustainable development in Africa is crucial to the prosperity and well-being of its people, and to the preservation of the environment. However, the continent faces major challenges that hinder its progress towards a sustainable future. This article examines these challenges and explores the opportunities that lie ahead, highlighting the importance of innovation, partnerships and youth participation in overcoming these challenges. By overcoming these obstacles and seizing the opportunities, we will succeed in moving towards sustainable and resilient development, creating a promising future for its people and its environment.

The Green Growth Programme for Africa takes a more holistic and systematic approach to development than is usually the case. It focuses on strengthening the emphasis on the quality of growth, ensuring that economic

growth is sustainable by using resources more efficiently (Comelgau. 1994).

Development approaches that systematically integrate economic and social concerns can generate significant developmental co-benefits. At household level, accelerating the transition from the inefficient use of traditional solid fuels, such as biomass and coal, to more modern fuels or the use of electricity has significant health benefits.

Sustainable land and water management is another example of an integrated approach that should be implemented in the context of green growth. Given that the majority of land and water resources are transboundary, it is necessary to emphasise regional integration and cooperation. Regional integration is also important for market development and new business opportunities.

It is crucial to mobilise the necessary financial resources, develop adequate infrastructure and promote transparent, accountable governance to create a sustainable Africa, where present and future generations can thrive in a healthy and prosperous environment with inclusive and participatory governance.

Inclusive Governance

Through Participation in Decision-making

Meeting these challenges and achieving sustainable, resilient development requires effective national systems

that are able and willing to provide safeguards for people and the planet. Environmental rights can contribute to this vision by providing a framework for environmental and climate justice, the protection of rights, and participatory and inclusive decision-making in which the benefits and costs of natural resource use are equitably distributed in ways that take account of poverty, deprivation and discrimination. These environmental rights are also recognised in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) and in the 2003 Revised African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, which serves as the main environmental framework convention for the member states of the African Union (AU).

Indeed, many national laws provide for varying standards and significant exemptions. Worse still, the strong institutions needed to ensure the rigorous application and enforcement of environmental laws are sorely lacking. The aim of this initiative is to study the feasibility and possibilities of improving the recognition and effective implementation of environmental rights in Africa. The specific objectives are to:

- Assess the various African agreements, frameworks, judicial decisions and legislation on environmental rights, and identify approaches that could foster more robust implementation.
- Encourage an inclusive process for faster adoption and implementation of environmental rights and the environmental rule

of law in Africa, which aligns with the achievement of the SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063.

This focus on development has been compounded by the need to promote economic recovery or growth, particularly in light of the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

These obstacles are compounded by the low level of access to information on environmental rights and the low level of access to appropriate decision-making forums, particularly at the local level. It is necessary to highlight the gender factor and the low level of representation of women in decision-making bodies, which impacts on development.

By Empowering Women and Young People

The First World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City in 1975, led shortly afterwards to the promulgation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in 1979.

After the Third World Conference on Women, held in Nairobi, women's issues were increasingly on the agenda of major world meetings and summits, and increasingly set out in conventions. Major relevant international frameworks designed to address gender equality include the Beijing Platform for Action, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo, the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development and the Millennium

Development Goals (MDGs) (which promotes gender equality and women's empowerment).

At the continental level, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union (AU) have adopted two instruments aimed specifically at promoting gender equality and women's empowerment: the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in Maputo in 2003, and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, adopted by the Summit of Heads of State in Addis Ababa in July 2004.

Despite these commitments and declarations, progress has been slow in correcting gender imbalances and eliminating gender-based violence.

It is recognized in Africa and around the world that investing in and empowering young people to assume leadership roles through active participation in public life can contribute positively to achieving the development outcomes set out in Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals. Both agendas recognize the vital role of young people, emphasizing their integration and greater participation, and the principle of "leaving no one behind".

Youth, particularly young women and girls, are full members of society, and should therefore enjoy the full rights accorded to all members of society to participate in political processes.

Despite all these positive points, young people are still under-represented in political spheres, especially in the fields of politics, economics, social affairs, cultural development, science and technology (AU, 2017).

Investing in young people, particularly in education, offers the opportunity to train a skilled workforce. Indeed, education enables young people to acquire the skills they need to get a better job in a fast-changing emerging economy. It also enables us to strengthen young people's capacities and ensure that their rights and freedoms are respected, enabling them to realize their full potential.

Conclusion

Ultimately, green growth is part of a broader discussion about the quality of growth and how the international community should view development in the 21st century. The AfDB's strategic work on green growth joins and complements the work on long-term strategy and the focus on inclusive growth.

The proposed concept and approach to green growth emphasises the need for Africa to pursue economic growth and argues that this can best be achieved if a more holistic approach to development is undertaken and efforts are made to ensure that Africa's environment and

natural resources are used sustainably so that the ecosystem goods and services on which many households depend are not threatened.

Endnotes

- ¹ Rio Declaration on environment and development, Doc Off AG NU, 1992, Doc
- ² "The 'Environment' Pillar in the Context of Sustainable Development", Res AG 67/213, Doc AG NU, 67th sess, Doc NU 67/213 (2023).

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