Unlocking the Pillars of Sustainable Development: A Framework for Intergenerational Equity

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Abstract: Sustainable development is a holistic and balanced approach to meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves integrating environmental protection, social inclusion, and economic growth to create a resilient and equitable society. SD focuses on addressing current demands without sacrificing the capacity of the next generation to address their own. But maintaining fair distribution of resources and benefits among present and future generations is still a difficult task. In order to achieve intergenerational and intragenerational fairness and thereby free the foundations of SD, this article offers a detailed approach. The framework includes the environmental, economic, and social equality components. In order to protect the earth for future generations. Economic equity concentrates on developing accessible economic structures that support equitable allocation of resources, opportunities, and wealth among various societal sectors. Intra-generational equity explores social fairness and promotes laws and initiatives that deal with injustices within the present generation. It emphasizes the value of strengthening vulnerable groups, elevating underprivileged communities, and closing access gaps to services like education and healthcare. The paradigm also highlights the interconnection of different aspects, acknowledging that advancements in one area may have good or negative effects on others. Therefore, strategies that encourage synergies and acknowledge trade-offs are crucial for SD. The framework needs strong governance and policy processes in order to be operationalized. Long-term planning is done by policy makers, who also adopt a holistic viewpoint that ignores party lines and other short-term considerations. To guarantee the fair implementation of SD, strong institutions, inclusive decision-making processes, and transparent accountability are crucial. Innovation and technical progress can also be crucial in opening up sustainable routes. Transformational results may be achieved by utilizing technology to increase resource efficiency, advance green energy, and promote social inclusion. In the end, this paradigm urges civic society, business sector players, governments, and all individuals to share responsibilities. To address the issues of intergenerational and intragenerational justice and open the door to a more sustainable, equitable, and prosperous future for all, cooperation and collaborative action are essential. Societies may unlock the tenets of sustainable growth and set the groundwork for a more peaceful cohabitation of the present and future generations by implementing this complete framework.

Keywords: Sustainability, Development, Sustainable development, Intergenerational equity

INTRODUCTION

In the developing discourses of modernity, sustainability emerged as a central goal, to bring about a harmonious balance between present and future generations and compatible aspirations, even when it has no reception great reputation, perfect understanding and scholarship in nature, the -makers of the system, a definite moral image and the general public. In pursuit of human consciousness and work towards the future It seeks to contribute to the discourse on SD by exploring its implications. The search for SD dates back to the groundbreaking 1987 World Environmental Development Commission report known as the Brundtland Report, sees SD as a development that meets current needs without depleting generative capacity, and of which future generations can handle (Ukaga, Maser & Reichenbach, 2011). With this thought decision-makers and practitioners can move in the direction of sustainability. Intergenerational equity is a fundamental principle of fair and equitable distribution of resources, opportunities and benefits between different generations, ensuring that the needs of present and future generations are taken into account and met. The concept of intergenerational equity recognizes that actions and decisions of the generation can have a profound effect on the well-being and opportunities of future generations based on the belief that each generation has a moral responsibility to leave behind a sustainable and prosperous world for those who will come. The main objective of this paper is to provide a comprehensive understanding of SD through the analysis of its three interconnected pillars: environment, economy and society. This paper argues that achieving SD requires careful consideration of the relationships, complementarities and trade-offs between these pillars, as well as the promotion of intergenerational and intergenerational equity. Simply put, in order to promote citizenship rather than spectatorship, a succinct and consistent discourse on SD is required to better elucidate the road and trajectory to SD. By providing more succinct information on its meaning, associated key concepts, dimension, the principles, and their implications for global, national, and individual actions in the pursuit of SD, this paper will also contribute to the comprehension and articulacy of the discourse. This is crucial because it would provide academics, researchers, policymakers, development practitioners, students and the general public additional knowledge about the pattern for further research and decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of development

Development, as a concept, has been associated with diverse meanings, interpretations and theories from various scholars. Development is defined as 'an evolutionary process in which the human capacity increases in terms of initiating new structures, coping with problems, adapting to continuous change, and striving purposefully and creatively to attain new goals (Peet, 1999 cited in Du Pisani, 2006). According to Reyes (2001) development is understood as a social condition within a nation, in which the needs of its population are satisfied by the rational and sustainable use of natural resources and systems. Todaro and Smith (2006) also define development as a multi-dimensional process that involves major changes in social structures, attitudes, and institutions, as well as economic growth, reduction of inequality, and eradication of absolute poverty. Several theories have been put forward to explain the concept of development. They include the Modernisation, Dependency, World Systems and Globalisation Theories.

The Modernization Theory of development distinguishes between two main categories of society in the world, namely the traditional and modern societies. The theory, according to Tipps (1976), argues that the traditional societies are entangled by norms, beliefs and values, which are hampering their development. Therefore, in order to progress, the traditional societies must emulate the culture of modern societies, which is characterised by accumulation of capital and industrialization which are compatible with development. In essence, this theory seeks to improve the standard of living of traditional societies through economic growth by introducing modern technology (Huntington, 1976). This theory is criticised for not taking into account Sen's (1999) view of development regarding freedoms and self-esteem. The Dependency Theory, based on Marxist ideology, debunks the tenets of the Modernization Theory and asserts that industrialization in the developed countries rather subjects poor countries to underdevelopment as a result of the economic surplus of the poor countries being exploited by developed countries (Bodenheimer, 1970; Webster, 1984). The theory, however, fails to clarify the dependency of the less developed countries on the metropolis in terms of how the developed countries secure access to the economic surplus of the poor countries.

The World Systems Theory posits that international trade specialization and transfer of resources from the periphery (less developed countries) to the core (developed countries) stifle development in the periphery by making them rely on core countries (Petras, 1981). The World Systems Theory perceives the world economy as an international hierarchy of unequal relations (Reyes, 2001) and that the unequal relations in the exchange between the Third World and First World countries is the source of First World surplus. This contrasts with the classical Marxist Theory, which posits that the surplus results from the capital-labour relation that exists in "production" itself. (Bodenheimer, 1970; Reyes, 2001) The World System Theory has been criticised for overemphasising the world market while neglecting forces and relations of production. (Petras, 1981)

Similar to the World System Theory, the Globalization Theory originates from the global mechanisms of deeper integration of economic transactions among the countries (Portes, 1992). However, apart from the economic ties, other key elements for development interpretation as far as globalisation is concerned are the cultural links among nations (Kaplan, 1993; Moore, 1993), In this cultural orientation, one of the cardinal factors is the increasing flexibility of technology to connect people around the world (Reyes, 2001). Therefore, open and easy communication among nations has created grounds for cultural homogenisation, thereby creating a single global society (Waks, 2006). Political events no longer take local character but global character. Thus, according to Parjanadze (2009), globalisation is underpinned by political, economic, technological and socio-cultural factors and orientations. Although these developments theories have their weaknesses, they have paved the way for the current global development concepts and paradigm, namely "sustainability," "development" and "sustainable development."

Sustainability

Literally, sustainability means a capacity to maintain some entity, outcome or process over time (Basiago, 1999). However, in development literature, most academics, researchers and practitioners (Gray & Milne, 2013: Tjarve, & Zemīte, 2016; Mensah & Enu-Kwesi, 2018; Thomas, 2015) apply the concept to connote improving and sustaining a healthy economic, ecological and social system for human development. Stoddart (2011) defines sustainability as the efficient and equitable distribution of resources intra-generationally and inter-generationally with the operation of socio-economic activities within the confines of a finite ecosystem. Ben-Eli (2015), on the other hand, sees sustainability as a dynamic equilibrium in the process of interaction between the population and the carrying capacity of its environment such that the population develops to express its full potential without producing irreversible adverse effects on the carrying capacity of the environment upon which it depends. From this standpoint (Thomas, 2015) continues that sustainability brings into focus human activities and their ability to satisfy human needs and wants without depleting or exhausting the productive resources at their disposal. This, therefore, provokes thoughts on the manner in which people should lead their economic and social lives drawing on the available ecological resources for human development.

Hák, Janoušková, and Moldan (2016) have argued that transforming global society, environment and economy to a sustainable one is one of the most uphill tasks confronting man today since it is to be done within the context of the planet's carrying capacity. The World Bank (2017) continues that this calls for innovative approaches to managing realities. In furtherance of this argument, DESA-UN (2018) posits that the ultimate objective of the concept of sustainability, in essence, is to ensure appropriate alignment and

equilibrium among society, economy and the environment in terms of the regenerative capacity of the planet's life-supporting ecosystems. In the view of Gossling-Goidsmiths (2018), it is this dynamic alignment and equilibrium that must be the focus of a meaningful definition of sustainability.

However, as argued by Mensah and Enu-Kwesi (2018), the definition must also emphasise the notion of cross-generational equity, which is clearly an important idea but poses difficulties, since future generations' needs are neither easy to define nor determine. Based on the foregoing, contemporary theories of sustainability seek to prioritize and integrate social, environmental and economic models in addressing human challenges in a manner that will continually be beneficial to human (Hussain, Chaudhry, & Batool, 2014; UNSD, 2018b). In this regard, economic models seek to accumulate and use natural and financial capital sustainably; environmental models basically dwell on biodiversity and ecological integrity while social models seek to improve political, cultural, religious, health and educational systems, among others, to continually ensure human dignity and wellbeing (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Evers 2018), and for that matter, sustainable development.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development (SD) has become the buzzword in development discourse, having been associated with different definitions, meanings and interpretations. Taken literally, SD would simply mean "development that can be continued either indefinitely or for the given time period (Dernbach, 1998, 2003; Lele, 1991; Stoddart, 2011). Structurally, the concept can be seen as a phrase consisting of two words, "sustainable" and "development." Just as each of the two words that combine to form the concept of SD, that is, "sustainable" and "development", has been defined variously from various perspectives, the concept of SD has also been looked at from various angles, leading to a plethora of definitions of the concept. Although definitions abound with respect to SD, the most often cited definition of the concept is the one proposed by the Brundtland Commission Report (Schaefer & Crane, 2005). The Report defines SD as development that meets the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meets their own needs.

Acknowledging the pervasiveness of WCED's definition, Cerin (2006) as well as Abubakar (2017) argues that SD is a core concept within global development policy and agenda. It provides a mechanism through which society can interact with the environment while not risking damaging the resource for the future. Thus, it is a development paradigm as well as concept that calls for improving living standards without jeopardising the earth's ecosystems or causing environmental challenges such as deforestation and water and air pollution that can result in problems such as climate change and extinction of species (Benaim & Raftis, 2008; Browning & Rigolon, 2019).

Looked at as an approach, SD is an approach to development which uses resources in a way that allows them (the resources) to continue to exist for others (Mohieldin, 2017). Evers (2017) further relates the concept to the organizing principle for meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend. Considered from this angle, SD aims at achieving social progress, environmental equilibrium and economic growth (Gossling-Goidsmiths, 2018; Zhai & Chang, 2019). Exploring the demands of SD, Ukaga et al. (2011) emphasised the need to move away from harmful socio-economic activities and rather engage in activities with positive environmental, economic and social impacts.

It is argued that the relevance of SD deepens with the dawn of every day because the population keeps increasing but the natural resources available for the satisfaction of human needs and wants do not. Hák et al. (2016) maintain that, conscious of this phenomenon, global concerns have always been expressed for judicious use of the available resources so that it will always be possible to satisfy the needs of the present generation without undermining the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs. It implies that SD is an effort at guaranteeing a balance among economic growth, environmental integrity and social well-being. This reinforces the argument that, implicit in the concept of SD is intergenerational equity, which recognises both short and the long-term implications of sustainability and SD (Dernbach, 1998; Stoddart, 2011). According to Kolk (2016), this is achievable through the integration of economic, environmental, and social concerns in decision-making processes. However, it is common for people to treat sustainability and SD as analogues and synonyms but the two concepts are distinguishable. According to Diesendorf (2000) sustainability is the goal or endpoint of a process called sustainable development. Gray (2010) reinforces the point by arguing that, while "sustainability" refers to a state, SD refers to the process for achieving this state.

The concept of sustainability appears poised to continue to influence future discourse regarding development science. This, in the view of Porter and van der Linde (1995), implies that the best choices are likely to remain those that meet the needs of society and are environmentally and economically viable, economically and socially equitable as well as socially and environmentally bearable. This leads to three interconnected spheres or domains of sustainability that describe the relationships among the environmental, economic, and social aspects of Sustainable Development.

Basically, it can be concluded from the figure that, nearly everything man does or plans to do on earth has implications for the environment, economy or society and for that matter the continued existence and wellbeing of the human race. Akin to this, as argued by Wanamaker (2018), the spheres constitute a set of interrelated concepts which should form the basis of human decisions and actions in the quest for SD. Yang (2019) supports the argument by opining that basically, the figure depicts that proper decisions on sustainable resource management will bring about sustainable growth for sustainable society. Examples of these include decisions on land use, surface water management, agricultural practices, building design and construction, energy management, education, equal opportunities as well as law-making and enforcement (Montaldo, 2013; Porter & van der Linde, 1995). The argument is that, when the concepts contained in the three spheres of sustainability are applied well to real world situations, everybody wins because natural resources are preserved, the environment is protected, the economy booms and is resilient, social life is good because there is peace and respect for human rights (DESA-UN, 2018; Kaivo-oja, Panula-Ontto, Vehmas, & Luukkanen, 2013). Kahn (1995) and Basiago (1999) provide a vivid illustration regarding the relationships among economic, social and environmental sustainability, arguing that the three domains must be integrated for sustainability sake.

Pillars of sustainable development

As a visionary and forward-looking development paradigm, SD emphasises a positive transformation trajectory anchored essentially on social, economic and environmental factors. According to Taylor (2016), the three main issues of sustainable development are economic growth, environmental protection and social equality. Based on this, it can be argued that the concept of SD rests, fundamentally, on three conceptual pillars. These pillars are "economic sustainability", "social sustainability", and 'environmental sustainability.

Economic sustainability

Economic sustainability implies a system of production that satisfies present consumption levels without compromising future needs (Lobo, Pietriga, & Appert, 2015). Traditionally, economists assuming that the supply of natural resources was unlimited, placed undue emphasis on the capacity of the market to allocate resources efficiently (Du & Kang, 2016). They also believed that economic growth would be accompanied by the technological advancement to replenish natural resources destroyed in the production process (Cooper & Vargas, 2004). However, it has been realised that natural resources are not infinite; besides not all of them can be replenished or are renewable. The growing scale of the economic system has overstretched the natural resource base, prompting are think of the traditional economic postulations (Basiago, 1996, 1999; Du & Kang, 2016). This has prompted many academicians to question the feasibility of uncontrolled growth and consumption.

Economies consist of markets where transactions occur. According to Dernbach, (1993), there are guiding frameworks by which transactions are evaluated and decisions about economic activities are made. Three main activities that are carried out in an economy are production, distribution and consumption but the accounting framework used to guide and evaluate the economy with regard to these activities grossly distorts values and this does not augur well for society and the environment (Cao, 2017). Allen and Clouth (2012) echo that human life on earth is supported and maintained by utilising the limited natural resources found on the earth. Dernbach (2003) had earlier argued that, due to population growth, human needs like food, clothing, housing increase, but the means and resources available in the world cannot be increased to meet the requirements forever. Furthermore, Retchless and Brewer (2016) argue that, as the main concern seems to be on economic growth, important cost components like the impact of depletion and pollution, for example, are ignored while increasing demand for goods and services continues to drive markets and infringe destructive effects of the environment (UNSD, 2018c). Economic sustainability, therefore, requires that decisions are made in the most equitable and fiscally sound way possible, while considering the other aspects of sustainability (Zhai & Chang, 2019)

Social sustainability

Social sustainability encompasses notions of equity, empowerment, accessibility, participation, cultural identity and institutional stability (Daly, 1992). The concept implies that people matter since development is about people (Benaim & Raftis, 2008). Basically, social sustainability connotes a system of social organization that alleviates poverty (Littig & Grießler, 2005). However, in a more fundamental sense, "social sustainability" relates to the nexus between social conditions such as poverty and environmental destruction (Farazmand, 2016). In this regard, the theory of social sustainability' posits that the alleviation of poverty should neither entail unwarranted environmental destruction nor economic instability. It should aim to alleviate poverty within the existing environmental and economic resource base of the society (Kumar, Raizada, & Biswas, 2014; Scopelliti et al., 2018).

In Saith's (2006) opinion, at the social level sustainability entails fostering the development of people, communities and cultures to help achieve meaningful life, drawing on proper healthcare, education gender equality, peace and stability across the globe. It is argued (Benaim & Raftis, 2008) that social sustainability is not easy to achieve because the social dimension seems complicated and overwhelming. Unlike the environmental and economic systems where flows and cycles are easily observable, the dynamics within the social system are highly intangible and cannot be easily modelled (Benaim & Raftis, 2008; Saner, Yiu, & Nguyen, 2019). As

Everest-Phillips (2014) puts it, "the definition of success within the social system is that "people are not subjected to conditions that undermine their capacity to meet their needs"

According to Kolk (2016) social sustainability is not about ensuring that everyone's needs are met. Rather, its aims at providing enabling conditions for everyone to have the capacity to realize their needs, if they so desire. Anything that impedes this capacity is considered a barrier, and needs to be addressed in order for individuals, organization or community to make progress towards social sustainability (Brodhag & Taliere, 2006; Pierobon, 2019). Understanding the nature of social dynamics and how these structures emerge from a systems perspective is of great importance to social sustainability (Lv, 2018). Above all, in Gray (2010) and Guo's (2017) views, social sustainability also encompasses many issues such as human rights, gender equity and equality, public participation and rule of law all of which promote peace and social stability for sustainable development.

Environmental sustainability

The concept of environmental sustainability is about the natural environment and how it remains productive and resilient to support human life. Environmental sustainability relates to ecosystem integrity and carrying capacity of natural environment (Brodhag & Taliere, 2006). It requires that natural capital be sustainably used as a source of economic inputs and as a sink for waste (Goodland & Daly, 1996). The implication is that natural resources must be harvested no faster than they can be regenerated while waste must be emitted no faster than they can be assimilated by the environment (Diesendorf, 2000; Evers, 2018). This is because the earth systems have limits or boundaries within which equilibrium is maintained.

However, the quest for unbridled growth is imposing ever greater demands on the earth system and placing ever greater strain on these limits because technological advancement may fail to support exponential growth. Evidence to support concerns about the sustainability of the environment is increasing (Gilding: ICSU, 2017). The effects of climate change, for instance, provide a convincing argument for the need for environmental sustainability. Climate change refers to significant and long-lasting changes in the climate system caused by natural climate variability or by human activities (Coomer, 1979). These changes include warming of the atmosphere and oceans, diminishing ice levels, rising sea level, increasing acidification of the oceans and increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases (Du & Kang, 2016).

Climate change has already shown signs of affecting biodiversity. In particular, Kumar et al. (2014) have observed that higher temperatures tend to affect the timing of reproduction in animal and plant species, migration patterns of animals and species distributions and population sizes. Ukaga et al. (2011) have argued that while dire predictions abound, the full impacts of global warming are not known. What is clearly advisable, according to Campagnolo et al. (2018) is that, for the sake of sustainability, all societies must adjust to the emerging realities with respect to managing ecosystems and natural limits to growth.

The current rate of biodiversity loss exceeds the natural rate of extinction (UNSD, 2018c). The boundaries of the world's biomes are expected to change with climate change as species are expected to shift to higher latitudes and altitudes and as global vegetation cover changes (Peters & Lovejoy (1992) cited in Kappelle, Van Vuuren & Baas (1999). If species are not able to adjust to unfamiliar geographical distributions, their chances of survival will be reduced. It is predicted that, by the year 2080, about 20% of coastal wetlands could be lost due to sea-level rise (UNSD, 2018c). All of these are important issues of environmental sustainability because as already pointed out, they have implications for how the natural environment remains productively stable and resilient to support human life and development.

The sustainable development goals

Sustainable development relates to the principle of meeting human development goals while at the same time sustaining the ability of natural systems to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depend (Cerin, 2006). While the concept of sustainable development has been relevant since time immemorial, it can be argued that the relevance deepens with the dawn of every day because the population keeps increasing but the natural resources available to humankind do not. Conscious of this phenomenon, global concerns have always been expressed for judicious use of the available resources.

The latest of such concerns translated into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The MDGs were a sequel to the SDGs. The MDGs marked a historic global mobilisation to achieve a set of important social priorities worldwide (Breuer, Janetschek, & Malerba, 2019). However, in spite of the relative effectiveness of the MDGs, not all the targets of the eight goals were achieved after being rolled out for 15 years (2000–2015), hence, the introduction of the SDGs to continue with the development agenda. As part of this new development roadmap, the UN approved the 2030 Agenda (SDGs), which are a call to action to protect the planet, end poverty and guarantee the well-being of people (Taylor, 2016).

A key feature of the Sustainable Development Goals is that their development objectives and targets are basically interdependent but interlinked (Tosun & Leininger, 2017). It is argued that the SDGs entail complementarities or synergies as well as trade-offs or

tensions which have implications for global and national contexts. The complementarities imply that addressing one goal could help to address some others at the same time. For instance, addressing issues of climate change could have co-benefits for energy security, health, biodiversity, and oceans (Le Blanc, 2015). As opined by Fasoli (2018), what needs to be noted is that, the SDGs are not standalone goals. They are interconnected, implying that achieving one goal leads to achieving another and, therefore, they should be seen as indispensable pieces in a big and complex puzzle (Kumar et al., 2014). In order to take advantage of the complementarities among the SDGs, Taylor (2016) suggests that the various countries review the numerous targets to identify the ones most likely to be catalytic as well as those that have multi-pronged impacts, while also aiming to implement the entire agenda. This choice, according to Meurs and Quid (2018), would have to be informed by country-specific priorities and resource availability. It is also worth noting that because of the complementarities of many of the goals and target areas, a single indicator may serve to measure progress across some goals and targets.

The complementarities and synergies aside, the SDGs also have trade-offs and tensions which come with difficult choices that may result in winners and losers, at least in the short term. For example, Espey (2015) argues that biodiversity could be threatened if forests are cut down for purposes of increasing agricultural production for food security, while Mensah and Enu-Kwesi (2018) also argue that food security could be in danger if food crops are switched to biofuel production for energy security. The implication is that, striking the delicate balance between achieving high levels of economic growth that contributes to poverty reduction and the preservation of the environment is not easy.

It is further argued that the SDGs have competing stakeholder interests attached to them. In Le Blanc's (2015) view, tackling the issue of climate change (Goal 13) is a good example of the competing interest. That is, those affected in the short term, such as fossil fuel business entities and their workers would consider themselves as "losers" if they are compelled to change, even though society as a whole will be the ultimate "winner" in the long term by avoiding the risks and impacts of climate change (Tosun & Leininger, 2017). Keitsch (2018) continues that the trade-offs can present governance issues, in the case of complex problems within the SDGs where the interests of different stakeholders conflict. Another key challenge according to Spahn (2018) is ensuring responsibility and accountability for progress towards meeting the SDGs. Several commentators, researchers and academics (Mohieldin, 2017; Taylor, 2016; Yin, 2016) are of the opinion that this calls for appropriate indicators and ways of monitoring and evaluating progress on the SDGs, especially at the national level (Kanie & Biermann, 2017). In this regard, it would be important to measure both inputs and output in order to check whether the various countries are investing what they set out to invest by way of addressing the issues, as well as tracking outcomes to check if they are actually achieving the set goals and targets (Allen et al., 2018; Breuer et al., 2019).

The UN Conference on SD, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2012, brought some key issues to the fore, including decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans and disaster readiness which call for priority attention. In the area of food and agriculture for instance, DESA (2013) estimates that about 800 million people are undernourished globally, and about 220 million hectares of additional land would be needed to feed the world's growing population by 2030. An estimated value of revenue and savings from achieving the SDGs in food and agriculture is $2.3 trillion. The top three opportunities in food systems are food waste reduction, reforestation and development of low-income food markets which are estimated to create 71 million jobs in the food markets, including 21 million across Africa and 22 million in India, where ample cropland and current low productivity pave the way for growth. (DESA, 2013)

According to Ritchie and Roser (2018), over half of the global population already resides in urban areas and this is expected to increase further to two-thirds by 2050. This will create socio-economic costs and benefits in many sectors. Businesses can take advantage of creating healthy and liveable cities to expand their operations, thus boosting employment. According to Jaeger, Banaji, and Calnek-Sugin (2017), potential profit from achieving the SDGs in cities is estimated at $3.7 trillion with approximately 166 million new jobs being in the areas of building, vehicle efficiency, affordable housing, and other urban opportunities. More than 1.5 billion additional energy consumers are anticipated by 2030 which is estimated to create about 86 million jobs and revenue of $4.3 trillion through potential payoff of circular models, renewable energy, energy efficiency and energy access. Furthermore, in Jaeger, Banaji, and Calnek-Sugin's, (2017) estimation, about $1.8 trillion revenue is potentially available from improved healthcare that takes advantage of technological innovation and other improvements in connection with the global health system, which is expected to create approximately 46 million jobs through new business opportunities in health.

Additionally, environmentally-friendly infrastructure is needed for increased economic output and productivity (Waage et al., 2015). Kappelle et al. (1999) have pointed out that infrastructure investment in developing countries will need to increase from US$0.9 trillion to US$2.3 trillion per year by 2020. These figures include an amount of US$200–$300 billion required to ensure that infrastructure entails lower emissions and more resilience to climate change. According to UNDP (2012), a relatively low estimate of the total annual climate change mitigation and adaptation costs through 2030 is $249 billion; and this addresses only one threat (global warming) to the global environmental commons. However, official development assistance (ODA) constitutes a relatively small pool of finance, at approximately $130 billion annually (UNDP 2012). Other costs of implementing the SDG include risks of

over-exploitation and the huge financial resources needed for the various investments. These show some of the socio-economic costs and benefits of SD but metrics for assessing the impacts of SDGs remain controversial (Campagnolo et al, 2018).

Given the debate about the costs and benefits, the trade-offs, complementarities and complexities inherent in the SDGs, the pertinent question that arises relates to how the UN can make countries respect the SDGs. In this regard, it is advisable that the UN takes into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respect national policies and priorities, ensuring that they are focused on SD (Tosun & Leininger, 2017). Although all the SDGs apply generally to both developing and developed countries, the challenges they present may be different in different national contexts (O'Neill, Fanning, Lamb,& Steinberger, 2018). Therefore, UN should emphasise universality with country-specific approach to the global goals (Allen et al., 2018). The UN could impress upon the developed countries such as the US, UK, Japan and Canada to sustainably transform their own societies and economies while contributing to achieving SD in the developing countries. The UN should support countries by facilitating approaches that are conducive to meaningful participation, engagement and dialogue as well as capacity building for all countries. The UN could promote good governance and support inclusive education, regulation and efficient resource allocation in all countries (Collste, Pedercini, & Cornell, 2017). The UN could promote appropriate technology and innovation as evidence shows that the trade-off between environmental and economic outcomes, for instance, can be overcome through the use of appropriate technology. Above all, Breuer et al. (2019) add that the UN should involve not only governments, but also other key stakeholders such as private sector, NGOs, and civil society in the global agenda and create feedback loops to hold all responsible entities accountable to make sure that the SDGs are actually implemented.

Challenges of sustainable development drawn from reviews

United Nations world summits and conferences have played a crucial role in raising awareness of issues, articulating goals and strategies, and mobilizing political will. They have engaged civil society and the private sector and influenced public opinion. The impact of UN conferences can be directly traced to some major examples of priorities such as the recent increases in ODA, the development of the Kyoto Protocol and the Declaration of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. The impact on national policies, actions and outcomes is immeasurable and uneven but certainly highly significant in many countries. The norms and policies articulated at these global conferences offer principles, standards and strategies to all countries committed to improving the well-being of their peoples.

Even after a treaty or convention has been ratified by an individual nation, there is no ironclad guarantee that all of its provisions will be enforced. The world is still working towards systems of international law that will enhance the enforcement of instruments to be adopted. At present much of what is adopted relies on public opinion as the primary tool of enforcement. There were major changes in some international organizations too. The World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) made poverty reduction their principal priority. The structural adjustment policies of the World Bank in the eighties and nineties were replaced by Poverty Reduction Strategies. These organizations and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) adopted the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as their overarching framework for development cooperation.

It is clear that though poverty has fallen in some countries, it has increased in others. Despite the warnings of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) also known as the Earth Summit which to establishes a framework for international collaboration on environmental conservation and development, addressing environmental concerns, and promoting sustainable development, the reductions in a few countries on global greenhouse gas emissions have continued to rise. There may be many reasons for these and many other failures, and delays and inadequacies. For instance, many countries lack the enabling environment essential for many policies to work. Countries that are conflict-ridden, or which have weak institutions, major disease infestations, poor human resources or small cadres of professional and technical personnel, can only address these impediments slowly. Many developing countries have tightly constrained resources, receive far too little Official Development Assistance (ODA), and have no panaceas for such poverty traps. In all countries, some domestic interests may strongly oppose policies which conflict with their short-term interests or preferences. Also, fossil-fuel-based energy companies strenuously oppose limiting green- house gas emissions.

METHODOLOGY

The review was guided by aspects of the "Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses" (PRISMA) guidelines (Moher et al., 2009; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003). Secondary data were collected through review of relevant materials including articles, theses, conference presentations and other documents available on the internet. The documents were identified through a combination of searches, using keywords and terms associated with SD. These included sustainability, development, sustainable development, economic sustainability, social sustainability, environmental sustainability and sustainable development goals. No date restrictions were imposed on the search as priority was given to the relevance of the materials in terms

of their substantial contribution to the ongoing discourse on SD, irrespective of the age of the material. Attempts, however, were made to capture as much recent literature as possible in order to reflect the currency and increasing relevance of the topic.

Literature that was not related to sustainability and development was excluded. However, in order to avoid the risk of missing potentially relevant literature, reference lists of selected articles were scanned for related materials to the topic under study. Information, including title and abstract, was reviewed for articles and other publications identified in the search. Selected materials meeting pre-defined inclusion and exclusion criteria and were coherent with the topic of interest were included in the review. The general inclusion criteria were relevance, authority and currency (Browning & Rigolon, 2019; Wolf et al., 2014). Relevance had to do with how the material had contributed to the SD discourse, while authority refers to whether it had been published by a reputable source or the material had been peer-reviewed or professionally edited, Currency, on the other hand, was defined in terms of whether the material was still influential regarding the debate on SD (Browning & Rigolon, 2019) as evidenced, for example, by s. The initial search criteria identified a total of about 24 references. However, applying the screening and eligibility processes stated above, 61 articles were identified for full-text retrieval, out of which 16 were identified as meeting the final inclusion criteria as for the study, texts were read thoroughly in order to extract the relevant information. Pieces of information gathered were analysed, combining the qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2000) and recursive abstraction (Leshan, 2012) techniques. That is, the contents were summarized under themes without coding but with notes; In this regard, the relevant information were summarised repeatedly, guided by the keywords and phrases already mentioned. The series of summarizing, which were manually done, were aimed at bringing out the basic results with regard to the viewpoints of each input data and to remove discrepancies and irrelevant data. The reasons for discarding particular aspects of each summary result were noted while each summary was being prepared in order not to forget the reasons for their exclusion. Pieces of information gathered through the summaries were synthesized, interlinked and paraphrased to make them more condensed, concise, coherent and manageable, being careful not to change the meaning of the data when combining the themes.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable development seeks to address the pressing global challenges faced by humanity while ensuring the preservation of the planet's resources and ecosystems for the well-being of future generations. To effectively address these global challenges, sustainable development requires cooperation and action from governments, businesses, civil society, and individuals. It requires long-term planning, innovative solutions, and a commitment to collective responsibility for a more sustainable and equitable future. By integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations, sustainable development offers a comprehensive framework for tackling the complex global challenges of our time.

Sustainable Development has attracted much attention in the academic, governance, planning and development intervention space. A wide range of governmental and non-governmental entities appear to have embraced it as an appropriate development paradigm. This is because most, if not all proponents and advocates of the paradigm, virtually seem to concur that the challenges confronting humankind today such as climate change, depletion of ozone layer, water scarcity, loss of vegetation, inequality, insecurity, hunger, deprivation and poverty can be addressed by adhering to the tenets and principles of SD.

The ultimate aim of SD is to achieve a balance among environmental, economic and social sustainability, thus, making these the pillars on which SD rests. While not assuming a definitive posture, sustainability of society can be said to depend on the availability of proper health systems, peace and respect for human rights, decent work, gender equality, quality education and rule of law. Sustainability of economy, on the other hand, depends on adoption of appropriate production, distribution and consumption while sustainability of the environment is driven by proper physical planning and land use as well as conservation of ecology or biodiversity. Although the literature is awash with a plethora of definitions and interpretations of SD, implicit in the pervasive viewpoints about the concept is intergenerational equity, which recognizes both the short and long-term implications of sustainability in order to address the needs of both the current and future generations.

SD cannot be achieved through isolated initiatives, but rather integrated efforts at various levels, comprising social, environmental and economic aspects. The successful implementation of the SDGs will rely upon disentangling complex interactions among the goals and their targets. An integrated approach towards sustainability would require realizing the potentials of its key dimensional pillars simultaneously, as well as managing the tensions, trade-offs and synergies among these dimensions. More importantly, in managing the tensions of sustainability and sustainable development, a key role has to be played by international organizations and agencies such as the UN, government of various countries, nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations.

SD thrives on the commitment of people and so in order to translate the concept into action, public participation should be increased. All people must be aware and acknowledge that their survival and the survival of the future generation depend on responsible behavior regarding consumption and production, environment and progressive's social values. It is only by integrating the pillars can negative synergies be arrested, positive synergies fostered, and meaningful SD made to happen. It implies that economic, social and environmental "sustainability" form elements of a dynamic system. They cannot be pursued in isolation for "SD" to flourish;

therefore, all decisions should seek to encourage positive growth and equilibrium within the natural system. Although ensuring sustainable development is everyone's business, global, regional, national organization's as well as governments and civil society organization's are advised and expected to show ownership, leadership and citizenship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Governments of all countries should promote "smart growth" through proper land use and alignment of their economies with nature's regeneration capacity. All countries should adopt appropriate production and consumption practices that fully align with the planet's ecological processes. This could be done through taxation and subsidy policies which accentuate the acceptable and eliminate unacceptable outcomes. In this respect, all countries should, for example, regarding pollution, enforce the polluter-pays-principle whereby governments require environment-polluting entities to bear the costs of their pollution rather than impose those costs on others or on the environment.

Population growth should be checked through population policies backed by legal frameworks. Unless special action is taken, population growth coupled with increased resource consumption beyond what the earth can accommodate, will lead to the decline in or the collapse of the environment, economy and society. All countries need to have population policies that seek to check unbridled population growth. In this connection, the UN should have a global policy on population growth and ensure that member countries comply with the policy.

There is the need for all countries to formulate and implement social policies that foster tolerance, social cohesion and justice as cornerstones of social interactions. This can be done by enshrining universal human rights within a framework of citizenship, inclusion, equity and effective political governance.

There should be constant education on SD by the UN and the governments of all countries as well as civil society organisation to all people resident everywhere. The sensitization programmes should be directed at ensuring that every country's residents understand the concept and principles of sustainable development and engage in responsible environmental, economic and social behavior as well as accountable stewardship.

Sustainable development requires the generation and application of creative ideas and innovative design and techniques. For this reason, the UN should partner with governments, private sector, development agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs) to provide strong institutional and financial support for universities and other research institutions for research into education, agriculture, physical development planning and land use, information and communication technology and health systems. All these should be backed by appropriate legal frameworks and strict enforcement of regulations to ensure that all the stakeholder comply with the SD agenda.

In prosecuting the SD agenda, UN should acknowledge and consider different national capacities and levels of development and respect national policies and priorities. The UN should also ensure that all countries emphasize universality with country-specific approach to the global goals, and encourage the developed countries to support the developing ones in the implementation of the global agenda.

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