

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Politics of Development

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Abstract

The world has come of age with its attendant contradictions and crises. Since 2nd World War (WW11) to the 21st Century, concerted efforts have been made by world leaders to create a modicum of peace and save humanity from the scourge of violence and poverty. This underscores the fact that the human family will not enjoy any development within an environment devoid of human security. This has been encapsulated in the United Nations Organization's (UNO) charter, and its subsequent Resolutions, Conventions and Declarations. It was in fulfillment of this vision to, protect and promote the global civilization that the SDGs were enunciated in September 2015 by the UNO. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the effective implementation of these goals considering the global politics of development which does not guarantee a development trajectory for the Third World countries, particularly in Africa. This is a qualitative study, and data collection was solely relied on secondary sources. These include review of relevant literature, newspapers, magazines, government bulletins and gazettes. It was discovered that the SDGs represent another milestone by the UNO to give humanity a qualitative existence. Unfortunately, its avowed benefit may not extend to the Third World countries because of the global politics of development. This has continued to manifest a condition of backwardness and despair. We, therefore, recommend that for SDGs to achieve its avowed mission, efforts must be made to extricate Third World countries from inhibiting external influences.

Keywords: declarations, politics, sustainable development goals, conventions and human security.

INTRODUCTION

The earth is one of the smallest planets of the solar system with a radius of about 6,400kms (Oyeshola, 2008:7). It is the third planet away from the sun after Mercury and Venus, and the abode of humanity and myriad living organisms. The survival of these diverse living organisms is directly dependent on its rich properties, components and resources. Most interesting and intriguing is the protective layer of the ozone located at the stratosphere, which shield the earth from the ultra-violet radiations emanating from the sun. All these celebrate the uniqueness of the earth and its richness which are geared towards maintaining a happiest possible equilibrium between bio-diversity of the flora and fauna.

The earth has all the essentials to support humanity, but not for our voracity and greed. In other words, while the earth has the capacity to sustain our needs, it cannot proper unsustainable exploitation of its resources. Therefore, as humanity multiplies and begins to develop novel strategies of conquering nature for production and consumption, efforts must be made to protect future generation from social extinction. This is the main thrust of all the efforts at environmental conservation, protection and sustainable development. Experts have argued that the exponential growth of human population, and industrialization portends a danger for humanity if no remedial action is taken. Therefore, protecting the

environment from unwanted despoliation and exploitation becomes inevitable. As Beder (1994:3) puts it, the task confronting us is to take better care of the environment while ensuring economic growth, both now and in the future. This is the cornerstone of all the United Nations (UN) conferences and aimed at striking a balance between economic growth and human development. This was the concern of the former Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Kimoon when he stated that there can be no plan B because there is no planet B. In the same vein, the Preamble of the UN Resolution A/RES/70/1 of September 25, 2015 clearly stated that:

We are determined to protect the planet from degradation including through sustainable consumption and production. Sustainably, managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the need of the present and future generation.

This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the SDGs and the politics associated with its implementation for development.

Conceptual Clarification

This section lays the foundation of the paper by explaining the basic concepts in the study for objectivity and comprehension. These include Sustainable Development and Politics. Sustainable

Development has become a complex and multifaceted concept in recent time. Undoubtedly, this has made it an integral part of human and environmental policy process. Simply put, it means to strengthen, and preserve a process of development. Development in this regard means all processes geared towards raising and improving the quality of life, protection and promotion of the basic freedoms of man. It also entails the active participation of people in the activities that concern them. This has been stated in the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, and the UN Declaration on the Right of Development. Section 2 of the Declaration stated that the human person is the central subject of development and should be the active participant and beneficiary of the right of development. Article 7 of the African Charter enjoins African leaders to pursue human-centered development and the full and effective participation of the people in charting their development policies, programmes and processes and contributing to their realization.

The concept Sustainable Development became prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the realization that humanity will face a dead end if there is no brake on the consumption locomotion. The WWF's Living Planet Index reported that there was a 35% decline in the earth's ecological health since 1970. This means that with the untrammled and unregulated exploitation of natural resources, the world's ecosystems have been placed on the path of depletion. Beder (1994:1) stated that:

Sustainable development is part of a second wave of environmentalism and heralds a new approach to tackling environmental problems, a shift from protest to consensus and negotiation. The first wave of environmentalism was associated with the counter-culture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. It grew out of traditional nature conservation concerns into an awareness of the potential for a global ecological crisis and was clearly a protest movement.

These protests, movements and conferences were precipitated by the unsustainable use of industrial products, with their unwholesome effect on the environment. Specifically, the emission of Greenhouse Gases (GhGs) like carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (NOX), Carbon monoxide (CO) and chlorofluoro carbons (CFCs) into the atmosphere have the capacity to weaken the ozone layer, and increase the intensity of the sun's ultra-violet rays on the earth. The possible consequence of these, is increase in the earth's temperature, rapid melting of Iceland and rise of sea level, desertification and poor agricultural yield.

All these point to the inescapable fact that there is need for a sustainable resource use, and that our environment must be protected to support and sustain present and future generation. According to the Brundtland Commission,

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

This definition takes for granted the inseparability and seamless relationship between the environment and development. The goal of Sustainable Development (SD) is to preserve human life and the environment. It means a high quality of life for the people, concern for our planet, and abhors unsustainable consumption. Therefore,

Sustainable development describes a process in which the natural resource base is not allowed to deteriorate. It emphasizes the hitherto unappreciated role of the environmental quality and environmental inputs in the process of raising real income and quality of life (Oyeshola, 2008:1161)

An essential ingredient of SD is Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP). The 1994 Oslo symposium on SCP defines it as:

The use of services and related products which respond to the basic needs and bring better quality of life while minimizing the use of natural resource, and toxic materials as well as emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle of the service or product so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generation.

From the foregoing, we can see that SD is principally focused on achieving three major goals:

- (i) Economic growth that is environmentally sustainable.
- (ii) Environmental protection.
- (iii) Social equality.

These variables are interrelated, and to neglect any one is to derail the ideals of SD. It is not amazing that Desais, Nitun, Deputy Secretary-General of the Rio Summit in 1992 noted that Sustainable development is a bridge concept connecting economics, ecology and ethics. The challenge is to integrate various sectoral policies such as agricultural, energy, trade and investment. To get real action, SD must extend to all sectoral agencies and most importantly to key stakeholders. Perhaps this was why Beder (1994:3) stated that:

Ecologically, sustainable development provides a conceptual

framework for integrating these economic and environmental objectives so that production processes and services can be developed that are both internationally competitive and more environmentally compatible.

It is within this scenario that we can see SD as a clarion call to divert the attention of humanity to the twin dangers of unsustainable consumption and poverty. As the earth's resources continue to deplete and environment degraded, many people are placed on the edge of poverty. The 2007 report of the African Economic Outlook stated that 210 million people live on less than \$1 per day and 80% of the world's population live on less than \$10 per day. Therefore, to enforce environmental discipline, poverty must be eradicated. After all, of all the pollutants we face, the worst is poverty (Oyeshola, 2008:38). Resolution 66/288 of the Rio Summit of 2012 (Rio + 20) titled "The Future we Want" unambiguously stated that:

Poverty eradication is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. In this regard, we are committed to freeing humanity from poverty and hunger as a matter of urgency.

In the same vein, the Johannesburg Declaration noted that the worldwide condition that pose severe threat to Sustainable Development of our people include chronic hunger, malnutrition, foreign occupation, armed conflict ... and illicit drugs. This was also emphasized in the United Nations resolution A/RES/70/1 of September 25, 2015. It averred that Sustainable Development recognizes that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent. SD, therefore, is a comprehensive and holistic concept whose avowed objective is the improvement of the welfare and happiness of humanity, without unnecessarily damaging the ecosystem and mortgaging the future generations. It underlies the salient fact that economic growth, human progress are mutually indispensable and inseparable. It is against this backdrop that myriad conferences have been organized by the UN and other concerned social groups. These include, but not limited to the, UN conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden from June 5-16, 1972. This conference led to the formation of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) in 1973, and the Declaration of the 26 Principles focusing on the environment and development,

and, the Brundtland Commission otherwise known as the World Conference on Environment and Development (WCED) set up by the former Secretary-General of the UN, Javier Perez de Cueller. The UN Resolution ARES/38/161 of 1983 mandated the Commission to:

- (i) Propose long-term environmental strategies for achieving SD to the year 2000 and beyond.
- (ii) Consider ways and means by which the international community can deal more effectively with environmental concerns in the light of other recommendations in its report.

The Commission headed by Gro Harlem Brundtland from Norway laid the foundation for more conferences and deepened popular interest on the environment and SD. Some of these conferences include, the Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992 often called the Earth Summit. A fall out of this conference is the Agenda 21.

The establishment of the UN commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), the UN conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, January, 2012 otherwise called Rio + 20 and also laid the foundation for the 3rd UN conference on Environment and Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, 2012.

It was in furtherance of the ideals and vision of SD that the UN through resolution A/RES/70/1 of September, 2015 declared the Sustainable Development Goals – Transforming our world. The Agenda 2030. SDGs reinforces the commitment of world leaders to transform the globe in the next fifteen years through SD. Hence, it is an agenda for 2030. SDGs is not an isolated and exclusive project, but a follow up of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other concerns aimed at improving the quality of human life and preserving the environment. In its Preamble, it stated that:

This agenda is a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity. It also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom. We recognize that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty is the greatest global challenge and indispensable requirement for sustainable development.

SDGs has 17 goals, and all member nations of the UN and concerned groups are enjoined to make the Agenda achievable (See table 1).

Table 1: 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Goals	Items
1	End poverty in all its forms
2	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3	Ensure health lives and promote well-being of all ages.
4	Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities.
5	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11	Make cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12	Ensure sustainable consumption and production.
13	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
14	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
15	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
16	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
17	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Source--w.w.w.un.org outcome-document-of-summit-for-adoption-of-the-post2015-development-agenda. Accessed on March 20,2017.

Human beings are daily involved in a political struggle for social survival, have dominion over others and access in the consumption of scarce resources. This never-ending struggle of humans prompted Aristotle to aver that man is a political animal (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999:1). The process in which people emerge to make decisions, policies, execute them and make sure that they are obeyed, constitute the essence of politics. It is the struggle for power, a power to make policies and allocate values in a seemingly authoritative manner. It is a process that ultimately maximizes and defines social capabilities and aid society to attain the highest form of social cohesion and efficacy. It is an inevitable phenomenon in the transformation and development of a society. The utility inherent in the art of politics made Nnoli (2003) to define it as the art of the possible, the governing of men, who gets what, when and how, and the emergence,

consolidation and use of State power. Therefore, it is a set of social relationship with a central body of varying legitimacy, whose function is to make and implement overriding decisions for the whole population in the interest of the latter (Nnoli, 2003:5).

While Politics is the exercise and control of power, but all power is not politics. Political power is directly associated with the State and its power. In other words, Politics is about the processes associated with the use, control and consolidation of State power. Max Weber noted that it is concerned with the operation of the State and its institutions. It means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power among individuals and groups within a State (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999:2). With political power, you can impose your will on others, produce an intended results on others because it is a special case of the exercise of influence. It is the process of affecting the policies of others with the help (actual or threatened) severe deprivations for non-conformity with the policies indeed (Anifowose and Enemu, 1999:109).

From the above definitions, we can deduce the following variables, authority, influence decision making ,conflict and ideology. These variables loom large in the control and exercise of State power. They can be said to be the building blocks of political practice. Dukor (2003:28) pointed out that The struggle for power (that is politics) is itself basically ideologically inspired and determined. In other words, politics as the struggle for power is not carried out within an ideological vacuum.

Indeed, Politics is not value free, but practiced and carried out within an ideological value on others. In this process, ideology becomes the determining factor in the assessment and evaluation of the historical mission of a State.

SDGs and the Politics of Development

A careful reading of the SDGs will reveal that it is a well-thought out strategy to guarantee the development of humanity through a careful use of resources. It is targeted towards circumventing a harebrained disposition in the exploitation, production and consumption of goods and services. The vision of SDGs is that by the next fifteen years, ‘the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions, according to national definitions will be reduced by half’. More important is goal 12 which enjoined all countries to ‘implement a 10-year frame work of programme on sustainable consumption and production with developed countries taking the lead, taking into account the development capabilities of developing countries’. While commending the UN for this populist Agenda, but the extent to which its objectives can be realized largely depends on the

Politics of the epoch. As we noted in the previous section, Politics involves power to dominate, exploit and make a claim on the way we should behave and how we want others to behave. This is why those with political power have that intrinsic ability to change the direction and behaviour of others in the community, the State and in the global community. In this scenario, the Politics of development as it affects SDGs vividly explains how those in control of the global political architecture use it to stultify global development process when their hegemony seem to be threatened. As a post-2015 Development Agenda, SDGs is seriously aimed at promoting and protecting the common feature of humanity by avoiding international environmental despoliation. But the degree and intensity of environmental degradation largely depends on technological sophistication. For those who possess it, they can probe and forage the innermost part of the earth for primitive accumulation. The attendant consequence is that the equilibrium of the ecosystem is distorted and twisted resulting to environmental disorder. It is against this backdrop that the developing countries vehemently argue that a successful implementation of the SDGs would require a reasonable commitment of the developed countries. This is because they are more guilty of environmental indiscipline. Rourke and Boyer (2003:43) stated that the LDCs need intensive assistance to develop in an environmentally responsible way. UN officials have placed that cost as high as \$125 billion a year, and many observers believe that the North should bear a great deal of the cost for three reasons. One is that the North is much wealthier than the South. The second reason is that the North has historically emitted 70 percent of the carbon dioxide (CO₂) and a majority of most other pollutants, despite having less than one-quarter of the world population. 'You can't have an environmentally healthy planet in a world that is socially unjust'.

More important is the fact that poverty eradication within fifteen years may gulp more than \$2 trillion to \$3 trillion per annum. Poverty eradication is a cardinal goal of SDGs. Considering the huge resources needed for the implementation of the SDGs. It is not amazing that developing countries have called for technical assistance. This is likely to deepen their dependency syndrome and the unequal relation between the developed and the developing countries. The aftermath is that the combined effect of poverty and unequal trading system, perpetuates unsustainable development, environmental degradation and poverty (Oyeshola, 2008:53). The nature of global political economy makes it possible for the developed countries to pay scant attention to UN Resolutions, especially when such Resolutions do not advance and consolidate their values and imperial vision. For instance, the United States of America (USA) declared that the Agenda 21 of the

Rio de Janeiro conference of June 13, 1992 was manifestly against American sovereignty. The main focus of the Agenda was changing consumption patterns, combating poverty, conservation and management of resources, strengthening the role of major groups and technological transfer.

The refusal of President George Bush to sign the Biodiversity Convention on the pretext that it did not protect intellectual property rights in biotechnology, and the lip-service adherence to Article 3(1) of the Kyoto Protocol by the industrialized world reflect the political character of environmental conservation.. While USA constitute less than 5% of the global population, but it uses ¼ of the world fossil fuel resources – burning 25% of coal, 26% of oil, 27% of the world's natural gas. Americans eat 815 billions of calories of food each day, and this is 200 billion more than enough to feed 80 million people. According to the Friends of the Earth, Europe (2000), People in rich countries consume up to 10 times more natural resources than those in the poorest countries. On average an inhabitant in North America consumes around 90 kilogram (kg) of resources each day. In Europe consumption is around 45 kg per day while in Africa people consume only 10 kg per day.

With more consumption of natural resources, there is the tendency of resource depletion without implementing the SDGs. Therefore in order to create a more sustainable and equitable world, regions with high levels of per capita resource use, such as Europe will need to sharply decrease their revenue use in absolute terms (Friends of the Earth, Europe (2000).

Since the developed countries bear more responsibilities in unsustainable consumption, they must be at the forefront of protecting our global commons. This is the whole essence of Common but Differential Responsibilities (CBDRs). CBDRs believe that commitment to SDGs should be a function of historical specificity. Muchhala (2014) noted that while SDGs has a universal appeal, the degree of natural responsibility in the implementation of the goals should be differentiated in accordance with the varying capacities, realities and developmental levels of countries. Developed countries should therefore adjust to sustainable consumption and lifestyle patterns.

A critical look at all the Summits on the environment will expose the Politics of environmental protection, and the extent protection of our ecosystem can be very political. It has been noticed in some of the summits that the industrialized world objected to and were able to defeat efforts by the developing countries to force the North to set binding time tables to cut down on the use of fossil fuels and to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to global warming (Oyeshola, 2008:51).

Realizing that the industrialized countries place a greater burden on the environment, the Rio Declaration Principle 7 states that: States shall cooperate in a spirit of global partnership to conserve, protect and restore the wealth and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem. In view of the different contribution of global environmental degradation, states have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.

Apart from the above, Section 58 (g) of the Rio+ 20 called for an effective avoidance of unwanted conditionalities on official development assistance and finance. Sub-section (o) is to promote sustainable consumption and production pattern. It is doubtful how the industrialized countries can implement these Resolutions, in view of the fact that they touch on their socio-political and economic jugular. Since obedience to UN resolutions depend on their political interest, it becomes indubitable how the SDGs can be implemented in the next one and half decades. Although, the MDGs have reduced poverty from 1.9 billion people in 1990 to 836 million in 2015, yet 17% of the world's populations are living on less than \$1.25 per day. This equates to 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty. This was why the Rio + 20 noted that poverty eradication is the greatest challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for suitable development.

In view of the tenor of global Politics of development; SDGs may well be a wish and not a binding commitment in the years ahead.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SDGs is one the salient programmes of the UN, to protect our common heritage, and build the future we want. It emerged as a complement to the existing programmes and an action plan aimed at halting the shrinking of the world's ecosystem, and reduce the negative impact of economic growth on the environment. It is on this premise that conservation and sustainable consumption and production becomes a desideratum. But a careful examination of all the environmentally-related conferences right from the Stockholm in 1972 to the Rio + 20 would reveal that the major task confronting humanity is how to preserve the environment and ensure a sustainable economic growth. This is the whole essence of ecological sustainable development which provides a conceptual framework for integrating economic and environmental objectives, so that products, production and processes and services can be

developed and be more environmentally compatible and congenial (Beder, 1994:3).

The recent projection by the UN that the world population would increase by 41% in 2050 to 8.9 billion people, and the Living Planet Report of 2016 noted that there was a 35% decline in earth's ecological health since 1970. It also stated that human activities and resource uses have grown so drastically, particularly since the mid-20th century that we are endangering a number of the key environmental systems. This is a grave pointer to the fact that something urgent has to be done to place our environment on a sustainable trajectory. SDGs becomes a channel through which a happy humanity can be guaranteed, and this should be mainstreamed in our decision-making and policy building. However, the achievement of this ideal requires a comprehensive and multidimensional commitment of state actors and major groups. Its success must not be predicated on political expediency or given a cautious support. To do this, is to consign future generation to limitless pain. Perhaps, this must have prompted Mazlum (2010:644) to declare that what is apparent is that despite the political commitment to sustainable development. measures taken to integrate environment into overall policy problems are far from sufficient.

The reason for this lacuna is that those who are in control of global political power do not want to implement any environmentally-related programme that is not in conformity with their values, ideology and interest. More intriguing is the fact that they possess the social capital to advance their interest over the majority of States actors. This is not only to insure their ascendant global hegemony, but determine global development process. Unarguably, this has subjected many UN programmes and even Declarations to much talk and less action. It must be stated that non-adherence to SDGs portend a possible dead-end for humanity. As the 2010 UNEP report warned, if the consumption aspiration of the wealthiest of nations cannot be satiated, the prospect for corralling consumption everywhere before it strips and degrades our planet beyond recognition would appear bleak.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the foregoing, it has become clear that protecting the ecosystem should be the collective effort of humanity. Therefore it, should not be subjected to manipulations of Politics. It is on that basis that we make the following recommendations.

- (i) The industrialized world should be at the forefront of all efforts aimed at achieving the vision of SDGs. This is because they engage in unsustainable consumption of the

earth's resources which adversely affect the equilibrium of the ecosystem.

- (ii) The industrialized countries should not subject the implementation of the SDGs and other life saving policies to their political interest. This is a sure way of consigning humanity to imminent danger, especially the Third World countries. While the former can protect itself against some environmental threats with its technological advantage, that may not be applicable to the latter.
- (iii) The values and objectives of SDGs should be mainstreamed in the curriculum of institutions of learning so that it would become part of the culture and habits of the people.
- (iv) This presupposes a demonstration of enough political will by State parties to implement the programme based on their capacity and responsibility.
- (v) The extent to which the above can be achieved depends on the existence of a leadership that has vision and committed to the values of good governance and democratic etiquette. It follows that the dreams of SDGs will be a mirage if there is no leadership commitment to ensure sufficient provision of goods and services, and a sustainable plan to lift many people out the poverty line.

Let us join hands together to save our only heritage and make our world a better place to live. It is through this that we can save future generation from the horrible fate of environmental disease and despair.

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