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Environment and development: the difficult choices ahead for achieving sustainable development

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Abstract
This paper discusses difficult choices nations will have to undertake (and those already have taken so far) for achieving sustainable development and the reasons and priorities for selection of those. Paper supports to a balanced approach proposed by United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to achieve sustainable development through incorporating social, economic and environmental policies into the heart of the development. It discusses four actions out of eight proposed by UNEP to achieve this goal such as the importance of strengthening policy cycle, enhancing technology for the environment, and using trade effectively for sustainable development and making policy instruments. To achieve sustainable development, developing countries need to provide with solutions for both unsolved root causes of underdevelopment in those countries and solutions for emerging environmental issues such as climate change and destruction of ecosystems. For both to be achieved it is vital for the higher level of individual, local, national and international collective efforts.

Keywords: Sustainable development, a balanced approach, root causes of underdevelopment, emerging environmental issues

Introduction

Sustainable development means an integration of environment at all aspects and stages of development process. According to UNEP (2002: P 402), sustainable development needs a balanced mutual and supportive approach of social, economic and environmental pillars. Economic development and human well-being depend crucially on the foundation of environmental resource base. Irrespective whether development or underdevelopment features of countries in the world, they cannot survive without services provided by ecosystems in the natural environment such as fresh water, quality air, foods, drugs and spiritual fulfilment. Furthermore, resources needed for many of production of goods and services are obtained from the environment. It is possible to observe that world nations have given their fullest attention to achieving an environmental friendly development over the past few decades. Utilizing existing resources in effective ways to meet current human needs and making protective and harmonizing measures to secure the environment have been two vital actions to be realised for all nations in the world today.

Brundtland (1987: chap 01) defines sustainable development, as "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This implies the need of the effective use of resources to meet current human needs within the capacity of the environment to generate its own supply. This further implies that the development achieved today should be sustainable in a way that it utilizes, maintains, develops and secures the existing natural resources for future generations to meet their needs.

Over the course of human history, all cultures have been aware of the integration of these three pillars (SD Gateway) in their historical development process. If so, why has it been a big challenge today? It has been a big challenge today due to many factors such that higher population growth, over consumption habits, higher level of poverty, and other sever environmental threats created by humans such as climate change, global warming, land and forest degradations, loss of biodiversity, desertification etc. UNEP (2002: P 402) identifies environmental, policy and lifestyles divisions, and vulnerability gap that exists between and within

nations as a serious threat to sustainable development. Therefore, it comes naturally a question into our minds that what can we do to achieve sustainable development? We need to do many things. Whatever we do, it should directly relate to the three factors (pillars) mentioned above. SD Gateway indicates, "It is about taking action, changing policy and practice at all levels, from the individual to the international".

In this scenario, the remaining part of this paper is devoted to analysis the difficult choices nations will have to take (and those already have taken so far) for achieving sustainable development and the reasons and priorities for selection of those. The remaining sections of the paper are structured as follows. Section 02 presents method of the study. In section 03, based on the facts in the literature, the author discusses and brings his views on the issues of the problem concerned. Finally, paper ends with concluding remarks in section 04.

Method

The author examines the literature discussed on possible ways to reach sustainable development and then presents his views and suggestions in support of those approaches. The author mainly selects four actions out of eight proposed by UNEP (2002: P 405-424) to reach sustainable development and present his views on the applicability of those into developing countries.

Discussion

The difficult choices ahead for achieving sustainable development

Four threats identified as environmental, policy, lifestyles divisions, and vulnerability gap in UNEP (2002: P 402) can be discussed under two challenges for developing nations for achieving sustainable development. First, there are many unsolved root causes of underdevelopment such as higher population growth, higher level of poverty, lack of good governess, poor ability to acquire modern technology, poor saving, investment and infrastructure, unsolved internal conflicts, poor economic policies and higher dependency on agriculture etc. Second, they have to face for large number of human made climate change related disasters such as floods, droughts, famine, and spread of vector borne diseases. The unfortunate thing is that all disasters mentioned above relate to the world climate change and the most responsible countries for the climate change are the developed countries. Hanmbock and Meyer (2006) indicate that one third of world rich people account for 94% and 90% world income and greenhouse gas emissions respectively while those for other two thirds share 6% and 10% respectively. Furthermore, it is reported that Africa is responsible only for 4% of total greenhouse gas emissions. This implies that many developing countries have become victims of climate change, which is mainly generated by developed countries such as USA, EU and other industrial countries, and newly immerged countries such as China and India. Climate change related disastrous are common for all irrespective where they live. It means that all nations are aware of this problem and therefore they have already taken some crucial steps (i.e. implementation of Kyoto Protocol) to mitigate and overcome the climate change related disastrous. However, as the developing nations do not have enough financial, technological and other resources, their coping capacity is very low. Therefore, this implies that an additional severe difficulty has been arisen in those countries for achieving sustainable development.

On the other hand, unsolved root causes of underdevelopment mentioned above make environmental problems further sever and then it in turn causes to keep those countries in underdevelopment in the long run. Therefore, this implies that it is vital to find solutions for those root causes in environmental friendly approaches while at the same time national and international agreed concessions are needed to activate in order to prevent, mitigate and cope with climate change related disastrous.

For example, consider population growth in the world. It has been estimated that within next 40 years, the world population will be around 9 billion in number. The problem is to what extent nations in the world can provide them with foods, employment opportunities, sanitation facilities and all other things needed to continue a better life. This really highlights the need of preparation for world nations to face such future challenges in a sustainable way that needs a crucial declining in consumption and changes in behavioral patterns. This problem will be further severe for developing nations if the higher level of current consumption gap between richest and poorest people in the world continues to remain over the next decades. According to UNEP (2002: P 402), richest 20 % of the world accounts for 86% of consumption. The danger is that the 80% of world poorest people those who account for just 14% consumption can tend to overexploitation of natural resources and hence it will be difficult to realize

sustainable development in such a situation. Furthermore, the danger will be further worse depends on to what extent the increased population's energy usage. It means that if they meet a large part of their energy requirement from fossil fuels and non-renewable energy sources, it will cause to increase the greenhouse gases at the atmosphere putting developing countries in trouble for climate change related disastrous. Goldemberg (2006: p 12) highlights that cutting down of consumption is impossible "except under very sever crisis" as people are keen to have comfortable lives in nature. This happens because human needs are endless. When one need is satisfied then another arises. However, all these endless needs are to be satisfied from limited resources. What sustainable development does is to manage between these two main concepts. However, if over-consumption habits could be changed in the long term, it will be a big help for sustainable development as this is directly related to the pressures on the environment through overexploitation of resources for productions, waste additions, greenhouse gas emissions and climate change related disastrous. Goldemberg (2006: p 12) suggests that the most effective way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions of higher energy use resulted from over-consumption is to use "fossil fuels more efficiently and switching strongly to renewable energies". On the other hand, as the higher population growth are associated with many other environmental, health, economic and sociological issues, though it seems quite difficult to implement, in sustainable development perspective, it is vital to control this population growth.

UNEP (2002: P 405-424) supposes a "balanced approach" to achieve sustainable development through incorporating social, economic and environmental policies into the "heart of the development". UNEP (2002: P 405-424) suggests eight actions to achieve that goal. These include "strengthening policy cycle, enhancing technology for the environment, using trade effectively for sustainable development, making policy instruments and packages for the environment, capacity building of environmental institutions, providing international policy framework, and shifting and sharing roles and responsibilities". The author would like to discuss first four of them in somewhat in detail below as the applicability and the impact of those four actions to the south are crucial.

Strengthening policy cycle:

This implies an integration of the environmental policies and concerns in all mainstream and local development plans. For example, Walljasper (2005) indicates that the secret of the success of sustainable development of some European towns is really a result of sensible urban planning and higher level of commitment of both policy implimentators and urban residents to implement those plans. They have encouraged people to use alternative transportation methods such as public transportation, walking and use bikes to travel as those seem to have real positive impacts on quality of life and environment. As a result, they have been able to reduce many negative environmental impacts such as CO2 emissions, noise, higher traffic, dirty air etc. However, they have done this through adjusting the environment in a way that it motivates people to follow those effective ways and change their lifestyles. Urban planners in those cities have made the town pedestrian environment is more attractive for people, built biochemical plants for cities' garbage problems, banned some human behaviors (i.e. pesticide usages), informed urban citizens on environmental matters, conducted in depth environmental assessments for each urban development projects, introduced traffic-pricing measures etc. Because of this process, lifestyles of people in those cities have been 'most earth-friendly'. However, the urban problems of developing countries are very higher than that of developed countries and hence sustainable development for urban cities in developing countries has been a big issue. Due to higher migration from rural areas to urban areas, there is a huge population pressure on the environment. These pressures are exacerbated further through higher level of poverty, slums and unemployment problems. Due to the lack of proper transportation facilities, concentration of employment opportunities and main public utility services on towns, a large number of people come every day to utilize those services. Therefore, higher level of traffic and other environmental issues are very high. In such a background, without having mainstream development programmes that bring development to the rural sectors in those countries and sensible long-term environmental friendly urban plans, creating European style cities is a dream that will never come to true for developing countries.

Enhancing technology for the environment:

Clean development mechanism (CDM) proposed in Kyoto Protocol has agreed to transfer technology and improved energy efficiency among communities

in the world. This is a very useful strategy for achieving sustainable development as poor nations do not have enough resources and technology to initiate such programs (Boer 2006). Such an approach is vital for the development of developing countries and for the reduction of pressures on the environment as those countries are highly dependent on the use of natural resources (agriculture, forestry, fishing, nonrenewable energy etc) for their survival. Davidson (2006) indicates that over 80% of people in Africa 'depend on the agriculture for their livelihood'. Therefore, there should have a realistic mechanism for transfer of technology for those countries. We saw that many of African countries could not get benefits from green revolution occurred in the history. If they were able to gain benefits from it, they would have definitely achieved a considerable sustainable development today. Li (2006) indicates that China's renewable energy consumption (REC) will increase from current 1% of REC of the country's gross energy consumption to 10% and 16% by 2010 and 2020 years respectively. However, the success of sustainable development depends on to what extent these technologies transfer for the poor nations.

Trade and sustainable development:

Trade can be used as an effective tool for the sustainable development though it seems many contradictions with the conservation and protection of the environment. In order to gain benefits from trade for developing nations to gear up their sustainable development, it is vital to remove some crucial trade barriers imposed by developed countries on the export of developing countries. This is because this leads to over exploitation of the environment of developing countries as most of their agricultural goods are exported as inputs rather than final productions.

Policy instruments and packages for the environment:

Market forces can be adjusted in a way that it promotes sustainable development. For example, establishment of a legal framework and competitive business climate that encourages corporations to follow a tribal bottom line (TBL) approach into their accounting system is a useful way for the sustainable development. Furthermore, introduction of a tax system on products that seem damage to the environment in their production and consumption process will be useful for sustainable development through reduction of negative environmental impacts and the possibility for the emergence of innovations. Those two concepts are somewhat new for developing nations. However, as the impact of such an initiative seems to be high, it is vital for developing countries to give their priorities to implement such difficult actions.

Concluding Remarks

Finally, it is possible to conclude that developing countries have many difficulties for achieving sustainable development. Those difficulties can be overcome if solutions are taken in sensible ways considering social, economic and environmental priorities. To achieve sustainable development for developing countries, they need to provide with solutions for both unsolved root causes of underdevelopment in those countries and solutions for emerging environmental issues such as climate change and destruction of ecosystems. For both to be achieved it is vital for the higher level of individual, local, national and international collective efforts. Managing and protecting the environment is vital to achieve Millennium Development Goals as destruction of environment increases poverty, decline food security, raise water problems, health issues, floods, droughts and many other socio economic and environmental problems (Mlaba 2005: Dasgupta 2005: Steiner 2005).

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