

**Online Publication Date: 10 April 2012**

**Publisher: Asian Economic and Social Society**



## **Environmental Philosophy for Sustainable Development**

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**Citation:** Francis Etim (2012): “Environmental Philosophy For Sustainable Development” International Journal of Asian Social Science Vol.2, No.4, pp.479-487.



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**Abstract**

The achievement of sustainable development is one of the greatest challenges facing the human race in general and African nation in particular, today. Recent ecological studies have shown that the universe is an international arena of existents. The environment as a natural locale of these reciprocal interaction is an important if not indispensable and complementary partner in any developmental agenda and project. This implies that every developmental stride has concomitant and attendant effect on the environment and vice versa. This calls for a responsive and preservative environmental philosophy that would lead to a sustainable development in Africa. This, the paper suggests, can be achieved through “Affective Humanism.”

**Introduction**

The issue of environment and development is topical. An added imperative and relevant of the issue is precipitated not only by the relatedness of the two phenomena but more by the problems that are provoked daily by adroit effect at development. No doubt, development as a phenomenon is desirable especially given its understanding as “a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital income and levels of living through modern production methods and improved organization” (Rogers, 8-9).

The desirability of development has led to superficial approaches over the years with emphasis on immediate actions to the blind neglect of attendant-telling consequences on human and natural environment. Even some philosophers had fallen prey to these short-term approaches to development. This was evident in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries when development was erroneously identified with progress, achievable through scientific advancements. This led to the mechanization of industries. Others like Comte resorted to positivism as the only pathway to achieving progress and development and Charles Darwin

felt comfortable with the evolutionary theory as the last solution to the issue of development. Some of these theories, G. Onah (171) argues, were “doctrines without proper knowledge of the laws of nature, which made their application difficult and redundant.” What this implies is that a developmental issue that involves scientific and technological applications requires a certain working philosophy, otherwise such development becomes anti-development. This calls for the exploration of veritable principles that would make such actions necessary, applicable, appealing and sustainable. A shift then from development to sustainable development is understandable given these negative tendencies associated with anachronistic developmental strive on human and natural environment.

However, the achievement of sustainable and equitable development is one of the greatest challenges facing the human race, especially given the concomitant nature of development and environmental management, which are apparently complementary aspects of the same programme. Indeed as noted by World Bank Report, “without adequate environmental protection, development would be undermined and without development, environmental

protection would fail” (59). What this entails is that policy that focuses entirely on environment can impede development, and at the same time, policy that extols development and growth at all cost might harm the environment significantly. The balance of the two competing needs is not easy especially in developing nations like Africa. It takes a lot of political will to achieve such a balance.

### **Situating the Issues in Perspective**

Development and Environment are two issues that their meanings and application vary according to intention and interest. The clarification of these concepts becomes very pertinent before embarking meaningfully upon their investigation.

### **What is Development?**

Among words that have grown in popularity and usage in recent times is the concept of development. It has become a household name in many countries of the world especially among the developing countries and is conceived both as a concept and as a process. In either way, “it is many faceted” (Rodney, 10). It can be applied to an individual as well as to a nation or to a continent. It generally connotes some kind of change or transformation. This is implied in or can be deduced from the Oxford Dictionary’s definition of development as, “advancement of political and social systems to become or make something larger and more advanced and more organized;” and, in Rodney’s definition of development as “increase in skill and capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships” (10).

In any case, definitions and applications of the concept of development vary according to discipline. For instance, the sociologist emphasizes the process of differentiation that characterizes modern society; the economist associates development with the maximization of profit involving manufacturing and production. The political scientist is concerned with the capacity of government to bring about political changes and stability; whereas, the political economists accentuation can be gleaned from E. Roger’s submission as “...a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to

produce higher per capita income and level of living through modern production methods and improved organization” (8-9). For the Psychologists, development revolves around the person and the individual that can lead to eventual self reliance and self estimation. This is the gamut of A. Igwe’s (4) assertion that genuine development is fundamentally about human beings in terms of ideas, which imbibe in them the quality to think qualitatively and tackle the problems that emerge out of their living conditions.

On another dimensions, Daniel Offiong (20) sees a close corollary between development and modernization. For him, both are intertwined process whereby development is seen as a good growth and a revised modernization. Berger’s idea of development seems to corroborate that of Offiong. Offiong citing Berger conceives modernization and development as “a process whereby societies and social institutions change from traditional and less developed ones” (21). By implication, modernization and development are anti-traditional. Both concepts involve complex changes in institutions or societies for the betterment of citizens. Real development then, according to Berger, has to do with a structured transformation of the economy, society, polity and culture of the state that permits the self generating and self perpetuating use and development of the people’s potentials.

G. Jonathan apparently summarizes the contemporary mindset on development thus:

...processes of advancement, growth and maturation that encompasses these material and/or issues that are central to meeting human basic needs and improving the quality of life (48).

Development is therefore fundamentally believed to be concerned with realizing the human potentials, which incorporates an economic dimension including poverty alleviation, promotion of investment and employment of wealth location. On the other hand, under-development is seen by some “not as the absence of development but as a comparative term, which indicates that social

development has been uneven and that some human group have advanced economically by producing more and becoming more wealthy” (Rodney, 13).

Given the modern tendencies towards development and developmental issues, Onah (171) insightfully warns that “any discussion on development must necessarily entail a good knowledge of the nature of man who is the ultimate object of development. If this is not done then indiscriminate quantitative multiplication of material goods may be mistaken for human development since it involves progress.” The culmination is the superficial approaches to development with emphasis on immediate action that could produce result without first exploring the principles that make such actions both necessary and possible. Even among philosophers, some have attempted to advocate the short-term approach to human development as in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries emphasis on progress as an index of development and achievable only by strict adherence to mechanical laws.

In reaction to that reductionist’s approach to development some authors like Nnoruka (243) strictures as “faulty using economic growth as indexes alone to measure development.” In Nnoruka’s perspective, development is concerned primarily with the individuals and the extent to which an individual realizes his potentials and attains social integration. Development and modernization therefore are not synonymous. Development rather starts with individuals, whereas modernization starts with society using structural growth as indicators. Therefore, genuine development must take account of man as a whole and not just an aspect of man. A society is developed when “both parts, societal aspiration and development are held in a balance” (Opuka, 67).

In whichever form development is discussed today, it is an undeniable fact that emphases have been mostly on economic growth. This inclination is best appreciated given the capitalistic base of the world developmental plan. According to United Nations Charter on Development as enshrined in the United

Nation General Assembly Charter, 1710, the world developmental plan includes inter-alia:

- Development and utilization of physical and human resources in under-developed countries.
- The formation of true development plans, providing for maximum mobilization of domestic resources and the effective utilization of external resources.
- An improvement in the machinery of administration, in institution and production incentives in order to meet the new and increased demands arising from these developmental plans.
- A reduction of science and technology to increase the attention given to specific problems of low-income countries.
- An increase and subsequent more vigorous growth of the exports earnings of underdeveloped countries.
- An increase and a more assured flow of capital in suitable terms to the underdeveloped countries. (Nigerian Ministry of Economic Planning and Development Bulletin, 3).

An analysis of the World Developmental plan shows over emphasis on economic growth and industrialization. These are no doubt, expected attendant resonances from a capitalistic economy with its devastating tendencies at emphasizing maximization of profit to the detriment of other issues. Though by the 60’s and the 70’s, the emphasis shifted towards equality of the distribution of socio-economic development, information resources, wealth, popular participation in self development, planning and execution, the thrust of the plan was no less the same, economic.

Today, however, the emphasis is not just on development but on sustainable development, which in the words of Trade Akin Aina and Ademola Salan:

Seeks to meet the need and aspiration of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future...It is a process in which the exploitation of reserve, the directive of investments, the orientation of

technological development and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations. It is futuristic (282-283).

For Jonathan, sustainable development refers to “growth and expression carried out in ways to ensure that future generation have at least the same opportunities as current generations” (47). Jonathan explains that it is difficult to establish the link between the present and future needs, especially because people often misconstrued the future as connoting an imaginable distance.

This term sustainable development coined 30 years ago by the Governing Council of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) underscores the intricate relationship between development and environment. Jonathan cites the council as writing:

...that environmental management implies sustainable development. The phrase is considered to be synonymous with “eco-development,” development without destruction and environmentally sound development (Jonathan, 48).

Deducible from the above citation is the fact that sustainable development recognizes two major issues:

-“That economic growth and environmental protection are inextricably linked, and that quality of present and future human generations rests on meeting man’s fundamental needs without destroying the environment upon which all life depends.

-That the basic obligations of the present human generations which preserved the environment for future ones are inter-generational equity and responsibility” (Jonathan, 48).

Sustainable development is therefore a complex multi-dimensional concept and phenomenon that involves inter-connected issues that bothers on ecological, social, cultural, economic and governance. It includes

inter-alia “the making of choices that enables the present and the future generations to meet their needs while maintaining the eco-system integrity” (Jonathan, 47).

In sum, sustainable development can be said to hinge on three pillars, according to John Paul II, namely “the economic, the social and the environmental. These should be rooted on solid ethical values” (Cited in Odoemene, 150).

### **Sustainable Development and Environment**

The multi-dimensional understanding and nature of sustainable development brings it in closed link with the environment. This fact is underscored in the following lines of Eddy Obi’s remarks:

Whenever sustainable development and justice are discussed, the following three possible components viewpoints must be borne in mind, namely, the economics, the ecological and the social and any real progress in understanding can be achieved when effort is made to integrate them into a cohesive whole (53).

A similar line of thought is embedded in the World Bank Development Report that “economic development and sound environment management are complementary aspects of the same agenda of achieving sustainable and equitable development” (cited in Odoemene, 59). The implication of this view is that inadequate environmental protection is quite likely to undermine development; whereas absence of development will bring about failure of environmental protection.

The complementary aspects of environment and development can best be appreciated given current ecological studies, which have expanded its frontiers beyond the structural and functions of a nature and particular organizations, to connote interconnectivity between all living organisms with the household (the universe) whereby the importance of an existent is determined by its effects and relationships to others. This fact must have elicited Odoemene’s (48)

submission that “the ecology of any living organism is determined by how it affects and is affected by its environment.” Experience has shown that everything is connected to everything else, hence, the meaning of the universe. An individual thing has meaning because it is part and parcel of a larger ecological whole. With this hindsight, one can come to conceive of a chain connecting all lives because everything is in one way or the other linked with one another.

Hitherto, developmental experts never took the environment into consideration, “they worked with an anthropomorphic framework similar to the exploitative economic models, which look upon the natural world as having only instrumental values – a common resource to meet human needs. They work with apparent neglect of the fact that policies that over emphasize unabated development at the expense of diminishing natural resources only serve to increase poverty in the long run” (Obi, 56). The visible presence of numerous unsustainable developments, according to Odoemene (47) “is traceable to the neglect of the domestic affair of nature (ecology) in favour of economic development (Oikonomia).” It is his believe that emphasis on economic development naturally leads to maximization of human welfare only within the constraints of existing capital stock and technologies and no more.

However, unfortunately in the mad rush for maximum investments and maximum profits, nature is reduced simply to a supply base of natural resources, raw materials for the satisfaction of human desires, and a veritable cash-flow that can be milked to death. This inclination reduces everything to a mechanical, utilitarian and instrumental value within which all living beings lose their autonomy and intrinsic worth.

This pattern of thought has been blamed on the Cartesian dualism of the enlightenment that disjoins nature from culture and mind from body. This philosophy paved way for modernity’s de-spiritualization of nature, while in itself created a dramatic new account of humanity’s place in the cosmos increasingly perceived as having no other moral

significance or divine purpose than its material value to humans. This attitude, Leonard Buff believes is “typical of a capitalistic mentality that attributes to the economy, power and the instrument that creates wealth through the ravaging of nature and human beings” (235). For D. Dorr, it is not only capitalism that is identifiable with this tendency, but the entire western economic principles. O this note Dorr writes:

But I think we need to look even more critically at western economies both in the capitalistic and its Marxist versions; for it is economics that provide the more immediate justification for the exploitative mentality. Both capitalist’s and Marxist’s economics promote and justify an attitude of aggression in relation to people (Dorr, 24).

Mcdonagh (112) reasoning on the spate of development related disaster in recent times rhetorically ask: “why does modern development lead to such ruthless and reckless behavior?” By way of response, he cites western Christianity with the biblical mandate “to subdue the earth” and the scientific mentality of “*scientia est potential*”, knowledge for the subduing of nature.

T. Berry (15) adduces two reasons for the ecological insensitivity of the West. First, are the strong biblical stress on monotheism and transcendence of God, which has the effect of de-spiritualizing and de-sacralizing the natural world, making it susceptible to exploitation. Second, is the idea of the coming of a perfect millennial state as part of human history. Berry further asserts that the commitment to transform the world today through technological and scientific knowledge has turned around to despoil the earth in the process with excessive devastation and insensitivity as the aftermath. Though, Berry is quick to note that it would be too sweeping to attribute the present devastating attitude to the dominant Christian world view. The blame should rather be attributable to European historical context in which the bible has been read, the world view of Greek thought and the urbanized context of later European experience.

Environment and developmental problems are, however, global issues, though regarded as more devastating among developing nations of Africa. The following extracts from Obi captures the dilemma of developing such nations:

The dilemma facing most government in the developing south is that they are genuinely committed to the economic development of the nations and peoples, and they find that they can do this only by exploiting the natural resources of their land. On the other hand, they would like to protect their original ecological balance. They are then caught between executing the noble goals of development in irreparable and irrevocable ways. They are often presented in Scylla-and-Charydis situation in which whatever option is taken turns out to be dangerous (57).

Most pathetic situation is the fact that the gigantic capital projects embarked upon by developing African countries at the end of the colonial era in the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's; projects like dams, factories, power stations, large scale agriculture, etc, did not implement or sustain a high standard of living in these countries. In most cases, the standard of living became worse. The main reason among others for this situation, according to some scholars is the fact of continuing environmental degradation (Kahn, 457). Paradoxically, it is these developing Countries that should rather strive to preserve the environment more given the fact that they are more dependent on the environment for their primal production activities such as, agriculture, forestry and resource extraction than the rich and developed ones that have many alternatives" (Kahn, 458).

The effect of this poor eco-management leads to high level of air and water pollution, degrading of the public health, reduction in the productivity in agriculture, industry, fisheries and forestry; and generating other social lost that reduce the future ability to produce income. These effects are far-reaching as they render the environment impoverished

leaving the people even poorer. This situation is what Kahn chooses to call "poverty vise" that grips the poor and holds them down perpetually. However, he continues that the ramifications of poverty reach beyond the poor because both the rich and the poor share the same planet and every lost of eco-system is lost to all.

### **An Environmental Philosophy for Sustainable Development**

The line of reasoning so far has underscored the fact that the synergy between environmental well-being and sustainable development, between order of nature and human desire to determine his future on earth, is in danger of coming apart on account of man's abuse of the environment. The quest for sustainable development then is "an expression of human quest for solidarity, bridging important natural, cultural, generational and other differences on behalf of the common good with the preservation and culturation of the earth's resources as essential aspects" (Pope John Paul II, 152). How to achieve this is the concern of this paper.

For Onah (172), any philosophical reflection on development and environment is inescapably bound up with a certain concept of man. This is part of the centrality of the anthropological question in philosophy. Braid and Ames (48-49) too believe that "people's attitude to the environment is greatly dependent on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them." Achieving sustainable development in Africa then requires an anthropocentric environmental philosophy that would lead to a balance and harmonious existence within the environmental economy. This I choose to call **Affective humanism**.

The two operative words, affection and humanism are informative of the thrust of this philosophy. It anchors fundamentally on the sentiment of empathy, which is the power and ability to understand imaginatively, and entering into another feeling. Such "empathic entry," if it forms the baseline of action would definitely affect the other thoughtfully. It emphasizes love as "a thoughtful concern for others, and fraternity as the mutual

identification with-the-other with whom I have a common dignity, common destiny, common humanity or a mutual celebration of likeness” (Uwalaka, 100). The bottom line of affective humanism is that it imposes solidarity and deep concern for everyone especially those that one shares a certain everydayness of existence.

Let me be quick to note that, by advocating affective humanism, I am not oblivious of the attendant danger of positing feeling as an ontological basis of action because of its essential nature of being subjective. Affective humanism is positive in the sense that it is wound around the human person as a *being-in-the-world* and as a *being-with-others*. Affective humanism then places man in his rightful position as a being that is “thoughtful” and “concerned.” It does not ontologize feeling; rather, it sees man as holistic with reason and feeling as complementary realities. Actually, it is humanity that is ontological but as an embodiment of reason and feelings, intellect and emotions. Unlike humanism in its general sense, which stresses the autonomy of the individual, affective humanism places emphasis on man not in its individuality, but as a being-with-others whose life and action affect each other positively or negatively.

Applying this philosophy to the issue of sustainable development connotes the fact that it is reasonable and justifiable to undertake development strides but this should be done thoughtfully, with “the-feeling-for-the-other,” that is, environment, which includes persons and things that are affected by this desirable pursuit of development. It is this thoughtful engagement in the affairs of men that I refer to as “**Affective Humanism.**” It is a call for attitudinal re-orientation towards the corporate existence of the eco-system, since the entire environment is conceived as a country of kindred’s who must co-habit and co-operate in the struggle for living, rather than resources to be exploited.

Affective humanism fundamentally reflects African ontology of universal brotherhood, which places emphasis on the earth as a community of existents. For C. S. Momoh (8), this communal tendency among the Africans

extends beyond the human realm to involve the gods and the ancestors. This submission of Momoh is corroborated by Igwe thus:

There is no broken point in the hierarchical chain of existence. Everything is essentially linked to God, the Supreme Spirit on one hand and with others on the other hand. Even animates objects possess a spiritual force by nature of which they are in existence. The spiritual force is given to every being by God who is the source of life and existence (45).

The visible order is a reflection of this ontological order and harmony. There is an inherent spiritual communalism that permeates the entire social structure, providing the nexus for integration and harmony. Within this ontological perspective, true economic value is placed on all resources, recognizing the dignity of the individual in the sense of being rooted in a particular milieu and community of existents. It emphasizes harmony and co-operation among persons, other existents and nature.

Since ecological and ontological issues are inter-related, African ontological consciousness sees people and animals and other categories of being as moral and divine agents maintained through conscious and responsible actions of different forms of life. This calls for a sense of harmony among existents since, to mistreat any aspect of biosphere of the extended family is to mistreat ourselves. In support of this position W. Kelbessa opines:

All creatures are believed to be children of one father and one mother. These bonds of kinship, mutuality and reciprocity, bound the diversified and complex world together. It is this traditional attitude towards nature that provides foundations for ethical restraint in relation to non human nature (49-50).

African conception of the universe places some form of restriction in dealing with nature. It fosters a responsible attitude towards



nature and instills the consciousnesses of living in partnership with the natural environment. The African is operating with the consciousness that if the environment deteriorates then his life and that of future generations of humans will be harmed.

For Dorr (28), the earth we live in is in some sense a source of value, calling and inviting us to respect it. This does not rule out intervention for the sake of development in the world. Intervention for developmental purpose is part of the pattern of the world. What is ruled out is mindless or irresponsible and disrespectful interference. We are called instead to participate responsibly in shaping the world in co-creating it.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion so far has underscored the fact that any developmental stride that hopes to achieve an enduring legacy must necessarily involve effective environmental management since development must take place within a locale. The term “sustainable” actually draws one’s attention to a timeframe of decision making. It clearly implies a longer timeframe than our proximate interests might otherwise dictate. It conveys the relevance of thinking and planning ahead for the purpose of leaving a lasting legacy for future generations. “When connected to the word, “development” then sustainable has a broader connotation that includes; “prudent use, long term thinking, planning and stewardship” (Jonathan, 48). This can best be achieved when based on a sound environmental philosophy as a pre-requisite. This to my mind is **Affective Humanism.**

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