

From 'Sustained Under-development' to 'Sustainable Development': Moving Africa to a Prosperous and Green Future through Justice and Collaboration

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Kariuki Muigua

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From 'Sustained Under-development' to 'Sustainable Development': Moving Africa to a Prosperous and Green Future through Justice and Collaboration

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Abstract

This paper discusses how Africa can attain a prosperous and green future through justice and collaboration. The paper examines the current status of Sustainable Development in Africa. It posits that Africa faces numerous environmental, social and economic challenges undermining the continent's progress towards Sustainable Development. In light of these challenges, the paper asserts that moving from sustained under-development to Sustainable Development is key in ensuring a prosperous and green future for people and planet in Africa. It examines how justice and collaboration can be harnessed towards fostering Sustainable Development for a prosperous and green future in Africa.

1.0 Introduction

Achieving Sustainable Development is a vital goal for both people and planet. It has been argued that it is necessary to forge a new relationship between people and planet in light of mounting environmental, social, and economic challenges that are prevalent throughout the world¹. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development² acknowledges that global problems including poverty, rising inequalities within and among nations, gender inequalities, unemployment, global health threats, conflicts, and

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¹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'The Triple Planetary Crisis: Forging a New Relationship Between People and the Earth' Available at https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/speech/triple-planetary-crisis-forging-new-relationship-between-people-and-earth?gad_source=1&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI5Jf4zJXihwMVR6KDBx2jcx22EAAYASAAEgIqsfD_BwE (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

² United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

more frequent and intense natural disasters are undermining development with severe consequences for humanity and nature³. These challenges are worsened by environmental threats including depletion of natural resources, environmental degradation, desertification, drought, freshwater scarcity, loss of biodiversity, and climate change⁴. In light of these challenges, Sustainable Development has become a clarion call towards establishing harmony between humanity and nature and tackling environmental, social, and economic problems facing the world for a more prosperous future for both people and planet⁵.

Sustainable Development has therefore emerged as a key ideal and principle aimed at meeting human development goals and needs while at the same time ensuring the ability of nature to provide the natural resources and ecosystem services upon which the economy and society depends⁶. Sustainable Development seeks to promote development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs⁷. It has been argued that Sustainable Development requires an integrated approach that takes into consideration environmental protection, economic prosperity and social equity⁸. The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* sets out the global vision for sustainability⁹. It envisions attainment of the environmental, economic, and social facets of Sustainable Development through 17 interconnected and mutually reinforcing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹⁰.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'The Triple Planetary Crisis: Forging a New Relationship Between People and the Earth' Op Cit

⁶ Mensah, J., 'Sustainable Development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review' *Cogent Social Sciences*, Volume 5, Issue 1

⁷ World Commission on Environment and Development., 'Our Common Future.' Oxford, (Oxford University Press, 1987)

⁸ United Nations., 'Sustainability' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

⁹ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1., Op Cit

¹⁰ Ibid

Achieving Sustainable Development is a vital goal for Africa. It has been argued that challenges such as poverty, hunger, food insecurity, drought, health threats, water scarcity, climate change, wars and conflicts, unemployment, inequalities and poor governance threaten the Sustainable Development agenda in the continent¹¹. Addressing these among other challenges is therefore necessary in reversing the trend of sustained under-development in Africa towards Sustainable Development.

This paper discusses how Africa can attain a prosperous and green future through justice and collaboration. The paper examines the current status of Sustainable Development in Africa. It posits that Africa faces numerous environmental, social and economic challenges undermining the continent's progress towards Sustainable Development. In light of these challenges, the paper asserts that moving from sustained under-development to Sustainable Development is key in ensuring a prosperous and green future for people and planet in Africa. It examines how justice and collaboration can be harnessed towards fostering Sustainable Development for a prosperous and green future in Africa.

2.0 The Status of Sustainable Development in Africa

Achieving Sustainable Development remains a challenge for Africa. It has been argued that the continent is still far from achieving most of the SDGs¹². For example, Africa contains the largest remaining share of global extreme poverty with approximately 400 million Africans still living in worse forms of poverty¹³. Although the levels of poverty

¹¹ African Development Bank., 'The way Forward to Achieving Sustainable Development in Africa.' Available at https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/ADR15_chapter_8.pdf (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹² United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'Africa SDGs Progress Report: Is the Continent on Track to Achieve the 2030 Goals?' Available at <https://www.uneca.org/africa-sdgs-progress-report-is-the-continent-on-track-to-achieve-the-2030-goals%3F#:~:text=%C3%97-.Africa%20SDGs%20Progress%20Report:%20Is%20the%20Continent%20on,to%20Achieve%20the%202030%20Goals?&text=The%20Africa%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goal,sustainable%20development%20path%20by%202030>. (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹³ Institute for Security Studies., 'Reducing Poverty in Africa: Huge Potential, But More Realistic Goals Needed.' Available at <https://issafrica.org/about-us/press-releases/reducing-poverty-in-africa-huge->

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in Africa are predicted to decrease in the coming years, the continent will still remain the poorest region compared to the rest of the world¹⁴. Further, Africa is not on track to meet the food security and nutrition targets stipulated under SDG 2 with millions of people in the continent suffering from moderate to severe levels of food insecurity, hunger and undernourishment¹⁵. It is estimated that hunger affects one in five people living in Africa¹⁶. Consequently, Africa has been classified as the most food-insecure region in the world¹⁷.

Gender inequalities are also prevalent in Africa undermining progress towards Sustainable Development. It has been observed that discriminatory laws and policies and societal norms continue to pose significant barriers for women and girls when it comes to accessing economic resources, education opportunities, property ownership, and financial services, limiting their opportunities and impeding job creation and economic growth in Africa¹⁸. Africa also faces several challenges in ensuring good health and well-being for its citizens. Factors such as disparities in access to health services, poor health policies and infrastructure, limited public health expenditure, poverty and conflicts limit the ability of citizens to access quality, modern, effective and appropriate health services in Africa¹⁹. In addition, it has been argued that the quality of employment remains a

[potential-but-more-realistic-goals-needed#:~:text=Policies%20that%20may%20boost%20poverty,and%20promote%20progressive%20social%20change](#) (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations., 'Africa Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition' Available at <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/c6c81d5f-e337-4b3e-8330-555c9ed0e741/content> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹⁶ AUDA-NEPAD., 'Ending hunger in Africa: The elimination of hunger and food insecurity on the African by 2025: Conditions for success' Available at <https://www.nepad.org/caadp/publication/ending-hunger-africa-elimination-of-hunger-and-food-insecurity-african-2025> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹⁷ World Vision., 'Africa hunger crisis: Facts, FAQs, and how to help' Available at <https://www.worldvision.org/hunger-news-stories/africa-hunger-famine-facts> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., '2025 Africa sustainable development report' Available at <https://www.uneca.org/2025-africa-sustainable-development-report> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

¹⁹ Ibid

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significant barrier towards achieving Sustainable Development in Africa as evidenced by cases of youth unemployment, gender disparities in employment, child labor, skills mismatches and high levels of informal employment²⁰.

Conflicts and wars also fuel under-development in Africa. The continent has been highly susceptible to intra and inter- state wars and conflicts for many decades²¹. Frequent wars and conflicts are being experienced across the African continent, which are fueled by various factors, including disputes over natural resources, fight for political control, poverty, negative ethnicity, religion, environmental causes, and external influence among others²². For example, many African countries that are rich in natural resources including oil, gas and minerals have been caught up in vicious cycles of conflicts undermining the potential of these resources to spur development²³. According to the United Nations, conflicts and wars have been a major hindrance in the quest towards Sustainable Development in Africa²⁴. The prevalence of wars and conflicts is therefore a major cause of sustained under-development in Africa.

Africa also faces numerous environmental challenges that affect the continent's development efforts. For example, it has been pointed out that Africa is facing the prospect of environmental calamity in the form of the triple planetary crisis comprising of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste which are affecting both people and planet²⁵. Further, due to poor environmental governance,

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Olaosebikan. A., 'Conflicts in Africa: Meaning, Causes, Impact and Solution.' *African Research Review*, Volume 4, No. 4 (2010)

²² Muigua. K., 'Towards Effective Peacebuilding and Conflict Management in Kenya.' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Towards-Peacebuilding-and-Conflict-Management-in-Kenya.docx-Kariuki-Muigua-MAY-2021x.pdf> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

²³ Henri. A., 'Natural Resources Curse: A Reality in Africa.' *Resources Policy*, Volume 63, 2019

²⁴ United Nations., 'Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa.' Available at https://www.un.org/osaa/sites/www.un.org.osaa/files/docs/2109875_osaa_sg_report_web_new.pdf (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

²⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Fostering Collaboration to Address Environmental Challenges in Africa.' Available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/speech/fostering-collaboration-address-environmental-challenges-africa> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

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Africa faces several challenges including illegal mining, illegal logging, unregulated fishing, illegal trade in wildlife and environmental degradation and loss²⁶. These challenges result in the loss of a huge share of Africa's natural capital fuelling underdevelopment in the continent²⁷.

From the foregoing, it is evident that achieving Sustainable Development remains a challenge in Africa. It has been argued that the current pace of progress in Africa is insufficient to achieve the SDGs by 2030²⁸. Challenges such as poverty, hunger, food insecurity, drought, wars and conflicts, water scarcity, climate change, poor governance, unemployment and inequalities contribute to underdevelopment in Africa²⁹. It is imperative to address these challenges in order to move from sustained underdevelopment to Sustainable Development in Africa.

3.0 Moving Africa to a Prosperous and Green Future through Justice and Collaboration

Achieving Sustainable Development is a vital goal towards a green and prosperous future in Africa. The continent faces several social, economic and environmental challenges which undermine progress towards Sustainable Development. However, Africa also has several opportunities that can unlock a green and prosperous future. For example, the continent has abundant natural resources including arable land, water, forests, minerals, oil and gas, and renewable sources of energy which provide immense opportunities to unlock a green and prosperous future³⁰. In particular, it has been argued that Africa's abundant renewable sources of energy including wind, solar, hydro and geothermal energy can help address many of the continent's social, economic, health and environmental challenges and foster the realization of a green, climate-safe and resilient

²⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Our work in Africa' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/africa/our-work-africa> (Accessed on 04/11/2025)

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., '2025 Africa sustainable development report' Op Cit

²⁹ African Development Bank., 'The way Forward to Achieving Sustainable Development in Africa.' Op Cit

³⁰ African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/green-growth-initiative/background> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

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future in which Sustainable Development prerogatives are met³¹. Due to the abundance of renewable sources of energy in the continent and the availability of critical raw materials including cobalt, bauxite, nickel, manganese, graphite, chromium and copper, it has been argued that Africa is at the heart of a green, low-carbon and climate resilient future³².

Africa's vast arable land also provides opportunities for a prosperous and green future. It has been argued that by embracing sustainable agricultural practices including organic farming, precision agriculture, and agroforestry, Africa can achieve food security and minimize the environmental impacts of agriculture and food production including biodiversity loss and climate change towards Sustainable Development³³. Further, due to its rich blue economy potential, Africa can also foster a prosperous and green future by strengthening sustainable marine and coastal tourism and fisheries³⁴. In addition, the successful implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) can unlock a prosperous and green future in Africa including through the development of green regional value chains³⁵.

³¹ International Renewable Energy Agency., 'Renewable Energy Market Analysis: Africa and its Regions.' Available at <https://www.irena.org/publications/2022/Jan/Renewable-Energy-Market-Analysis-Africa> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

³² Mo Ibrahim Foundation., 'Africa's Critical Minerals: Africa at the Heart of a Low-Carbon Future' Available at <https://mo.ibrahim.foundation/sites/default/files/2022-11/minerals-resource-governance.pdf> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

³³ African Development Bank Group., 'Africa's Green Growth Agenda: Unlocking Opportunities for a Climate-Resilient Future' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/press-releases/africas-green-growth-agenda-unlocking-opportunities-climate-resilient-future-81858#:~:text=%E2%80%9CFor%20the%20African%20Development%20Bank,its%20people%20and%20the%20planet> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

³⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Africa's green business opportunities are abundant, UNEP study shows' Available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/africas-green-business-opportunities-are-abundant-unep-study-shows> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

³⁵ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'African Countries Urged to Prioritize Green Value Chains for Minerals.' Available at <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/february-2023/african-countries-urged-prioritize-green-value-chains-minerals> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

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From the foregoing, it is evident that Africa has immense potential to transition from sustained under-development to Sustainable Development. African Union's *Agenda 2063*³⁶ sets out a strategic framework for inclusive growth and sustainable Development in Africa. It seeks to foster a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and Sustainable Development³⁷. Agenda 2063 identifies several aspirations, goals, and priority areas towards achieving a prosperous and green future in Africa³⁸. It has been argued that actualizing the aspirations, goals, and targets of the Agenda 2063 can accelerate the Sustainable Development agenda in Africa³⁹.

In order to ensure a prosperous and green future in Africa, it is imperative to pursue justice and collaboration. It has been argued that justice is at the heart of Sustainable Development by providing opportunities to ensure inclusive and equitable economic growth, empowering the poor and the marginalized for social equity, and safeguarding the environment for present and future generations⁴⁰. Justice ensures that economic, social and environmental governance frameworks and policies are equitable, responsive, and accessible to all, therefore playing a critical role in achieving various aspects of Sustainable Development⁴¹. Strengthening justice systems and processes enables traditionally marginalized populations including the youth, the elderly, women, migrants to participate in legal processes that promote inclusive growth in sectors such as health, employment, education, housing, environmental governance and

³⁶ Africa Union., 'Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want' Available at https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/33126-doc-framework_document_book.pdf (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ United Nations Development Programme., '2023 Africa Sustainable Development Report.' Available at <https://www.undp.org/africa/publications/2023-africa-sustainable-development-report> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁴⁰ International Development Law Organization., 'Doing Justice to Sustainable Development: Integrating the Rule of Law Into the Post-2015 Development Agenda' Available at <https://www.idlo.int/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/Doing%20Justice%20to%20Sustainable%20Development.pdf> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁴¹ SDG Resource Centre., 'Access to Justice.' Available at <https://sdgresources.relx.com/tags/access-justice> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

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entrepreneurship towards Sustainable Development⁴². The role of justice in the Sustainable Development discourse is recognised under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. SDG 16 seeks to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for Sustainable Development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels⁴³. It has been argued that SDG 16's emphasis on justice is critical in ensuring fairness and legal protection for all persons, and especially the most vulnerable since it calls for the establishment and strengthening of institutions at all levels to deliver justice effectively, transparently, and without undue delay for Sustainable Development⁴⁴. Strengthening justice systems in Africa is therefore important in realising Sustainable Development.

Collaboration is also an effective strategy towards achieving Sustainable Development in Africa. It has been argued that collaboration is vital in ensuring a prosperous and green future since it enables diverse stakeholders including governments, the private sector and the public to work together towards common solutions in the quest for Sustainable Development⁴⁵. Through collaboration, it is possible to foster stringer partnerships that can accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development by mobilizing resources, sharing knowledge, promoting the creation and transfer of environmentally sound technologies, and building capacity⁴⁶. SDG 17 urges states to collaborate on key issues including finance, technology, capacity-building and trade towards achieving

⁴² Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'Leveraging the SDGs for Inclusive Growth: Delivering Access to Justice for All.' Available at <https://www.oecd.org/gov/delivering-access-to-justice-for-all.pdf> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁴³ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Op Cit

⁴⁴ SDG Resource Centre., 'Access to Justice.' Op Cit

⁴⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-17#:~:text=Goal%2017%20and%20the%20environment,management%20and%20processing%2C%20and%20mitigation.> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁴⁶ Ibid

Sustainable Development⁴⁷. Collaboration is therefore key in achieving Sustainable Development in Africa. It has been argued that the scale, scope and complexity of economic, environmental and social transformation required to realize the Sustainable Development agenda means that no one state or sector – government, business, civil society or academia – will be able to manage the transformation alone⁴⁸. Collaboration in Africa is key in building bridges between countries and cultures, promoting mutual understanding and respect, and strengthening regional partnerships for Sustainable Development⁴⁹. It is therefore imperative for African countries to collaborate on key issues including trade under AfCFTA, finance, environmental protection, and technology development and transfer in order to achieve a prosperous and green future for Sustainable Development⁵⁰.

4.0 Conclusion

Achieving Sustainable Development remains a significant hurdle for Africa. Challenges such as poverty, hunger, food insecurity, drought, health threats, water scarcity, climate change, wars and conflicts, unemployment, inequalities and poor governance are contributing to sustained under-development in the continent⁵¹. However, the continent also has immense opportunities to achieve a prosperous and green future including vast arable land, abundant critical raw materials and renewable sources of energy, huge blue economy potential, and trade under AfCFTA⁵². By strengthening justice and collaboration, Africa can unlock its Sustainable Development potential for a prosperous and green future. It is therefore necessary to design appropriate, equitable, accessible,

⁴⁷ United Nations General Assembly., 'Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Op Cit

⁴⁸ World Economic Forum., 'Why Collaboration will be Key to Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals' Available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/realising-the-potential-of-cross-sector-partnerships/> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁴⁹ Africa Connect., 'Partnering to Maximise SDG Actions (SDG 17): The Efforts of African RENs' <https://africaconnect3.net/partnering-to-maximise-sdg-actions-sdg-17-the-efforts-of-african-rens/> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ African Development Bank., 'The way Forward to Achieving Sustainable Development in Africa.' Op Cit

⁵² African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Op Cit

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affordable and responsive justice systems in Africa including through embracing Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes such as mediation, conciliation, negotiation and arbitration in order to achieve Sustainable Development⁵³. These processes emphasize harmony, collaboration, humanness and togetherness over individual interests therefore creating a conducive environment for economic, social, cultural and political development towards realizing the Sustainable Development agenda⁵⁴. Further, it is imperative to strengthen collaboration between states and between governments, the private sector and the public in order to accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development by mobilizing resources, sharing knowledge, promoting the creation and transfer of environmentally sound technologies, and building capacity⁵⁵.

Strengthening justice and collaboration is therefore vital towards moving Africa from 'Sustained Under-Development' to Sustainable Development.

⁵³ Muigua. K., 'Alternative Dispute Resolution and Access to Justice.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2015

⁵⁴ Muigua. K., & Kariuki. F., 'ADR, Access to Justice and Development in Kenya.' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ADR-access-to-justice-and-development-in-Kenya-Revised-version-of-20.10.14.pdf> (Accessed on 05/11/2025)

⁵⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals' Op Cit

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Africa%20SDGs%20Progress%20Report:%20Is%20the%20Continent%20on,to%20Achieve%20the%202030%20Goals?&text=The%20Africa%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goal,sustainable%20development%20path%20by%202030](#)

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