

Enhancing Environmentalism for Green Growth

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Kariuki Muigua

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Abstract

The concept of environmentalism seeks to achieve harmony between humanity and nature. It stresses that humanity is integral to nature and that nature is vital for human survival hence the need to embrace a symbiotic relationship between the two. Environmentalism seeks to ensure that nature is conserved and protected in order to sustain both the present and future generations. This paper critically examines the need to enhance environmentalism for green growth. The paper posits that fostering green growth is a pertinent ideal in light of the Sustainable Development agenda. The paper defines green growth and critically discusses its elements. It further posits that fostering environmentalism is a key strategy towards green growth. The paper suggests approaches towards enhancing environmentalism for green growth.

1.0 Introduction

The concept of environmentalism focuses on restoring a symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature which is an ideal that requires fundamental alterations in human behaviour and in the characteristics of social life¹. It has been noted that the relationship between human beings and nature has been untenable therefore threatening the integrity and viability of nature and human well-being². According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), environmental problems facing the planet including the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution have

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¹ Choucri. N., 'Environmentalism' Available at <https://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/141579/%5BChoucri%5D%201993%20Environmentalism.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

² Ibid

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heightened the importance of forging a new relationship between people and the planet towards achieving sustainability³.

Environmentalism stresses that humanity is integral to nature and that nature is vital for human survival hence the need to embrace a harmonious relationship between the two⁴. It focuses on reassessment of humanity's relationship with nature in order to enhance environmental conservation and minimize human impacts on the environment⁵. Environmentalism advocates for the adoption of political, economic, and social policies that enhance environmental protection⁶. It also focuses on the preservation, restoration, and improvement of the natural environment⁷. This concept seeks to ensure that nature is conserved and protected in order to sustain both the present and future generations⁸.

This paper critically examines the need to enhance environmentalism for green growth. The paper posits that fostering green growth is a pertinent ideal in light of the Sustainable Development agenda. The paper defines green growth and critically discusses its elements. It further posits that fostering environmentalism is a key strategy towards green growth. The paper suggests approaches towards enhancing environmentalism for green growth.

³ United Nations Environment Programme., 'The Triple Planetary Crisis: Forging a New Relationship Between People and the Earth' Available at <https://www.unep.org/newsandstories/speech/tripleplanetary-crisis-forging-new-relationship-between-people-and-earth> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

⁴ Choucri. N., 'Environmentalism' Op Cit

⁵ Environmentalism., Available at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/environmentalism> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Environmentalism., Available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environmentalism> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

⁸ Song. W., & Cao. H., 'Historical Evolution and Reflections on Harmony between Man and Nature' Available at <https://www.scirp.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=120602#:~:text=Harmony%20between%20man%20and%20nature%20means%20that%20man%20needs%20to,to%20preserve%20nature%20while%20developing> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

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2.0 Green Growth

The idea of green growth aims to foster economic growth that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities⁹. Green growth has also been defined as promoting economic growth and development, while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which human well-being relies¹⁰. Green growth is therefore growth that is environmentally sustainable¹¹. It is a development model that seeks to deliver economic growth that is both environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive¹². This concept seeks opportunities for economic growth that are low-carbon and climate resilient, combat pollution, maintain healthy and productive ecosystems, and create green jobs while reducing poverty and enhancing social inclusion¹³.

According to the World Bank, green growth is efficient in its use of natural resources, clean in that it minimizes pollution and environmental impacts, and resilient since it accounts for natural hazards and the role of environmental management in preventing physical hazards and excessive commodity price volatility¹⁴. The United Nations Environment Programme further notes that green growth is low carbon, resource efficient and socially

⁹ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'Enabling Measures for an Inclusive Green Economy in Africa' Available at https://www.greenpolicyplatform.org/sites/default/files/downloads/resource/UNECA_Enabling%20measures%20for%20an%20inclusive%20green%20economy%20in%20Africa.pdf (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development., 'Towards Green Growth' Available at <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264111318-sum-en.pdf?expires=1724073546&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=E34A1AF0D5BEFA1932CC992346CAD933> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

¹¹ World Bank Group., 'Inclusive Green Growth' Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/129971468157532224/pdf/793260BRI0v20R00Box037737400Public0.pdf> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

¹² Global Green Growth Institute., 'Accelerating the Transition to a New Model of Growth' Available at https://gggi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/17078_GGGI_Strategic_Plan-2015_v13_JM_HOMEPRINT.pdf (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ World Bank Group., 'Inclusive Green Growth' Op Cit

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inclusive¹⁵. Green growth ensures that growth in employment and income are driven by public and private investment into such economic activities, infrastructure and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services¹⁶.

It has been noted that green growth is centred on mutually reinforcing aspects of economic, social and environmental development¹⁷. Green growth takes into account the full value of natural capital as a factor of production and its role in economic growth¹⁸. This concept focuses on cost-effective ways of addressing environmental challenges to affect a transition towards new patterns of growth that will avoid crossing critical local, regional and global environmental thresholds¹⁹. Green growth is therefore concerned with the interrelated system of economic production and consumption activities, policies and instruments, and institutions determining how scarce resources are allocated to meet economic, social and environmental objectives²⁰.

Green growth is at the heart of Sustainable Development. The idea of Sustainable Development seeks to promote development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs²¹. In order to achieve this goal, Sustainable Development focuses on promoting environmental conservation, economic development and social progress²². It has been argued that

¹⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Green Economy' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-economy> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development., 'Towards Green Growth' Op Cit

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ United Nations Economic Commission for Africa., 'Enabling Measures for an Inclusive Green Economy in Africa' Op Cit

²¹ World Commission on Environment and Development., 'Our Common Future.' Oxford, (Oxford University Press, 1987)

²² Fitzmaurice. M., 'The Principle of Sustainable Development in International Development Law.' International Sustainable Development Law., Vol 1

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Sustainable Development is the overarching principle underpinned by green growth initiatives to enhance environmental sustainability, while achieving higher economic growth and increasing the resilience of communities and nations against climate change and other environmental disasters²³. Green growth therefore builds on the broad ideal of Sustainable Development and provides a pathway that seeks to achieve growth targets and development objectives in a more efficient, sustainable and resilient manner²⁴. It emphasizes the importance of economic growth for development and poverty eradication, together with the importance of environmental sustainability and social inclusion, for sustenance of growth and the achievement of Sustainable Development²⁵. Promoting green growth is therefore key in achieving Sustainable Development. To this end, it has been noted that green growth can be used as an efficient strategy to support the implementation of the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development since it turns the trade-off between the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental) into a synergy²⁶. Green growth has been described as an essential ingredient for any Sustainable Development strategy that delivers win-win outcomes for society in the sense that it seeks to protect the environment while accelerating the pace of economic growth and social equity²⁷. It is therefore imperative to foster green growth for Sustainable Development.

²³ Enhancing Environmental Sustainability through Green Growth., Available at <https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2020-08/18.%20Chapter%2014%20Enhancing%20Environmental%20Sustainability%20through%20Green%20Growth.pdf> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

²⁴ African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/green-growth-initiative/background> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

²⁵ Global Green Growth Institute., 'Accelerating the Transition to a New Model of Growth' Op Cit

²⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific., 'Green Growth' Available at <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/environment-development/sustainability-transitions/green-growth> (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

²⁷ Chuku. C., & Ajayi. V., 'Growing Green: Enablers and Barriers for Africa' Available at https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/wps_no_363_growing_green_in_ africa_barriers_and_enablers.pdf (Accessed on 19/08/2024)

3.0 Environmentalism as a Driver for Green Growth

Environmentalism particularly focuses on achieving the ideal of a clean, safe, healthy, and sustainable environment²⁸. It has been pointed out that all people have the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment²⁹. Since human rights and the environment are interdependent, a clean, healthy and sustainable environment has been described as necessary for the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation and development, among others³⁰. Similarly, the enjoyment of all human rights, including the rights to information, public participation and access to justice, is vital in protecting the environment³¹. It has been argued that without a clean, safe, and healthy environment, human beings are unable to fulfil their aspirations³².

In recent years, the recognition of the links between human rights and the environment has greatly increased³³. For example, the number and scope of international and domestic laws, judicial decisions, and academic studies on the relationship between human rights and the environment are growing rapidly³⁴. For example, it is estimated that over 150 countries have binding legal obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to a clean, safe, healthy environment and sustainable environment³⁵. In addition, environmental rights are recognized in a number of international and regional human rights treaties,

²⁸ Muigua. K., 'Enhancing Environmentalism For Sustainability' Available at <https://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Enhancing-Environmentalism-for-Sustainability.pdf> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme., 'What is the Right to a Healthy Environment?' Available at <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-01/UNDP-UNEP-UNHCHR-What-is-the-Right-to-a-Healthy-Environment.pdf> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights., 'About Human Rights and the Environment' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-environment/about-human-rightsand-environment> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Advancing the Right to a Healthy Environment' Available at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-rights-and-governance/what-we-do/advancingright-healthy-environment> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

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national constitutions, laws, and legal precedents³⁶. At the global level, the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment has been recognized by the United Nations General Assembly as a fundamental human right that is vital for the enjoyment of all other human rights³⁷. The Resolution by the United Nations General Assembly urges all states to adopt policies for the enjoyment of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as appropriate, including with respect to biodiversity and ecosystems³⁸.

The recognition of the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment has been hailed as key in reducing environmental injustices; closing protection gaps and empowering all people, especially those in vulnerable situations, including environmental human rights defenders, children, youth, women, and Indigenous Peoples; and accelerating the implementation of environmental and human rights obligations and commitments in all countries³⁹. The recognition of the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is also key in improving the quality of life for people all over the world⁴⁰. It demonstrates the global acceptance of the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right and could stimulate global efforts towards attaining this right and strengthening environmental governance⁴¹.

Environmentalism has played a key role in fostering green growth by advocating for the preservation, restoration, and improvement of the natural environment⁴². It focuses on

³⁶ Ibid

³⁷ United Nations General Assembly., 'The Human Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment: Resolution Adopted by the Human Rights Council on 8 October 2021' A/HRC/RES/48/13

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ International Institute for Sustainable Development., 'UNGA Recognizes Human Right to Clean, Healthy, and Sustainable Environment' Available at <https://sdg.iisd.org/news/unga-recognizes-human-right-to-clean-healthy-and-sustainable-environment/> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Muigua. K., 'Realizing the Right to a Clean, Healthy and Sustainable Environment.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Realizing-the-Right-to-a-Clean-HealthyandSustainable-Environment.pdf> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁴² Muigua. K., 'Enhancing Environmentalism For Sustainability' Op Cit

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fostering harmony between humanity and nature for Sustainable Development⁴³. Environmentalism has been integral in fostering the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment through promoting environmental sustainability, strengthening environmental governance, utilizing litigation as a tool for safeguarding environmental rights and fostering environmental justice, and promoting environmental ethics⁴⁴.

The concept of environmentalism is therefore fundamental in promoting green growth. Green growth focuses on the sectors of the economy that are integral in achieving environmental sustainability. Such areas include renewable energy, sustainable transport and infrastructure, energy-efficient building, clean and green technologies, sustainable waste management, sustainable agriculture and forest management, sustainable tourism, and sustainable fishing⁴⁵. Green growth focuses on altering production and consumption patterns through approaches that reduce pollution, improve energy and resource efficiency, minimize greenhouse gas emissions, and avoid or reverse the degradation of the environment and natural resources⁴⁶. This idea emphasizes that economic growth is of central importance for development and poverty eradication and that achieving environmental sustainability and social inclusion are equally important and necessary to ensure that economic development is sustainable over the long term⁴⁷.

⁴³ International Union for Conservation of Nature., 'In the Spirit of Nature, Everything is Connected' Available at <https://www.iucn.org/news/europe/201801/spirit-nature-everything-connected> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Kasztelan. A., 'Green Growth, Green Economy and Sustainable Development: Terminological and Relational Discourse' *Prague Economic Papers* (2017), 26(4):487-499

⁴⁶ Green Growth in Kenya: Engaging the Private Sector., Available at https://www.greenpolicyplatform.org/sites/default/files/downloads/resource/GG_in_kenya_engaging_the_private_sector_DANIDA.pdf (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁴⁷ Global Green Growth Institute., 'Green Growth in Action: Attaining Green Cities' Available at https://gggi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Green-Growth-in-Action-Attaining-GreenCities_reduced-size.pdf (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

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Environmentalism is key in promoting green growth by advocating for complementarity between environmental protection and economic growth⁴⁸. It has been pointed out that the recognition of interdependence between environmental conservation and economic growth rather than the trade-offs between economic growth and environmental protection has made the concept of green growth increasingly attractive to policymakers over the traditional environmental protectionist approaches that conservatively seek to protect the environment at the expense of the much-desired economic growth especially in developing countries⁴⁹. Environmentalism can advance green growth by advocating for environmentally sustainable economic growth⁵⁰.

A clean, healthy, and sustainable environment has been recognized as essential for supporting economic activities and human well-being in the long-term⁵¹. It has been noted that achieving a “win-win” situation in respect of economic growth and environmental protection has become a common goal for Sustainable Development in all countries around the world⁵². Healthy ecosystems increase all the economic returns from the activities they support⁵³. Further, cleaner air, water, and oceans enable people to lead healthy and productive lives for posterity⁵⁴. In addition, cleaner production standards spur innovation, and industry and the development of clean technologies that provide jobs and support sustainable growth⁵⁵. By embracing environmentalism, countries can enhance green growth through low-emission development strategies in areas such as

⁴⁸ Chuku. C., & Ajayi. V., ‘Growing Green: Enablers and Barriers for Africa’ Op Cit

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific., ‘Green Growth’ Op Cit

⁵¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., ‘Economic Policies to Foster Green Growth’ Available at <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/economic-policies-to-foster-green-growth.html> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁵² Yang. Z., Gao. W., & Li. J., ‘Can Economic Growth and Environmental Protection Achieve a “Win-Win” Situation? Empirical Evidence from China’ *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2022 Aug; 19(16): 9851

⁵³ The World Bank Group., ‘Toward a Clean, Green, Resilient World for All’ Available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/environment/publication/environment-strategy-toward-clean-green-resilient-world> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

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renewable energies, climate-smart agriculture, sustainable transport, and lower-carbon cities⁵⁶.

The relationship between a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment and economic development is acknowledged under the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*⁵⁷. The Declaration stipulates that in order to achieve Sustainable Development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it⁵⁸. It further states that the right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations⁵⁹. In addition, the Rio Declaration acknowledges that human beings are at the centre of concerns for Sustainable Development and are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature⁶⁰. The Rio Declaration therefore envisages the nexus between environmentalism and green growth by advocating for harmony between economic growth and environmental protection.

The role of environmentalism in green growth was also upheld during the *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)*⁶¹. Governments agreed at Rio+20 to frame green growth as an important tool for Sustainable Development; one that is inclusive and can drive economic growth, employment, and poverty eradication, whilst maintaining

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ United Nations General Assembly., Rio Declaration on Environment and Development., A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I), Available at https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_CONF.151_26_Vol.I_Declaration.pdf (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁵⁸ Ibid, Principle 4

⁵⁹ Ibid, Principle 3

⁶⁰ Ibid, Principle 1

⁶¹ United Nations., United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)., A/CONF.216/L.1., Available at <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/13662/N1238164.pdf?sequence=1&%3BisAllowed> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

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the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems⁶². The Rio+20 outcome document acknowledges that green economy can contribute to eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while fostering environmental conservation⁶³. It urges all countries to promote sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development and environmental protection for the benefit of humanity and nature⁶⁴.

Environmentalism is therefore key in promoting green growth. This concept advocates for complementarity between environmental protection and economic growth⁶⁵. However, it has been noted that most economic development and growth strategies in most countries encourage rapid accumulation of physical, financial and human capital resulting in environmental degradation and depletion of natural resources⁶⁶. By depleting the world's stock of natural wealth – often irreversibly – this pattern of development and growth has detrimental impacts on the well-being of current and future generations⁶⁷. It is therefore imperative to enhance environmentalism for green growth.

4.0 Conclusion

Green growth is vital in fostering Sustainable Development. This concept harmonizes economic growth with environmental sustainability, while improving the eco-efficiency of economic growth and enhancing the synergies between the environment and economy⁶⁸. Green growth is a model that provides both direct and indirect benefits

⁶² Ibid

⁶³ Ibid

⁶⁴ Ibid

⁶⁵ Chuku. C., & Ajayi. V., 'Growing Green: Enablers and Barriers for Africa' Op Cit

⁶⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication' Available at https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/126GER_synthesis_en.pdf (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁶⁷ Ibid

⁶⁸ United Nations., 'Green Growth' Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1447> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

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which support poverty reduction, improve productivity and quality of life through more inclusive economic growth, efficient and sustainable use of resources and food security⁶⁹. According to UNEP, green growth does not replace Sustainable Development, but creates a new focus on the economy, investment, capital and infrastructure, employment and skills and positive social and environmental outcomes⁷⁰. Green growth builds on the broad concept of Sustainable Development by providing a pathway that seeks to achieve growth targets and development objectives in a more efficient, sustainable and resilient manner⁷¹.

Enhancing environmentalism is vital for green growth. The concept of environmentalism focuses on the preservation, restoration, and improvement of the natural environment⁷². Environmentalism aims at restoring harmony between humanity and nature for sustainability⁷³. Environmentalism can enhance green growth by fostering complementarity between environmental protection and economic growth⁷⁴. In order to enhance environmentalism for green growth, it is imperative to address existing and emerging development challenges without degrading the environment and depleting natural resources therefore leaving economies and livelihoods more vulnerable to climate change and other environmental, social and economic risks⁷⁵. Fostering environmental sustainability and strengthening environmental governance are key priorities in enhancing environmentalism for green growth. Environmental sustainability is a key priority towards conserving the environment while fostering economic growth and social progress⁷⁶. Sound environmental governance is also crucial in safeguarding the

⁶⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations., 'Green Growth Framework for Fiji: Restoring the Balance in Development that is Sustainable for Our Future' Available at <https://www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/LEX-FAOC164896/> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

⁷⁰ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Green Economy' Op Cit

⁷¹ African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Op Cit

⁷² Environmentalism., Op Cit

⁷³ Choucri. N., 'Environmentalism' Op Cit

⁷⁴ Chuku. C., & Ajayi. V., 'Growing Green: Enablers and Barriers for Africa' Op Cit

⁷⁵ African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Op Cit

⁷⁶ Muigua. K., 'Enhancing Environmentalism For Sustainability' Op Cit

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environment and realizing human rights including the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment which is crucial for economic growth⁷⁷. It is imperative for all countries to embrace environmentalism for green growth by leveraging on areas such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, sustainable infrastructure, sustainable tourism, green industrialization, sustainable forestry, and the blue economy⁷⁸.

Environmentalism and green growth are therefore ideals that can be pursued simultaneously for Sustainable Development. It is thus imperative to enhance environmentalism for green growth towards restoring harmony between people and the planet.

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Muigua. K., 'Green Growth: Examining the Status of the Concept Globally and within East Africa' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Green-Growth-Examining-the-Status-of-the-Concept-Globally-and-within-East-Africa-1.pdf> (Accessed on 20/08/2024)

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