

Looking Beyond Paris: Reflections on Development and Sustainability

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Abstract

The paper critically reflects upon development and sustainability. It argues a case for countries to look beyond the Paris Agreement and embrace Sustainable Development in order to effectively confront climate change. It examines some of the current concerns in development and sustainability. It further suggests approaches towards embracing Sustainable Development as an ideal.

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1.0 Introduction

Climate change has been described as an undesirable phenomenon that affects realization of the Sustainable Development agenda across the world by affecting the sustainability of the planet's ecosystems, the stability of the global economy and the future of humankind¹. The impacts of climate change including intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity are being witnessed across the world². Climate change has therefore been referred to as the most pressing global challenge that affects both developed and developing countries in their efforts towards the realization of the Sustainable Development agenda³. The United Nations 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve Sustainable Development⁴. It urges all countries to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts in order to achieve Sustainable Development⁵.

The *Paris Agreement*⁶ was adopted to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of Sustainable Development and efforts to eradicate poverty⁷. It seeks to achieve this goal through measures such as holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels,

¹ Climate Change., 'Meaning, Definition, Causes, Examples and Consequences.' Available at <https://youmatter.world/en/definition/climate-change-meaning-definition-causes-and-consequences/> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

² United Nations., 'What is Climate Change?' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³ Muigua. K., 'Achieving Sustainable Development, Peace and Environmental Security.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2021

⁴ United Nations., 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

⁵ Ibid, Sustainable Development Goal, 13

⁶ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change., 'Paris Agreement.' Available at https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

⁷ Ibid, Article 2 (1)

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recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change⁸; increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience and low greenhouse gas emissions development, in a manner that does not threaten food production⁹; and making finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development¹⁰.

The Paris Agreement has been hailed for strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change¹¹. It builds upon the *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* and for the first time brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, with enhanced support to assist developing countries to do so¹². As such, the Paris Agreement charts a new course in the global climate effort. The Paris Agreement has had notable successes including encouraging countries to set carbon neutrality goals, embrace net zero targets and adopt a collaborative approach towards combating climate change¹³.

However, it has been argued that most solutions to combating climate change such as those envisaged in the Paris Agreement usually focus on restricting emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide¹⁴. It has been pointed out that such policies intended to tackle climate change through restrictions on greenhouse gases are almost certainly not sustainable since they bear significant costs and have minimal impact on the climate and will most certainly bring about poverty, making it more difficult for the poor

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ United Nations Climate Change., 'Key Aspects of the Paris Agreement.' Available at <https://unfccc.int/most-requested/key-aspects-of-the-paris-agreement> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

¹² Ibid

¹³ Nahm. J., 'Failures and Successes of the Paris Agreement.' Available at <https://ace-usa.org/blog/research/research-foreignpolicy/failures-and-successes-of-the-paris-agreement/#:~:text=The%20Paris%20Agreement%20achieved%20notable,reabsorbed%20without%20significant%20environmental%20impact>. (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

¹⁴ Climate Change and Sustainability, Available at <https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=13823&printable=1> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

to adapt to climate change¹⁵. Consequently, it has been argued that confronting climate change through global regulation of greenhouse gas emissions alone will not be sufficient or could be counterproductive¹⁶. Sustainable Development has therefore been idealized as the best response to climate change.

The paper critically reflects upon development and sustainability. It argues a case for countries to look beyond the Paris Agreement and embrace Sustainable Development in order to effectively confront climate change. It examines some of the current concerns in development and sustainability. It further suggests approaches towards embracing Sustainable Development as an ideal.

2.0 Reflections on Development and Sustainability

Development is perceived as a multidimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social systems¹⁷. It entails various facets including economic development that focuses on improvement in the provision of goods and services in a society and human development which focuses on the improvement of the well-being of individuals and their relationships with the society in areas such as health, education, entitlements, capabilities, empowerment among others¹⁸. Sustainability on the other hand is a long-term goal for the world to meet the needs of economic growth with the least amount of impact on the environment¹⁹. It refers to the ability of societies to exist and develop with without depleting natural resources²⁰. To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations²¹. The

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Todaro, M. P., & Smith, S. C., 'Classic Theories of Development: A Comparative Analysis.' *Economic Development*, (2004) 113-148.

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ Scoones. I., 'Sustainability.' *Development in Practice* 17.4-5 (2007): 589-596.

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ United States Environmental Protection Agency., 'Sustainability.' Available at <https://www.epa.gov/sustainability/learn-about-sustainability> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

intersection between development and sustainability has led to the emergence of the concept of Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development is development which considers the long term perspectives of the socio-economic system, to ensure that improvements occurring in the short term will not be detrimental to the future status or development potential of the system²². It has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs²³. It combines elements such as environmental protection, economic development and social concerns²⁴. Sustainable Development has been embraced as the global blueprint for development as envisaged under the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which seek to strike a balance between social, economic and environmental sustainability²⁵.

The SDGs form the framework for improving the lives of populations around the world and mitigating the hazardous effects of climate change²⁶. It has been observed that Sustainable Development attempts to reduce the development impact created on the environment and promotes ways in which society can adapt to the challenges that climate change presents²⁷. Sustainable Development policies can help to remedy impacts associated with climate change²⁸.

Countries are increasingly embracing a positive approach towards development and sustainability by embracing Sustainable Development as part of their national

²² Muigua. K., 'Nurturing Our Environment for Sustainable Development.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2016

²³ World Commission on Environment and Development., 'Our Common Future.' Oxford, (Oxford University Press, 1987)

²⁴ Fitzmaurice. M., 'The Principle of Sustainable Development in International Development Law.' *International Sustainable Development Law.*, Vol 1

²⁵ United Nations., 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Op Cit

²⁶ United Nations., 'Sustainability.' Available at <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/sustainability> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

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development agendas²⁹. In Kenya, Sustainable Development has been enshrined as one of the national values and principles of governance³⁰. This approach has allowed countries to pursue development and sustainability as related agendas contributing to the attainment of Sustainable Development and confronting global challenges including climate change³¹. Development and sustainability is now being increasingly witnessed in several sectors of global economies including agriculture, infrastructure development, transport, tourism, manufacturing and financial services³².

Sustainable agricultural practices including crop rotation, planting cover crops, reduction or elimination of tillage, integrated pest management, integrating livestock and crops, sustainable water use, irrigation and agroforestry are now forming the backbone of the agricultural sector in many countries³³. Development in the manufacturing sectors is also embracing sustainability through reusing and recycling strategies, waste management methods, software tools, pollution prevention methods, efficient industry practices, and business development models aimed at yielding products through eco-friendly approaches³⁴. The transport sector is also embracing sustainability through the use of low and zero emission, energy efficient, affordable modes of transport, including electric and alternative fuel vehicles, as well as domestic fuels³⁵. Development in the tourism sector is also embracing sustainability through green tourism and eco-tourism approaches³⁶.

²⁹ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development., 'Sustainable Development Strategies What are They and How Can Development Co-operation Agencies Support Them?' Available at <https://www.oecd.org/dac/environment-development/1899857.pdf> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³⁰ Constitution of Kenya, 2010., Article 10 (2) (d)

³¹ United Nations., 'Sustainability.' Op Cit

³² Neumayer. E., 'Human Development and Sustainability.' Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20171206022258id_/https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/6248638.pdf (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³³ Union of Concerned Scientists., 'What Is Sustainable Agriculture?.' Available at <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/what-sustainable-agriculture> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³⁴ Narayanan. G., & Gunasekera. J., 'Introduction to Sustainable Manufacturing Processes.' Sustainable Manufacturing Processes, 2023

³⁵ Office of the Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy., 'Sustainable Transportation and Fuels.' Available at <https://www.energy.gov/eere/sustainable-transportation-and-fuels#:~:text=Sustainable%20transportation%20refers%20to%20low,as%20well%20as%20domestic%20fuels>. (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³⁶ Muigua. K., 'Fostering Sustainable Tourism in Kenya.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Fostering-Sustainable-Tourism-in-Kenya.pdf> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

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Further, the financial sector in most countries is adopting sustainability practices through the use of green products such as green bonds³⁷. Countries are also enhancing investments in clean and green sources of energy as part of their development agenda which is a vital initiative in enhancing sustainability³⁸.

Development and sustainability can therefore be pursued together under the Sustainable Development agenda. This approach has the ability to help countries combat climate change. It has been observed that some synergies already exist between climate change policies and the sustainable development agenda in most countries, such as energy efficiency, renewable energy, transport and sustainable land-use policies³⁹. As a result, it has been observed that successfully limiting global climate change to 'safe' levels in the long-term is likely to require connecting climate change policies to Sustainable Development strategies in both developing and developed countries⁴⁰. Since the feasibility of stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations as a response to climate change is dependent on general socio-economic development paths, it is imperative to put climate policy responses in the larger context of development and sustainability rather than viewing climate change as an add-on to those broader policies⁴¹. It is thus evident that climate policies may impact development priorities in both positive and negative ways, depending on the strategies, instruments, and contexts and that development policies such as those on agriculture, energy, forestry, tourism, transportation, manufacturing and population, could be relevant to climate change⁴². For example, small-scale rural

³⁷ Lala, O., & Stone, D., 'The Role of Central and Commercial Banks in Promoting Sustainable Finance in Africa.' Available at <https://www.mfw4a.org/blog/role-central-and-commercial-banks-promotingsustainable-finance-africa> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³⁸ Muigua, K., 'Adopting Green Energy for a Bright Tomorrow.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Adopting-Green-Energy-for-a-Bright-Tomorrow.pdf> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

³⁹ Beg, N., 'Linkages between Climate Change and Sustainable Development.' *Climate Policy Review*, 2002

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Swart, R., Robinson, J., & Cohen, S., 'Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Expanding the Options.' *Climate Policy* 3S1 (2003) S19-S40

⁴² Banuri, T., & Opschoor, H., 'Climate Change and Sustainable Development.' DESA Working Paper No. 56, ST/ESA/2007/DWP/56

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renewable energy projects or local forestry projects offer climate change mitigating options with poverty benefits⁴³.

The Paris Agreement recognizes the relationship between climate change and the concepts of development and sustainability. The Agreement upholds the intrinsic relationship that climate change actions, responses and impacts have with equitable access to Sustainable Development and eradication of poverty⁴⁴. The Agreement further seeks to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of Sustainable Development and efforts to eradicate poverty⁴⁵. The Agreement also envisages designing climate change responses within the broader context of development and sustainability and calls upon countries to pursue mitigation and adaptation actions while fostering Sustainable Development and environmental integrity⁴⁶. It also encapsulates the role of Sustainable Development in reducing the risk of loss and damage associated with climate change⁴⁷.

Climate change can therefore be confronted within the broader context of development and sustainability. According to the UNFCCC, pursuing climate action and Sustainable Development in an integrated and coherent way offers the strongest approach to enable countries to achieve their objectives efficiently and quickly under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁴⁸. Further, the outcome of the Rio+20/Earth Summit 2012 envisages the role of development and sustainability in combating climate change⁴⁹. The outcome of the Rio+20 urges countries to pursue development and sustainability by ensuring the promotion of an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ Paris Agreement., Preamble

⁴⁵ Ibid, Article 2 (1)

⁴⁶ Ibid, Article 6 (1)

⁴⁷ Ibid, Article 8 (1)

⁴⁸ United Nations Climate Change., 'Action on Climate and SDGs.' Available at <https://unfccc.int/topics/cooperative-activities-and-sdgs/action-on-climate-and-sdgs> (Accessed on 06/10/2023)

⁴⁹ United Nations., 'United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20)' A/CONF.216/L.1

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generations⁵⁰. It also envisages combating climate change within the framework of development and sustainability⁵¹. To this end, it urges countries to pursue development and sustainability through measures such as sustainable agriculture, including crops, livestock, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture, that improves food security, eradicates hunger and is economically viable, while conserving land, water, plant and animal genetic resources, biodiversity and ecosystems and enhancing resilience to climate change and natural disasters⁵². It also envisages development and sustainability through various approaches including enhancing energy efficiency, promoting the blue economy, conservation of forests and good land management practices as part of the global efforts to combat climate change⁵³.

Development and sustainability can therefore be pursued together under the concept of Sustainable Development. This approach offers the strongest approach to enable countries to achieve their objectives efficiently and quickly under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development compared to pursuing the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions as a sole objective⁵⁴. However, there is need to address the problems hindering the achievement of development and sustainability. These problems include poverty, unemployment, war and instability, governance problems, population increase and poor governance and depletion of natural resources⁵⁵. Solving these problems will enable countries realize development and sustainability while meeting the ambitions put forward under the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁵⁶.

⁵⁰ Ibid

⁵¹ Ibid

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ United Nations Climate Change., 'Action on Climate and SDGs.' Op Cit

⁵⁵ Beg. N., 'Linkages between Climate Change and Sustainable Development.' Op Cit

⁵⁶ Ibid

3.0 Conclusion

Development and sustainability are vital components of the Sustainable Development agenda⁵⁷. It is imperative for countries to pursue development and sustainability in order to realize the aspirations of the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁵⁸. This can be achieved by striking a balance between the various facets of development and sustainability including economic sustainability, resource sustainability, social sustainability, energy sustainability and environmental sustainability⁵⁹. Countries should therefore undertake initiatives to foster development by eliminating poverty, promoting food security, enhancing the quality of education, promoting access to health services, water, energy and decent employment while building resilient industry and infrastructure⁶⁰. This should be done within the confines of sustainability through embracing sustainable practices in various sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, energy, tourism and transport⁶¹. It is also vital for countries to embrace sound governance and sustainable management of natural resources including land, forests, water and wetlands, wildlife and biodiversity, minerals, fisheries and the blue economy as part of their development agenda⁶².

Through the foregoing approaches, development and sustainability will be realized. It has been correctly opined that since the feasibility of stabilising greenhouse gas concentrations as a response to climate change is dependent on general socio-economic development paths, it is imperative to put climate policy responses in the larger context of development and sustainability rather than viewing climate change as an add-on to

⁵⁷ Fitzmaurice. M., 'The Principle of Sustainable Development in International Development Law.' Op Cit

⁵⁸ United Nations Climate Change., 'Action on Climate and SDGs.' Op Cit

⁵⁹ Dincer. I., & Ozturk. M., 'Energy, Environment, and Sustainable Development.' *Geothermal Energy Systems*, 2021

⁶⁰ United Nations., 'Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' Op Cit

⁶¹ The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development., 'Sustainable Development Strategies What are They and How Can Development Co-operation Agencies Support Them?' Op Cit

⁶² Muigua. K., Wamukoya. D., & Kariuki. F., 'Natural Resources and Environmental Justice in Kenya.' Glenwood Publishers Limited, 2015

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those broader policies⁶³. It is therefore necessary for countries to look beyond the Paris Agreement and pursue development and sustainability.

⁶³ Swart. R., Robinson. J., & Cohen. S., 'Climate Change and Sustainable Development: Expanding the Options.' Op Cit

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