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STRIVING FOR RESULTS: PRESCRIPTIONS FOR BROADENING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES FOR POLICY MAKING AND PLANNING IN AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

This paper contends that the conceptual basis for sustainable development (SD) planning and policy making in Africa is inadequate and needs to be broadened or 'scaled up.' Thus, the paper takes SD discourse to a new conceptual level, based on the contention that SD achievements in the continent are dismal. Two of several causes of poor SD performance are uninformed African masses about SD policies, and non-inclusion of the masses in SD policy mechanisms by inept leaders. The paper prescribes broadening the conceptual framework for formulating and implementing SD policies from the current 3-E principles (environment, economy, and equity), articulated in the 1987 Brundtland Report, to 5-Es. The two additional principles are enlightenment and engagement, and they address the two aforementioned causes of low SD achievements in Africa.

Keywords: Sustainable development policy and planning; Sustainability principles; Enlightenment; Engagement

INTRODUCTION

One of the most urgent development challenges that Africa currently faces is the management and optimization of her natural resources for the benefit of her peoples. The urgency stems from chronic problems, such as some of the world's highest population growth rates, wars and inter- and intra-border political crises, starvation, rural-urban migration, exploding cities, crude production technologies, illiteracy, and grinding poverty. Overwhelming as the combination of these problems are, the premier need to sustain people's lives with any degree of 'quality' dictates that Africa must continue to seek intelligible and pragmatic ways to manage her natural resource base, also known as the natural environment. The environment is the basis of all life and human functions and activities. Its essential elements, also known as the life-support systems (LSS), are land, water, air, fauna (animal life), flora (plant life), and, as some would add, underground minerals or resources (James & Lahti, 2004; Marsh & Grossa, Jr., 1996).

Africa's natural environment, consisting of its vast resources at, above, and below ground, has been and remains the continent's source of both sustenance and 'tragedies'. Depending on how Africa's natural resource base has been, is, and will be managed, the environment has been an intricate part of Africa's past glory, is part of her present tragedies, and will be part of her hope for a sustainable future. This makes the need for a conceptually sound basis for SD policy making and planning critical. This paper posits that the classical 3-E's, articulated in the 1987 Brundtland Report, are necessary but insufficient for policy makers, technocrats, and citizens to grasp the scope and implications of formulating and implementing SD policies and plans. Therefore, judging from expert assessments of development planning experience across Africa, this paper contends that, in addition to the Brundtland principles, which can be said to focus primarily on the intents or goals of SD, principles are needed that address the 'target-related' requirements to achieve those goals. These are process requirements that are critical for the population targeted by SD policies and initiatives to comprehend and be a part of the implementation of SD.

Prior to prescribing the two additional principles that would broaden the conceptual framework of SD planning, this paper begins, first, with a brief review of the origin and definition of SD. Second, the paper presents a brief but vivid overview of the current status of SD in Africa, in order to underscore the need for citizen enlightenment and engagement, the two additional E-principles prescribed. Third, the

two additional principles prescribed are examined in some detail, to accentuate how critical they are in order to make target populations relevant in the SD equation. Finally, the paper concludes by reiterating the complementary relationship between the five SD principles advocated.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The publication of the groundbreaking report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development - WCED (popularly called the Brundtland Report), introduced the concept SD into the field and lexicon of development planning (Pinderhughes, 2004; Gunder, 2006; Stefanovic, 2000). In the report, SD is defined as meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987:8). Thus, SD should be based on the principles or goals of an environment that is effectively protected, an economy that is vibrant but does not overexploit the environment, and an equitable society, where access and opportunities to use the LSS for self enhancement are non-discriminatory.

Commenting on the prominence of SD in public policy and project planning worldwide, Bressers and Rosenbaum (2003:5) noted that “sustainable development has rapidly acquired such global salience that it is now a strategic concept at virtually every level of international and national government where public policy is discussed. However, what SD implies about the appropriate means to this end or about what is to be specifically achieved, is a matter of continuing debate.” Much as Brundtland’s definition of SD has generated, and continues to generate, debates and even controversies, scholars such as Gunder (2006) noted, quite interestingly, that “... it is this lack of clarity that allows this concept to be a ‘real’ or ‘good thing’ for all those who embrace it, regardless of the particularity of their individual understandings, dreams, and desires about this sublime subject.” This paper indeed considers most SD polemics distracting, sheer “*ad hominem*,” or mere academic exercises, in the belief that sustainability discourses should not be about the etymology of terms, but what Stefanovic (2000) aptly argues should be the phenomenology of sustainability, whereby humans, through what she terms originative thinking, would reverse taken-for-granted assumptions about sustainability in an effort to respond more genuinely to unlimited human needs in the face of limited ecosystem or natural resource capacity. Such is the case of Africa today, given the burgeoning population in the face of dwindling, contested, overexploited, inadequate, or unsustainable resources.

Given the resource challenges facing the world community today, it is not surprising that SD has become the battle cry and rallying point for practitioners, scholars, and advocates of improving human quality of life through development that empowers people and addresses their basic needs in a pragmatic, sustained, and equitable manner (Lindsey, 2003; Porter, 2000). Mazmanian and Kraft (1999:18) noted pointedly that, “as a practical matter, sustainability can mean any important change values, public policy, and public or private activity that moves communities, and individuals, toward realization of the key tenets of ecological integrity, social harmony, and political participation.”

Numerous policy and program initiatives have been introduced at the global and local levels to help communities achieve SD, for example, the United Nations (UN) Agenda 21, and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Agenda 21 was conceived and adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June of 1992. It is a comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally, and locally by organizations of the UN system, governments, and key grassroots groups in every area in which humans impact the environment. Through programs, known as 'Local Agenda 21' or 'LA21', some national and state governments have legislated or advised that local authorities take steps to implement Agenda 21 locally, in compliance with UN recommendations. The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), another example of UN efforts to implement SD ideals, resulted from a Declaration by world leaders at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. According to the UN Chronicle (2008), “the Declaration represents the commitment by developing countries and their partners in the developed world to build upon a universal framework for the eight Millennium Development Goals, to be achieved by 2015. While the first seven MDGs target concrete obstacles to development (in the areas of poverty and hunger, education, equality, health and the environment), MDG 8 - develop a global partnership for development - represents the underpinning of all these Goals.” In addition to these two programs, there is a plethora of others at the international and local levels to achieve the ideals of SD. An example at the international level is Kyoto Protocol, which is a 1990 agreement made under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), urging the industrialized countries to reduce their collective emissions of greenhouse gases by 5.2% compared to the year 1990. At the national, an example, which is fast becoming internationalized, is the eco-municipality program that originated in Sweden as a brainchild of Swedish oncologist Karl-Henrik Robert, founder of The Natural Step (TNS) approach on which the eco-municipality program is based (James & Lahti, 2004).

THE STATUS OF SD IN AFRICA

Judging by the general development data on Africa, as will be briefly reviewed in this section, it is impossible not to conclude that the status of SD in the continent is deplorable and dismal. In any society, one of the foremost indications of development, and by remote extension SD, is how prudently natural resources are used to meet people's basic needs. A critical dimension of prudence, in this sense, is the service and product costs to citizens of meeting basic needs. The challenge of prudence is minimizing consumption costs to citizens for using society's natural resources to meet basic needs, for example, water, energy, and land costs. In this sense, a society with a high standard of living may not be necessarily prudent on the SD scorecard. Yet, until the threshold of unsustainability, that is, the point at which citizens are forced to compromise on basic needs due to the exorbitant costs of purchasing or paying for those needs, a correlation can be drawn between the standard and quality of living, that is, development in a society, and sustainability standards (or overall quality of life) in that society. Based on this correlation, arguable as it may be, the approximate indicators of SD in a society are those used in conventional development studies, such as life expectancy, literacy, and the like. Some pertinent examples of these indicators are discussed below, to demonstrate the dismal status of SD in Africa.

Development indicators are an area of inquiry that is of primary interest to development and political economists. In classical macroeconomics, the general status of development in a country is measured by specific variables, fundamental of which are, one, productivity levels (Gross Domestic Product - GDP) per capita (for individuals) and for whole nations, and two, the human development index (HDI). The HDI was developed in 1990 by two Asian economists (Pakistani and Indian), to enable a comparison of the achievements of the world's countries in terms of the life expectancy, educational attainment, and adjusted real income or standards of living of their citizens. The measure has been used to classify countries into three development categories, namely, low HDI or underdeveloped countries, medium HDI or developing countries, and, high HDI or developed countries. HDI shows how the political economy of a country translates into tangible quality of life standards for citizens.

Based on data available, the picture on Africa's GDP per capita and HDI shows that the region is the least developed in the world, making SD challenges, such as meeting the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), most daunting. For example, commenting on Africa's GDP per capita, the UN

Millennium Project (2005:14, 16) noted that “in the 33 countries of tropical Sub-Saharan Africa, the average GDP per person is only \$270 a year, a mere 71 cents a day.” It added that:

In sharp contrast to Asia’s progress, most of Sub-Saharan Africa faces significant challenges in meeting the Millennium Development Goals on almost every dimension of poverty, with many countries falling behind. Between 1990 and 2001 the number of people living on less than \$1 a day rose from 227 million to 313 million, and the poverty rate rose from 45 percent of the population to 46 percent (*ibid*).

Equally distressing is the HDI for Africa. The latest HDI and GDP data refer to year 2005, as reported in the 2007/2008 Human Development Report of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2007/2008). The report shows that, of the 177 in the HDI rankings, 70 are high HDI countries, 85 are medium HDI countries, and 22 are low HDI countries. Based on the composite measure of three factors of human development, which are life expectancy at birth; enrollment at the primary, secondary, and tertiary level; and income or purchasing power parity (PPP), the report revealed that there is no Sub-Saharan African country in the highest HDI in the world, while Gambia is at the bottom of the medium HDI category, with a score of .502 (155th in the world); life expectancy at birth of 58.8 years (138th in the world); combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrollment ratio of 50.1% (149th in the world); and GDP per capita of \$1,921(144th in the world).

In the low HDI category of 22 countries, all of which are in Sub-Saharan Africa, Senegal came in on top with a total score of .499 (156th in the world); life expectancy at birth of 62.3 years (132nd in the world); combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrollment ratio of 39.6% (159th in the world); and GDP per capita of \$1,792 (145th in the world). At the bottom of the heap is Sierra Leone, with a total score of .336 (177th in the world); life expectancy at birth of 41.8 years (173rd in the world); combined primary, secondary, and tertiary gross enrollment ratio of 44.6% (155th in the world); and GDP per capita of \$806 (169th in the world).Some critics charge that the HDI is not an adequate measure of development, or what some call quality of life. The UNDP (2007/2008) candidly recognized this concern, indicating that:

The index is not in any sense a comprehensive measure of human development. It does not, for example, include important indicators such as gender or income inequality and more difficult to measure indicators like respect for human rights and political freedoms.

What it does provide is a broadened prism for viewing human progress and the complex relationship between income and well-being.

In order to address this valid charge or concern, another platform suggested in this paper to assess SD in Africa is the continent's progress or achievements on the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The goals were adopted unanimously in 2000 by all the countries of the world to combat abject poverty in the world. In the latest comprehensive review of the MDGs by the UN, for example, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated that, "we are now at the midpoint between the adoption of the MDGs and the 2015 target date. So far, our collective record is mixed" (United Nations, 2007:3). In a more incisive overview of the report, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs admitted that:

Currently, only one of the eight regional groups cited in this report is on track to achieve all the Millennium Development Goals. In contrast, the projected shortfalls are most severe in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even regions that have made substantial progress, including parts of Asia, face challenges in areas such as health and environmental sustainability. More generally, the lack of employment opportunities for young people, gender inequalities, rapid and unplanned urbanization, deforestation, increasing water scarcity, and high HIV prevalence are pervasive obstacles (United Nations, 2007:4).

Another comprehensive evaluation of the MDGs to date was conducted and reported under the auspices of the United Nations Development Program (UN Millennium Project, 2005). The findings and conclusions of this copious report were not any different from all other reports', and that is that evidence on the ground in Africa is that all is not well with Africa's development. While other regions of the world continue to show progress on the economic, technological, and overall quality of life fronts, Africa is on the aggregate stagnant or retrogressing. Examples of chilling evidence to support this claim are plentiful. Alan Lopez, Coordinator of the Epidemiology and Burden of Disease Team of the World Health Organization (WHO), observed that "healthy life expectancy in some African countries is dropping back to levels we haven't seen in advanced countries since Medieval times" (WHO, 2000). On the problem of illiteracy, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2000) stated that:

Literacy remains a major barrier to the development of African countries. Despite the progress achieved since 1990, the absolute number of African adults who cannot read or write increased from 131.4 million in 1990 to 136 million in 2000.

UNESCO made clear the strong correlation between illiteracy and poverty, a relationship which further compounds Africa's development hurdles. The story is not different for many other development problems. For example, 30% of Africa's children, under five years of age suffer from moderate to severe malnutrition, compared to 26% in South Central and East Asia. The World Bank (2006) warned that "malnutrition rates are expected to fall everywhere - except in Sub-Saharan Africa." Yet on the business or investment front, the World Bank sponsored a survey of the investment climate in 63 countries, covering 50,000 firms from years 2001 to 2005, and discovered that Africa had the lowest business environment reform intensity than any other region in the world. Africa had an average of 0.6 reforms, in contrast with Central Asia and Eastern Europe, which recorded an average intensity of 2.4 reforms, the highest of any region in the world. The situation is equally disturbing in terms of Africa's status in the current global race or competition on 'knowledge economy' (KE). Examining the application of information and communications technology (ICT), perhaps the most powerful tool for managing and delivering the tacit and explicit knowledge required for the KE, Africa fares no better than any other region in the world in terms of ICT design, invention, or even deployment and application (Kolo, 2009). Also on ICT, the UN Millennium Project (2005:152, 156) noted that "Africa has been the great laggard in technological advance," further alluding to sources that show that:

Tropical Sub-Saharan Africa produces roughly a twentieth of the average patents per capita in the rest of the developing world. And it has only 18 scientists and engineers per million population compared with 69 in South Asia, 76 in the Middle East, 273 in Latin America, and 903 in East Asia.

The evidence on Africa's development thus far suggests that a significant segment of the continent is unarguably in a development dire strait, in spite of noticeable but sporadic changes in the growth rates of economies here and there. From failed or failing governments and alarming rates of illiteracy and unemployment, through devastating incidents of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, to recurrent hunger, starvation, and malnutrition, even international development organizations, and aid and donor agencies are showing signs of 'fatigue' or share exasperation in the fight against underdevelopment and suffering in Africa, in addition to and/or compounded and exacerbated by debilitating diseases, social, political and environmental injustice, and poor management and leadership (Stocking, 2003). The UN

Millennium Project (2005:19, 20) was poignant on the gloomy development environment in Africa when its report noted, quite copiously, that:

The region is off track to meet every Millennium Development Goal. It has the highest rate of undernourishment, with one-third of the population below the minimum level of dietary energy consumption. Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest primary enrollment rates of all regions. Despite recent progress, gender disparity at the primary level is 0.86, the lowest of all regions. The HIV/AIDS crisis is devastating much of the continent, destroying lives and livelihoods. Women are disproportionately affected, with 13 infected women for every 10 infected men. The region also has the highest TB incidence in the world and the highest maternal and child mortality ratios (maternal mortality ratios are 46 times higher than in the developed world). Progress in access to safe drinking water, though more promising, is still too slow to achieve the MDG targets. More than 160 million people live in slum-like conditions where they lack security of tenure, and safe housing. Most of the region lacks access to information and communication technology, with just 5.3 telephone subscribers per 100 inhabitants. Rates of deforestation are among the highest in the world, illustrating the continent's environmental crisis. Without sustained support, Sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely to meet any of the Goals.

As Kolo (2009) noted, however, there are recent and emerging efforts by African governments to forge some sort of partnerships and establish new initiatives in SD, good governance, and accountability. A prime example is the New Partnership for Economy and Development (NEPAD), an initiative of the African Union (AU). Yet, and sadly, as the UN Millennium Project (2005:147) cautioned:

Tropical Africa, even in well governed parts, is stuck in a poverty trap—too poor to achieve robust and high levels of economic growth, and in many places simply too poor to grow at all. More policy or governance reform, by itself, is not sufficient to break out of this trap.

The belief in this paper is that the urgency of SD in Africa requires a multi-prong approach that combines short-term measures, such as those sponsored by International Development Assistance and treaties to alleviate specific conditions, with long-term strategic and structural measures that aim at ideals, such as capacity building, strategic thinking and adaptive frameworks for planning and problem-solving. This is similar to the view expressed by Carley and Christie (2000:viii–ix) that:

Constructive response to environmental crisis are threefold. The first requirement is continuing philosophical and moral debate about the appropriate nature of sustainable development, North-South relations, and the need to empower local communities to manage their own futures. The second is for the development of human resources and

organizational capacity for environmental management, linking governments, business and community groups in a sense of common purpose. The third requirement is for fundamental research and development, especially in energy, agriculture, and manufacturing processes.

It is in the context of the aforementioned suggestion, along with the belief in this paper, that the paper prescribes broadening the principles that underpin the conceptual basis for SD policy and planning in Africa. The two additional principles prescribed are enlightenment and engagement. They are briefly previewed and rationalized in the following section.

OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES OF SD

This paper posits that the ‘definitional obfuscation’ of SD and the conundrum that the implementation of SD poses, due primarily to the nexus or confluence of science, politics and the citizen interest, should not prevent or hinder the type of effort in this paper to explore feasible means of formulating and planning pragmatic SD policies and projects. The focus of this paper is on the conceptual or knowledge-base of SD planning. Conceptual clarity is a necessary aspect of ‘effective’ planning. While, for example, the classical 3-E principles of SD help to understand what society should aim for, they are complemented by the two additional principles prescribed in this paper, in terms of the dynamics of any process or method employed to pursue SD. Together then, the 5-E principles have the potential to help policy makers and technocrats map out a SD course that is feasible and actionable, and to unravel the SD conundrum that the world, especially Africa, faces. First is an overview of the enlightenment principle.

Enlightenment, as conceptualized in this paper, comes through education, experience, and consciousness/awareness, all of which provide the rationale for one’s decisions. In this sense, enlightenment can serve as the glue between the other four ‘Es’, and the ‘clue’ to implementing SD initiatives effectively. Boone and Modarres (2006) observed that the pathways to a sustainable urban future are difficult to predict, “but experience and knowledge can be the basis for guidelines or prescriptions.” They added that, “the first and most important prescription for a sustainable future is to be smart. It suggests that we use our best ideas to create an urban future that improves quality of life while continuing to make cities vibrant, progressive, energetic, and inviting places.”

From a more historical perspective, it can be argued that every dimension of the human experience and accomplishment is aided by, even predicated on, wisdom (enlightenment) that comes from usable knowledge, that is, knowledge that is applicable to purpose. All major breakthroughs in every aspect of human history emanated with the application of knowledge to a problem, challenge, or purpose by an individual or a group. The view in this paper is that knowledge, or what some choose to call information, enlightenment or education, is a powerful tool that enables someone to make a reasoned judgment in a given situation. Reasoned judgment, according to Cunningham and Cunningham (2002:353), depicts “thoughtful decisions based on careful, logical examination of available evidence that recognize the potential for error or new information.” Reasoned judgment is a pragmatic approach to dealing with the uncertainty and inconclusiveness of science, and the subjectivity and whimsicality of politics. Thus, as Cunningham and Cunningham (*ibid*) noted, “society has long used reasoned judgment to address issues of uncertainty...,” and as Stefanovic (2000:xxi) noted on a rather cautionary note, “science is reaching some limits in predicting environmental risks and no amount of technological manipulation can solve problems in the face of such scientific uncertainty.”

The type of enlightenment adduced in this paper to unravel the SD conundrum in Africa and elsewhere is the one that results from the social and experiential learning articulated, advocated and prescribed, explicitly or implicitly, by planning and social change scholars, such as John Friedmann (1973) in his transactive planning theory; Patsy Healey’s (1997) collaborative planning theory; John Forester’s (1989) communicative planning theory; Simona Agger’s (1979) urban self management concept; Sherry Arnstein’s (1969) citizen participation theory; Saul Alinsky’s (1971) radical theory; Paul Davidoff’s (2000) advocacy theory; David Korten’s (1980, 1984) social learning theory; and, Paolo Freire’s (1970, 1973) ‘conscientization’ concept. In sum, these scholars conceptualized effective planning and change as resulting from equipping citizens with the information that opens up their worldviews, convinces them that they are capable of taking control of their own affairs, and indeed provides them with the motivation and psycho-social incentives to engage directly and actively in their communities’ decisional processes. This is the kind of enlightenment or awareness that fuels the ‘natural will’ that serves as the basis for social interactions in the *gemeinschaft* communities widely studied by scholars from the German school of community sociology (Tonnies, 1983). It is awareness that results in turning a cause into a passion, a spiritual pursuit, or what, in terms of the ardent embracement of SD around the world

today, Gunder (2006:209, 212) called a ‘transcendental’ idea. It leads to significant changes in value systems, and such value changes are especially necessary in the quest to plan sustainable communities. As Stefanovic (2000:xvi) commented, “as we develop policies and plans for sustainable development, basic beliefs and value systems frame the very questions we ask in the first place,” adding that “after all, environmental decision-making is first and foremost a process of thinking, as a condition for enlightened action.”

More in terms of its outcome for grassroots citizens in France than its conceptual base of instrumental rationality, the famous historic enlightenment experience in 17th and 18th century Europe serves as a ‘beacon’ for the SD enlightenment principle prescribed in this paper. The history of enlightenment shows that, from John Locke and Isaac Newton in Britain to Voltaire in France, and Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in America, the argument and belief were that enlightenment, deemed as reasoning and the drive for individual achievement or self-reliance would liberate people from the shackles of oppression and injustice. The underlying ideas of enlightenment were later to lead to the French and American Revolutions (Bennett, 2005). In this sense, enlightenment can be liberating, enabling, and empowering in terms of its potential to induce a radical or drastic change in the status-quo. This type of self-empowerment and reliance is the thrust of the ‘alternative development’ strategy discussed extensively by Friedmann (1992), and advocated by civil society organizations worldwide. To be clear, the enlightenment prescribed in the paper should be an ‘ammunition’ for citizens, especially in places, such as Africa, where people feel uninformed about policies and plans that affect their lives, to be intelligibly, meaningfully, and constructively engaged in policy and planning processes. Carley and Christie (2000:65) put it more crisply by stating that, with regard to SD, the:

...commitment to dialogue also rules out simplistic ideological viewpoints from left or right and, of course, the authoritarianism that has been so prevalent and damaging in many non-Western countries. Rather the requirement is for intelligent debate, fully aware of the intellectual reasoning, and tensions which underpin the Western democratic ideas being exported worldwide.

Several other SD scholars have harped on, or accentuated, the pertinence of enlightenment as a potent key for changing people’s attitudes and activities in order to achieve SD goals. In his widely acclaimed book on sustainability planning, for example, Wheeler (2004:85-101) discussed a litany of what he calls ‘tools for sustainability planning,’ among them Geographic Information Systems and mapping,

environmental impact reporting, development path analysis, ecological and footprint analysis. Yet, he emphasized that, “among the most important tools for long-term change are strategies of education, communication, and consensus building,” adding that “one common denominator behind such strategies is the recognition that for political or social change to occur people’s beliefs, knowledge, values, and paradigms of thought must also change,” (Wheeler, 2004:100).

The crucial role of enlightenment in SD planning was also loudly trumpeted in the famous work of James and Lahti (2004) on the eco-municipality experience in Sweden and America. They stated quite emphatically that:

Education about what sustainability means and how local actions connect to global trends is key to local official endorsement, municipal staff participation, and widespread community agreement on the goal of a sustainable community. Education fosters a shared understanding of the challenge facing humanity. It can reveal global and local possibilities for those who choose to be on the forefront of change. Community engagement and motivation for changing to sustainable practices will occur only if people come to understand the nature of the unsustainable problems with which we all wrestle, and if they have access to a mental model for more sustainable behavior (ibid:206, 207, 229).

Arguing along the same line as these authors, in an inspiring forward to their “how to” book, Swedish oncologist Karl-Henrik Robert, founder of The Natural Step (TNS) approach on which the eco-municipality program is based, commented on the advantages of communication and enlightenment for sustainability planning. He stated that:

The clearer and more decent the communicated core values and principles are, the less leaders need to make demands upon participants and to control the process with all its details. Clear core values and principles for dignified goals attract engagement, and the demands and the control occur where it belongs - where the actual change takes place (James and Lahti, 2004:xiii).

Finally, Thorns (2002:210) honed in on the need for an enlightened approach to sustainability planning and suggested the need for planning institutions to be equally enlightened in the process of improving the human-ecosystem relationship. This need, he noted, “brings the debate around to the necessity for ‘enlightened institutions’.”

This paper holds the view that there are two critically essential and inextricably interwoven dimensions to the concept of enlightenment. One is about understanding the full consequences, impacts and ramifications of choices, decisions, and actions on individuals (the self), the immediate group (community), and the supra group (beyond the local community). Two is acting responsibly to eliminate, minimize, or mitigate the negative externalities of one's decisions, choices, and actions. One cannot occur without the other, but, most importantly, it is best when both occur concurrently, such that decisions do not cause or trigger negative externalities. Put in lay terms, enlightenment implies doing the right thing by oneself and by other people and entities.

The view in this paper thus far is that, in Africa and the world over, enlightenment of all the stakeholders in the SD process is a powerful key to unraveling the SD conundrum. Enlightenment helps people to comprehend the nature and dynamics of the ecosystem, and the impacts of their activities on the system. Enlightenment also provides the rationale and conviction for people to want to act responsibly toward the ecosystem by changing or stopping those activities that threaten or undermine the welfare of the ecosystem and, thus, of people. Enlightenment is almost the spiritual (not religious) ingredient in the strategic recipe for achieving the ideals of SD.

The second principle prescribed in this paper is engagement, also known in the development policy and planning literature and practice as participation and, recently, partnership. Engagement has a corollary relationship with enlightenment, as evidence from the historical evolution of public engagement in the machinery of governance, especially in western democracies, would show. The historical genesis of engagement is the democratic system of government that originated in Greece around the 5th and 4th Centuries B.C. Over the centuries since then, this form of government has evolved all over the world into what is now believed to be a form (the best) of government, whose basic tenets include representation, inclusion, consensus-building, negotiation, collaboration, transparency, and accountability.

This paper further examines engagement from the bias of the community planning profession, since, according to Carley and Christie (2000:65), SD reflects “a concern for the future even to unborn generations,” thus, it “must imply comprehensive planning for that future.” From this angle, undoubtedly one of the most heralded conceptual and pseudo-empirical constructs of engagement is Arnstein's (1969) famous eight-rung ladder of citizen participation, which has been translated into five

languages and has been used for programming by agencies, such as the World Bank. She depicted citizen participation as the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, normally excluded from the political process, to be deliberately included. Participation, she posited, allows citizens to join in determining how information is shared, how goals and policies are set, how resources are allocated, how programs are operated, and how contracts are parceled out. Arnstein's ladder has not been without its critics, but it has been for decades a basis for critical dialogue on citizen participation in the planning process, including discussions by some of the planning doyens mentioned earlier in this paper. Also, in an interesting empirical community participation study in Northeastern Brazil, for example, Nance and Ortolano (2007:296) cautioned that "increased participation" in a project should not be automatically "associated with enhanced performance." The view in this paper is that, regardless of the format of participation and the type of project, performance will be based, to a large extent, on how much the participants comprehend the dimensions and dynamics of the project in focus, of their roles and obligations, of the total costs to them for participating, and of the dividends that would accrue to them directly as a result of their participation.

SD experience across Africa leaves no doubt that most citizens are totally ignorant about, and uninvolved in, the processes that lead to policies, projects, and programs that are foisted on them. At the UN Summit on the world food crisis early in 2008, for example, one of the presidents in attendance from a West African country complained loudly that Africa's food crisis would be better resolved if the UN consulted with, and engaged, African leaders in developing solutions to the crisis. The same charge can be leveled against most African leaders who, after independence from their colonizers, operated what seemed more like a caretaker, rather than nationalistic, governments. This paper feels strongly that if the African masses are enlightened or aware about SD issues facing them and future generations, the chances of them getting involved and agitating for accountability from their governments would increase dramatically. Conversely, the more actively engaged the masses are in policy and planning processes at all levels, the better the chances will be to engender and implement pragmatic projects. Among the key advantages which engagement has the potential to bring to the SD policy and planning processes are buy-in into, and support for, the processes by all stakeholder, especially the masses; legitimacy of the processes; collaboration (team work) by all the stakeholders; accountability and transparency of the processes; value-added benefits of volunteers and non-profits in the processes; and

overall longevity of initiatives. Some of these factors were eloquently captured by Carley and Christie (2000:43), who noted that:

For environmental management, we need to understand the role of consensus, which is sharing of views and values by a broad constituency within a society. In participating in any public policy debate, an objective should be to assist the development of a sufficient degree of consensus for action. At best, consensus reflects a transcendent societal view which goes beyond the individualism of the market but is complementary to it, reflecting a marriage between market economics and social responsibility. This involves trade-offs between individual freedoms in the market-place and the quality of public life....

As shown earlier in the review of the status of SD in Africa, each of the aforementioned factors is currently a crippling hindrance for cost-effective SD planning in the continent.

CONCLUSION

In wrestling with the question of why African countries continue to under-perform in achieving SD goals, a review of pertinent literature points, in this paper's opinion, to the absence or de-emphasis of citizen enlightenment and engagement in the diverse set of initiatives and strategies adopted in these countries, for example, the MDGs, eco-tourism, green development and other SD initiatives. Where funded by International Development Assistance agencies, these programs are known to be festering environments for political and bureaucratic corruption in Africa. This paper contends, therefore, that the more enlightened and engaged the African masses are in SD policy and planning initiatives, the more they would hold their leaders accountable for program effectiveness, as well as play their supportive roles as patriotic citizens to ensure the effectiveness of initiatives. Also, enlightenment and engagement are critical requirements for attitudinal and behavioral changes needed in African communities, accompanied by changes to and in people's activities. This point was aptly made by James & Lahti (2004:229), authors of one of the most popular "how to" books on sustainability, who noted that:

It is important to remember that it is not reports that change society but the many concrete actions of individual people both within and outside a municipal government. However, those people's efforts will have more lasting results when their work is supported through use of platforms that integrate sustainable policies and practices into ongoing operations.

In the world's sustainable communities, attitudinal and activity changes have been effected through informed public policies and enlightened and active or engaged citizenries. This point was clearly

conveyed by the commentary by The Granite State Planner (2001:2) on the now famous eco-municipality program, which originated in Sweden. According to the commentary:

The eco-municipality approach uses widespread community awareness-raising and integrated municipal involvement. The “common language” afforded by the Natural Step framework fosters understanding of what “sustainability” is and also how to achieve it across all parts of municipal government and the wider community. The likelihood of conflict and competition among resulting actions is therefore minimized, since all sectors are using the same “sustainability playing rules.”

Finally, it is important to emphasize that there are key implications of the two additional SD principles prescribed in this paper. In no order of importance, among the implications are, one, the need for SD scholars and policy makers to raise the level of intellectual discourse on SD. Contextual insights into, and models of, SD practices need to be developed to avoid the “one-size fits all” approach to SD planning. Why, for example, should there be a global weighting, as in the MDG goal to half the world’s absolute poverty, of the purchasing power of one dollar in America and in a remote African village? Two is the need for a careful blend of discrete and integrated policies, in order to foster intergovernmental collaboration and stretch the coverage of the world’s resources over the ever increasing complex SD problems in Africa. This is analogous to the ‘scaling up’ strategy that is being currently prescribed to reach the MDG goals in Africa. Four is the urgent need to establish appropriate institutional mechanisms to help Africa pursue SD initiatives in intelligible, competent, and professional manners. Currently, institutional or structural mediocrity undermines SD planning in Africa. *Pari- passu* with institutional capacity is the final need for decentralized structures and processes to enlighten and engage the African masses in SD policy and planning processes. Among the immediate advantages of decentralization would be garnering the people’s experiential knowledge about tested age-old SD practices to complement contemporary and Western practices. Decentralization will also help citizens to stay engaged with programs aimed at improving their lives, ensuring that transparency, accountability, and performance, becoming the hallmark of SD projects. Decentralization will help people see and enjoy the dividends of SD planning. Results are what the African masses continue to yearn for in all the talk and hoopla about SD. As James & Lahti (2004:217) stated, “in the general public’s view, it is not enough to talk and produce good-looking documents about planning and sustainable development. Visible results count the most.”

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