

Interrogating the Economy-First Paradigm in ‘Sustainable Development’: Towards Integrating Development with the Ecosystem in Ethiopia

Tsegai Berhane Ghebretkle *

Abstract

This article examines the concept of sustainable development after the Post-2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement with particular emphasis on Ethiopia. Various African countries are vulnerable to climate change, as is evidenced by recent droughts. Ethiopia is selected as a case study in light of its pace in economic growth and as a country which is among the ones that are most affected by climate change. I argue that the concept of sustainable development will be meaningful if it is related only to the core idea of ecological sustainability. Long-term economic growth in Ethiopia is possible if the underlying environmental resources that underpin it are protected and enhanced. Sustainable development remains peripheral and impractical as long as the pursuit of economic and social development remains the practical driving force behind the Ethiopian government’s policy as the primary measure of success. It is argued that the overarching standard for the application of sustainable development should be the integrity of the country’s ecosystem. It is the economic growth which needs to be aligned to the ecological integrity, not the other way round because equitable economic growth requires the protection of its foundation, i.e. the ecosystem. If sustainable development is not based on ecological integrity; it remains a form of hegemonic knowledge, ‘based on a narrow, weak notion of sustainability that promotes reformist fantasies that the crisis can be addressed within the social, political, economic and cultural structures that created it.’

Key terms

Ethiopia, sustainable development, economic growth, social development, ecological sustainability, weak sustainability, strong sustainability

DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/mlr.v11i1.3>

This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND)

* Tsegai Berhane Ghebretkle, LL.B. (Addis Ababa University), LL.M (the University of Oslo), Ph.D (University of Warwick); Assistant Professor of Law, Mekelle University School of Law; currently Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Institute for Dispute Resolution in Africa (IDRA), University of South Africa. Email: tsegai7@yahoo.com

I would like to thank Professor John McEldowney, Dr. Elias N. Stebek and the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Introduction

Developing countries such as Ethiopia face different daunting and sometimes contradictory challenges to promote sustainable development. One of the problems developing countries, especially in Africa, are facing is drought and food shortage. The United Nations has warned that ‘... more than 36 million people face hunger across Southern and Eastern Africa. The immediate cause of the drought which has crippled countries from Ethiopia to Zimbabwe is one of the strongest El Niño events ever recorded’.¹

According to the scientists, climate change has ‘turned normal weather patterns upside down around the globe’.² It is also undermining ‘[Africa’s] ability to endure extremes in weather, leaving huge numbers of people vulnerable to hunger and disease’. The Common African Position (CAP), which stresses that the post-2015 Development Agenda should reflect Africa’s priorities and development programmes, also underlines the urgency to address ‘the challenges posed by climate change, desertification and land degradation, drought, loss of biodiversity, sustainable natural resource management ...’.³ Agenda 2063, which is claimed to be an endogenous plan for transforming Africa, also calls for urgent action regarding climate change.⁴

Ethiopia is facing its worst drought in decades, with more than 10.2 million people in need of food aid. This is due to the weather conditions ensuing from the El Niño phenomenon. According to the Ethiopian Government ‘[t]he failure of two consecutive rainy seasons, including the Kiremt rains, which normally feed 80 to 85 per cent of the country between June and September, has devastated livelihoods and greatly increased malnutrition rates across the country’. According to the Government’s statement an about ‘435,000 children are in need of treatment for severe acute malnutrition (SAM), and more than 1.7

¹ *The Guardian* (16 March 2016), ‘Drought and rising temperatures ‘leaves 36m people across Africa facing hunger’. Available at <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/mar/16/drought-high-temperatures-el-nino-36m-people-africa-hunger>> (accessed 24 October 2016).

² *Ibid.*

³ *The Common African Position (CAP) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, Available at http://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/uploaded-documents/Macroeconomy/post2015/cap-post2015_en.pdf (accessed 29 October 2016).

⁴ Agenda 2063 is an endogenous approach on ‘how the continent should effectively learn from the lessons of the past, build on the progress now underway and strategically exploit all possible opportunities available in the immediate and medium term, so as to ensure positive socioeconomic transformation within the next 50 years’. See African Union Commission (2015), *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want*. Available at: http://agenda2063.au.int/en/sites/default/files/agenda2063_popular_version_05092014_EN.pdf (accessed 29 October 2016).

million children, pregnant and lactating women are in need of supplementary feeding'. The statement further indicates that '[m]ore than 5.8 million people are in need of emergency water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services'. Water shortages have also 'given rise to hygiene issues, leading to water-related public health concerns, including scabies.' Moreover, the drought has 'affected school attendance, with more than 2 million children on the verge of dropping out and over 3,000 schools at risk of closure'.⁵

The country worst hit by the current climate crisis across southern and eastern Africa is Ethiopia, where 'rains vital to four-fifths of the country's crops have failed'.⁶ Gillian Mellisop, UNICEF representative to Ethiopia, notes that 'Ethiopia has been hit by a double blow, both from a change to the rainy seasons that have been linked to long-term climate change and now from El Niño, which has potentially led the country to one of the worst droughts in decades'.⁷

Some of the contradictory challenges to promote sustainable development in developing countries, including Ethiopia, are: promoting equitable economic development, protecting the environment, and social justice. Here, the issue is whether it is possible to have all of them at the same time, especially in a country such as Ethiopia, which pledges to pursue developmental state policies and aspires to be a middle income country through fast and pro-poor economic growth.

This article shows that in the face of climate change –as evidenced by its manifestations such as drought,– the idea that economic growth and environmental protection can be achieved at the same time is either a rhetoric or a pretext for promoting economic growth at the expense of the environment. It further contends that, in the Ethiopian context, the concept of sustainable development will be meaningful only if it is related to the core idea of ecological sustainability. Long-term economic growth is possible only if the environmental resources that underpin it are protected and enhanced. As long as the pursuit of economic and social development remains the practical driving force behind the Ethiopian government's policy and the primary measure of national success, sustainable development will remain peripheral and impractical.

If the benchmark for the application of sustainable development is not based on ecological integrity, it is bound to remain '[a]n archetypical form of hegemonic knowledge, an ideological cocktail of anthropocentrism,

⁵ FDRE (2016), Ethiopia Humanitarian Requirements Document. Available at: <reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ethiopia_hrd_2016.pdf> (accessed 26 October 2015).

⁶ *The Guardian* (16 March 2016), *supra* note 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

developmentalism, neoliberalism and scientism based on a narrow and weak notion of sustainability’ and this merely ‘promotes reformist fantasies that the crisis can be addressed within the social, political, economic and cultural structures that created it.’⁸

The first section of this article deals with Ethiopia and the post-2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement. Section 2 deals with sustainable development after the Paris Agreement. The last section discusses sustainable development in the Ethiopian context. This article does not discuss ‘weak’ sustainability in detail (other than a brief reference to the concept in Section 2.1) because the term, as expounded in various literature, represents the interpretation of sustainable development that gives primacy to economic development under the misconception of considering it as a panacea to all social and environmental challenges.

1. Ethiopia and the post-2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement

Currently, climate change is affecting every country (developed or developing) on every continent. It is affecting lives and disrupting national economies. More people in our planet are experiencing the impacts of climate change, which include but are not limited to changing weather patterns, droughts and shortages. One could also say these impacts of climate change are at their highest levels in human history. If no action is taken, the world’s average surface temperature is projected to rise and is likely to surpass 3 °C.⁹ In such a situation, the poorest and most vulnerable people on our planet – mostly in developing countries such as Ethiopia– are likely to be affected the most. For instance, some studies in Ethiopia indicate that by 2050 the temperature of the country could increase in the range of 1.7 to 2.1 °C unless appropriate mitigation measures are taken.¹⁰ According to the study, this incidence would aggravate ‘food insecurity, spread transmitted diseases in the form of epidemics, and cause degradation of land resources and destruction of infrastructures’.¹¹

⁸ Sam Adelman (2011), *Re-imagining Climate Justice in the Ecology of Knowledges*; in *Re-imagining our Sociological Contemporaneity: What is the Age of Re-embodiments?* p. 5. Unpublished. (Copy on file with the author.)

⁹ *The Guardian* (July 14, 2017), *Paris climate change agreement: the world’s greatest diplomatic success. The guardian newspaper*, available at; <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/13/paris-climate-deal-cop-diplomacy-developing-united-nations>> (Accessed July 14, 2017)

¹⁰ FDRE National Planning Commission, (2016), *Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) 2015/16–2019/20*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

To address the challenges of climate change on our planet, on 12 December 2015, an agreement was signed in Paris which was hailed as ‘historic, durable and ambitious’.¹² The Paris Agreement on Climate Change’s central aim is:

‘to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Additionally, the agreement aims to strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change. To reach these ambitious goals, appropriate financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework will be put in place, thus supporting action by developing countries and the most vulnerable countries, in line with their own national objectives. The Agreement also provides for enhanced transparency of action and support through a more robust transparency framework.’¹³

Ethiopia has signed the Paris Agreement on Climate Change¹⁴ and developing countries such as Ethiopia are expecting a great deal from this agreement, since such effective global cooperation on climate change ultimately enables nations moving ahead to take action. Ethiopia has put in place a number of measures to mitigate climate change. These include a number of national policies and strategies. For instance, a Climate-Resilient Green Economy Strategy was developed in 2011. As discussed in section 3 below, Ethiopia’s Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE), vision and strategy emanated from the Constitution of Ethiopia and the Environment Policy of Ethiopia approved in 1994 and 1997 respectively.

However, lack of resources is hampering progress.¹⁵ Hence, Ethiopia’s commitment is conditional on developed countries’ providing more support, as it simply does not have the capacity or resources to meet the targets. With regard to finance, the CAP¹⁶ reaffirms that:

¹² Fiona Harvey (2015), ‘Paris Climate Change Agreement: The world’s greatest diplomatic success’. *The Guardian*. Available at; <<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/dec/13/paris-climate-deal-cop-diplomacy-developing-united-nations>> (accessed 26 October 2016).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *Addis Fortune Newspaper* (October 26, 2016), ‘Ethiopia signs Paris Climate Change Accord’. Available at; <<http://allafrica.com/stories/201604250523.html>> (accessed 26 October 2016).

¹⁵ For instance, in the Ethiopian case ‘building green economy requires an estimated total expenditure of around US\$150 billion over the next 20 years’. See FDRE, 2011. Ethiopia’s Climate-resilient Green Economy: Green Economy Strategy, November 2011, Government of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.

¹⁶ The Common African Position (CAP), *supra* note 3.

‘previous commitments by developed countries in financing development, including through Agenda 21 and its programme of implementation, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, and the Doha Declaration on Financing for Development, among others, are indispensable for achieving the full and effective translation of partners’ commitments into tangible sustainable development outcomes.’¹⁷

With regard to finance, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which is claimed to be a ground-breaking agreement,¹⁸ also provides a foundation for implementing the global sustainable development agenda that world leaders adopted in 2015.¹⁹ The Addis Ababa Conference builds on the outcomes of two previous Financing for Development conferences in Monterrey, Mexico and in Doha, Qatar.²⁰ It addresses all sources of finance and covers cooperation on a range of issues, including technology, science, innovation, trade and capacity-building.²¹ It also calls on ‘developed countries to implement their commitment to a goal of jointly mobilizing US\$100 billion per year by 2020 from a wide variety of sources to address the needs of developing countries’.²² Therefore, at a global level, finance is considered to be the linchpin for the success of the new sustainable development agenda, which will be driven by the implementation of 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to be dealt with in sub-section 2.2 below.

The ex-Secretary-General of the United Nations, on 5 October 2016, noted that the threshold for entry into force of the Paris Agreement was achieved.²³ Accordingly, the Paris Agreement entered into force on 4 November 2016.²⁴ The first session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ With regard to the importance of the agreement, the then UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, remarked that ‘this agreement is a critical step forward in building a sustainable future for all. It provides a global framework for financing sustainable development.’ He also added that ‘The results here in Addis Ababa give us the foundation of a revitalized global partnership for sustainable development that will leave no one behind.’ See *Countries reach Historic Agreement to generate Financing for New Sustainable Development Agenda, 2015. Third International Conference on Financing for Development, 13–16 July 2015, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*. Available at: <<http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/ffd3/press-release/countries-reach-historic-agreement.html>> (accessed 29 October 2016).

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ UN News Centre (2016), Available at:

<<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=55219#.Wb7edV96Uk>> (accessed 31 October 2016).

²⁴ Ibid.

Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA1) took place in Marrakech in conjunction with COP 22 and CMP 12.²⁵ However, various critics have indicated gaps the Paris Agreement. As Fiona Harvey notes, ‘the caps on emissions are still too loose, likely to lead to warming of 2.7 to 3 °C above pre-industrial levels, breaching the 2 °C threshold that scientists say is the limit of safety, beyond which the effects – droughts, floods, heat waves and sea level rises– are likely to become catastrophic and irreversible.’ She further states that ‘[p]oor countries are also concerned that the money provided to them will not be nearly enough to protect them.’²⁶ Another gap in the Paris Agreement is that ‘not all of the agreement is legally binding’ and thus ‘future governments of the signatory countries could yet renege on their commitments’.²⁷

Kumi Naido, former Executive Director of Green Peace International considered the Paris Climate Change Agreement as joining hands in a common cause, and meanwhile underlined the *caveat* that the agreement ‘is only one step on a long road and there are parts of it that frustrate, that disappoint [him], but it is progress.’ According to Naido, ‘[t]he deal alone won’t dig us out of the hole that we’re in, but it makes the sides less steep.’²⁸

Central point to the Paris Agreement is the commitment made by countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions through Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs).²⁹ However, many scholars are sceptical about the impact INDCs will have, especially on the degree of political commitment from some governments. For instance, Bickersteth notes that “Many countries’ national climate plans –known as Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) in UN jargon– were produced in a hurry for Paris, with limited consultation: weakly integrated with the rest of the economy, business, politics and other sectors”.³⁰ He further notes: ‘Much needs to be done to link these

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Fiona Harvey, *supra* note 12.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ As for the Ethiopian Government, Ethiopia’s INDCs mark an important step towards sustainable development consistent with the Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities. It also contributes to Ethiopia’s global effort to mitigate climate change while ensuring the realization of an equitable and resilient green economic growth nationally. See the document on the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Available at: <<http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/Ethiopia/1/INDC-Ethiopia100615.pdf>> (accessed 31 October 2016).

³⁰ Climate Home News (2016), Available at: <<http://www.climatechangenews.com/2016/07/25/after-paris-how-are-countries-tackling-climate-change/>> (accessed 31 October 2016).

national climate plans into national development plans and national budgets, and factor them alongside national level responses to the SDGs.³¹

Thus, the UN conference in Paris is not a quick-fix in tackling climate change, but merely marks a commendable beginning thereby requiring political commitment, financing, the use of new technologies and capacity-building.³² A 'complete package' for the Paris Agreement is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.³³ The implementation of the Paris Agreement is indeed essential for the achievement of the SDGs adopted on 25 September 2015, and it provides a roadmap for climate actions that will reduce emissions and build climate resilience.

2. Sustainable Development and the post-2015 Paris Climate Change Agreement

2.1 Underlying Tension in the Concept

In any development agenda there are underlying tensions between the need to industrialize and the need to protect the environment. This tension lies at the heart of environmental politics. The concept of sustainable development is an attempt to resolve this tension. Baker notes that the concept opens up debates about our relationship with the natural world: What constitutes social progress and what the character of the development should be? Nwankwo *et al* stress that 'concerns about sustainable development mirror our (humankind's) collective anxiety about the sort of society we wish to create and how we wish to live in it'.³⁴ They argue that 'it is also about the sort of society we have created and the implication for present and future existence'.³⁵

The underlying point in sustainable development is that economic and social growth, on the one hand, and environmental protection, on the other, are possible at the same time because they complement each other. However, sustainable development has been criticized as being an ambiguous and politically fabricated concept designed to accommodate irreconcilable interests.³⁶ Pearce *et al* note that there are more than 40 definitions.³⁷ The most

³¹ Ibid.

³² European Commission (2016), Available at; <<https://eudevdays.eu/topics/climate-change-agreement-towards-paris-and-beyond>> (accessed 31 October 2016).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Nwankwo *et al* (2016), *Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: Issues of Knowledge Development and Agenda Setting*, p. 2. Available at; <<http://homepages.uel.ac.uk/D.A.C.Boyd/IJTMSD%20Multidisciplinary%20paper.pdf>> (accessed 26 March 2016).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Sharachandra Lele (1991), 'Sustainable development: A critical review', *World Development*, 19(6): 613. See also and Dick Richardson (1997), 'The politics of

widely used is the definition in the Brundtland Report, which defines it as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’.³⁸

Even if the concept of sustainable development is endorsed by many governments in their legal systems, there is considerable controversy about how it is understood. Owing to this ambiguity, there are various forms of sustainable development, starting from a light touch (weak form) to a more substantive and tougher test (strong form). The debate over these two forms of sustainable development revolves around the degree to which ‘natural capital and human-made capital can be *substituted* for each other’³⁹ (emphasis added).

Proponents of weak sustainability argue that ‘natural capital and human-made capital are indefinitely or even infinitely substitutable’.⁴⁰ Weak sustainable development espouses an anthropocentric view of the relationship between people and nature, composed of ‘three strands: the perception that people are separate from nature; the idea that nature is a “resource” to be used for the benefit of society or individuals; and the view that we have the right to dominate nature’.⁴¹ At the centre of weaker sustainable development is an implicit optimism that ‘people will be able to find a solution to environmental problems that arise’, and they will be able to ‘enhance the stock of resources’.⁴² Technological progress is ‘assumed to enable people to manipulate the Earth to meet their enormous demands on it’.⁴³

Proponents of strong sustainability, on other hand argue that ‘[t]here are limits to which natural capital can be replaced or substituted by human-made capital’ and they state that ‘sustainability requires that we maintain the level of natural capital or at any rate that we maintain natural capital at or above the level which is judged to be critical’.⁴⁴ The common thread in strong sustainability is the view of ‘the Earth as finite and their conceding that no habitable future is possible unless the demand-side of the equation radically alters by rethinking our attitude towards nature as well as our view of economic

sustainable development’ in Susan Baker, Maria Kousis, Dick Richardson, and Stephen Young (eds.) (1997), *The Politics of Sustainable Development-Theory, Policy and Practice within the European Union*. London: Routledge, 41.

³⁷ Pearce *et al* (1989), *Blueprint for a Green Economy*. London: Earthscan, 173–185.

³⁸ WCED (1987), *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 43.

³⁹ John O’Neill (2007) *Markets, Deliberation and Environment*. New York: Routledge, 101.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Colin C. Williams & Andrew C. Millington (2004), *The Diverse and Contested Meanings of Sustainable Development*, *The Geographical Journal*, 170(2): 100.

⁴² *Id.*, 101.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ John O’Neill, *supra* note 39.

progress and development'.⁴⁵ For advocates of stronger sustainability, 'the weaker versions of sustainable development are much more about sustaining development rather than sustaining environment, nature, ecosystems or the Earth's life support systems'.⁴⁶

In the stronger versions of sustainable development, a different view of the relationship between people and nature is adopted. The objective is 'to protect natural ecosystems but not simply for the pleasure of people, as is often the case in anthropocentrism. Instead, the argument of strong sustainability theorists is that nature has biotic rights'.⁴⁷ They argue that 'nature has a right to remain unmolested that does not require justification in human terms, just as there are inalienable human rights that require no justification'.⁴⁸ Stronger sustainability theorists argue that 'human society –in its endless pursuit of materialism– is heading in the wrong direction'.⁴⁹

2.2 Perceptions of Sustainable Development, 1992 Onward: Between a mask and genuine content

The international community adopted the concept of sustainable development at the Rio Summit in 1992 as a paradigm but not as a binding legal norm.⁵⁰ The summit marked the first international attempt to draw up action plans and strategies for moving towards a more sustainable pattern of development. It was attended by 'over 100 Heads of State and representatives from 178 national governments'.⁵¹ The summit was also attended by representatives from a range of other organisations representing civil society. Sustainable development was the solution to the problems of environmental degradation discussed by the Brundtland Commission in the 1987 report, 'Our Common Future'.

In September 2000, at the Millennium Summit held in New York, 189 UN member-states adopted the Millennium Declaration. Even if it was not a legally binding instrument, nor a formal UN resolution, in practice it had acquired a politically and morally compelling character. The Millennium Development

⁴⁵ Williams & Millington, *supra* note 41, 102.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Dryzek defines paradigm as 'a type of inter-subjective understanding that conditions individual action, and social outcomes, in the international system no less than elsewhere. It has no formal existence resembling that of organizations, constitutions, laws, and treaties. Yet they can be nonetheless effective in coordinating the behaviour of large numbers of actors ...'. See, John S. Dryzek (2007), *Paradigms and Discourses*, in *Oxford Handbook of International Environmental Law*, New York: Oxford University Press, 45.

⁵¹ Sustainable Development Commission (2016), Available at <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/pages/history_sd.html> (accessed 26 October 2016).

Goals (MDGs) were designed to serve as a roadmap for world development by 2015. In August 2001, a year later, the UN Secretariat published the eight MDGs.⁵²

The World Summit on Sustainable Development was also held in Johannesburg in 2002, which was attended by 191 national governments, UN agencies, multilateral financial institutions and other major groups to assess progress made since the Rio Summit a decade earlier.⁵³ The Johannesburg Summit ‘delivered three key outcomes: a political declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and a range of partnership initiatives’.⁵⁴ Key commitments included ‘those on sustainable consumption and production, water and sanitation, and energy’.⁵⁵

In order to assess and secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to organize a conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 24 December 2009. In the resolution, two themes of focus were identified. First, ‘a green economy within the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication’ and, second, ‘an institutional framework for sustainable development’.⁵⁶ As per the resolution, the Rio+20 Conference was held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 13 to 22 June 2012. It remains the third and the largest global UN conference on sustainable development after the Stockholm in 1972 and Rio in 1992.

The document titled ‘The Future We Want’⁵⁷ was an outcome of the Rio+20 Conference. It outlines four important agreements reached at the conference. These are: (1) to design universal SDGs; (2) the application of green economy⁵⁸ as a critical tool for achieving sustainable development; (3) the application of overseas development assistance and other development finance to promote

⁵² The MDGs include: halving extreme poverty and hunger; achieving universal primary education; empowering women and achieving gender equality; reducing mortality for the under-fives by two-thirds; reducing maternal mortality by three-quarters; reversing the spread of major diseases, especially HIV/AIDs and malaria; ensuring environmental sustainability; and creating global partnerships for development with targets for trade, aid and debt relief.

⁵³ Sustainable Development Commission, *supra* note 51.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/64/236 adopted (24 December 2009).

⁵⁷ UN General Assembly Draft Resolution A/66/L.65, *The Future We Want* (24 July 2012).

⁵⁸ UNEP defines a green economy as ‘one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities’. See UNEP (2011), *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*. Available at: <www.unep.org/greeneconomy> (accessed 21 September 2012).

sustainable development in developing countries; and (4) the centrality of enhanced capacity and resilience in promoting sustainable development.

However, these outcomes have been criticized, for instance, by Pearce, who argues that ‘[t]he Rio+20 summit produced a largely meaningless document that failed to address the daunting environmental challenges the world faces’ and notes that ‘many at the conference looked to an alternative approach called green economics –using market forces to help nations achieve sustainable development’.⁵⁹ He observes that ‘the conference did agree to start talks on setting sustainable development goals to augment the world’s existing millennium development goals, but could not agree on what topics they might cover’.⁶⁰

Jim Leape, the World Wildlife Fund Director (2005-2014) criticized the outcomes of Rio+20 as a ‘colossal failure of leadership and vision’.⁶¹ Likewise, Care International labelled it as a charade.⁶² Achim Steiner, the director of the UNEP (2006-2016) remarked that ‘we can’t legislate sustainable development in the current state of international relations’.⁶³ Marc Robinson holds a similar view and argues that ‘sustainable development remains mostly just that –a concept rather than an on-the-ground reality. To date, the focus has been heavily skewed towards the economic pillar, with less attention paid to the equally important pillars of social equity and environmental sustainability.’⁶⁴

Adelman argues that ‘Rio+20 failed because it replicated the failing of sustainable development in the form of green economy’.⁶⁵ In his view, Rio+20 was a double failure: *first*, it offered vague aspirations rather than concrete solutions to climate change, species extinction and environmental destruction. This reflected a *second* and more profound failure: the summit further entrenched the erroneous idea that the solution to the environmental crisis lies in the self-same neoliberal ideology that has intensified the crisis during the past 40 years.⁶⁶ He argues that ‘the green economy concept is designed to mask or

⁵⁹ Fred Pearce (2012), *Beyond Rio, green economics can give us hope*. *The Guardian*. Available at; <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/series/guardian-environment-network>> (accessed 18 December 2012).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ WWF Global. Available at; <http://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?205290> (accessed 21 December 2012).

⁶² Fred Pearce, *supra* note 59.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Marc Robinson (2012), Preface, in *OECD, Development Cooperation Report 2012: Lessons in Linking Sustainability and Development*, OECD Publishing. Available at; <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/dcr-2012-5-en>> (accessed 21 December 2012).

⁶⁵ Sam Adelman (2013), *Rio+20: Sustainable injustice in a time of crisis*. Unpublished. (Copy on file with the author.)

⁶⁶ Ibid.

displace attention from the failure of markets to provide viable solutions to the climate crisis, the epistemological bankruptcy of market fundamentalism and the resistance of the hegemonic discourse to alternative ways of understanding'. According to Adelman, 'like sustainable development, the green economic approach seeks to elide the irrefragable contradiction between the expansionary logic of capitalism and the absolute limits of nature', and he concludes that 'Rio+20 deepens the epistemological crisis by regarding the limits of the ecosystem as incidental problem rather than a fundamental constraint'.⁶⁷

The Rio+20 Conference and its outcome demonstrate that an economic system solely based on growth is not able to enhance sustainable development. *Secondly*, it indicated that the state remains central but that non-state actors have to be accommodated. *Thirdly*, there is a need for enhanced capacity and coordination among different stakeholders to enhance sustainable development. *Fourthly*, sustainable development indicators are required at the global and national levels. *Fifthly*, and most fundamentally, the green economy advocated at Rio+20 needs to be implemented according to ecological principles, and it should not simply focus on economic growth.

The discussions during the Rio+20 conference further indicated the international community's expectations that the concept of green economy will play an important role in providing a coherent vision that guides development policy and planning. In other words, from the outcome of the conference one can see that a green economy should be understood as one in which economic, environmental and social policies and innovations enable society to use resources efficiently while maintaining the natural systems.

However, the green economy concept as understood at the conference faces serious challenges. It focuses on economic growth in order to increase prosperity without increasing resource efficiency. And it does not acknowledge that it is possible to become more resource efficient but still exert excessive demand on the environment. This author argues that to achieve sustainability we need to focus on ecosystem resilience –that is, to maintain the status and limits of the natural system. In the course of addressing these challenges of boosting resource efficiency and ecosystem resilience, there is also the need to include the element of human wellbeing which targets at ensuring an equitable distribution of the benefits and costs of the economic growth.

The pursuit of formulating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that can accommodate the needs, concerns and interests that fall in a spectrum of political and policy appeal to both developed and developing countries was

⁶⁷ Ibid.

indeed challenging. It was under such a setting that the SDGs,⁶⁸ otherwise known as the Global Goals or the Agenda 2030, were born at the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. The objective was to replace the Millennium Development Goals and produce a set of universal goals that meet the urgent environmental, political and economic challenges facing our world. They are meant to symbolize an urgent call to shift our world into a more sustainable path. Among others, they are a universal call – to end poverty, protect our planet and ensure peace and prosperity. They provide guidelines and targets (to be adopted) for all countries in accordance with their own priorities and the environmental challenges.

The SDGs comprise 17 goals. Among other priorities, they include new areas such as: climate change, economic inequality, innovation, sustainable consumption, peace and justice. The goals are interconnected. Success in one is closely connected with success with another. The SDGs are unique in that they cover issues that affect us all. They reaffirm our international commitment to end poverty, permanently, everywhere. They are ambitious in ensuring no one is left behind. More importantly, they involve us all in building a more sustainable, safer, more prosperous planet for all humanity.

3. Sustainable Development in the Context of Ethiopia

The 1992 Rio Conference and the pursuits of sustainable development coincided with a new era of socio-economic and political changes in Ethiopia.⁶⁹ After years of rule under a command economy, prolonged civil war and repeated drought, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia was formed in 1991 and

⁶⁸ End poverty in all its forms everywhere; end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture; ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages; ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning; achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; Ensure access to water and sanitation for all; ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all; build resilient infrastructure, promote sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; reduce inequality within and among countries; make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources; sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, halt biodiversity loss; promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies; and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development. Available at: <<http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>> (accessed 24 October 2016).

⁶⁹ Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) (2012), *United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), National Report*, 17. Available at: <<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/973ethiopia.pdf>> (accessed 20 October 2016).

began a broad spectrum of reform measures to address both the immediate need for economic recovery and reconstruction to jump-start the economy, while addressing the long-term structural problem of underdevelopment.⁷⁰

Since the late 1990s and early 2000s, Ethiopia has instituted a series of medium-term plans and focused policies such as the Agriculture Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) policy, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), and a Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) 2005/6–2009/10. In 2010 Ethiopia unveiled a Growth and Transformation Plan I (GTP I) for the period 2010/11–2014/15⁷¹ At the same time, a Climate Resilient Green Economy Strategy was developed in 2011.⁷² Ethiopia's Climate-Resilient Green Economy (CRGE) vision and strategy emanated from the Constitution of Ethiopia and the Environment Policy of Ethiopia approved in 1994 and 1997, respectively.

The 1990s and early 2000s development plans focused on the economic and social development pillars, and integration of the environment pillar began during the formulation of the PRSP in 2002/03, as the country's economic began a double-digit rate of growth.⁷³ PASDEP integrated the environment in the development plan with clear indicators and targets.⁷⁴ Among all of the medium and long-term plans prepared in Ethiopia, the GTP I was the most ambitious and had the hallmark of an integrated plan incorporating sustainable development principles and objectives.⁷⁵ On 16–May 2016, the government has introduced GTP II⁷⁶ (2015/16–2019/20) as the continuation of GTP I.

The sustainable development efforts of the country are therefore supported by a number of national policies, strategies and laws. For instance, the concept of sustainable development is also clearly included in the 1995 FDRE Constitution, the 1997 Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE) and three core environmental proclamations, namely the Environmental Protection Organs Establishment Proclamation No. 295 of 2002; the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation No. 299 of 2002; and the Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation No 300 of 2002. Ethiopia is also a signatory state to a number of multilateral agreements that have a bearing on the sustainable development efforts of the country.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Id., p. 19.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ *Supra* note 10.

⁷⁷ For instance, it is party to both the UNFCCC (ratified in 1994) and the Kyoto Protocol (ratified in 2005).

3.1 Sustainable Development and the FDRE Constitution

The idea of sustainable development is endorsed in the FDRE Constitution, but neither the Constitution nor subsidiary laws have defined it. Article 43 of the Constitution, under the heading ‘the right to development’, reads as follows:

1. The people of Ethiopia as a whole, and each Nation, Nationality and People in Ethiopia in particular have the right to *improved living standards* and to *sustainable development* (emphasis added);
2. Nationals have the right to participate in national development and, in particular, to be consulted with respect to policies and projects affecting their community;
3. All international agreements and relations concluded, established or conducted by the State shall protect and ensure *Ethiopia’s right to sustainable development* (emphasis added), and
4. The basic aim of development activities shall be to enhance the capacity of citizens for development and to meet their basic needs.’

However, the Amharic version⁷⁸ of article 43(3) differs from the English version. The words ‘የማይቋረጥ ልዩ-ገን/ *yemayaquarit idget*’ that are used in Amharic version mean ‘unstoppable or continuous growth’. The aim of development according to the Amharic version of article 43(4) of the Constitution is ‘the development of citizens and satisfaction of their basic needs’. It can be argued that sustainable development in Ethiopia is primarily about equitable economic growth. It does not deal adequately with environmental issues.

This argument is supported by the fact that the Constitution contains a separate provision on the ‘right to clean and healthy environment’ in article 44. From this disparity in the meaning of sustainable development, it can be argued that sustainable development has two different meanings at the *international* and *national* levels (emphasis added). At the national level it is understood as unstoppable growth while at the international level it is considered as development that includes economic, social and environmental protection. This implies that sustainable development could have different audiences at national and international levels.

Krueger *et al* argue that ‘Ethiopia uses the language of sustainable development to communicate to the international community its commitment to world ecological stability and thus to secure foreign aid’ and for the ‘domestic audience, sustainable development represents the promise of a brighter future and a higher standard of living.’ They argue further that ‘the government adds to its power and legitimacy, holding out the image of richer prospects and invoking

⁷⁸ As per article 5 of the FDRE Constitution, Amharic is the working language of the Federal Government. See, FDRE, 1995. The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No 1/1987, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 1(1).

the power of industrialized nations where the term [sustainable development] originates'.⁷⁹

Chapter 10 of the FDRE Constitution (articles 85–92) contains principles and objectives which help to define and guide the implementation of sustainable development.⁸⁰ The Constitution provides that 'any organ of government [federal or state] shall, in the implementation of the Constitution or other laws and public policies, be guided by the principles and objectives specified under this Article'.⁸¹ From a reading of the Constitution, it is clear that the objectives are intended to guide different government organs in enforcing and implementing the Constitution, subsidiary laws and public policies. In Ethiopia, constitutional objectives are elevated to the status of guiding principles and, if properly implemented, they can play a vital role in implementing sustainable development.

Taking the Constitution at face value and treating sustainable development as a right, it might be interpreted as a very broad right that includes the economic, social and environmental elements of sustainable development in the context of good governance. But the main issue is: which one would prevail when these elements of the right to sustainable development are in conflict with one another? It is inevitable that these elements would be a conflict. Unless one of these elements is given priority and taken as a benchmark, it is impossible to resolve the conflict. I argue that as a way out of this conflict, the principle of sustainability should be given priority and serve as a benchmark for implementing the concept of sustainable development in Ethiopia.

Even if the concept of sustainable development in the Constitution is stated as a right, it is difficult to pin it down as a specific right. Although it is fundamental in character, it cannot be characterized as a specific and mandatory right. The list of claims that can be included under this right appears to be entirely open-ended, involving: prevention and control of industrial pollution, smoke from motor vehicles, discharge of oil, chemical effluents, garbage and raw sewage into rivers, and so on. Petitioners who invoke the right to sustainable development must show, before a trial court, a more specific legal right than the general stipulation under article 43(1) of the Constitution. In that case, the trial court can validly pass judgment granting all or part of the relief prayed for. Otherwise, this will force the courts into the uncharted territory of social and economic policy-making. In a situation where no specific, operable norms and standards are shown to exist, policy-making bodies such as the

⁷⁹ James Krueger *et al* (2012), 'Environmental permitting in Ethiopia: No restraint on 'unstoppable growth'? *Haramaya Law Review*, 1(1): 79.

⁸⁰ Articles 85–92.

⁸¹ Article 85(1).

legislature and executive need to be given a real and effective opportunity to identify, formulate and promulgate those norms and standards, and to implement them before judicial intervention.

3.2 Sustainable Development and the Environmental Policy of Ethiopia

The Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE) endorses the concept of sustainable development as its overall policy goal. It was designed to integrate development and environmental concerns.⁸² It has also substantially drawn from international initiatives such as the UN’s Agenda 21 and IUCN’S Caring for Earth.⁸³ The overall policy goal is:

‘To improve and enhance the health and quality of life of all Ethiopians and to promote sustainable social and economic development *through the sound management and use of natural, human-made and cultural resources and the environment* as a whole so as to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs’⁸⁴ (emphasis added).

In contrast to the Constitution, the EPE contains more specific policy objectives and key guiding principles, including: sustaining essential ecological and life-support systems, protecting future generations’ interests, the application of new technology for proper natural resource management, pollution prevention and public participation in environmental management activities.⁸⁵ Key principles include the right to live in a healthy environment, sustainability, the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle.⁸⁶ These key guiding principles are supposed to guide the overall policy and the specific policy objectives of the EPE and other strategies and programmes to implement sustainable development. The EPE states that:

‘Establishing and clearly defining these guiding principles is very important as they will shape all subsequent policy, strategy and programme formulations and their implementation. Sectoral and cross-sectoral policies and environmental elements of other macro policies will be checked against these principles to ensure consistency’.⁸⁷

⁸² Gedion Asfaw, Kifle Lemma & Sebsebe Demissew (2007) ‘Ethiopia: Protecting nature in a developing decentralized country’, in Albert Breton, Giorgio Brosio, Silana Dalmazzone and Giovanna (eds), *Environmental Governance and Decentralization*, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 117.

⁸³ Id., 119. (IUCN: The International Union for Conservation of Nature)

⁸⁴ FDRE (1997), *Environmental Policy of Ethiopia*, EPA/MoEDC, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 3.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Id., 4, 5, 15 and 19.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

The concept of sustainable development as envisaged in the policy document is based on the principle of sustainability –sustainable social and economic development through the sound management and use of natural, human-made and cultural resources and the environment. The fact that principles such as the right to clean and healthy environment, sustainability, precautionary and the polluter pays are given emphasis in the policy document also corroborates this argument. It could also be argued that the underlying assumption of the policy is that if the principle of sustainability is followed through, a situation of economic and social sustainability can be observed.

According to the FDRE Constitution, the power to formulate and implement economic, social and development policies and strategies is vested in the Council of Ministers,⁸⁸ whereas the power and function to approve these policies and strategies is that of the House of Peoples' Representatives.⁸⁹ However, it is important to stress that the Constitution is silent on how environmental policies and strategies are to be formulated.

The Environmental Protection Organs Establishment Proclamation (EPOEP) empowers the Federal Environment Protection Authority (FEPA) (currently the Ministry of Forest, Environment and Climate Change (MFECC))⁹⁰ to prepare, review and update environmental policies, strategies and laws in consultation with competent agencies, other concerned organs and the public at large.⁹¹ Upon approval by the Environmental Council (EC),⁹² FEPA is mandated to monitor and enforce their implementation.⁹³ Unlike the express statement of economic, social and development policies and strategies at the constitutional level, the authorities in charge of the formulation and approval of environmental policies and strategies have not been mentioned. One can argue that this indicates the lower priority given to the environment. Hence, even if the EPE incorporates the principle of sustainability, it needs the backing of new laws to achieve its overall goal, objectives, targets and principles.

3.3 Sustainable Development and Core Environmental Laws

There are different proclamations and regulations that are directly related with the protection of the environment. Among these, three proclamations constitute

⁸⁸ FDRE, Constitution, *supra* note 78, article 77(6).

⁸⁹ Article 55(10).

⁹⁰ See FDRE (2013), Definition of Powers and Duties of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No.803/2013, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 19(61):6990-6694; and FDRE (2015) Definition of Powers and Duties of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Proclamation No.916/2015, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 22(12): 8582-8655.

⁹¹ FDRE(2002), Environmental Protection Organs Establishment Proclamation No. 295/2002, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 9(7): 1939–1944; article 6(2).

⁹² Article 9(1).

⁹³ Article 6(2).

the core of the Ethiopian environmental law regime: the Environmental Protection Organs Establishment Proclamation (EPOEP) No. 295 of 2002; the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation (EIAP) No. 299 of 2002; and the Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation (EPCP) No 300 of 2002.⁹⁴ These proclamations deal with enforcement mechanisms, environmental impact assessments, the protection of the environment and the safeguarding of human health and wellbeing. For instance, the preamble to the EPOEP states:

‘Assigning responsibilities to separate organizations for environmental development and management activities on the one hand, and environmental protection, regulations and monitoring on the other is instrumental for the sustainable use of environmental resources, thereby avoiding possible conflicts of interest and duplication of efforts.’⁹⁵

The Proclamation aims to enhance the implementation of sustainable development by establishing two regimes: one for environmental development and management; the other for environmental protection, regulation and monitoring. By designating two separate regimes, the Proclamation aims to avoid possible conflicts of interest –between economic development and the protection of the environment. The proclamation aims to promote coordinated but differentiated responsibilities among the environment protection agencies at federal and regional levels. However, according to Sintayehu Tadesse (ex-head of the Environmental Protection section in the Environmental Protection, Land Administration and Use Bureau of Amhara Regional State) and Hadush Berhe (former head of the Environmental Protection Department in Tigray Land Administration and Environmental Protection Agency), the coordination among environmental protection agencies is poor.⁹⁶

The preamble of the Environmental Impact Assessment Proclamation states the following:

‘Assessment of possible impacts on the environment prior to the approval of public instrument provides an effective means of harmonizing and integrating environmental, economic, cultural and social considerations into a decision making process in a manner that promotes *sustainable development*’⁹⁷ (emphasis added).

Environmental impact assessments are important instruments of environmental planning that promote sustainable development. They are mechanisms through which environmental concerns are integrated into the

⁹⁴ Environmental Protection Organs Establishment Proclamation (EPOEP), *supra* note 91.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Sintayehu Tadesse (2011), [Personal communication], 29 March; Hadush Berhe(2012), [Personal communication], 27 January.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

development agenda of the country. However, with the ineffective environment protection, regulation and poor coordination among monitoring organs, it is unlikely that such environmental assessments can achieve their stated goals. The fact that some of the environment protecting, regulating and monitoring organs are established at lower organizational level and are not staffed and equipped with all the necessary expertise and equipment exacerbates the problem.⁹⁸ Therefore, strengthening the EIA system in Ethiopia is crucial in the efforts toward sustainable development. In this regard, the Preamble to the Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation (EPCP) No 300 of 2002 states:

‘The protection of the environment, in general, and the safeguarding of human health and well-being, as well as the maintaining of the biota and the aesthetic value of nature, in particular, is the duty and responsibility of all. ... It is appropriate to eliminate or when not possible, to mitigate pollution as an undesirable consequence of social and economic development activities’.⁹⁹

The EPCP is meant to implement sustainable development in the country by protecting the environment through avoiding pollution from any economic activity. When this is not possible, its function is to mitigate pollution through the application of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). However, this should not imply that an EIA’s focus is simply mitigation; it is also a tool to prevent industrial pollution. The concept of sustainable development is in principle endorsed in different policies, strategies and laws in Ethiopia. The issue is how practical they are. To address this issue, it would be useful to discuss the recently passed Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II).

GTP II is built on sectoral policies, strategies and programmes, lessons drawn from the implementation of GTP I, and the post-2015 SDGs.¹⁰⁰ It has also taken into account global and regional economic situations with direct or indirect bearings on the Ethiopian economy.¹⁰¹ According to the National Planning Commission, the post-2015 SDGs, the Common African Position (CAP) on the Post-2015 Development Agenda,¹⁰² Agenda 2063 of Africa,¹⁰³ and

⁹⁸ For instance, in Dire Dawa Administration and Harari People National State they are established as authorities. In Amhara Regional State, Benshangul Gumuz Regional State, Gambella People’s National State, and Oromia Regional State they are established as bureaux. In Somali National Regional State and Tigray Regional State (where the two exemplary case-study industries are located) are established as agencies.

⁹⁹ FDRE (2002), Environmental Pollution Control Proclamation No. 300 of 2002, *Federal Negarit Gazeta*, 9(12): 1959–1966.

¹⁰⁰ FDRE National Planning Commission, *supra* note 10, 76.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² CAP reasserts ‘the urgent need to end poverty in all its forms and achieve an integrated, prosperous, stable and peaceful Africa that is effectively engaged in the global arena, which is Africa’s vision in [post-2015] development agenda’. It also underlines ‘the post-2015 Development Agenda should reaffirm the Rio Principles, especially the principle of

the Addis Ababa Action Agenda¹⁰⁴ have been embraced and integrated into the national plans, policies and strategies.¹⁰⁵

The government believes this presents a unique opportunity for integrating and mainstreaming: 'the principles of sustainable development goals and the tenets of Agenda 2063 of Africa into policies and programmes to articulate the national priorities, opportunities and challenges to the pursuit of economic structural transformation'.¹⁰⁶

These international and regional instruments substantiate the various national policies, strategies and development priorities which constitute the basis for GTP II.¹⁰⁷ The main basis of GTP II is the country's vision to become a lower middle-income country by 2025.¹⁰⁸ It states that in the coming ten years, 'Ethiopia's vision is to reach the level of lower middle-income countries where democracy, good governance and social justice are maintained through people's participation'.¹⁰⁹

The realization of this vision calls for 'creating competitive, productive and inclusive economy in all aspects'.¹¹⁰ Hence, every aspect of the plan emanates from this vision of becoming a lower middle-income country by 2025. In order to eradicate poverty, Ethiopia has 'embarked on ambitious infrastructure investment projects to improve its economic competitiveness, including a multi-billion dollar plan to scale up energy generation [dam building]'.¹¹¹

The Council of Ministers had allocated more than US\$ 12.4 billion (274,373,197,248 birr) for the 2016/17 fiscal year. Out of this budget, more than US\$3.1 billion (68,792,874,848 birr) was allotted for regular expenses; more than US\$4.8 billion (105 708 615 000 birr) was allocated for capital expenses; more than US\$3.9 billion (87,871,707,400 birr) subsidized the regional states. More than US\$542 million (12 billion birr) was allocated for sustainable

common but differentiated responsibilities, the right to development and equity, and mutual accountability and responsibility, as well as ensure policy space for nationally tailored policies and programmes on the continent, including appropriate support for the implementation of the NEPAD'. See CAP, *supra* note 3.

¹⁰³ Agenda 2063, *supra* note 4.

¹⁰⁴ Countries reach Historic Agreement to generate Financing for New Sustainable Development Agenda(2015), *supra* note 17.

¹⁰⁵ FDRE National Planning Commission, *supra* note 10, 76.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Reuters Africa. Available at:<<http://af.reuters.com/article/investingNews/idAFJQE85D07S20614?sp=true>> (accessed 10 June 2012).

development,¹¹² and compared to the previous budget, this budget has shown a 13.3 percent increase.¹¹³

It is absolutely appropriate to focus on poverty alleviation. However, eradicating poverty and environmental sustainability are two aspects of the same pursuit. Poverty can be temporarily eradicated at the expense of the environment. Dobson argues that ‘social justice and environmental sustainability are not always compatible objectives’.¹¹⁴ He stresses that ‘social justice [for instance, poverty eradication] and environmental sustainability speak different languages and have different objectives’.¹¹⁵ He emphasizes that ‘assertions to the contrary are more often, based on wishful thinking than on clear-sighted analysis or hard empirical evidence’.¹¹⁶ Hence, the effort to alleviate poverty in Ethiopia will be futile if the government and other development actors fail to protect the environment.

One might argue that Ethiopia is entering a potentially new era under the Paris Agreement and that this might give rise to practicable solutions. However, I argue that as long as the concept of sustainable development is developed and interpreted in the context of the economy-first paradigm, and as long as the pursuit of economic and social development remains the practical driving force behind the Ethiopian government’s policy and the primary measure of national success, sustainable development will remain peripheral and impractical.

Conclusion

It is too early to predict the effects of the Paris Climate Change Agreement on developing countries such as Ethiopia. Some analysts and environmentalists are less sure about its impact, while there are also views that do not regard the Paris Agreement as a breakthrough, thereby expecting the unfolding of endless climate damage. The latter even go further in saying it is not that strong. According to these critics its success depends on the political will of the governments of developing countries, enhanced awareness at the grassroots, available fund, and good governance in efficiently and effectively using fund for the purpose intended. This places enormous pressure on infrastructure planning

¹¹² Ethiopian News Agency(2016), Available at: <<http://www.ena.gov.et/en/index.php/politics/item/1435-council-of-ministers-approves-over-274-billion-birr-budget-for-upcoming-ethiopian-fiscal-year>>(accessed 1 November 2016).

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Dobson (2003), *Social justice and environmental sustainability: Ne'er the twain shall meet?*, in Julian Agyeman, Robert D Bullard and Bob Evans (Eds). *Just Sustainabilities: Development in an Unequal World*, UK: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 83.

¹¹⁵ Id., 112, 91.

¹¹⁶ Id., 83.

as well as the appropriate use of funding in developing countries such as Ethiopia.

The main challenge in the promotion of sustainable development in Ethiopia seems to be political will and the capacity to enforce the existing environmental degradation laws and pollution control laws, and lack of capacity and coordination on the side of environment-regulating institutions. Apparently, policies and laws that cannot be implemented are not effective tools in bringing about sustainable development. Ethiopia is thus at cross-roads between business as usual, which is bound to aggravate environmental degradation and pollution in the context of the weak version of sustainable development that has influenced the country's policies in development paradigms, or gear readjustments, by giving prime attention to the treasures in the ecosystem as a foundation for all development pursuits.

The Ethiopian government pledges that poverty reduction obtains top priority. It also aspires to alleviate poverty through accelerated economic growth, increased investment, job creation and higher income, all of which mean giving less focus in reality to environmental concerns. With regard to the international setting, the outcomes of the UN conferences on sustainable development held in Stockholm in 1972, in Rio in 1992 and again in Rio in 2012 have not achieved their intended objectives, while the effectiveness of SDGs and the Paris Agreement remains to be seen. _____■
