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**FORESTRY ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA**

**Sub –Theme 2: Centrality of Forests and Forestry in Greening an economy**

- 2.1 **Enefiok S. Udo:** Centrality of Forests and Forestry in Greening an Economy  
**130-141**
- 2.2 **Opeyemi Olajide & Egor B. Etigale:** Forestry Actions for Greening a Fast-Growing Economy: Nigerian Perspective  
**142-149**
- 2.3 **Badejo, S.O., Adejoba, O.R. & Ojo, A.R. :** Bamboo: A Versatile Tool for the Actualization of Green Economy  
**150-156**
- 2.4 **Adekola P.J. Ojo, M.O. Bobadoye, B.O., Aderemi A.M. & E. Kuforiji :** The Potential Role of Vermiculture Technology in Environmental Management in Nigeria  
**157- 161**
- 2.5 **Etuk, I. M., Akpan, M. P. & Etuk, A. I. :** Biodiversity Conservation: A Critical Component of Green Economy  
**162-168**
- 2.6 **Dan, P. H., Anosike, Q. C., Nsien, I. B. & Ubboh, O :** Sustainable Forest Management: A Pathway to a Green Economy  
**169-175**
- 2.7 **Ejizu A.N, Eric E.E, Ehirim B.O, and Okonkwo H. O. :** The Role of Watershed Management for Green Economy Development  
**176-182**
- 2.8 **Adewole, N. A., O. Y. Ogunsanwo & I. O. Azeez :** Influence of Sustainable use of Environmental Goods and Services on The Green Economy Goals In African Countries  
**183-190**
- 2.9 **Erhabor, L.O. & Onyekwelu, J. C. :** Assessment of Growth and Yield Models For Sustainable Development of Young Tectona Grandis (Linn. Fin) Plantations in Osho Forest Reserve, Nigeria  
**191-199**
- 2.10 **Shuaibu, R. B. & Dagba, B. I. :** Challenges of Forest Inventory and its Effects on Forest Management and Planning in Nigeria  
**200-206**

# INFLUENCE OF SUSTAINABLE USE OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOODS AND SERVICES ON THE GREEN ECONOMY GOALS IN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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## Abstract

This paper reviewed the status of environmental goods and services utilization in Africa viz-a-viz the goal of green economy. A systematic appraisal of the potential of utilizing forest goods and services in a sustainable manner to reduce the striking poverty in Africa is one of the focuses of this paper. It identified the challenges **slowing** down the development of environmental goods and services in a sustainable manner to guarantee green economy in Africa. The paper recommends urgent action in the direction of poverty and ignorance reduction by governments in Africa. This will engender sustainable utilization of goods and services in African states' indigenous communities towards meeting the green economy goals.

**Keywords:** Green-Economy, Rural communities, Sustainability, Africa

## Introduction

As part of Rio Declaration, Green Economy (GE) was identified as an important tool for achieving sustainable development. Green economy has several features which has made it important and central driver of sustainability (Khor, 2011a&b; Morrow, 2012). The key elements of the Rio declaration suggested holistic implementation of GE policies as transition to sustainable development in developing countries or those with their economy in transition. The all inclusive approach employed by developing countries have yielded positive experiences in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication and has helped such countries in capacity building (UNEP, 2010; Khor, 2011a &b).

At the beginning of the 20th century, the total population of Africa was about 118 million, accounting for 7.4% of the global population (AU, 2001; ECA, 2007). African population was observed by ARIR (2013) and reposed ADB (2004) as continuously growing from 469 million to 798 million from 1980 to 2000. By the year 2000 the proportion of African population from the world population has reached 13% and 37.8% of the African population resides in the urban centers (ADB, 2004; African Regional Implementation Review, 2013). By projection, the population of African living in urban center will hit 646 million by 2020. Although, one may be conservative in estimating rate of growth of population in urban

center in Africa in view of the insufficient and accurate data. The earlier statistics quoted indicated a current rate of 3.5% per year urbanization in Africa. The rate is probably the highest in the world, and the consequence is the rapid growth of urban agglomerations throughout the region. Again it has been estimated that Africa's urbanized population will constitute 53.5% of its entire population by 2030 as against 39% in 2005 (ADB, 2004; WHO, 2010).

This fast rate of urbanization places strain on infrastructure, goods and services. Many of the newly urbanized centers have its larger population living in the slums. There is a growing and urgent need for integrated approaches to ensuring sustainable environment via deliberate planning and management. The unprecedented population growth, especially at the urban center is posing great treat to achieving GE goals and sustainable ecosystem. The perspective of this paper is that encouragement of sustainable use of environmental goods and services will guarantee achievement of GE goals in Africa.

Protection of environmental goods and services is one of the important components of *Agenda 21* (UNECA and FSSD, 2010) and it is a cornerstone of national and international conservation strategies, and indeed, most are currently established to safeguard human life and need (Karingi *et al.* 2007). Also, the protection of environmental goods and services, which provide a number of direct and indirect benefits to people are becoming more widely appreciated and valued. Different countries are differently blessed in an un-equitable manner by nature (Dike, 2008; UNEP, 2013; ten Brink *et al.* 2012). Key amongst the environmental goods and services in Africa which individual States are expected to ensure their continued supply are agricultural and forests products, soil and water, wildlife and aquatic animals, energy, oil and gas products, mineral resources, medicine, education, transportation, technology to name a few. These goods and services are particularly important for African poorest people, who rely heavily on nature for their livelihoods, diet, and health (ten Brink *et al.* 2012). Degradation of environmental services is a driver of poverty and social conflict, and a significant barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for eradicating poverty and hunger, improving health, and achieving environmental sustainability.

It is common in African countries to disregard local initiative (such as capacity development, adoption of reverse technological method to creating new products from wastes among others) directed at realising green economy goals. Government in Africa, take Nigeria as example is often eager to turn the nation to a consuming economy by aggressive pursuance of expatriate investors who are merely interested in a line of production that consumes only the currently over-exploited resources (ADB, 2004; Khor, 2011a&b). The policies drivers in such countries merely judge performance with the nation's gross domestic product (GDP).

An economist may argue on the potency of existing initiatives that seems to have no regard for the goals of GE rather than launching a new but conservative approach to complement

nation's GDP. But for developing countries in Africa to free her citizen from the plaguing poverty and attain the GE focus, the economy operator must realise that GDP only measures the net output of goods and services produced by an economy in a given period (Bosworth and Collins, 1999). It assesses goods and services at market prices. However, public services are often valued by their production costs, which impact the overall well-being of the citizenry. By implication policy operators in Africa must agree to the fact that GDP itself tells nothing about the state of society, the quality of natural environment and safety among others. GDP does not tackle the evolution of social health (inequality, poverty), or the defensive nature of certain expenditures, leisure time among others. GDP should therefore neither be seen as a measure of development in general, nor that of sustainable development.

However, the concept of Green Economy maintain that sustainable use of environmental goods and services will create new livelihood opportunities to help in contributing towards poverty reduction and sustainable development (Bosworth and Collins, 1999). It is for this reason that this paper intend to promote the concept of sustainable use of environmental goods and services in African countries, especially in Nigeria.

### **Major Trend and Emerging Issue**

In Africa, individual State is expected to play strategic roles in ensuring sustenance of environmental goods and services. Specifically goods and services domicile in individual States are to be administered in consonance with the set Agenda 21. Countries like Algeria and Malaysia had proactively established new environmental ministries, units, or committees during or after the 1992 RIO conference. In other countries such as Botswana, Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Nepal, Papua New and Guinea, where no new institutions have been established, overseeing the implementation of Agenda 21 had been designated to the existing environmental agencies, secretariats or ministries. In Nigeria, Ghana, and Morocco, new units have been opened within ministries or the environmental component upgraded to ministry rank or upgraded within already established institutions (Bosworth and Collins, 1999; Khor, 2011; UNECA, 2008).

Many of the existing environmental institutions are designing and launching new programs, including the review of national legislation. Some, for example Namibia, Nigeria and Benin Republic among others have prepared National Agenda 21 (UNECA, 2008). The broad strategy though national, has to be worked out through dialogue involving the components of the state because the mechanism is often more effective when decentralized. Increasingly stressed have been the need to establish effective consultation within countries, often down to local-community levels, and the need to empower community-based organizations.

On the other hand, strong national policies and programmes allow countries to be in better positions to negotiate at the global forums. It is necessary to develop a dialogue between business, industry, commerce, environmental and developmental NGOs, and citizens' groups and to try to build consensus at the local and national levels (AU, 2001). In this

context, the most interesting initiatives are those at the local level. Even one of the guiding principles when formulating Agenda 21 specified that:

*"Indigenous people and their communities and other local communities have a vital role in environmental management and development because of their knowledge and traditional practices. States should recognize and duly support their identity, culture and interests and enable their effective participation in the achievement of sustainable development."* (ECA, 2007)

The local authorities are the closest level of governance to the people and they play a vital role in mobilizing the public for sustainable development. African countries should give special attention to:

- ✓ strengthening their local authorities;
- ✓ organization of a consultative process to achieve consensus; and
- ✓ preparation of the local agenda for sustainable use of goods and services.

In the light of the foregoing, sustainable use of goods and services should be seen as a means to an end in building green economy in various African nations. There should be a concerted effort made by members of African Union for joint conferences or very broad commitments to start a defined process by a certain date to discuss the issue of sustainable use of goods and services. Deliberate effort must be put in place to sustainably use all categories of the locally available environmental goods and services by the individual States in order to achieve environmental or social improvements by a certain year. These targets will provide an initial basis and facilitate the task for measuring progress towards actualization of green economy.

### **Constraints and Challenges**

Pervasive poverty and social inequities remain major constraints to sustainable development in Africa (AU, 2001). Poverty is a cause and an effect of environmental degradation. The un-equitable, in-efficient and un-productive use of environmental resources offers great hindrances to sustainable livelihoods required to reduce poverty. In most of African countries, income poverty is particularly severe. There is, however, considerable variation between income poverty levels: less than 15 percent of Morocco's population lives on less than US\$2 per day, compared to Mali where about 91 percent of people live on less than US\$2 per day. Between 1981 and 2001, the number of people living on less than US\$1 per day in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) nearly doubled from 164 million to 313 million. Seventy-eight percent of SSA's population live on less than US\$2 per day (AU, 2001). The proportion of people living below the US\$1 poverty line has declined in North Africa from 2.0 percent in 1999 to 1.9 in 2001, while it has increased in SSA from 42.7 percent in 1999 to 46.4 in 2001 (AU., 2001; Bosworth and Collins, 1999). There is no evidence that situation has changed for better in any of the above mentioned countries in Africa.

Planning is unarguably a herculean task, but it becomes much more daunting in an uncertain socio-political and economic environment (AU, 2001). In many African Countries before 2007 to date there are rising political instability, insecurity, youth unemployment, devastating social, economic and political impact of HIV/AIDS crisis, illicit exploitation of natural resources, illegal flows of small arms, unconstitutional takeovers, efforts to prolong terms in public office, attempts to undermine or disqualify opposition members, incitement of hatred and attacks for political and electoral gain among others. These societal ills confronting African countries are major constraints to achieving the goal of using her environmental goods and services sustainably (Dike, 2008; AU, 2001).

Nigerian situation from 2007 to 2013 may be gauged by the perennial power problem and economic insecurity which seems to persist. The problem experienced on these developmental indices constitutes the main challenge to her ability to use her environmental goods and services sustainably. Lack of capacity to contain gas flaring in the oil and gas sector combined with the insurgence of regional militancy groups, thwarted attempt by Government to coordinate the development of environmental goods and services sustainably via Niger Delta Commission (NDC). Also worthy of note is the inability of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to control the amount of money in circulation so as to tame inflation ravaging the economy (Dike, 2008). The insecurity and continuous living in palpable fear of Boko Haram (suicide bombers) is another challenge. Some African countries are recently going through unrest caused by political instability and economic crises: Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, Somalia, Sudan and Ivory Coast.

African Union which is expected to provide support to ailing African countries has to continuously battles with many institutional challenges. AU is faced with inadequate capacity to managing peace support operations, plan emergency responses and provide needed support to key peace building especially in security sector reform (Dike, 2008; AU, 2001). AU has failed to help many African countries on energy issue where the investment needed for gas infrastructure, institutional framework for the industry and pricing had constituted major challenges to sustainable use of the environmental goods and services. Inadequate financial resources were the AU great bane as it relies mostly on contributions of its own member States. There have been increasing demands for AU assistance by member states beyond the member-supported resources.

### **Implementation Progress and Achievement**

African States considered improved human well-being as a major step towards managing environmental goods and services sustainably. Since human well-being is multidimensional, management of environmental goods and services sustainably is regarded as a precursor to living a good life in good health. African States after the 1992 world convention has evolved policies, laws and bodies whose goals are to see to the issues of income, food, clean water, energy, personal security through the absence of conflict, mitigation of environmental disasters and promotion of good governance among others (AU, 2001). This effort is to guarantee a condition in which people are not just physically well, but have choices and live in dignity. The extent of well-being, as reflected in income, health,

education and inequity, is an indication of how successful or unsuccessful development policies have been. In turn, the well-being of people affects their ability to effectively and sustainably manage resources.

Since the promotion of Agenda 21 and especially from 2007 till date, many African countries had prioritized the development of health services upon its consideration as the most crucial environmental service (AU, 2001). States efforts directed at expanding access to primary health-care facilities, increased spending in the health sector and investment in human capacity had continued un-abated both in principle and in action. Various bodies in the respective African countries continue with the implementation of health sector strategies and, since 2000, programs to meet the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) health targets had been at the front burner in the health related ministries of African countries. African country like Nigeria had made a significant improvement in the selected health-care indicators like infant mortality rates and life expectancy. For instance Nigerian Government at various levels between 2007 to date renewed their effort to wipe out polio and malaria even in the remotest rural settlement in the country. This effort has paid off as Nigeria is near polio free rating country like many Southern States in Africa (Dike 2008; WHO, 2010; UNECA and FSSD, 2010).

The differential access and control of natural resources by men and women determine how much influence they have on environmental management. In many African societies, productive and parenting roles are clearly divided along gender lines. Gender roles, however, are complex and shaped by other factors, such as age and position in the family. For example, rural women in many parts of Africa are responsible for child rearing, the nutritional and health needs of the family, food production and weeding of crops, while men open up the land. In many places, women are the primary custodians of environmental resources by virtue of their position in the household, giving them responsibility for managing energy, water and farming among other things. They are often the repositories of indigenous knowledge and the promoters of biodiversity conservation and environmentally-friendly management. African countries had participated considerably in the integrated environmental management approach through improvement of gender relations.

Gender inequity is abating as female citizens are daily encouraged to participate in governance through enhanced access to basic facilities, such as education and health care. This has impacted positively upon the choices and opportunities women have, and ultimately on how they use and manage natural resources. African countries before are generally ranked very low on the Gender-related Development Index (GDI): they constitute 35 out of the 40 countries with the lowest GDI ranking (Dike, 2008). Recent rating shows that African countries is performing much better in Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) as evident in the higher rates than the global average for participation of women in parliament in Nigeria, Ghana and Liberia.



Knowledge and access to information are essential for effective management of environmental goods and services and have significant impacts on the economy and the livelihood choices people make. Indigenous knowledge systems based on centuries of observation and continually developed in response to changing social and environmental conditions are an important resource for many rural people. This knowledge base offers opportunities not only for conservation but also for the commercialization of wild resources, as demonstrated, for example, by the increasing markets for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), such as bamboo, rattan among others. The effort to channel research on the development of knowledge on the utilizations of hitherto un-patronized forest resources to remove pressure on highly patronized ones is a good lift in Africa. West African countries are particularly noted for taking up this challenge. A great performance is expected before 2030 as long as there is continuous effort in investing on improving community skills and access to relevant information.

### **Green Economy and Ecosystem Sustainability: Lessons and Conclusion**

Pervasive poverty and social inequities remain the major enemies of sustainable development in Africa. For any meaningful impact to be made by 2030 every States in Africa has to be proactively committed to evolving pragmatic approaches that will eradicate poverties and renew sense of social equity among her citizenry. Deliberate effort must be made to explore, exploit and deploy environmental goods and services in an equitable, efficient and productive manner that will create opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, which will in turn reduce poverty. It is by so doing that the benefit of green economy can be enjoyed in African country.

Improvement on literacy level of citizenry coupled with indigenously developed technological capacity is a way out of the current impasse. From engineering perspective, there is need for Africa to copy Asian giants method of development. There are number of resources that exist in abundant and which still largely remains untapped. Sustainable utilization method should be developed for such raw material. Local manufacturers of equipment, goods and providers of services should be heavily subsidized. Deliberate effort should be directed towards making formal education compulsory to all citizens. Huge investment is required in tertiary education sector to effectively reduce the literacy level in Africa before 2030 to realize the set goals on sustainability of environmental goods and services as well as attainment of green economy goals. However, unless there are significant inflows of external financial support to help some African countries in this respect, the situation is likely to worsen considerably given the unabated threats from pervasive poverty.

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