

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND ITS EFFECTS ON
WORLD AND NATIONAL POLITICS
(COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN FOUR DIFFERENT CONTEXTS)**

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Abstract

The concept of sustainable development since first introduced in the Brundtland Report in 1987 has changed the world view about economic growth. It established a new meaning of growth that maintains also social and environmental sustainability. This paper will show how the concept has been crystallized and how through the years the world's way of thinking has been shaping and adapting this new concept. Sustainable development has become the most commonly used concept, there is almost an agreement throughout the world about issues concerning climate change, biodiversity and natural resources preservations. Sustainable development has become an anchor in national politics. Countries like Egypt, Bolivia, Sri Lanka and Norway have introduced policies that are in line with sustainability. However the degree of influence, the understanding of the concept and the policies nevertheless differ from state to state.

Key words: sustainable development, Egypt, Bolivia, Sri Lanka, Norway

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1. Introduction

The concept of sustainable development has had a great affect on world politics as it has successfully linked together development and environment (Adams 2009). In the Brundtland Report sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987:13). Not only has it had an impact on environmental and development agencies, but sustainable development has also influenced and contributed to the making of national policies around the world. Egypt, Bolivia, Sri Lanka and Norway are all countries that have been affected by the concept of sustainable development and consequently it has influenced their national policies. The degree of influence, the understanding of the concept and the policies nevertheless differ from state to state. In Norway sustainable development is strongly incorporated into policies while in Bolivia the understanding of the concept differs from the common understanding introduced in the Brundtland report as it has been influenced by indigenous believes from Bolivia. The first section of the paper will focus on the origin of the concept and the affect it has had on world politics. Second, the national policies of Egypt, Bolivia, Sri Lanka and Norway will be examined to gain an understanding of how sustainable development has affected their policies. At last a conclusion will be presented of how both the world politics and national politics has been affected by the concept.

2. Sustainable Development and World politics

After World War II there have been several changes in conceiving the concept of development. In the 1960s there were various factors that change people’s views of the human influence on nature with the "green wave" entering the political arena in the 60s and further in the 70s. However, some of the environmental organizations failed to see the bigger picture, issues such as drought and floods, diseases, famine were seen as separate from the political economy. In the 80s a new wave of environmentalists in world politics started to challenge the traditional international developmentalism, the thought of just economic expansion. The idea of economic growth changed from being an end in itself, to become a mean to reach the final end of development (Adams 2009).

In the late 80s there was a main shift in the paradigm reflected in the emergence of the concept of sustainable development presented in Brundtland report in 1987. This report has planted the principle of sustainable growth; powerful growth that is socially and environmentally sustainable. Sustainable development is built on three main aspects: environmental, economical and social. Each of these aspects resembles a dependent system that integrates with the others to produce the whole system where the human live. The system does not function well if one of these components is not functioning properly (Harris 2000).

Inspired by the Brundtland Report, the Rio Summit in 1992 is considered a major step forward in the path of sustainable development on real grounds. The Summit resulted in international commitments towards climate change, forests and biodiversity. Among the agreements of the Summit was the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Principles of Forest Management, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and Agenda 21, which required countries to draw up a national strategy of sustainable development in the field of social, economic and environmental issues (UNCSD 2007, UNEP 2007).

In 2002 the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg where the concept of sustainable development was further extended to reach into areas of business, local government and civil society (UNCSD 2007). Accordingly, adaption of sustainability was more widely spread that competitions between many corporations has become on processing of sustainable ways of production and operation as well as environmental performance which becomes an important aspect that “differentiates corporations in term of both consumer choice and investor confidence” (Adams 2008:122).

The path of sustainable development has not been completed yet. Nitin Desai, a senior adviser to the Brundtland Commission and a key draftsman of the report, has argued that “the commitment to sustainable development has not gone much beyond environmental authorities” (UNCSD 2007:1). However the coming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development that will be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 is expected to underpin further political commitment to sustainable development in future (UNCSD 2010).

The concept of sustainable development has gained a strong position in world politics the last decade. The affect it has had on national politics has nevertheless differed from state to state. In the next section four countries will be examined to see how sustainable development has affected their national policies.

3. Sustainable development and National politics

3.1 Egypt

Egypt has been much influenced by the calls to save the future and maintain development for future generations by saving the environment which was reflected in the Brundtland report (WCED 1987). Accordingly, Egypt has adapted the concept of sustainable development since the beginning of the 90s. Alongside the economic and social development programs inspired by the concept of sustainability that started in Egypt by the 90s, the Egyptian government has focused on the environmental aspect in a new and (?) different way, albeit its production of greenhouse gas emissions was small and equivalent using the 1995 Global Warming Potential (GWP) of the IPCC (EEAA 1999).

Egypt has a massive swelling population more than 80 million inhabitants. Its resources are nevertheless limited and therefore Egypt's capability to feed its population is also limited. Moreover its Mediterranean coast, the Nile valley and Delta, where 97% of the population live, are extremely vulnerable to sea level rise and climate change (EEAA 1999). Hence an Egyptian environmental action plan has been set followed by many environmental laws and decrees issued in 1994 .The most important was law number 4/1994 by which the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) gained more authority to discuss and regulate the environmental affairs. As a result the EEAA set a standard for the air emissions, systems for hazardous waste handling was permitted and sources of marine and land based pollution was examined. Further a minister for environment affairs has been assigned in 1997. Accordingly a set of standards has been set for investors to adjust their industrial projects to be friendlier to the environment. Egyptian law include for the first time economic incentives for investors that complies with the environment

regulations and penalties for those who do not (Abd el wahaab 2003). In addition to the industrial sector, mitigation actions for reducing CO₂ emissions in Egypt have also been extended to other responsible sectors of such emissions. There are programs for making the transportation sector more energy efficient (Abdel Gelil 2008) and strategies to reform the agriculture sector by improving crops pattern and the on-farm irrigation system. Beside strategies for amending the energy sector to secure energy supplies; sustain current energy usage; and abate GHG emissions (EEAA 2010).

Although there are "strategies and programs" to preserve the sustainable environment in Egypt however its implementation on real ground is not as sounding as on papers. The process of sustaining the environment is hindered by institutional weakness, the limited decision-making powers of local administrations and the improper reflection of environmental costs in prices (ENPI 2007).

3.2 Bolivia

Bolivia was one of the first countries in the region and at international levels to incorporate the concept sustainable development into its laws (Paredes C. and Aguirre B. 2001). The Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 is an important event in this development as new policies based on the concept of sustainability were adopted only shortly after the conference. Economic policies were prioritized to secure economic stability. A free market economy policy was introduced in 1985 and to further secure sustainable development in the 90s Bolivia continued to open up for foreign investment and privatized state enterprises. It was nevertheless understood that the social services and environmental laws also had to be developed to secure sustainable development (Paredes C. and Aguirre B. 2001).

The Law 1333 of the Environment is particularly important when it comes to the preservation of the environment. The Law adopted the definition of sustainable development as it is stated in the Brundtland Report and its objective is "the protection and conservation of the environment and the natural resources...promoting sustainable development with the goal of improving quality of life of the society" (Paredes C. and Aguirre B. 2001). In 1996 several laws were introduced to

further promote sustainable development. Law 1700 for forestry and Law 1715 on “National Service of Agrarian Reform” was put into effect and a regional and national development program based on the principles of Agenda 21 was also promulgated (Paredes C. and Aguirre B. 2001).

There has however been a shift in the paradigm after the election in 2006 where Evo Morales was elected as Bolivia’s new president. During the 90s state enterprises were privatized to increase economic growth. Morales wishes to turn the trend around and give the control back to the state. The most important national policy adopted concerns natural resources with the nationalization of hydrocarbons in 2006, giving back the control of the production of oil and gas to the state (Ministry of Sustainable Development and Planning 2005).

The concept of sustainability is still visible in Bolivia’s national politics as Evo Morales is a strong advocate for sustainable development. His understanding of the concept is however influenced by the indigenous view of the earth. They believe in a relationship between *Pachamama* (mother earth) and men. This ideology defends a fair connivance between men and nature in a common place where they both subsist by giving each other energy without abuse of what is taken and what is given (Yampara 2005:24). Sustainable policies in Bolivia are now influenced by this Andean conception of reciprocity. Evo Morales has nevertheless tried to give the ideology a more contemporary understanding by institutionalizing it and internationalizing it in the fight of climate change.

3.3 Sri Lanka

There are number of national levels of policies and acts that has been implemented by the government regarding sustainable development. The government of Sri Lanka first took an interest in environmental politics in 1981 when they established the Central Environment Authority, under the National Environment Act of 1980. A separate cabinet ministry was created for the subject of environment in 1990. The National Environment Policy was implemented in 2003 which was influenced by the concept of sustainable development with the main focus of protecting the environment. The policy aims to promote the sound management of Sri Lanka's

environment balancing the needs for social and economic development and environment integrity. It also aims to manage the environment by linking together the activities, interests and perspectives of stakeholders and to assure environmental accountability. (Ministry of Environment 2010)

In the recent years Sri Lanka has developed several policies and acts which aims to protect the environment such as the the National Policy on Wild Life Conservation (2000), National Air Quality Management Policy (2000) and the National Watershed Management Policy (2004) (Ministry of Environment 2010). Sri Lanka has also signed all major international conventions regarding the environmental protection such as the Montreal Protocol (1989), the Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992) and the the Kyoto Protocol (1997) (SACEP 2010).

In Sri Lankan policy, it has always been a tradition to put efforts to reduce poverty on top of the government agenda. It was one of the first developing countries to understand the multidimensional nature of poverty, and emphasized policies of free health and education as early as the 1930s (Kelegama 2001). There have been several economic development projects and poverty reduction plans established by the governments that have been influenced by the concept of sustainable development and its focus on social and economic justice. Samurdhi is one of these programs. It is a national program introduced by the government in 1994 and their aim is to "minimize the poverty and contribute towards a stable national development, by identifying the potential in families through people's participation-based development" (Ministry of Nation Building and Estate Infrastructure Development 2009).

National polices and plans introduced by the various governments have been beneficial for the protection of the environment as well as achieving economic and social justice to some extent. There are nevertheless still issues to be solved. Sri Lank is facing environmental problems such as, land degradation due to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, waste disposal and inland water pollution (Ministry of Environment 2010). Although starvation and destitution has being eradicated, still between one fifth and one third of the population remain poor (Kelegama, 2001). Even though the government has introduced environmental policies the real impact of these policies which aimed to achieve the sustainable development in Sri Lanka has been weakened by the lack of good governance.

3.4 Norway

International discourses about sustainable development have made a great impact on Norwegian politics. After World War II most politicians considered large-scale industrial production as the only way out of the economical crisis. During the 50's and 60's there was an increasing recognition of the connection between emissions and ecological disturbances (Adresseavisa 2009). Over the last decades there have been several events that have affected the national politics in Norway.

The first major United Nations conference on international environment issues was held in Stockholm in 1972. The focus was the need for a common outlook and for common principles to inspire and guide the peoples of the world in the preservation and enhancement of the human environment (UN 1972). Only weeks before this milestone of a meeting and as one of the first countries in the world, Norway founded the Ministry of Environment. The objective of the new Ministry was "to promote an optimal balance between the utilization of our resources for economical growth and the protection of natural resources for the benefit of human well-being and health" (Regjeringen 2010).

The political agenda lead to a growing interest for environmental issues among the Norwegian people. Organizations already focusing on environmental protection were growing and new ones were founded (Lishaug and Jakobsen 2007). The new organizations put pressure on the politicians, focusing on actual challenges and strategies, and monitoring results.

The Brundtland report released in 1987 had a special interest, since the leader of the commission was the Prime minister of Norway. The report focusing on "our common future" assessed the environmental issues in a global perspective and even got the UN general assembly to discuss environment and development as one single problem (Adams 2009:76). Together with several international conventions on climate change, this changed the perspective and focus also in domestic politics. New laws was implemented to contribute to a sustainable development and affected areas such as protection of biodiversity, pollution in air and water, waste and recycling, environmental issues in polar areas and preservation of natural areas (NOU 2009:16).

After the election in 2009, a political platform was formed by the New Norwegian government, a coalition of Labour Party, Socialists Left Party and Centre party. In the document the government is stating Norway as an eco-friendly nation, aiming to be at the forefront of international environment policies. Further the document proclaims that “Norway shall build its environmental policy on the principle of sustainable development and the reasonable administration and use of natural resources” (Arbeiderpartiet 2009). Even if this document forms a platform and makes a guideline for Norwegian politics today, challenges regarding sustainable development are under continuous discuss.

4. Conclusion

Sustainable development has had an effect on both world politics and national politics since it was first introduced in the late 80s. Internationally, sustainable development has become the main focus when debating development and environment (Adams 2009). The affect it has had on national politics has differed from state to state and the understanding of the concept is also different as Bolivia’s understanding of sustainable development is influenced by indigenous believes. Even though countries like Egypt, Sri Lanka and Norway had been influenced by the concept and introduced environmental policies accordingly, it also became clear that the real impact of these policies especially in developing countries were to some extent limited due to institutional weakness, limited decision-making power and insufficient reflection of environmental costs in prices (ENPI 2007). It is a challenge in itself to make politicians prioritize sustainable development and further implement policies to protect the environment. However it can be concluded that sustainable development has succeeded in raising the awareness of the link between development and environment and the importance of understanding that link when making policies and planning development work.

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