

Sustainable Development, Environmentalism, Population Control and Global Governance

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One aspect of globalization, and one that is far more important than the globalization of consumer goods, is the globalization of ideas. Although many Africans are justifiably critical of the evils of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism and their negative impact on traditional African societies, there is remarkably little criticism of ideas from the West. Although some Western ideas are good, many are not. One Western idea that should be scrutinized carefully by Africans is that of “sustainable development”. And sustainable development does not come alone; it is bundled with other ideas that also should be evaluated critically, including environmentalism, population control and global governance.

Sustainable Development

It would be a mistake to understand “sustainable development” exclusively or primarily in terms on economic prosperity, because goods of the soul are more important than material goods for true human development. Our understanding of development should include all aspects of human development.

The classical definition of “sustainable development” is found in the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, which is entitled “Our Common Future” but is commonly known as the “Brundtland Report”, after its Chairwoman, Gro Harlem Brundtland of Norway:

Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs.¹

This definition raises more questions than it answers. What do we need? Who gets to decide what we need? Does this definition include everything that we need in order to live virtuous lives, or only what is necessary to sustain physical life? Who is “poor”? What does it mean to be “poor”? Who gets to decide who is “poor”? Which is worse, material poverty or spiritual poverty? Are needs and poverty to be understood only in terms of technology, social organization and the natural environment? Although all three, especially social organization, are important, they leave out much that is far more important.

James D. Wolfensohn, who served as President of the World Bank from 1995 to 2005, attempted to develop a “structure for holistic sustainable development”, which was launched by the World Bank in 1999 as the “Comprehensive Development Framework” (CDF). According to the World Bank, “The CDF emphasizes the interdependence of all elements of development—social, structural, human, governance, environ-

mental, economic, and financial.”²

Depending upon how one interprets the “human” element of development, this list is either redundant or incomplete. Social and governance development are obviously aspects of human development. Structural development is about the development of man-made structures. Since economic and financial systems do not exist apart from human activity, economic and financial development are also aspects of human development. None of these elements of development can be separated from human development. Perhaps environmental development is an exception. But if we understand “environment” etymologically as that which surrounds something, then the something that it surrounds is humanity. The concept of environmental development makes sense only in relation to human development. So, one could ask why “human” is included in this list of elements of development, since they are all aspects of human development. The list appears to be redundant.

If, on the other hand, the list of elements other than “human” is understood to include all of the aspects of human development, then it is far from complete. In fact, it ignores the most important aspects of human development: spiritual, intellectual and moral development. The World Bank’s Comprehensive Development Framework falls short of its goal of being holistic.

Environmentalism as Religion

Both the Brundtland and the Wolfensohn understandings of “sustainable development” include reference to the (natural) environment. This theme recurs in many other documents on sustainable development. According to the “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development” of 1992: “In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.”³ Similarly, the “Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development” of 2002 states, “We assume a collective responsibility to advance and strengthen the interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – at the local, national, regional and global levels.”⁴ And the Business for the Environment (B4E) Climate Summit of 2010 in Mexico City opens its “Call to Action” by relating climate change to sustainable development:

Climate change is the most urgent economic, environment and development challenge of our times. It weakens economic development, competitiveness and stability, undermines the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and has irreversible impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity on which we depend. Tackling climate change requires a common global effort from business, politics and civil society to drive delivery on a low carbon economy and support more equitable and sustainable development.⁵

To be sure, because we are finite beings with material bodies that require oxygen, water and nutrients, the natural environment is necessary for our development. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to adopt environmentalism as our religion.

Earth-worship, which was one form of ancient, pagan religion, is making a comeback as the West abandons Christianity. Among important philosophers of reverence for nature is Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). As E. Michael Jones puts it: “If nature worship is a religion, then Jean-Jacques Rousseau is its theologian. . . . The religion of nature is Eden without the Fall.”⁶ More recently, feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether contributed to the rehabilitation of earth-worship with her 1992 book *Gaia and*

God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing.⁷ In ancient-Greek mythology, “Gaia” is the name of Mother Earth. Earth worship is also gaining popularity in some countries today in the form of the neo-pagan religion Wicca.

While environmentalism is not, strictly speaking, a religion for most people who are concerned about the natural environment, a number of authors have noted that it has assumed many of the characteristics of a religion in the post-Christian West. In the words of Matthew Hanley, who has worked as an HIV/AIDS technical adviser to Catholic Relief Services, “Fighting the green fight can give people something akin to a religious sense of identity and purpose.”⁸

According to William Cronon, Professor of History, Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin, environmentalism shares

certain common characteristics with the human belief systems and institutions that we typically label with the word *religion*. It offers a complex series of moral imperatives for ethical action, and judges human conduct accordingly. The source of these imperatives may not appear quite so metaphysical as in other religious traditions, but it in fact derives from the whole of creation as the font not just of ethical direction but of spiritual insight. The revelation of seeing human life and the universe whole, in their full interconnected complexity, can evoke powerful passions and convictions ranging from the mystical to the missionary.⁹

Princeton University physicist Freeman Dyson, who describes himself as “a practicing Christian but not a believing Christian”¹⁰, makes the point as follows:

There is a worldwide secular religion which we may call environmentalism, holding that we are stewards of the earth, that despoiling the planet with waste products of our luxurious living is a sin, and that the path of righteousness is to live as frugally as possible. The ethics of environmentalism are being taught to children in kindergartens, schools, and colleges all over the world.

Environmentalism has replaced socialism as the leading secular religion. And the ethics of environmentalism are fundamentally sound. Scientists and economists can agree with Buddhist monks and Christian activists that ruthless destruction of natural habitats is evil and careful preservation of birds and butterflies is good. The worldwide community of environmentalists—most of whom are not scientists—holds the moral high ground, and is guiding human societies toward a hopeful future. Environmentalism, as a religion of hope and respect for nature, is here to stay. This is a religion that we can all share, whether or not we believe that global warming is harmful.¹¹

And philosopher Stephen T. Asma, who was raised as a Catholic but is now a Buddhist,¹² understands environmentalism in terms of the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Although the West has largely abandoned Christianity, Westerners still have the emotions of Christianity and require something like environmentalism to fill the void that is left by their apostasy:

Vitriol that used to be reserved for Satan can now be discharged against evil corporate chief executives and drivers of gas-guzzling vehicles. Apocalyptic fear-mongering previously took the shape of repent or burn in hell, but now it is recycle or burn in the ozone hole. In fact, it is interesting the way environmentalism takes on the apocalyptic aspects of the traditional religious narrative. The idea that the end is nigh is quite central to traditional Christianity—it is a jolting wake-up call to get on the righteous path. And we find many environmentalists in a similarly earnest panic about climate change and global warming.¹³

If we abandon belief in the supernatural, as many Westerners have done and some Africans are doing, the natural becomes the *summum bonum*, highest good. Although

we have a responsibility to be stewards of the natural environment, we must avoid the error of turning environmentalism into a secular religion. Because we have rational, spiritual, immortal souls, one human person is infinitely more important than all of the trees in the Amazon rainforest.

Population Control

The concept of sustainable development is linked not only to environmentalism, but also to population control. And the most popular means of promoting population control are “family planning” and “reproductive health”, which are euphemisms for contraception and abortion.

According to the “Brundtland Report”: “The sustainability of development is intimately linked to the dynamics of population growth. . . . The very possibility of development can be compromised by high population growth rates.”¹⁴ Furthermore, according to those who tell us what we should believe, the problem is so serious that responsibility for deciding how many children to have should be taken from parents and given to governments: “A population policy should set out and pursue broad national demographic goals in relation to other socio-economic objectives.”¹⁵

“Agenda 21”, which came out of the 1992 UN Conference on Environment & Development in Rio de Janeiro, emphasizes the importance of “strengthening research programmes that integrate population, environment and development”.¹⁶ “Agenda 21” also explains the importance of integrating population programmes into governmental strategies and of persuading populations to accept reductions in their rates of growth:

National reviews should be conducted and the integration of population policies in national development and environment strategies should be monitored nationally.

Population programmes should be consistent with socio-economic and environmental planning.

Understanding of socio-cultural and political factors that can positively influence acceptance of appropriate population policy instruments should be improved.

Workshops to help programme and projects managers to link population programmes to other development and environmental goals should be conducted.¹⁷

A 2001 UN book repeats the assertion that governmental planners should decide how many children are to be born: “Population and development policies—especially those relating to the size, growth and distribution of population—are necessary and vital components of the constellation of actions needed to ensure sustainable development and to safeguard the environment during the twenty-first century and beyond.”¹⁸ This violates one of the pillars of social ethics: the principle of subsidiarity. Families have the right and the responsibility of deciding how many children they will have. It is unjust for governments to abrogate this right and responsibility.

Some demands for population control are motivated by neo-Malthusian concerns. Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), author of *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), popularized the idea that human population, if unchecked, will grow faster than the capability of the earth to sustain it. Among contemporary neo-Malthusians is Roger V. Short, Professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the University of Melbourne, Australia:

The inexorable increase in human numbers is exhausting conventional energy supplies, accelerating environmental pollution and Global Warming, and providing an

increasing number of Failed States where civil unrest prevails. Few can be left in any doubt that calling a halt to future population growth in both developed and developing countries is the greatest challenge now facing our world.¹⁹

Short adds, “It is sad that in many developing countries, abortion is still illegal, thereby denying women access to the latest and safest procedures.”²⁰ Kenya is no longer one of those countries. Although many Kenyans do not understand that they voted in August 2010 to legalize abortion in their country, they did. According to the new Constitution of Kenya: “Abortion is not permitted unless, in the opinion of a trained health professional, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger, or if permitted by any other written law.”²¹ This sentence can be accurately paraphrased as follows: “Abortion is permitted if, in the opinion of a trained health professional, there is need for emergency treatment, or the life or health of the mother is in danger, or if permitted by any other written law.” “Health” includes mental health. And any trained health professional is permitted to make the decision. As Don Feder of the World Congress of Families explains: “An exception to a ban on abortion for the ‘health of the mother’ is virtually abortion-on-demand. You can always find an obliging ‘health professional’ – including mental-health workers – who will certify that any condition would endanger a woman’s health unless a pregnancy is terminated.”²² Kenya is now compliant with the West’s agenda for Africa.

In 1968, Stanford University biologist and neo-Malthusian Paul Ehrlich predicted imminent global famine, unless immediate action was taken to limit population growth. He argued that even people who were not convinced that he was right should still limit births: “If population control is undertaken and is successful in preventing births, but it turns out to be unnecessary, then what is lost?”²³ Julian Simon, Professor of Economics and Business Administration at the Universities of Illinois and Maryland, responded to Ehrlich’s question:

If you value additional human lives, and some lives are unnecessarily prevented from being lived, that is an obvious loss. The fact that this is not a loss in Ehrlich’s eyes tells us his implicit values. . . . The Ehrlich argument boils down to an inverted (or perverted) Golden Rule: Do unto others – prevent their existence – what you are glad no one did to you.²⁴

In 1980, Simon challenged Ehrlich to a wager, which Ehrlich accepted. Simon bet that the prices of five metals – chrome, copper, nickel, tin, and tungsten – would go down during the 1980s; Ehrlich bet that their prices would go up. Simon won the bet; the prices of all five metals decreased between 1980 and 1990.

The strongest demands for population control, however, are not grounded in Malthusianism. The West has a serious problem of too few births. As a consequence of decades of contraception, sterilization and abortion, there is negative population growth in some countries; death rates are higher than birth rates. This is not good for a nation’s economy. Furthermore, many in the West understand that with greater population, all else equal, comes greater power in the world. It is never the case, of course, that all else is equal. But it is no coincidence that the two countries poised to overtake the United States as global economic superpowers, China and India, also have the largest populations in the world. Neither is it a coincidence that the most influential of the countries between North Africa and South Africa, Nigeria, is also the largest African country in terms of population.

In 1974, the U.S. Government produced a classified document entitled “National Security Study Memorandum 200” (“NSSM 200”), with the subject line: “Implications of Worldwide Population Growth for U.S. Security and Overseas Interests”. It was declassified in 1989, but has not been rescinded or superseded. “NSSM 200” acknowledges

that the purpose of population control is to serve U.S. strategic, economic, and military interests and states that programmes to promote population decline should be tied to development “assistance”:

It is clear that the availability of contraceptive services and information is not a complete answer to the population problem. In view of the importance of socio-economic factors in determining desired family size, overall assistance strategy should increasingly concentrate on selective policies which will contribute to population decline as well as other goals. This strategy reflects the complementarity between population control and other U.S. development objectives.²⁵

“NSSM 200” also outlines a strategy for concealing the true motivation from leaders of developing nations:

It is vital that the effort to develop and strengthen a commitment on the part of the LDC leaders not be seen by them as an industrialized country policy to keep their strength down or to reserve resources for use by the ‘rich’ countries. Development of such a perception could create a serious backlash adverse to the cause of population stability.

The U.S. can help to minimize charges of an imperialist motivation behind its support of population activities by repeatedly asserting that such support derives from a concern with:

- (a) the right of the individual couple to determine freely and responsibly their number and spacing of children and to have information, education, and means to do so; and
- (b) the fundamental social and economic development of poor countries in which rapid population growth is both a contributing cause and a consequence of widespread poverty.

Furthermore, the U.S. should also take steps to convey the message that the control of world population growth is in the mutual interest of the developed and developing countries alike.²⁶

Population control is not in the interest of “developing” countries. It is in the interest of “developed” countries that are committing national suicide through contraception, sterilization and abortion. Population growth in developing countries does present challenges. In order to develop to their potential, children must be fed, housed, clothed and educated. Parents, assisted by other organizations, including government, are responsible for ensuring that these needs are met. Not all parents, organizations and governments are meeting those responsibilities. But population growth is not in itself a handicap to development: “As the experience of many developing countries has demonstrated, high rates of population growth are compatible with rapid economic growth over long periods.”²⁷ When more children are born, there are more potential leaders, more potential problem-solvers and more potential productive workers.

It is true that some African localities are over-populated. Kibera is over-populated. But Kenya is not over-populated, and neither is Africa as a whole. The African Union’s “Maputo Protocol” of 2003, which has been signed by most of the nations of Africa, including Kenya, calls upon signatories to “ensure that the right to health of women, including sexual and reproductive health, is respected and promoted.” It then asserts that the “right to health of women” includes “the right to choose any method of contraception”. It also calls upon signatories to “protect the reproductive rights of women by authorising medical abortion in cases of sexual assault, rape, incest, and where the continued pregnancy endangers the mental and physical health of the mother or the life of the mother or the foetus.”²⁸ Human Life International responded in 2007:

The Maputo Protocol is a part of the decades-long campaign by Western elites to reduce the number of black Africans. Yet United Nations figures show that Africa is not overpopulated . . .

The assumption often used to promote the Maputo Protocol and other such ideological plans is the overpopulation of Africa. It is assumed that there are too many black people, and that the wealthy nations of the world must work to reduce their numbers in cooperation with African governments. This is not true. . . . According to the United Nations Population Division, Africa's population density in 2005 was 30 people per square kilometer. That of Europe, including Russia, was 32. The sparsely populated United States had 31 people per square kilometer and Latin America and the Caribbean, 27. Asia is increasingly prosperous and had 124. Africa is a land of tremendous natural resources that would be wealthy if it did not suffer from political and economic exploitation. The Maputo Protocol is another example of wholesale social engineering imposed on Africa.²⁹

Global Governance

Sustainable development, environmentalism and population control are all related to the movement towards global governance. World government is not a new goal. Both capitalism and socialism,³⁰ which agree more than they disagree, because both are materialist, tend to minimize national sovereignty. Capitalism and socialism flock together, because they are birds of a feather. In fact, they are two wings of the same sick bird.

Capitalism seeks to reduce the importance of countries, because borders are barriers to free trade and the expansion of global markets. PricewaterhouseCoopers has recently identified six trends that it believes “will drive sustainable development over the next decade and so shape the form it takes”.³¹ First among them is a reduction in the importance of national governments:

Global market forces will play a much greater part than government policy in the decision-making process. The influence of the markets will grow, as they reflect rising demand, shrinking supplies and changing patterns of demand for natural resources; labour and distribution costs; environmental and health legacies; operating and product liabilities; the security of assets, including intellectual property; and the pressures for fairer trade and a more equal distribution of wealth across the global population.³²

For socialism, the “withering away of the state” is explicit. In the words of Friedrich Engels:

The first act by which the state really comes forward as the representative of the whole of society — the taking possession of the means of production in the name of society — is also its last independent act as a state. State interference in social relations becomes, in one domain after another, superfluous, and then dies down of itself. The government of persons is replaced by the administration of things, and by the conduct of processes of production. The state is not ‘abolished’. It withers away.³³

The capitalist utopia is a borderless world of homogenous consumers, without governmental interference in free markets. The socialist utopia is a stateless dictatorship of the proletariat and worker's paradise. Both eschatologies, however, belong to mythology. With neither capitalism nor socialism is a situation of no government possible. When national governments decrease, global government increases – a development contrary to the principle of subsidiarity. (It should be noted that the provision for counties in the

new Constitution of Kenya, if properly implemented, is a move in the opposite direction, consistent with subsidiarity.) And many capitalists and socialists make no secret of the fact that their goal is not really a situation of no government, but one of global government.

Though the desire for global governance is not new, global warming provides a new justification: we need global governance, among other reasons, in order to prevent environmental catastrophe. According to its website:

The Global Governance Project (Glogov.org) is a joint research programme of thirteen European research institutions that seeks to advance understanding of the new actors, institutions and mechanisms of global governance. While we address the phenomenon of global governance in general, most of our research projects focus on global environmental change and governance for sustainable development.³⁴

After assuring the reader that he is not a “conspiracy theorist”, Gideon Rachman, Chief Foreign Affairs Columnist for the *Financial Times*, explains why he believes world government is a real possibility:

For the first time in my life, I think the formation of some sort of world government is plausible. A “world government” would involve much more than cooperation between nations. It would be an entity with state-like characteristics, backed by a body of laws. The European Union has already set up a continental government for 27 countries, which could be a model. The EU has a supreme court, a currency, thousands of pages of law, a large civil service and the ability to deploy military force. So could the European model go global? There are three reasons for thinking that it might.

First, it is increasingly clear that the most difficult issues facing national governments are international in nature: there is global warming, a global financial crisis and a “global war on terror”.

Second, it could be done. The transport and communications revolutions have shrunk the world so that, as Geoffrey Blainey, an eminent Australian historian, has written: “For the first time in human history, world government of some sort is now possible.” Mr Blainey foresees an attempt to form a world government at some point in the next two centuries

But – the third point – a change in the political atmosphere suggests that “global governance” could come much sooner than that. The financial crisis and climate change are pushing national governments towards global solutions, even in countries such as China and the US that are traditionally fierce guardians of national sovereignty.³⁵

Global governance is a consequence of the materialism that most of the West, and much of the rest of the world, has adopted, whether in the form of capitalism or of socialism or of some compromise between the two. To have a hierarchy of communities, related to each other according to subsidiarity, it is necessary to recognize that non-material goods exist and are higher than material goods. Capitalism and socialism agree that material goods are all that matter, or are what matter most; they disagree about how material goods should be distributed. Instead of many communities of persons, we have one huge collection of individuals.

A word about “conspiracy theories” is appropriate at this point. Although “conspiracy theorist” is a term of derogation and although some conspiracy theories deserve ridicule, history is full of actual conspiracies and some contemporary conspiracy theories are actually true. There is an enormous body of literature today about the “New World Order Conspiracy”, some arguing that it is a reality and some arguing that those

who believe it is a reality should see a psychiatrist. This “conspiracy theory” actually comes in many versions, not all of which can be true, because some versions contradict others. To examine the evidence pro and con would be beyond the scope of this essay. But one does not have to believe in conspiracies to recognize that the world is becoming an oligarchy.

The Role of Universities

African universities and intellectuals have a critical role to play with regard to sustainable development: helping us to think correctly about what kind of development is appropriate for Africa. Should Africans understand sustainable development in the same way that Westerners understand it? Should Africans accept or resist Western materialism and consumerism? Is the fact that the West is declining and the East is rising relevant to how Africans should understand sustainable development? Who is more developed, a society with the latest technology or a society in which the institution of the family still survives?

Thus far, many African intellectuals have accepted uncritically whatever bad ideas they have received from the West: secularism, materialism, consumerism, contraception, abortion, liberal democracy, the capitalism-socialism dichotomy, legal positivism, psychology without the soul, pragmatic philosophy of education, etc. African universities and intellectuals need to provide leadership in scrutinizing ideas from the West and separating the wheat from the chaff. Furthermore, because a theory of comprehensive or holistic or integral sustainable development requires a proper ordering of qualitatively different goods, developing such a theory of sustainable development requires interdisciplinary academic research. If African universities are able to meet this challenge, we may be able to develop an understanding of sustainable development appropriate for the people of Africa.

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