Economic aspects of sustainable development in Africa

Seraj Mietig
Ph.D. Candidate

DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.15.08.2025.p16406
https://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.15.08.2025.p16406

Paper Received Date: 19th June 2025
Paper Acceptance Date: 28th July 2025
Paper Publication Date: 6th August 2025

Abstract

The modern world is already faced with a common responsibility and the necessity to harmonize its development with the needs of people and nature and with the awareness that the Earth must be preserved both for the current generation and for future generations of people. The obligation of today's generation to leave at least as many chances for development as it has for its offspring stems from the fundamental principle of moral justice, which is that all people have equal rights to the broadest basic freedoms that do not endanger the freedom of others. The current generation has the right to resources and a healthy environment, but it must not jeopardize the same right for future generations.

Key words: Economic, Modern, Earth, environment.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development implies the harmonization of various development aspects and conflicting motives contained in the programs of individual sectors. Political will and determination are needed for the purposeful resolution of such conflicts. The key prerequisites necessary for the acceptance and application of the concept of sustainable development of the economy and society, as well as for its successful realization, are appropriate leadership, broad political, social and media support, as well as social agreement that it is necessary to accept this concept. At the same time, strong political will, commitment of the Government and support of the public represent the most immediate success factors.

Concepts of sustainable development and sustainability

A characteristic of sustainable development is the greater involvement of the public in making decisions about solving environmental problems. It is not enough for the government to decide for it declaratively, but the public must be specially encouraged, first of all timely informed and trained so that it could objectively influence the outcome of solving the problem in which it is interested.

The meaning of the concepts of sustainable development and sustainability is complex. The only thing that can be said for sure about them is that they still cause a lot of debate. Basically, it is a political and global concept that initially referred primarily to the environmental protection problems of less developed countries. Although the term was first used by Barbara Ward in 1969,[1] it attracted more attention from the world public in 1974 after the Cocoyoc Declaration, whose conclusions recognized the connection between social well-being and environmental issues.[2] After the report Our Common Future (the so-called report of the

[1] At the Conference on Economic Development in Washington, USA. See in Pravdić (2001: 223)
[2] In September 1974, a joint conference of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and the United Nations Commission on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) WCED (1987) was held in the city of Cocoyoc, Mexico.

Brundtland Commission) of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, as well as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the concept began to appear in national strategic and development documents.

Ten years after Rio de Janeiro, in September 2002 in Johannesburg, the international community once again confirmed its determination for sustainable development and sustainable management of natural resources, and in the center of attention, as a prerequisite for everything, was education. Sustainable development presupposes the harmonization of economic, ecological and social aspects of development and therefore necessarily presupposes interdisciplinary research. As economists have always been interested in economic growth and efficiency, ecologists in the integrity of ecological systems, and sociologists in fairness and security for all members of society, it was necessary to unite research efforts and offer an idea acceptable to all. The biggest research challenges are precisely where certain disciplines meet or intertwine.

Sustainable developement

The most frequently cited definition of sustainable development is certainly the one from the Brundtland report, which describes sustainable development as "development that enables meeting the needs of current generations, without jeopardizing the needs of future generations." [3] This definition is acceptable from a philosophical point of view. In this way, many accepted sustainable development primarily as a moral obligation. Over time, many definitions of sustainable development have emerged, and international financial institutions have brought the concept closer to economists.

Today, at the base of all definitions is sustainable development as a concept that encompasses the interwoven, economic, social and environmental dimensions.[4] The technological development of modern civilization has reached a stage when different development goals intersect in a dramatic way. Conflicts between economic and environmental goals are of utmost importance.

Social justice includes: ensuring and encouraging cultural diversity; maintaining and supporting institutions of social systems; supporting social justice and gender and racial equality; enabling participation in decision-making by all segments of society; ensuring equal educational opportunities for all.

Economic security includes: increasing productivity and production of useful goods and services; reducing poverty in the world; ensuring fair distribution of goods and constant improvement of equality in all segments of the economy; ensuring employment, earnings, new investments, trade and distribution of goods; raising innovation and entrepreneurship.

Ecological balance implies: ensuring and maintaining genetic diversity; supporting biological production; developing resistance to negative impacts on the environment, as well as encouraging and enabling recovery in the event of negative impacts; ensuring a clean environment and stable climate; encouraging eco-efficiency in all parts of society.

Sustainable development and the sustainability of development are revealed as major global problems and for almost forty years, since they were included in the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) in 1972, they remain important areas of research in many sciences (economics, ecology, technology, biology, geography, sociology, legal and political sciences, as well as many others), and areas of national state policies as well as numerous international initiatives and undertakings. The past period marked the essential penetration of the true philosophy of globalism and, if not yet complete planetary, but certainly increasingly regional, forced by environmental reasons, the connection and transnational integration of ever wider parts of the world, which is an undoubted civilizational shift of permanent importance and with huge perspectives.

Humanity finally discovers that Nature does not recognize any borders (state, national, linguistic, cultural, religious, etc.), but it still does not know enough how to get rid of its own narrow-mindedness, arrogance, insensitivity, selfishness, superiority complex and all other limitations that appear as a de facto lack of vision and own mission in the modern world, which is changing

[3] WCED (1987: 43)
[4] World Bank, 1992

dramatically rapidly. Sociologists look at sustainable development and sustainability through their prism. They indicate that there are different influences on the attitude towards the environment and on the choice of measures.[5]

Developement policies

At the heart of future sustainability research is likely to be considerations of the endogenous accumulation of human and intellectual capital, as well as a more formal analysis of global environmental problems. In a global environment, problems do not remain within national borders, so appropriate solutions require increasingly coordinated international activity. Therefore, in recent years, the concept of global public good has become increasingly important in the formulation of various policies.

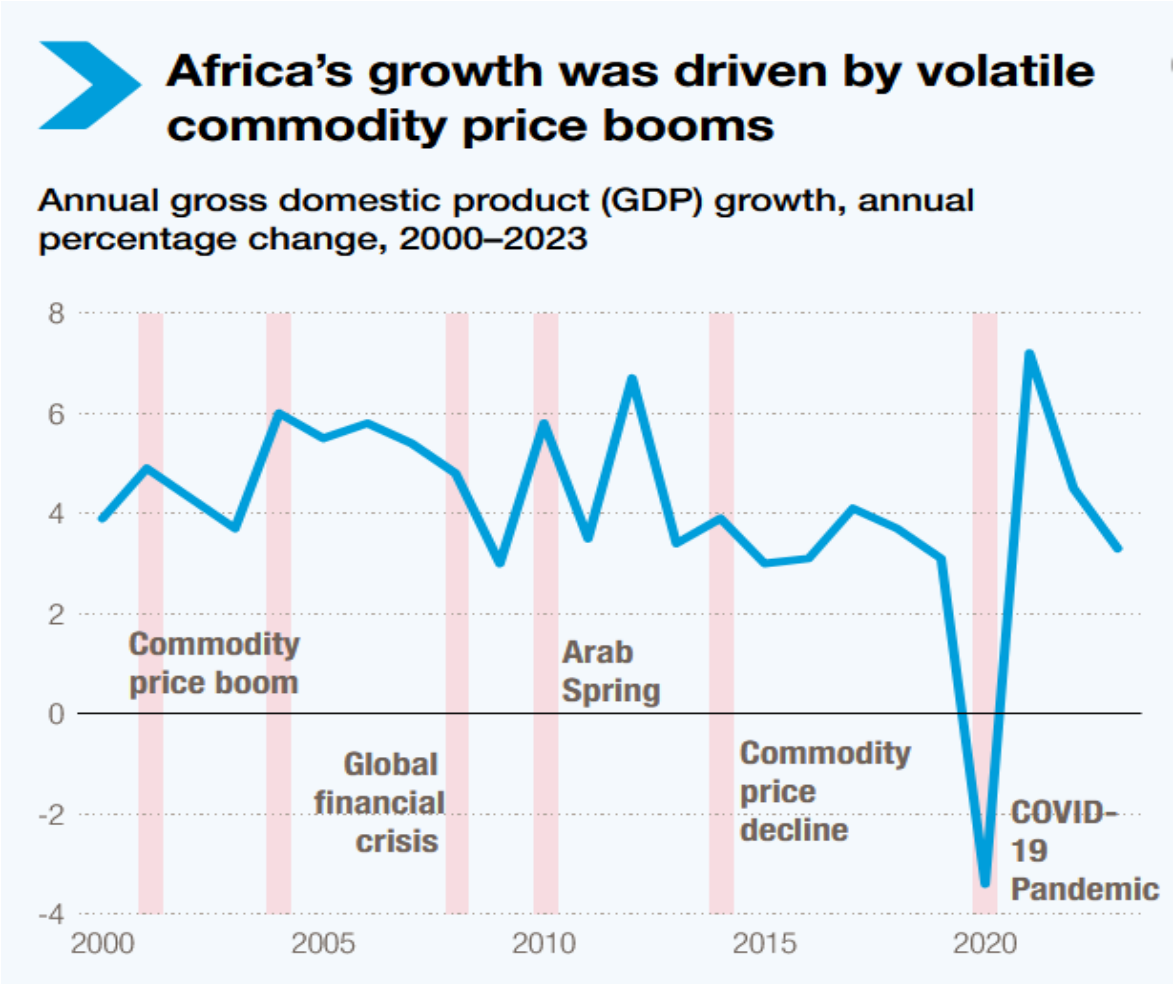
The concept of global public good came to the center of discussion when facing the numerous challenges of increasingly intense international interdependence, as well as the challenges of poverty reduction, but it first appeared in the programs of various UN agencies, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and various international non-governmental organizations. Global public goods include a quality environment, health, knowledge, property rights, peace and security. The main objections to this concept can be that it is too academic and abstract. Although there are numerous studies, there is still a considerable gap between the understanding of the role of international public goods in economic development and the specific needs of such goods in the global environment. In that discussion, the priorities of less developed countries did not find an appropriate place. We should recognize those global public goods that are most important for achieving economic development in underdeveloped countries, the lack of which affects the speed and quality of development in those countries.

Economists narrow and limit sustainable development by reducing economic goals to growth and efficiency, social goals to fair distribution and poverty reduction, and environmental sustainability is sought to be achieved only by managing natural resources. The relationship between economic growth and sustainable development is the first question that economists seek to answer. When analyzing the relationship between the environment and economic growth, different formal models are considered, which we classify into several groups: optimal control models, endogenous growth models and models based on the so-called Kuznets curve applied to the environment (Environmental Kuznets Curve - EKC). The concept of the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) first appeared in 1992 in the World Development Report document, without using the term EKC.[6] The concept is based on an economic model in which there is no feedback effect of the quality of the environment on production possibilities, and trade has a neutral effect on the state of the environment.

Private rates of resource depletion are higher than socially optimal and the economy is not sustainable. The third model considers the balanced stable growth of the economy and the performance of state measures for the conservation of natural resources. State incentives for environmental protection slow down their depletion. Interest rates rise because resource prices rise and investment in physical capital has the effect of saving natural resources. The fourth model applies to underdeveloped countries whose development is based on the use of natural resources. The basic factors of the model are exogenous population growth, the absence of technological progress in the production and processing of natural resources, as well as the absence of externalities. The optimal solution can be reached under two conditions. The first is that the rate of growth (renewal) of resources exceeds the sum of the rate of population growth and the discount rate of utility. The second condition is a large enough initial growth of resources to feed the population. This model provides enough elements to determine a concrete development policy, for example, an agrarian policy.

[5] Rayner, S., 1994, Governance and the Global Commons, Discussion Paper, 8, London: London School of Economics, Centre for the Study of Global Governance

[6] Kordej-De Villa, Z., (1999) Economic growth and sustainable development, Economic trends and economic policy, 9 (73)



Picture 1. African growth and commodity prices in last 25 years dependant on prices booms[7]

Rate of sustainibility

Another question that economists are trying to find an answer to is how to measure sustainability? Ecological economists use physical measures of ecosystem elasticity (resilience) and resource quantities which they then compare with population and consumption pressures. So they conclude: if demand for resources (without substitutes) is a significant fraction of current supply, then our use of resources is unsustainable. To help measure sustainability, environmental economists propose Daly's rule, according to which any reduction in the stock of natural capital must be offset by manufactured capital that can produce comparable services.[8]

In 1975, the first "International Program of Education and Training for Environmental Protection" was prepared (UNESCO and UNEP), and after the Rio Conference, in 1993, it was improved in order to reorient the education and training of the global population for the purpose of sustainable (harmonized) development. This program defines the main goals of education:[9]

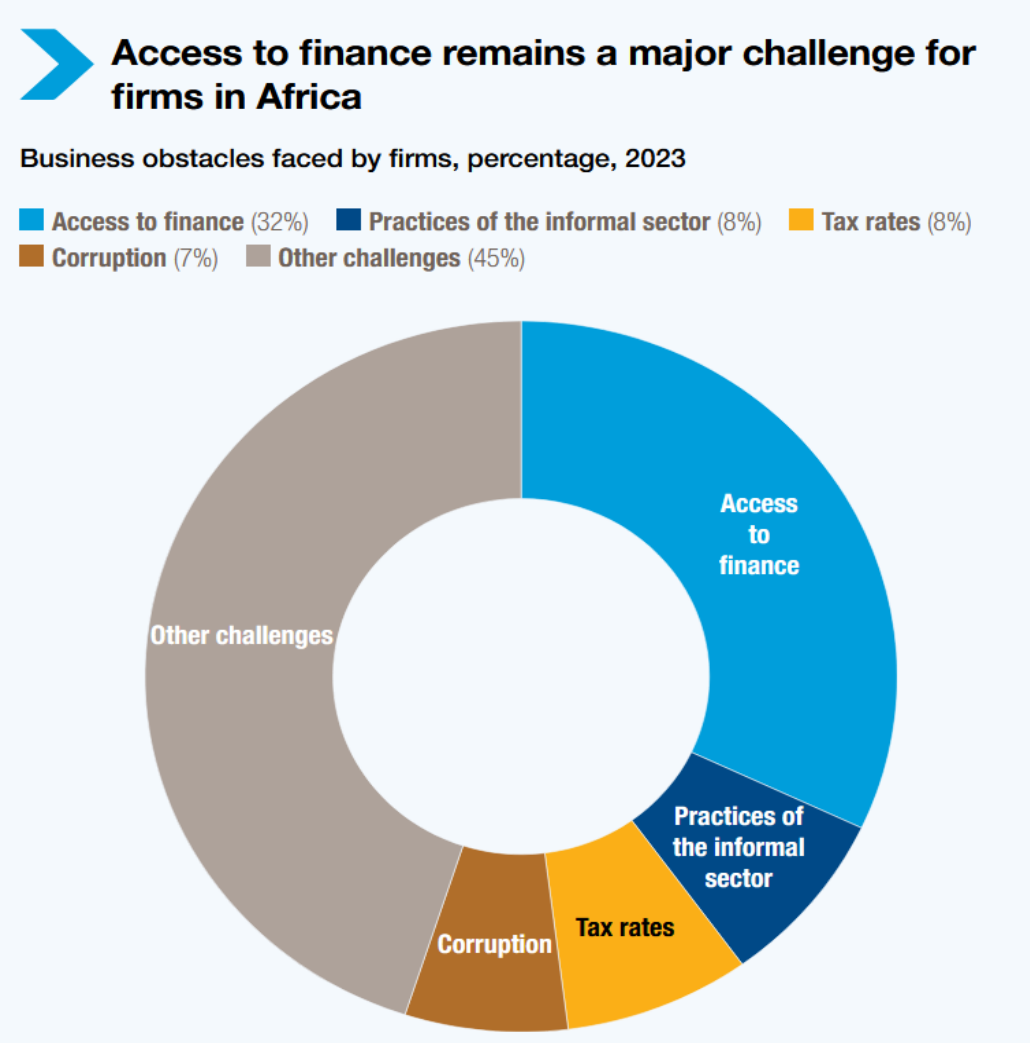
[7] UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) calculations, based on data from the World Development Indicators database (World Bank).
[8] Daly, H. E.,1990,Toward Some Operational Principles of Sustainable Development,*Ecological Economics*,2 (1)
[9] UNESCO - UNEP, "International environmental education program", Paris, 1993

1. enabling each individual to achieve the awareness, knowledge, and skills necessary to actively participate in the protection and improvement of the environment and the achievement of coordinated development,
2. creation of a new environmentally desirable behavior and lifestyle,
3. developing ecological ethics and ecological culture,
4. strengthening education and training for environmental protection for all,
5. improving the quality of life.[10]

In recent years, African leaders have responded to the challenges of resource-based growth by renewing their political commitment to structural transformation and adopting several initiatives, at national and regional levels, aimed at diversifying production and export structures. But structural transformation is a double-edged sword: while necessary for sustainable growth and poverty reduction, it also imposes significant costs on ecological systems, especially when governments do not take conscious and appropriate action to reduce environmental damage. Fischer-Kowalski and Haberl argue that, in the past, the transition from an agrarian to an industrial socioecological regime was a major factor in the rapid increase in environmental pressures.

The resulting problems range from climate change, pollution due to increasing amounts of different types of waste, deforestation, desertification and degradation of freshwater resources, to the loss of biodiversity. It is crucial that the renewed focus on structural transformations in Africa is not achieved at the expense of social and environmental sustainability. Therefore, as they must make additional efforts to transform their economies, African governments should also strive to improve resource efficiency and address the negative environmental impacts of structural transformations.[11]

[10] Ibid
[11] Fischer-Kowalski, M. and H. Haberl (eds.). Socioecological Transitions and Global Change. Trajectories of Social Metabolism and Land Use. In “Advances in Ecological Economics,” series editor: Jeroen van den Bergh. Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, USA, 2007



Picture 2 Access to finances with obstacles [12]

Conclusion

Priority goals for all African countries are accelerated transformation, integration, diversification and growth of African economies in order to reduce their vulnerability to external shocks and increase their dynamics, internalize the development process. It is considered that an average, real, growth rate of at least 6% per year is needed by the continent in order to achieve sustainable economic growth and balanced development, increase incomes and eradicate poverty. At the same time, there must be reciprocity of obligations and responsibilities of African countries, on the one hand, and the international community, on the other.

African countries remain heavily dependent on the export of a few commodities, and trade-loss conditions have further strained their capacity to invest in human and physical infrastructure. The current level of national savings and investment is insufficient to ensure the accumulation process needed to put Africa on a sustainable growth path. Greater growth and development in Africa, in order to meet the goals set by the international community, including poverty reduction, contained in the Millennium Declaration will be difficult to achieve. Africa needs to review its growth strategies and find ways and means to make them more compatible with the goal of sustainable development.

[12] UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) calculations, based on data from the Enterprise Survey database (World Bank).