

Developmental Issues in Africa: “A Sustainable Development Process or A Process of Robbing Peter to Pay Paul”

(The Nigerian Construction Industry Scenario)

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Abstract— The title of this paper is a question for which an answer is required or demanded. It pre-supposes that in most African countries there had been halting rather than sustainable progress. No wonder therefore that for many decades now, if not centuries, countries in Africa have remained classified either as under-developed, developing, third world, name it, even after many years of independence. This is not to say that in some instances both the political and economic decisions or policies had not been sound on some issues intended to remove and resist this derogatory tag but that in many other instances it has been robbing Peter to pay Paul. Even when we have our HEADS and HANDS full of IDEAS and TECHNOLOGIES locally developed or sourced from those who gave us names we do not want to, or should not, answer or accept, yet we have very little to show. The question is why? This paper therefore has tried to look at the scenario in the Nigeria Construction Industry to see where the industry has been hitting the targets in term of development and where not for whatever reasons and to provoke thoughts and deep thoughts in the construction industry and create awareness in other areas by highlighting avenues for breakthroughs to remove the yoke of underdevelopment and, just may be for once, be in charge of our own destinies. Pre-construction, construction and post-construction phases of development all have tremendous impact on our development and implementation programmes. This fact we often ignore, both as individuals or government agencies as shall be seen in this essay. Ignorance of this fact is creating imbalances in our development programmes amounting to robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Key Words: *Halting progress, Sustainable progress, Yoke of Underdevelopment, Construction industry scenario*

I. INTRODUCTION

After several years or decades of independence many African countries/States are still playing catch-up regarding sustainable development and who knows for how long this situation may remain at the rate we are going? This is not to say that developments had not taken place but unfortunately one is down-hearted to note that despite such developments in the various fields to which reference can be made, there is still poverty around Africa. Therefore Africa is still largely described as ‘third world’ and ‘developing’ while the ‘second’ and the ‘first

worlds’ industrialized nations are often being described as ‘developed’. Interestingly, however it is worthy of note that there is no evidence whatsoever that our world was created in bits or in three stages by the Creator and whatever classification is simply man-made. What is responsible for the classification or stratification is in the way we respond or handle the empowerment given to us ‘subdue’ our world. The response time may be quick or slow, or the handling of the process being carried out skillfully or clumsily; it all depends on either individuals or nation. Hence for instance some people take the word ‘subdue the earth’ to mean ‘over power’ or ‘maximize the benefits’ without control rather than it to mean exploring the earth and taking all its advantages and benefits intelligently under control; while some people interpret the accompanying blessings of fruitfulness and multiplication and replenishment of the earth to mean having a limit of two, three, or four children; while some others interpret this to mean ten or more children as the limit of fruitfulness for the full benefits of the blessings. They do this, of course, without counting the costs. Hence, for example, a woman who just gave birth to her ninth child was asked her reason for going further with child-bearing. Her answer was that since she was not educated and had no money, nothing else to present to her family on returning home but her children. She has lost sight of the cost of their total upbringing and even the cost of transporting these children home to her people. In other words poor education and lack of understanding of the subject matter of sustainability will lead to irrational decisions and consequently reduce the usefulness of a development project.

The interpretation, by this woman, of the blessings of fruitfulness and multiplication is on false premise and lack understanding of issues of housing, food, clothing, health, education and so on. These are intimately connected to the future of this woman’s responsibilities to the innocent children. Therefore when the consequences of development in a direction are not viewed in the light of total progress, there can be no sustainability. Fortunately the thrust of the key note addresses by the two invited speakers at the last year

edition of this International Conference on Development Issues in Africa was on the need for us to examine and re-examine, to check and cross-check all available facts and theories on development process before adapting them for use to meet our needs. It was made abundantly clear that for over 250 years economic theories had been in contradiction of one another to guarantee sustainability and growth. The second speaker made it clear that this is so for the fact there are differences and peculiarities between nations in terms of people and available resources. Therefore whole-sale adoption, as we were made to understand, is likely to fail and be unworkable without adjustments in contents and context. In his own closing remarks, the chief host of the occasion, Dr. David O. Oyedepo, Chancellor of this institution, based on his own experiences, buttressed this idea of looking inward and outward for relevant data to achieve sustainable development and economic growth.

In the face of current levels of knowledge in relation to sustainable development processes, developing countries, particularly in Africa, should grow wings in the face of challenges rather than buy crutches on the basis of the experiences of those who have gone before.

There is never a right time to do the wrong thing. It is often forgotten or ignored that there is always a chain of reactions that follow development decisions which might underpin or undermine current and future development programmes. Implicit in the specific desire to subdue the earth are the requirements for careful planning and organizing processes to ensure sustainable development and progress without which African countries may never be able to break the yoke or jinx of underdevelopment by moving from the class of, according to man's classification and definition, 'third world' to the class of the 'other two worlds'.

In most of the African countries, especially in Nigeria, decisions had been taken toward the realization of the objectives of a project without deep consideration for the possibilities that may affect the three factors of national prosperity. These are environmental, social, and economic factors which affect the essence of other areas of national development programmes.

Also globalization has led us in Africa to the notion that a nation can enter easily the molds of another nation's development programmes without some consequences [1]. For example less developed nations have been found to hastily key into, or log on to or run with ideas from more developed nations without first breaking the fallow grounds that others have broken in their own development processes in order to create level ground. Failure to do this will amount to planting among thorns. It should not be forgotten that decisions made are usually based on the fundamental beliefs and character qualities.

In a newspaper article titled 'Varsity DON tasks Media Professionals on MDGs' by Jumoke Obaoye, based on an interview with Dr. Joe Obe of the Department of Mass Communication, Covenant University, Ota, it was revealed that no African country has yet to realize any

aspect of MDGs by 2015 and that in Nigeria, in particular, the situation is disturbing as we are not just getting it right. The summary of the interview was that "In Africa, there are over 100 million more people living in poverty than in 1990; the number of people suffering from hunger has increased since 1997, and over 150 million children in developing countries are underweight." The Millennium Development Goals is a document or treaty signed by 189 countries of the world but it is still in Africa that even an aspect of the objectives has yet to be met? Although globalization obviously has loads of advantages, especially those that can hasten our strides in progress, but not necessarily that we should overlook the pitfalls on our way. When we know where we are going and can identify all the twists and turns the rest is simple.

Yes, Nigeria is blessed. It is a country rich in minerals, land, and human resources.. However the truth of the matter is that it is not what you have; it is what you do with what you have that makes the difference. Hence, [2] said "One clear perspective on Nigeria's underdevelopment, (or is it lack of development), is that we are poor because our society is poorly organized over the country's territorial space". He went further to say that poor spatial organization has serious impacts on lots of issues including the way we manage our political, economic, environmental, and emerging social landscapes.

The construction industry is directly responsible for the built environment. A huge proportion of the capital investment is tied to the initial outlay, subsequent use, and maintenance. It follows, therefore, that sustainable development derive largely from numerous construction scenarios. There are examples of cases where it is thought right steps had been taken in furtherance of a development process to achieve much progress in development but which, instead, had caused so much damage to progress than thought. A few instances of this will be highlighted presently to promote understanding of the perception and direction of this topic.

II. THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY

It is difficult to understand what is required to ensure sustainable development without first of all promoting an understanding of sustainability. The idea of sustainability first came up at a United Nation Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 as an approach aimed to harmonize environmental, social and economic objectives development. Since then several definitions have been given by various people on the subject matter of sustainability. Each of the definitions could be aggregated to mean one and the same thing. However the following two definitions seem to capture very aptly the essence of this essay.

Sustainable development can be defined as 'maintaining a delicate balance between the human needs to improve the lifestyles and a feeling of well-being on one hand and on the other hand preserving natural resources and ecosystem on which the present and the future

generations depend. In other words sustainability is a rolling investment that caters for now as well as later. It is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising or jeopardizing the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. Obviously to create a balance between present which is committed to improvement of lifestyles and well-being and the preservation of natural resources and ecosystems for the future requires careful planning and organizing process. It is a process that cannot afford to continue to be arbitrary with issues concerning the destiny of a nation and people. Hitherto development programmes of a country like Nigeria, though may look attractive or achievable, have been on ad hoc basis and will amount to building on sandy soil or building castles in the air without first building up a comprehensive network of consequences of actions and reactions.



Fig. 1 Balanced Sustainable Development [3]

Another definition says that ‘Sustainable development is the development that meets the present needs without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.’ This definition is as contained in World Commission on Environment and Development 1987 “Our Common Future” which is otherwise known as ‘Brundtland’ Report or Tokyo Declaration.

The two definitions above, and the supporting illustrations, of sustainability bring home to us most emphatically the point that development has both the human and environment faces and should not be carried out on ad-hoc basis for full benefits.

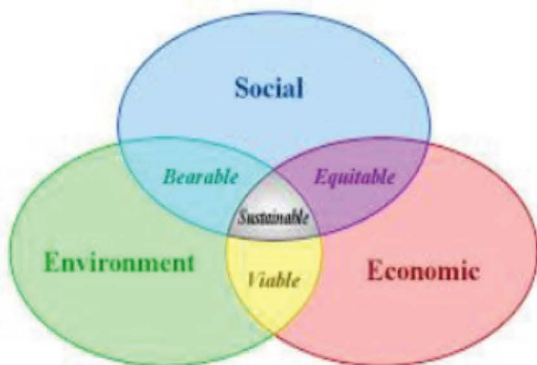


Fig. 2 Components of Sustainable Development [3]

Going by the above definitions, sustainable development issues must encompass all the tenets of good standard of living for everyone without exception. Development becomes sustainable only when the impacts are felt positively by everyone everywhere every time and that

both the natural and built environments are not diminished in value and quality. In other words sustainable development covers the three aspects of a nation’s prosperity; that is quality environment, quality social life, and equitable economic growth. These three centres depicting prosperity must remain mutually inclusive. This is to say that they must remain in equilibrium or near equilibrium to claim any measurable progress. Hence, [4] warned in his article in ‘Environment and Urbanization Journal’ titled “Sustainability is not enough” as he argued that sustainability should not be considered as a goal, particularly that many bad programmes are sustainable but as constraints limiting the usefulness of many other good programmes.

The import of this observation is that a viable program of development on its own can create untold hardships in other areas when considered in isolation. The woman with ten children can supply cheap and adequate labour if there are other avenues of relevance to other development programmes; instead she created problems for herself and the society. Therefore it is not what we want, feel, or like but the corporate needs of the nation to move forward in various directions for a common goal that makes a sustainable development.

The theme that recurs throughout a development process is that man is the *raison d’etre* as well as the means of economic development. The former is perhaps self-evident, but a constant reminder to this fundamental fact is important for two reasons. In the first place, economists have often tended to consider man in this respect only in terms of how much he consumes from the proceeds of economic activity and consequently how much can be saved for further investment. Secondly the politicians, as frequently, seem to be lost in the admiration of the outward and superficial signs of development ---what Galbraith refers to as ‘symbolic modernization’, for example breaking down old buildings to make room for road expansion or widening of roads, constructing a prestigious overhead bridge project as we see in recent times, if economically wholly unjustified that in the long run may minimize the well-being of individuals in the community or amounting to turning our backs on the community for which the project is intended to serve or help.

The demolition cost is usually from the ordinary tax payers’ account but the beneficiaries are the few well-todos in the society for whom the roads were improved to get quickly away from the poor and dirty environments. The response from the masses is the dumping of heaps of refuse bags by the road sides as seen today, most probably, in protest against government action. Hence, there are good roads but poorly utilized and badly polluted. Some of the buildings facing these roads are as embarrassing as the conditions of the roads themselves.

The point of view of man being a means of production involves the question of quantity in relative and absolute terms of employed labour force, and quality in terms of skill, efficiency, brain power, and experience. These are some of the factors which underlie any consideration of

man development as a resource in sustainable development. Unfortunately a development program that overlooks this fundamental issue either by ignoring the training or the well-being of available human resource will fail to achieve sustainable development.

III. THE IMPACT OF CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Construction Industry has earlier been described as having substantial role to play in every aspect of our developmental programmes, be it education, health, industrial processing, banking and so on for the simple fact that all of these must operate within the built environment. To play its expected role huge parcels of land are required in various locations.

The question that comes to mind very quickly from the above review and discourses on sustainability is how does the construction interfere with the environmental, social, and economic activities? How does it become a part of the sustainable process at the pre-construction, construction, and post-construction stages? The schematic figure above depicting the sustainability of development captures three key issues that could and would render a program of development either potent or impotent at these various stages and in many other instances.

(a) **The environment:** - Built or natural environment in the definition of the advanced learner dictionary can be looked upon as the conditions that affect the behavior and development of a system or a body. This is the world in which we live – people, animals, and plant. The built–up environment has a hold on social while the natural consists of atmosphere, hydrosphere, and biosphere – (the ecosystem). One must be destroyed, relocated, or must change outlook to create the other. In most cases the natural will change to create the built environment. In the two cases there is need for adequate appraisal in order not to make it a case of two edged sword – a case of head or tail you lose.

Pre-construction activities involve massive land requirement resulting in active land speculation. It involves the planning and organizing the use of land and other resources which are critical factors in the delivery process of the built environment.

In a sustainable program of development land is required for the built environment, and the built environment requires resources from the land. It is usually give and take. The built environment may be housing or school; it may be a factory or a road; whatever it is, it means a change in use of land (i. e. from one activity to another). It means displacement of some people and wild

lives. It is also means taking a huge chunk away from the ecosystem. It may lead to improvement of the land, particularly if, for example, a change from subsistent to mechanized farming though the new use still causes displacement of people and even the wild life at that. The picture painted here above gives an overwhelming need to plan and organize very adequately for sustainability. Planning and organizing for sustainable land use is dependent upon availability and stringent application of Land Use Act which, unfortunately, came into existence only in the nineties in Nigeria. Even then it does not make such provision for clear distinctions for various uses as usually is the case in more advanced countries where lands for agriculture, housing, industrialized processes, and other uses, have been earmarked from the very beginning.

Consequentially, land speculation, sale, and use of land are not under good control and had given rise to haphazard development which constitutes constraints to sustainable development. Arising out of this practice are the following issues:-

- (i) Improper use of land for odd purposes such as burying corpses in rooms or on premises.
- (ii) Rushed and unapproved development leading to poor and unsustainable construction
- (iii) Non-compliance of buildings to designs and construction practices leading to slum development and poor sanitation
- (iv) Total abuse of or disregard for Planning Laws and erection of ‘jerry buildings’ and unhealthy dwellings without basic necessities
- (v) Environmental pollution of natural and the built environments leading to health challenges and imbalance in ecosystem
- (vi) Interference with the ecosystem leading to global warming for which developing nations are ill-equipped to handle
- (vii) Social disharmony and insecurity

Change in land use should be equitable and inclusive to avoid social inequality. For example a change of use from subsistent farming to mechanization requiring extensive land for operation may increase production of

food but the displaced subsistent farmer may find it impossible to benefit from the farm produce on display for sale on the shelves of big supermarkets in town or perhaps are intended for export trip to a neighbouring country. In the meantime his farmland is gone forever and many other patrons also become handicapped. Displaced and unemployed villagers by a change of land use for other laudable purposes may never be able to derive the benefits on account of costs.

While land use can lead to huge benefits to some it spells doom and frustration for others. This will obviously upset the balance between equity, improvement of lifestyles and well-being, and preserving natural resources and ecosystem referred to in figures one and two above, as well as interfering with the interdependency and connectivity between the three essential components of prosperity of the nation on the one hand and the sustainable development on the other hand.

At the pre-construction stage of a built environment project, the natural environment comprising the atmosphere, hydrosphere, biosphere (the ecosystems), is hugely impacted, concerning the rate at which resources for the built environment are used and the extent to which replacement is planned, This is a critical factor in the game of sustainability that will guarantee the future generation a chance and ability to meet their own needs. As we plan change of use, we must plan for new directions and fresh orientation for the displaced human beings to ensure continued participation in economic activities for sustainable growth and food security. As we plan new developments for ourselves we must think of the destruction being caused to the natural habitat for the animals in the ecosystem already almost being driven into extinction. What are the replacement plans and in what measure would have to become a priority. Clearing the forests for housing and road construction is not only upsetting the ecosystem but already leading to some implications on the built infrastructures. The ripple effect is endless and these few instances here mentioned are to sharpen our awareness. The devastation caused by the destruction of the ecosystem as we take from the natural resources without replacement program in place is very well understood by all of us and the world at large. A bit of this has been highlighted elsewhere in this essay.

Food security is closely linked with land use. There are always a thousand reasons for arbitrary use of land for other purposes than for agriculture. Though the country is blessed with large land mass but unfortunately the vegetation is different from one place to another. We are rapidly consuming a portion that supports the growth of specific crops that cannot grow somewhere else. Whereas it is possible to build houses and other infrastructures anywhere, it is not always possible to plant crops anywhere. Some states right now have no land to grow their own food

(b) **Social Influence:** - Social consequences of arbitrary development have been alluded to in several sections of this essay. In figure two above we see that the three issues in the social component relating to sustainable development are whether or not the new

situation is bearable, sustainable and equitable. For example, change in use of farmland such as subsistent farming to mechanized farming, or education, or hospital means displacement of farmers from carrying out their subsistent farming as the encroaching new development renders them unemployed and unemployable. The produce of mechanized farming is hardly affordable by the displaced people who now have no recognized source of income. The displaced individuals may never be able to derive any benefit from any educational and healthcare developments on account of cost as; in the meantime, their sources of income are gone forever. Therefore in our society today we have a social group of unemployed individuals claiming or being referred to as ‘okada-union’, or ‘omo-onile’, or ‘land speculators, who are now sources of social nuisance, and embarrassment to the nation everywhere. The population of this group is increasing by the day.

The sprawl of cities into the rural areas creates social disorder and segregation, incompatibility and inequality in living standards. This leads to creation of **Slums and Slum-Clearance** in a vicious cycle. Slums are man-made resulting from improper implementation of a housing development program, or total disregard for provisions of minimum standard facilities for good living either in the absence of Land Use Act or failure to adhere or observe its provisions. It is a place where the poor and their families in the society struggle to make a living. They are products of poor housing planning and development; poor and unsustainable architectural concepts as well as poor construction approach. In the UN – HABITAT it was advocated that we should build a new type of city – the city of 21st century – that is a ‘good’ people city, one that is capable of integrating the tangible and more intangible aspects of prosperity, and in the process shedding off the inefficient unsustainable forms and functionalities of the city of the previous centuries. This implies avoidance of slums which restrict provision of modern amenities essential for healthy living as well as removing imbalances social integration. As already stated, sustainable development is human-centered from the point of view of the derivable benefits as well as the means of economic growth. Social equality and equal opportunity are essential ingredients for effectiveness and full participation everyone. It is an inclusive program. Nigeria remains a poor nation because our development process takes off in the air in most cases without solid base to withstand the storm, the inevitable storm of the world around us.



Fig.3. Slum Area of an Urban Center Devoid of Basic Amenities for Healthy Living

Slum-Clearance by a simple definition it is clearing up the mess initially created either through ignorance or under economic or social pressure. Whatever is the case it costs money, displeasure, and dissatisfaction, and represents backward step. This is contrary to rules of the game of sustainability. We give compensations to those displaced by slum-clearance which are hardly enough to make a start on anything acceptable or near current requirements. In the process what are doing is simply asking the displaced group of people move to new locations where subsequently they would be dislodged once again.

Three notable slum-clearances took place in Lagos that need to be remembered by the virtue of their locations in relation to new developments. The first was the clearing of Maroko, the second Makoko, and the third Oshodi. Initially Maroko was occupied by the immigrants from nearby border villages between Nigeria and Benne Republic. In 1990 Governor Raji Rasaki took action to forcefully remove the nuisance reportedly caused by the inhabitant of this enclave. Land ownership of this parcel of land then got transferred to the elite of Victoria Island, which is now a prime Estate property in Lagos. There are various lessons to learn from slum-clearance exercise.

The clearance of Maroko led [6] in his work titled ‘Recent Slum-Clearance Exercise in Lagos – Victims or Beneficiaries’ to make a remark that ‘the clearance of Maroko seemed to have served to exacerbate the already existing intransigent of urban housing shortage problem in Lagos’ as those evicted became homeless or destitute even when the new owners continue to live in prosperity. The clearance of Makoko led to deaths of members of the community which, invariably, brought total condemnation of the world upon the government for the slum-clearance activity embarked upon leading to loss of lives. The project was subsequently stopped and abandoned. Abandoned project is a colossal waste of resources apart from reducing people to a state of destitution.

The clearance of Oshodi obviously eased traffic in that area but created a new market for a section of the society bring about inequitable economic activities and

subsequently poverty to others who could not afford a new rental required.



Fig. 4 Clearing the Slum at a Considerable Expense to Displace Members of Society

Slum is a world phenomenon. The pile chart below shows the population of the world living in slum requiring to be relocated and integrated into the New Cities the whole world is envisaging according to UN-HARBITAT REPORT 2012/2013. According to this report it is expected that as the world today move into the urban age, the dynamism and intense vitality of cities become even more important. A fresh future is taking shape with urban areas around the world becoming not just the dominant form of habitat for humankind but the engine room of human development as a whole.

(c) **Economic Factor of Sustainability:-**

Most of the prestigious projects that developing nations, and in particular Nigeria, rely on foreign investors to execute. In other words the nation rely almost entirely on borrowed money from external sources to be paid back from internally generated revenues that is taxes and so on. The implications of this are numerous

- (i) Only few from the society may benefit from such projects
- (ii) High interest rate and unpalatable conditions of repayment running the masses to the ground
- (iii) Reduction of our God given resources without much consideration of other areas of growth.
- (iv) Projects being constructed by foreign companies rather than home-grown professionals.
- (v) Importation of construction resources from the lender
- (vi) Locally available resources are not matured before use and are getting used up without any replacement plan, with a resultant rise in overall cost of the project. and poor buildings showing early structural defects.
- (vii) Immature resource (e.g. wood converted from wet log) for roof structure and poor buildings showing early structural defects.

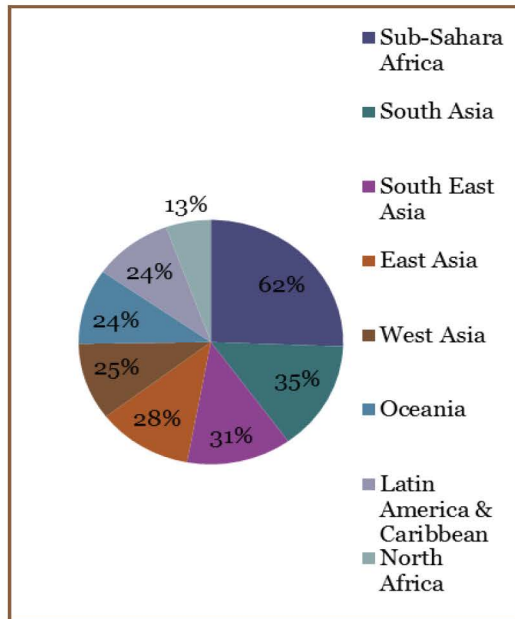


Fig. 5 Proportion of Urban Population Living in Slum

The envisaged new cities of the world are to be human centered. They are to be ecologically friendly. They are totally integrated to ensure equal opportunity for participation and derivable benefits. Some of the new cities of the world being built are shown below. By creating sufficient spaces and greeneries around and within our built environment we give ourselves a chance of healthy living to take opportunities available.



Fig. 6 Creating a Conducive Environment for Urban Population

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Sustainable development needs to integrate judicious utilization of available environmental, social, and economic resources to promote the well-being of people. There is interrelatedness between these three factors and ignoring one may spell doom for the others in terms of sustainability and prosperity of a nation. It will structurally be unpredictable if not unstable, to erect a building on strip foundation, no matter how deep, where a raft ought to have been used as a structural requirement.

A raft covers all the weak spots to provide all round stability.

Construction industry activities will impact sustainable development at pre-construction, construction, and post-construction stages in the following manners:-

- (i) Pre-construction Stage:- Can lead to organized and planned use of land and hence sustainable development or improper use of land; displacement of people and wild lives; creation of unemployment; interference with the ecosystems and other forms of pollution.
- (ii) Construction Stage:- Economic drain-offs; use of internally generated revenues for the benefit of few; pollution and social segregation just to mention a few.
- (iii) Post-construction Stage:- Maintenance of healthy environment; Slum creation and subsequent clearance.

It is a known fact that national or human development is about much more than rise and fall of national income. It is about creating an environment in which people can develop their full potentials and lead productive, creative lives in accord with their needs and interests and to do this without jeopardizing the interests of the others.

People are the real wealth of a nation. By action or inaction a nation can create opportunities for her people through sustainable development borne out of proper planning and organizing. Invariably developing nations concentrate a lot more on economic activities of the order that gives no room for participation of all. Hence it was remarked by the [5] that the lopsidedness focus on purely financial prosperity has led to growing inequality between the rich and the poor, generated serious distortion in form and functionality of the cities and also causing serious damage to the environment – not to mention the unleashing of precarious financial systems that could not be sustained in the long run and that therefore a fresh approach to prosperity, one that is holistic and integrated and which is essential for the promotion of a collective well-being and fulfillment of all is desirable. Developing nations invariably jump in most cases before looking, to the detriment of their lofty economic development programmes. Any economic program that does not permeate the entire society is undesirable and self-destructive.

It is true that the world is now a global village and through globalization a platform is provided to hastening our strides in progress, but not necessarily to overlook pitfalls in the way. Overlooking pitfalls in the way may be too expensive to the extent of forcing one nation remaining dependent on another perpetually. Every nation has peculiarities which must be put into consideration for sustainable development. Every nation knows, or should know, where the shoes are pinching most. We must always keep in touch with our own control tower to avoid crash landing.

Sustainable development requires sustained quality input to avoid quick decay and degradation of environment, air and land pollution.

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