Rethinking growth and neo-liberalization development models in Africa: towards a sustainable environmental ethics

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Abstract: For a long period in the past, and even presently, many people think that if they can only get the economy right, everything else will fall into place. Soothing as this ‘econo-mythical’ presupposition seems, it has formed the bedrock of human predicament. It has constituted the perceptual model through which many individuals and societies see and understand the world, human activities and human relationship with the environment. This presupposition, which provides the intellectual foundation for neo-liberal conceptual framework compels individuals and societies to pursue development in strictly economic terms. This ideology amounts to a reductive definition of the idea of development. It implies a desperate pursuit of economic growth at the expense of the environment and other aspects of human existence. The paper undertakes a critical analysis of the neo-liberal growth model and its implications for development in Africa, especially in relation to the appropriation of development resources including economy and environment. It is discovered by this research that the neo-liberal growth model does not and cannot provide the proper normative principles for efficient energy and environmental management in Africa. Therefore, it is proposed that a new development paradigm which considers overall sustainability of present and future generations of Africans be embraced.

Keywords: Africa, Development, Energy, Environment, Ethics, Sustainability.

1. Introduction

The socio-economic situation in most African countries is pathetic in that, whereas sustainable development requires improved environmental management, these poor countries excessively exploit their environments in order to meet their basic needs. As a result of high level of poverty and poor technology, the reliance on environmental resource base is alarming. This is not to exonerate the industrialized nations from abuse and degradation of natural environment due to industrial activities. If the idea of sustainability involves maximizing the net benefits of economic development, subject to maintaining the services and quality of natural resources over time [1], then, Africa is far from achieving the minimum benchmark for sustainable development. The current level of individual and household poverty in Africa is blamed among other things on the prevailing development paradigm on the continent. Therefore, this article argues that a shift from the current neo-liberal development paradigm is a conditio sine qua non for environmental sustainability in Africa. As long as extreme poverty and unguarded consumption patterns persist, struggle for survival remains or becomes more demanding with its consequence being unhindered environmental abuse and degradation.

The paper has four main sections. The first sets the pace for the argument and establishes a common understanding between the author and the reader by clarifying salient concepts used in the paper. The scope of the second section is to examine the modern origins of mainstream
development theories following the World War II, especially the growth theory and neo-liberalism. While the former constitutes a version of the Keynesian frameworks, the latter claims to be a reaction to Keynesianism. Also, it is expected that this section provides a causal relationship between praxis of these theories and the inevitable environmental abuses in Africa. The third section of the paper undertakes an evaluation of major ethical foundations for environmental sustainability discourse and provides us with the metaphysical underpinnings of some environmental ethical behaviour. In the fourth section, the article suggests the idea of eco-development as an alternative strategy for overall sustainability in Africa. This suggestion comes after a review of the idea had been done in the same section.

2. Concepts Clarification
It is pertinent to commence the argument by establishing a common understanding of the major concepts used in this paper, which are ‘sustainability’, ‘development’ and ‘natural environment’. Sustainability simply refers to meeting our present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. [2] The idea of sustainability involves three major and mutually inclusive aspects of human existence, namely: environmental conservation, social responsibility and economic development. Human existence as well as societies therefore becomes sustainable to the extent at which these components are enhanced and appropriated. Development is a phenomenon that pervades the essence of man. Development in human society is a many sided process involving the individual and the group. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. [3] As a result of the interdependence between the individual and society, the development of the individual is largely a product of the collective conventions and world-view of the community in which the person is accommodated. At least, every human being is socialized into a social group; and his/her development is the degree at which he/she is capable of internalizing these communicated norms. The individual is not an isolated island; therefore, the indices of development highlighted above are expressions of interpersonal relations whose language game is a structure put in place by the society.

At the level of society, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both the internal and external relationships. [3] Development has often been used exclusively in economic sense. The justification, being that the state of economy is itself an index of other social features – a positioned influenced by the Marxist economic ideology. [4] Economic development is the overall increase in the capacity for relating with the environment, by members of the society. The quality of the capacity to appropriate the environment is a function of the extent at which man understands the laws of nature (science), on the extent at which the people put that understanding into practice, by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized (institutions). [5] Going by this argument, one could infer that the economic status of a society is a reflection of developments in other critical areas of such a society.

However, this justification remains unconvincing for equating “development” with economic development. It amounts to logical reductionism when development is equated with the economy. It could even be untenable to argue that the end, to which human beings aspire, is a conducive and friendly economy which is a part of the development indices. Rather, one should consider the attainment of the desired economic condition as one of the requirement to enhance human capacity to exist. Economic development may be dependent on some other human dispositions and capacities such as a degree of moral knowledge and appreciation [6], the sense of justice and fairness that is higher than the brute. The individuals must have had a sense of justice which they draw upon in their daily lives and that the principles of justice are a public conception and a commonly acknowledged moral conviction. [7] Therefore, economic development becomes a part of the development equations and at best a reflection of the level of development in other aspects of the society. In other words, the “accounting system by which a nation measures its well-being is a
The notion of development derives from a much older idea of progress, which has its roots in the ancient Greece. This idea presents “development” as a continuous process, as unending pathway toward better livelihood. The concept has been used to describe Western economic growth since the Middle Ages, as well as to explain the process through which all societies are expected to achieve certain economic, social, political, cultural, and other goals.

Development in human society is a conscious process which derives from man’s desire to live a better life and his vehement pursuit of the desired status. Development constitutes the successive consequences of the relationship between human beings and the environment. In other words, the history of human development is an account of his relationship with the environment. It is an unfolding of his potentiality to study, understand and live by the realities of the environment as it was reported that much of human history has been a struggle for survival against natural hazards and against real and imagined enemies. [5] The first stage of human development as a social group is the capacity to make and use tools. Tools were made and used in order to control the hostility of the environment, and to maximally access the benefits thereof. Increasing efficiency in this respect could lead to better economic status, that is, the optimization of the resources available in the environment for the satisfaction of human needs.

The use of tools also had political implications and benefits. Hence, the Stone Age was regarded as the first human civilization. Development in the past has always meant the increase in the ability to defend the independence and sovereignty of the social group and indeed to infringe upon the freedom of others. The colonial experience of Africa by the imperial colonialists corroborates this notion. The colonial masters were mainly Europeans who were sophisticated in technology compared to the colonized populations. They invaded the societies with little or no advancement in technology; impoverished them and used their persons and resources to enrich their home economies. Even in the contemporary period, nations with unprecedented advancement in technology possess better economies and at the same time, they are the major global political actors. Therefore, the interconnection between knowledge, economy and politics cannot be over-emphasised.

Material welfare of the individual human person and of all the people has come to dominate the development discourse. This makes economic concerns occupy the central position in most development strategies and policies. Consideration for other spheres of human existence is to the extent to which it promotes the economy. Hence, development has come to mean the elimination of poverty, disease and ignorance; the increase of national wealth in such a way that every person has enough to consume. The chief aspect of development, according to this perspective, is the degree of access to the material wealth and factors of production. It is a transformation of the conditions of life of the majority of people in a beneficial manner to enhance their attainment of individual and collective material well-being.

Consequently, the global system is classified on the basis of the economic status of each component nation and region. The present global order is an interaction of three major economic worlds namely: the First World, the Second World and the Third World. On the basis of this global economic classification, the world is further stratified as ‘developed’, ‘developing’ and ‘underdeveloped’ with many African countries falling within the group of underdeveloped nations. Despite its enviable economic stature, the First World continues to strive for better economic positions. In what could be regarded as the survival of the fittest, the global economic space has been historically characterized by competition, exploitation and conspiracy, which calls for caution on the part of Africa and Third World nations in the execution of bilateral and multilateral
economic pacts. Allan Gilpin (1995) defines the environment as the components of the earth and includes:

- Land and air including all layers of the atmosphere.
- All organic and inorganic matter and living organisms.
- The interacting natural systems that include components referred to in components above.

To corroborate the broadness of the above definitions, Gilpin argues that the word environment embraces the conditions of influences under which any individual or thing exists, lives or develops. For him, these conditions can be categorised into three.

1. The combination of physical conditions that affect and influence the growth and development of an individual or community.
2. The social and cultural condition that affects the nature of an individual or community.
3. The surroundings of an inanimate object of intrinsic social value.

These definitions imply interdependency and interaction between existents that inhabit the environment. The European Commission defines the environment as the “combination, the settings, the surroundings and the conditions of life of the individual and of the society, as they are or as they are felt”. [9]

The natural environment constitutes a vital element in the process of development. It is a unique element in itself. It is immobile, and therefore incapable of any replacement, it can only be managed. The recurrent agitation for environmental responsibility is highly prudential and essentially obligatory. It is prudential in the sense that without improving environmental management, development may continually be elusive in poor countries, and the environment may continue to degrade. This conviction is encapsulated in the concept of environmentally sustainable development which presents Sub-Sahara Africa with the opportunity to view her development challenges in a new and different perspective, as well as to work out new solutions that are better adapted to the region.

The choice of this paper focusing on development and environmental sustainability is premised on the assumption that, all human activities are pursued within time and space. The environment constitutes the space within which other activities are executed. It could be regarded as the primary resource for human and natural existence. According to the Global Forum on Environment and Economic Growth (GFEEG), the links between the economy and the environment are manifold: the environment provides resources to the economy, and acts as a sink for emissions and waste. Natural resources are essential inputs for production in many sectors, while production and consumption also lead to pollution and other pressures on the environment. Poor environmental quality in turn affects economic growth and wellbeing by lowering the quantity and quality of resources or due to health impacts, etc. [10] Consequently, there is a relationship between the development model that is prevalent in the society and people’s attitudes towards the environment. In other words, socio-economic factors determine the possibility of environmental sustainability.

To this extent, the main achievement of the World Commission on Environment and Development [2] was not so much that it revealed new insights; rather it placed environmental problems, issues and concerns on the agenda on the local, national, regional and international levels more forcefully than ever. In his article “Environmental Sustainability with Development: What Prospects for a Research Agenda”, Harold Brookfield writes
Without apology, I concentrate almost entirely on ‘environmental sustainability’, on the premise that the practice of development, especially but not only in the Third World, depends ultimately on the continued viability of the resource base. [11]

In the same vein, Brohman emphasised the centrality of environmental concerns in development and sustainability discourse in the following words:

Worsening environmental problems have prompted a rethinking of the development agenda linking issues of sustainability to more traditional concerns for growth and equity. [12]

Environmental concerns are presently addressed at the local, national and international levels. In other words, frameworks for sustainable development are moving away from their prior technical fixation toward a more holistic focus which stresses the contextual specificity of environmental problems and includes a people-oriented agenda based on the needs and rights of local people. [12] The effects of rapid environmental change are being felt at all levels of human groupings. Nevertheless, concern for environmental change has until recently been confined to the margins. Hence, among other conferences, the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 enunciated that:

Without improving environmental management, development will be undermined, and without accelerated development in poor countries, the environment will continue to degrade. [13]

3. Growth, Neo-Liberalization and Environmental Abuse in Africa
At the Bretton Woods conference, the intellectual shadow of the leading economic thinker of the age, John Maynard Keynes, had a great impact, and he made important contributions to its proceedings. Keynes’ thought had come to exercise a profound impact on a generation of political leaders. His postulation for economic development was absorbed for both international and domestic economies. His idea of a smoothly running capitalist economy rested on a much greater role of the state than had been tolerated in classical and neo-classical methods of development, which had been more concerned with the free market. [14] To deal with recession, Keynes advocated the use of fiscal policy-government spending. By building roads and dams, for example, a government could create jobs, which in turn would create more demand for goods and services, which would cause factories to increase their output and thereby employ more labour, and so on in an upward spiral. Once the economy is revived, government could regulate it by taking money out of it. Put simply, Keynes’ prescription for improving the capitalist economy was for “governments to save in good times, spend in bad.” [14] He allowed governments to borrow, if necessary, to inject money into the economy. He reasoned that the loans would be repaid later from the earnings generated by a newly robust economy.

In the late 1940s, governments in Western Europe and North America started adopting Keynesian model. By then, the division of Europe into two blocs was becoming more consolidated. Capitalism only firmly reestablished its hold on Western Europe when United States instituted the Marshall Plan, whereby it injected billions of dollars into the reconstruction of Western Europe’s ravaged infrastructure- a reflection of Keynesian thesis. It was a recipe for social peace like none seen before. Scholars at the time became so optimistic and proclaimed that correct economic management would prevent there ever being another Depression.

The idea that Third World development was a process and goal for which the First World especially the United States, should provide assistance grew out of the auspicious experience of the Marshall Plan in Europe, as well as Cold War fears and ambitions. [15] The mainstream framework
of growth and modernization theories both arose in the context of Cold War competition between the superpowers for influences in the South (Africa). However, it was later realized that much of the mainstream development theory had served as instrument for American foreign policy and that it had ever been for her economic interest, more than anything else.

Growth theory as a school within development studies was popularized from the late 1940s to mid-1950s, after which it was gradually absorbed into the broader framework of modernization theory. It was based on the transfer of a series of Keynesian models for analyzing economic growth that had been developed in the United States and Europe to the Third World. The idea of development was conceived rather narrowly as economic growth. Social and cultural growth received attention only in their role of either facilitating or militating against appropriate societal changes that would accompany economic growth. Its intellectual roots being extensively based in Keynesian economics, growth theory was sometimes termed International Keynesianism. The Keynesian program of growth took a strongly interventionist position toward Third World development, which stressed comprehensive development planning by reformist states in collaboration with foreign donors.

Although growth theory rejected some aspects of neoclassical economics as inappropriate for Third World development, its models and theoretical framework nevertheless remained firmly rooted in Western economic history. This implied that growth theory was structured by a Eurocentric vision of development based on a Keynesian interpretation of the unique, albeit historically important, experience of core industrial capitalism. The ‘new nations’ of the post-colonial world, mostly in Africa were required to adopt the Western model in order to develop; this represented a ‘modernization imperative’ whereby countries pass through a sequence of stages on a unilinear path toward higher Western-style development. Most mainstream theorists in the 1950s and 1960s rejected the classical liberal emphasis on market forces and outward oriented growth as inadequate for the special Third World needs of rapid development, on the account of its inability to address the essentially dynamic problems of the Third World.

However, by the end of the 1960s, there was a shift to a more orthodox neo-liberal approach in major development sub-fields. By the late 1970s, the rise of anti-Keynesian conservatism in Europe and the US, and the seeming inability of growth theory to proffer solutions for the mounting Third World problems prompted a major change within mainstream theory as a whole. The political conditions at the same time favoured liberal theorists, and brought liberalism to the fore after a prolonged period at the margins of development discourse. The economic crisis experienced by many Third World nations in the late 1970s also provided additional impetus for neo-liberal counter-revolution.

Liberalism has evolved as a prominent ideology which determines and influences the contemporary global politics and economy. Hence, key to understanding the prominent economic features of the current global arrangement is the policy of neo-liberalization, which became prominent in the 1980s during the Reagan administration in the United States and the Thatcher government in the United Kingdom. [16] Neo-liberal economics mandate massive reduction in social spending and investment by the state, streamlining of government duties through job cuts, divestitures in public enterprises and the promotion of the private sector. The neo-liberal economic policy compels the state to divest public investment and participation in commerce. States' regulatory functions are often considered as “interference”, thereby subjecting citizens to the unbridled power of the so called free and fair market. Multilateral institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been saddled with the responsibility of ensuring the implementation of the neo-liberal economic policy across the globe. Over the past three decades, neo-liberalism has moved from the fringes to the center of development studies, thereby displacing Keynesianism as
the dominant development orthodoxy. To ascertain the influence of liberalism as an ideology and America as major economic actor on the global economic order, globalization has been described in some quarters as 'liberalization' and 'westernization'.

A major feature of the traditional neo-liberal development model is that it tends to focus singularly on the economic value of monetary transactions, i.e. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the exclusion of other progressive indicators such as social and environmental values. Growth, usually measured in terms of aggregate levels of production and consumption- typical of the neoliberal capitalist mindset- has been the prevailing measure of development. This Western vision of progress and modernization has commonly produced a pattern of development that ignores African traditional human-nature relations and inadequately addresses issues of social equity, ecological balance and overall sustainability.

From growth to modernization, and to neo-liberalization, mainstream development initiatives have applied ‘nature-conquering’ technologies on a massive scale, with devastating effects on many ecologically vulnerable Third World areas. Tropical ecosystems around the world are being destroyed at a rate of 25 million acres per year. [17] The relentless spread of large scale infrastructure projects has caused especially widespread damage to fragile environments and indigenous cultures in many countries. Many of these projects are typically initiated with the caption ‘development needs’, and are usually sponsored by foreign national governments. In some cases, the covert interests of some of these projects are sometimes elite groups (politicians, contractors, businessmen) linked to multinational capitals, whose interests are furthered through concerted lobbying within national and multinational development agencies. The poor indigenes of the affected communities are mainly excluded from the decision-making process while at the same time bearing the burden of the environmental cost of these projects. Moreover, economic growth . . . does not trickle down to the poor. An inequity aggravated by the fact that the economic wealth in the world so far is accomplished through unsustainable subsidies from the planet, while the cost for these subsidies are largely taken up by others, in general to poorest communities. [18] A case in point to illustrate environmental abuse by business corporations is the oil exploration activities by International Oil Companies (IOCs) in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

The Niger Delta region is an epitome of oil wealth. It holds at least 20 billion barrel of oil reserves, while the Shell led-petroleum activities pumps about 2 million barrels of oil daily from the region. The region represents the core area where exhaustive production and exploratory activities take place. Activities of the IOCs in the Niger Delta region include extractions, drilling, earth-moving activities, deep-sea explorations, opening of roads, bush clearing, deployment of heavy equipment, digging of borrow pits, massive construction works which include petroleum terminals. There are pipelines network that criss-cross parts of the region for easy crude oil transportation.

The Niger Delta today inhabits about 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups with about 250 dialects. [19] The region is inhabited by Nigerian minority groups such as Itsekiris, Urhobos, Ijaws, Ilajes, Ogonis, Kalabaris’, Efiks, Ikweres. Various reports have identified ways by which the IOCs’ operational activities impact negatively on their host communities. First, there is serious implication for human displacements. As the IOCs expand their exploration activities to capture new oil opportunities, they embark on human displacements with tragic interferences and disruptions of human settlement equilibrium. Farmlands, houses and other settlements were made to be supplanted by erected oil facilities. Second, operations of the IOCs often result in massive oil spills across lands, forests and sea in the Niger-Delta region. Oil-related chemicals spill on available surfaces across the lands and water in the operating areas. When this happens, the spillage disrupts the eco-balance. In addition, water is polluted and the earth is de-fertilized for good planting. Third, oil companies flare about 1.7 billion standard cubic meters of gas.
The negative effects of gas flaring are unimaginable. The recurring gas flares close to Niger Delta host communities precipitate air pollution. [20] [21] It contributes to global warming. It also leads to many destructive air hazards. Fourth, exploratory activities also pose serious health implications to its host communities in the Niger Delta region. Apart from the fact that host communities are made to contend with polluted water and other related health risks; there is strong challenge of hydro-carbon contamination that over-hangs every inhabitant in Niger Delta region. Contrary to the enormous wealth that accrues to the national government of Nigeria and to the capitalist Multinationals, the majority of the population in the Niger-Delta region are forced to live with wanton poverty. Encroachments on farmlands and water ways due to oil spillage and massive water pollution have denied Niger Delta host communities major sources of livelihood. Oil spills make farm lands unfit for cultivation, available plants are easily exterminated while fishes are poisoned to death. By implications, exploratory activities have engendered and perpetuated personal and community poverty across Niger-Delta Region of Nigeria.

Apart from the large-scale economic and developmental projects, many other forms of economic practices and activities are responsible for environmental destruction especially in the poor communities of the Third World nations. Such is the case, for example with the Green Revolution in agriculture, which has been associated with social inequalities, groundwater depletion, soil erosion and degradation, chemical contamination and the reduction in biogenetic diversity in many countries. Among the most serious environmental problems arising from unsustainable agricultural practices has been the gradual deterioration of the soil base in many Third World areas-a phenomenon the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has termed the ‘quiet crisis’. [22]

Either in the industrialised North or the developing countries of the South, the pursuit of economic development in line with the modern and neo-liberal growth models constitutes a major threat to development and environmental sustainability. It is reported that “over the last forty years in the United States, the genuine progress indicator (GPI) has been considerably lower than the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This disparity indicates that while personal consumption may be going up, the inequalities, social malaise, and degradation of nature are sending the GPI lower”. [23] The Brundtland report traced how ecological devastation in many developing countries is amplified by poverty-induced behaviour and by the need to secure foreign exchange. Production of primary export commodities is often linked with environmental damage. The current debt situation and adjustment policies orchestrated by the neo-liberal capitalist multinational development agencies and creditors coerce countries to increase their production of export commodities with concomitant further pressure on the bio-physical environment. The pressure on the developing countries to survive economic hardships and the pressure on the rich industrialised countries to sustain and expand their economic power have resulted in the global scope of environmental abuses.

It has become increasingly clear that the effects of environmental degradation do not respect national borders. With the current knowledge about a number of global environmental challenges -a weakening ‘green lung’ capacity of tropical rain forests, perforation of the ozone layer and global warming, shrinking of bio-diversity base, and pollution of oceans with potential implications for oxygen production by plankton – it is pertinent to note that global cooperation and international collaborations are urgently needed to salvage the situation holistically. The following section of the paper attempts an evaluation of pertinent environmental ethical theories which serve as the basis for prescribing right conducts and behaviour for environmental sustainability, especially as it relates to African realities.

4. Environmental Sustainability: Ethical Evaluation

According to Mark Sagoff, “the environment is what nature becomes when we view it as a life-support
system and as a collection of materials.” [24] He explained that one can either think of the system in a mechanistic fashion, as a collection of materials with various physical and chemical interactions or in a more organic way, giving attention to the many ways in which the individuals are interdependent in their very nature. From the latter viewpoint, the environment stands related to the beings within it intrinsically. As such, the environment as an organic system takes on an even greater significance than from a mechanistic perspective. These viewpoints further influence the value people place on the environment.

One distinction that plays a significant role in environmental ethics is the distinction between intrinsic value and instrumental value. Things have intrinsic value when they have worth in themselves for some reasons. Things have instrumental value if their worth is dependent on their usefulness for some purpose and for people. Some environmentalists believe that plants and animals for example, have only instrumental value. They believe that trees are valuable because of their usefulness to man. Other environmentalists insist that plants and ecosystems have value in themselves in some sense. Another term being used in environmental ethics is “prima facie” value. This literally means something like “at first glance”. Something has prima facie value if it has the kind of value that can be overridden by other interests or values. For example, the financial interests of a community could be valued and thus be considered as a prima facie value if it could be waived for stronger interests or values such as human health. These considerations regarding the nature and kinds of value play a crucial role in judging ethical issues and conducts relating to the environment. This is exemplified by the following perspectives in environmental ethics.

4.1. Anthropocentrism: As ethics of environmental sustainability, anthropocentrism prescribes a minimization of environmental abuse, ills and degradation as long as human good is effected in the process. For example,

It is difficult to think of an action which would do irreparable damage to the environment or ecosystem but which would not also threaten human well-being . . . if a polluter dumps toxic waste in a river, this action could be said to be wrong . . . because the interests of the river are violated, but also . . . because there are human interests in having clean water. [25]

The basic assumptions in the above position are: first, that only human beings are morally significant persons. Second, that the duty humans owe the environment is an indirect one, since keeping the environment safe and healthy will guarantee human survival.

According to critics, anthropocentrism is the mistake of giving exclusive or arbitrarily preferential consideration to human interests as opposed to the interests of others. [26] It asserts that only humans have intrinsic value or worth. According to this ethics, those things are good that promote the interests of human beings. Thus, it is believed that animals are valuable in so far as they are useful to man in a variety of ways such as providing emotional, aesthetic, nutritional, clothing, entertainment and medical benefits. Anthropocentrism according to Midgley is simple human chauvinism, narrowness of sympathy comparable to national or race or gender chauvinism. [27] Barbara Mackinnon pointed out another difficulty with anthropocentric view in that sometimes, anthropocentric values conflict. [28] The reality of value conflicts has brought about the Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) idea which helps in guiding and directing assessment of interests and values.

Anthropocentrism in ethics derives its negative and misleading normative appellation when used as analogous of egocentrism. Anthropocentrism cannot simply be condemned for being human-
centred if it is to perform the critical functions envisaged for it; since there are also respects in which human-centredness is unavoidable, unobjectionable or even desirable. [26] Human-centredness is unavoidable for the following reasons:

i. Every being’s worldview is shaped and limited by the position of the being within the world. That is, all beings and species posit the kind of perspective in which they are at the centre of the scheme of things. Therefore, humans can only think as humans. In other words, ‘perspectival anthropocentrism’ would appear to be inescapable. [29]

ii. Humans, like other beings, have legitimate interests which they are justified to pursue.

Moreover, the desirability of human-centredness consists in that self-love, properly understood, can be considered a precondition for loving others, so, by analogy, it could be maintained that only if humans know how to treat their fellow humans decently will they begin to be able to treat species decently. [30] Human-centredness, in Hayward’s analysis does not necessarily involve the exclusion of the well-being of other species, rather, serve to promote it.

4.2. Biocentrism: This is also known as extensionism of life-principle ethic, which by implication means that moral patiency should be extended beyond human interest to include other sentient and living things that can suffer pain and experience pleasure. The basis of this theory is that all existents have life as the common origin and characteristic. The advocates of this ethics are of two categories: those who argue that moral considerability be extended to all animals and plants; and those who hold that it must be restricted to animals only.

Albert Schweitzer in his *Reverence for Life* initiated the biocentric ethics. He emphasized that value be accorded to non-human forms of life including plants. According to him, life is the basic characteristic which all living things have in common and since life is sacred, then, it must be treated as such. It implies that humans have moral duty not just towards fellow human beings, but also to other forms of life. The following remarks succinctly capture Schweitzer’s position:

> A man is ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life that he’s able to assist and shrinks from injuring any that lives. He also not asks how far this or that life deserves one’s sympathy . . . and to what degree it is capable of feeling. Life as such is sacred to him. He tears no leaf from a tree, plucks no flower and takes care not to crush an insect. [31]

Taylor, in his *Respect for Nature*, as shown by Singer, advocated moral extension to all beings since they possess intrinsic value, therefore, they are purposeful. He reasoned thus,

> . . . Every living thing is pursuing its own good in its own unique way, once we see this, we can see all living things as we see ourselves and therefore we are ready to place the same value on their existence as we do on our own. [32]

Both Schweitzer and Taylor based their arguments on the principle of the value of life which commands one to respect life as the ultimate good. However, biocentrism commits the error it sets out to correct. It is an extreme position, since it could imply that both human and animals may not feed on plants and other existents in the ecosystem. This position may be too rigid and unrealistic for by this, the natural food chain will be disrupted. It negates the sustenance of life it is committed to preserve. Because of the apparent problems with this position, some of its proponents have attempted some sort of modifications. They argue that moral considerability should only be extended to animals or sentient beings since they have the capacity to experience pain and pleasure. This argument relies on the assumption that there is neither a distinct nor essential morally relevant
differences between mankind and mankind’s closest kin in the phylogenic scale. [33]

This modification seems to have failed; for the basis of the argument is unfounded and untenable. The restriction of experience of pain and pleasure to sentient existents is devoid of logical rigour. Experiencing pain and pleasure is a response to stimuli, which may be physical, psychological or physiological or sometimes combined. Plants also respond to stimuli. For instance, when a tree is exposed to excessive heat or burning at a close distance, it begins to respond to that experience while the leaf begins to shrink and drop from the trunk. It is therefore evident that the condition is hostile to that plant. The point is that there is no morally relevant difference between a beast and the *Iroko* tree. The discrimination between animals and plants is morally unjustifiable just like racism. The question is to what extent can biocentrism address environmental challenges?

From Schweitzer’s and Taylor’s perspective, animals and plants will only be good for nothing. They will exist, die and rot. The logic is that if humans forbid their use in order to preserve their intrinsic value, then human beings will be passive and other existents will be redundant. It is obvious then that no problem will be solved. Although biocentrism claims to rely on the principle of life-ethic, it at the same time contradicts the natural process of life forms. It should be noted that decomposition, tear and wear, are natural realities that necessarily occur as natural processes. Human activities can only alter the rate or speed of these processes. Human activities are therefore encouraged to strive at attaining and maintaining natural equilibrium. Going by this version of biocentric environmental ethics, man would have perpetually remained in primitivity - no science, medicine, technology, education and development. There would not have been any difference between human and brute. The responsibility of man to the natural environment lies in his unparalleled ability to coordinate the affairs of other life forms and to curtail the inconveniences imposed by nature. Hence, a situation in which man is absolutely inactive and totally constrained from the use of various forms and levels of life for his immediate, remote, direct and indirect benefits can only remain at the level of hypothesis.

From Singer’s position, biocentrism may also be inadequate because naturally there are some carnivorous animals (predators) that inflict pains and feed on other less powerful animals (prey). Should all animals who feed on other animals be exterminated so that pain will not be inflicted on other animals? Would this sort of extermination not lead to self-contradiction on the part of Singer? This version of biocentrism is inconsistent and inadequate, even as shown in Singer’s argument where he admitted that the existence of carnivorous animals do pose one problem for the ethics of animal liberation. [34] Goodpaster stresses this inadequacy by rejecting the sentiency criterion put forward by Singer. He alleges that it is guilty of the same limitation and arbitrariness because if rationality or any other criteria for moral considerability proposed by the humanist is arbitrary and irrelevant to the status that it would confer, how is sentiency any less arbitrary and irrelevant. [35]

4.3. *Ecocentrism*: Ethicist of this tradition stress that it is whole systems or ecosystems that has intrinsic value and not humans only. This ethic is grounded on a metaphysics that is radically different from that of the preceding ethics. The traditional metaphysical bifurcation of man and nature has been the basis for moral conclusions in anthropocentrism and biocentrism. On the other hand, the basic presupposition in ecocentrism is that “no metaphysical cleavage can be made between man and animals [nature]”. [36] An ecosystem is a whole of interacting and interdependent parts within a circumscribed locale. Ecosystems are a continuum of variations, a patchy mosaic with fuzzy edges. Some interactions are persistent, others occasional. [37] The ecosystems are loosely structured wholes. The boundary changes and some members come and go. There are varieties of relationship, sometimes there is competition within the whole; sometimes there is symbiosis. The need to survive pushes various creatures to be creative in their struggle for an adaptive fit. Although it is loose and decentralized, there is a unity to the whole.
Every section of life on human planet consists of a system of life, intricately interwoven and interdependent elements that function as a whole. It forms a basic pyramid with myriad smaller organisms at the base and gradually fewer and more complex organisms at the top. Plants depend on the soil, insects depend on plants, and other animals depend on insects. In this system, individual organism feeds off one another. Some elements come, others go, it is the whole that continues. The health or otherwise of the ecosystem is attributable to the whole system. Hence, “a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to do otherwise”. [38] The system has integrity because it is a unity of interdependent elements that combine to make a whole with a unique character. It has stability, not in that it does not change, but that it changes only gradually. Finally, it has specific beauty which reflects as a matter of harmony, well-ordered form, or unity in diversity. [39]

Morality becomes a matter of preserving this system or doing only what fits it. Hence, ecocentrism is an ethic that deals with humans’ relations to land and to the animals and plants that grow upon it. [40] The standard of measuring morality becomes the effects human actions have on the ecosystem. An action is morally worthy if it produces good effects, guarantees the preservation, stability, integrity and the beauty of the biotic community. It is bad if it hinders the sustenance of the same. It therefore means that ecocentrism dictates caution on freedom of action in the struggle for survival, such that human freedom is not devoid of responsibility.

However, some criticisms have been raised against ecocentrism despite its inspirational tendency in advocating environmental responsibility. It is alleged of being consequentialist, since the rightness or otherwise of an action depends on how its consequence benefits or harms the environment. Hence, it fails in providing genuine traditional moral principle. But this criticism is not capable of invoking any major upset in ecocentric ethics because there is no basis for regarding traditional moral principle as a better standard than consequentialism. Moreover, the existence of a single moral principle per se is still the object of a hot debate in the field of ethics. Hence, the above criticism is a reflection of a philosophical prejudice.

Another objection states that ecocentric ethic cannot establish the fact that all things or beings in the ecosystem possess equal intrinsic value, and if it does, it fails to tell us the value of individual micro-organism or plant. Therefore, some scholars believe that it fails as a normative theory. They assert that it only fosters emotional inclination and awareness of environmental danger awaiting humankind and the need to change. If this is the case, then ecocentrism has made a laudable contribution by evoking a tremendous shift in human attitude from the selfish approach, such that humans are now conscious of their responsibility and obligation to the biotic community.

Those who claim that ecocentrism fails as a normative theory are not explicit enough, because the observations and objections they raised are not sound enough for such a conclusion. A theory is normative when it advocates a certain conviction that is considered morally praise worthy and fit for practice. The “ought to be” is always advocated in any normative theory, and the principle of universalizability is a key condition that makes a theory normative. Persuasions could be one of the efficient ways of changing the status-quo. Raising awareness is also an expedient effort in an effective campaign against environmental abuse. Hence, ecocentrism remains an ethical theory for environmental sustainability.

4.4. African Environmental Ethics: Africa, as a continent, has multiplicity of cultural practices and belief systems that make it difficult to generalize or sum up the entire African moral dispositions into a consistent whole without a sweeping generalization. To this extent, one of the Africans renowned scholars, Kwasi Wiredu once argued that there is no basis for an “African culture”, except for the
common oppression suffered under the Westerners and present indigenous misgovernment. [41] However, there are basic constitutive socio-cultural elements that cut across the continent of Africa. Some of these cultural practices and beliefs define the place and role of humans in natural community and prescribe norms that help to regulate human conduct in the society. Regarding humans and the natural environment, it is widely believed by African cultures that there is a sense of sacredness that characterizes the link and relationship between human beings and other beings and things in the world. These relationships are governed and monitored by some metaphysical forces, which ensure the natural order of things by allocating rewards and punishment. This belief has helped, among other things, to preserve social order and environmental values from generations to generations across many African societies.

To a large extent, the traditional normative principle upon which African land ethic is based, and which in fact may help to address the current ecological crises in Africa, is found in their belief in communalism and supernaturalism. Communalism and supernaturalism are fundamental world-views which provide the basis for almost all aspects of African life. Communalism, in this regard simply refers to the African social organization that sets community interests prior to individual interests. The traditional African social system is such that the diverse individual aspirations must align with the common good as defined by the community. Therefore, the achievement of communal objectives takes precedence over personal interests. In this regard, communal property is treated with respect and care by every member of the community. The traditional African idea of the community is a relationship of kinship that comprises of the unborn, the living and the dead. For instance, the Yoruba, a socio-cultural group in the South-West of Nigeria, Africa, view community as an integrated whole in which human and non-human forces and powers- physical and quasi-physical- interact in a mutually reinforcing manner. To corroborate this belief, Omari argued that “the important thing which united all African societies with regard to ownership of land was that land was considered a communal property belonging to both the living and the dead. Those ancestors who had lived on the land belonged to the social unit which owned and controlled the land and each individual who used the land felt a communal obligation for its care and administration before passing it to the next generation”. [42] This metaphysical conception of the community by many African cultural groups is extended to their conception of communal assets which include their natural environment.

By supernaturalism, the Africans believe that there is a particular force and spirit in control of every existent and its position in nature. For example, it is the Yoruba belief that the world is not one, over which a person or group of persons can claim to have total control. It is not a place where an individual can assert his unbridled and unguarded freedom. Supernaturalism is the basis for the practice by many traditional African societies to reserve places such as forests, rivers and mountains as sacred abode of spiritual and quasi-physical existents. These secluded portions of their natural environment were accorded great respect and care as a matter of communal and individual obligations. The spiritual explanations provided for the obligation to respect and care for the environment was a communal element that the individuals have imbibed as basis for personal environmental responsibility. The ownership, allocation and control of land, forests and water resources all fell within the spiritual realm. Several forest phenomena; trees, rocks, mountains, pools, mermaids, snakes and large trees were made holy and conserved by cultural and spiritual design. [43] The affinity between the traditional African and his environment is captured in the statement “the forest is our skin and if one removes the skin of the human being, the end result is death”. [44]

Theoretically, the African environmental ethical orientation is similar to the ecocentric thesis. The closest affinity between the two orientations is in the conception of the place of man within the biotic community and man’s responsibility towards others in the natural environment. The
traditional African environmental ethics commits human beings to the obligation to sustain the integrity, balance and beauty of the ecosystem. This commitment is reinforced by and reflected in the African agricultural practices, festivals and rituals, totems and taboos, industry, housing, etc. There were several hunting and farming rules that were generally observed by the hunters and farmers to ensure the sustainability of the natural environment. Although these laws were occasionally violated by few individuals, the laws were largely and easily obeyed because they appealed to people’s cultural sensibilities. Therefore, it becomes very important to maximally engage cultural and indigenous resources in addressing environmental concerns both at the theoretical and practical realms; a proposition which is emphasized in the ‘eco-development’ approach to development.

5. Appraising Eco-development as Alternative Strategy for Development and Environmental Sustainability in Africa

Since the early postwar period, the central focus of the mainstream development strategies in Africa has been economic growth and the top-down diffusion of development impulses. The pattern of development was such that important decision-making was controlled by major international institutions in collaboration with local Third World (African) elites. In the execution of development projects, participation of the concerned people or communities was restricted to some hastily organized meetings in which foreign experts updated the people about the objectives and implementation of such projects. This approach to development had crippled the principles of self-help and community development in most part of Africa thereby inhibiting popular development.

In view of the above, alternative theory of development was born out of the realization that economic growth was not necessarily correlated with other development objectives such as rapid employment creation, eradication of poverty and inequalities, provision of basic needs and enhancement of human freedoms. The experience of the 1950s and 1960s suggested that, while growth was important, it was by no means a sufficient condition to induce broad-based development. It was noted that more than a decade of rapid growth in underdeveloped countries has been of little or no benefits to perhaps a third of their population. [45] Successful development should be measured not in abstract, aggregate growth indices, but according to other people-oriented criteria, such as the universal provision of basic needs, promotion of social equity, enhancement of human productive and creative capabilities through education, and most importantly, the capacity of communities to set and meet their own development goals. Thus, the themes that alternative theorists of development grapple with include: refocusing on human needs; new concepts of planning; participation and power; women and gender; environment and sustainability; popular development; among others.

Environmental considerations were given particular prominence within the alternative concept of ‘eco-development’, which was introduced by Maurice Strong at the 1972 Stockholm conference and was further elaborated and popularized by Ignacy Sachs. [46] The eco-development approach did not necessarily seek to halt the growth processes entirely, but called for industrialization and other development processes to be made more compatible with environmental sustainability through means such as the adoption of appropriate technologies, the encouragement of conservationist life-styles, and the use of bottom-up participatory planning approaches. Eco-development includes other elements such as harmonizing consumption patterns and lifestyles with environmental needs; using ecologically based productive systems; maintaining low energy profiles and promoting renewable energy bases; limiting depletion of non-renewable resources through recycling and other means; finding more socially and environmentally sustainable uses for existing resources and utilizing decentralized planning methods to encourage local participation. [47]

The alternative concept of eco-development is also devoid of any universal or abstract meaning of
development. As a strategy, it consists of specific elements- a particular people with their own values and needs, living in a distinct region with culturally specific resource. Eco-development contends that, in the real sense, development does not occur in a generalized form. It can only be of something specific, such as a certain eco-region with its own special conditions and needs. [47] Eco-development appreciates the reality of cultural differences and the contextual specificity of the various human groups. However, it is important to note the danger of implying the problematic cultural ‘relativism’ from this realistic cultural ‘difference’. The former involves windowless ideas that cannot engage in dialogue and communication. [48] It could also be difficult to strip development of any universal character for this would mean denying it of any global relevance and discourse. It also implies its negation as a human phenomenon. Likewise, to affirm it only as a phenomenon of specific culture- ecoregion- involves a contradiction because it is possible to logically group the entire human race as a single social group. In this sense, we shall be talking of humanity as a single human culture.

Despite the possible misrepresentations of eco-development, it remains a strategically viable idea, calling on countries, especially in Africa, to be more self-reliant- to create strategies appropriate to their own ecological and cultural contexts rather than looking to the North and West for development solutions. This does not rule out collaborations and occasional foreign interventions. It advocates that development strategies should make use of the resources in a given region in ways that both sustain ecological system and provide for basic human needs. This strong normative component gives the eco-development approach a paradigmatic quality. [49]

To be truly sustainable, development must meet the needs of local people, because otherwise, many people will be compelled by necessity to take more from the environment than is advisable. Struggles over the environment often involve survival or the struggle to meet basic needs; the cost of individuals pursuing their own self-interests is often borne by the group. The appeal to idealism or altruism to protect the environment is questionable and unrealistic when households are forced to behave ‘selfishly’ in their struggle to survive. Hence, sustainable development should be linked with goals of distributional equity and social justice – within and between countries as well as generations. This underscores its inherently political nature. As the WCED (1987) argues, achieving sustainability implies basic political change in line with an alternative development agenda.

The pursuit of sustainable development requires a political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision making. . . . This is best secured by decentralizing the management of resources upon which local communities depend, and giving these communities an effective say over the use of these resources. It will also require promoting citizen’s initiatives, empowering people’s organizations, and strengthening local democracy. [50]

As it is contained in “Our Common Future”, sustainability, particularly in the context of African continent, has a strong political element linked to the needs and interests of the people. This concern for meeting popular needs also inevitably gives sustainability an important livelihood component. This connection is most explicit in the concept of “sustainable livelihood security” developed by Chambers and Conway:

[S]ustainable livelihood security [is] an integrating concept . . . livelihood is defined as adequate stocks and flows of food and cash to meet basic needs. Security refers to secure ownership of, and access to, resources and income – earning activates, including reserves and assists
to offset risk, ease shakos and meet contingencies. Sustainable refers to the maintenance or enhancement of resource productivity on a long-term basis. [51]

The concept implies conserving natural resources and other environmental factors that are essential to people’s livelihood. It includes a broader analysis of links between environmental sustainability, basic-needs provisions, and issues of power at the national and international levels. For all these reasons, eco-development represents a significant advance in our ability to conceptualize sustainability especially in Africa.

6. Conclusion
Arising from the arguments put forward in this article, one could safely submit that traditional mainstream development models are largely responsible for the massive global abuses that have brought about the various ecological challenges on humanity in general and Africans in particular. Under the neo-liberal model of development, the vast majority of the African population is alienated and enslaved to material greed. Human crave for consumption has been expanded with resultant pressure on limited natural resources. The high rate of environmental violations and non-conservationist tendencies could be blamed on excessive crave for material acquisition which is typical of neo-liberal economic system. In this regard, sustainable consumption pattern becomes desirable and inevitable for healthy environment.

For Africans, the traditional pattern of consumption used to align with the necessity to preserve the ecosystem. However, cultural dislocation which is endemic on the continent of Africa has led to the neglect of those traditional values that have hitherto sustained prosperous economy and healthy environments on the continent. Although, absolute reliance on appeal to traditional pattern of consumption may not be applicable in this age, national policies and legal frameworks should be formulated and implemented to ensure sustainable household, corporate and public consumptions patterns. Some of these policies which could be reviewed and adopted for regulations include: the Energy Labelling Directive [52], the Ecolabel Regulation [53], the Green Public Procurement Communication [54], etc.

Therefore, meaningful improvement in human attitude towards the environment, especially in Africa, is possible when there is a paradigm shift in dominant definition of and approach to development. The redefinition of the concept of development will imply a reassessment of development priorities in a way that the neo-liberal economic error is not perpetuated. The error which proceeds from reducing development to economic progress, translates to fundamental human problems as captured below:

In the pursuit of economic development, human beings have abused the biosphere in their way to economic ascendancy; they have violated the peaceful cohabitation of their fellows, as in slavery and the slave trade. The blind pursuit of economic growth has brought the current calamitous conditions upon them. Environmental degradation, social breakdown, moral decadence, psychological turmoil, cultural dislocation, insecurity, and economic depression are some of the problems that threaten their [human] very existence. [55]

In a nutshell, green and innovative energy solutions are necessary requirement for the realization of the desired sustainable development across Africa but they are not sufficient without corresponding fundamental changes in the African socio-economic and political systems.
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