

ECO-EFFICIENCY AS AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY FOR ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

One of the biggest concerns of this age in Africa and other third world regions is the issue of population growth as opposed to environmental sustainability. The issue is precisely whether the earth's resources can sustain the rapid expansion of population and the future generation. The relationship between population growth, depletion of resources and environmental sustainability has reignited an extensive worldwide debate

Current and projected figures in Africa are indeed alarming. By 2050 the world population will reach 9 billion with 20 % living in Africa, while the resources will be reducing both qualitatively and quantitatively, thus posing a great challenge on the capacity of countries to feed their citizens.

The issue is of great concern at the global level as evidenced by the number and importance of international conferences organized on the topic. Out of 17 newly adopted Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030), the Global leaders dedicated specifically 34 goals on environment protection and sustainable development.

While the issue is of great concern at the global level, rural and poor communities in Africa developing countries are more concerned about their day to day survival. When asked about their participation in sustaining natural resources for future generation, their response comes with no hesitation that they won't be any future generation if the current is struggling for survival.

It is obvious that the majority of African countries cannot achieve effective environmental protection if serious measures are not taken to ensure equity in natural resource distribution, win- win partnership with external investors, application of eco-efficient strategies. This paper will mainly focus on the latter.

Since we agree that eco-efficiency means " meeting the needs of the present without jeopardizing the needs of future generations by increasing productivity so that more is obtained from less", the concept of 'eco-efficiency' and its policy have an important meaning in Less Developed Countries (LDC) context because of its relationships with sustainable development concept.

In this context, we look at eco-efficiency at three levels

Household and community level: many people in developing countries depend directly on the local environment not only for their livelihoods but also for their very survival. To meet their basic needs, the tendency is to overuse the existing natural resources, that results in environmental degradation, they end up by producing less, using more resources and energy. People are not aware or do not care about the adverse impact of their subsistence practices on environment.

At this micro-level, eco-efficiency means the ability for local communities to use efficiently the resources available to meet their basic needs, grow and improve the living conditions for all members of the community, while at the same time they secure these resources for the future generations.

Eco-efficiency means also for the poor people who do not have much resource to increase the productivity in order to meet their needs and at the same time preserve and secure their capital (natural resources).

At this level, eco-efficiency is achieved at a micro-level (households, local communities) by promoting community behavioral change with regard to harmful practice and availing new and affordable technology to the communities to produce more while using little resources. There is a need for more innovative farming technologies that will enable communities to meet their own current needs and secure resources for future generation

Primary environmental care (PEC) is a successful strategy since it integrates three essential components:-meeting basic health and livelihoods needs; empowering people and communities for decision-making and action in accordance with their own priorities and ensuring protection and sustainable use of natural resources in and around communities. So that eco-efficiency strategy is internalized as it is grounded on people's needs and priorities as shown in UNICEF's projects in Philippines (Family Food Production), Brazil (Poverty and Environment project) in Nepal (Activities to reduce Women's workload) in Madagascar (Environmental Education) and Tanzania (Child Survival and Development Program).

Another strategy worth the investment is to promote alternatives so that the majority of people do not live on the direct exploitation of natural resources, these can include food processing technology and service

The National level should more focus on the management of national resources, like lakes, forests, mines etc. and national policies in environmental issues.

National Governments are responsible for the distribution of natural resources to avoid overexploitation of marginal lands, setting up and enforcing policies related to the efficient use of local resources and supporting environmental education programs.

Local Governments also have a big responsibility in the management of national resources and negotiation at international level.

Eco-efficiency means at this level, effective implementation of policies that enable people to improve their living conditions, using available resources and at same time protecting the whole environment. It means a proper repartition of the available resources in accordance with local needs and the need for a sustainable yield and assigning proper resources to external investors and policies: implementing policies that regulate international business in order to combine the maximum profit from the business and the protection of local resources.

Local Government should make sure that needs and priorities of local communities are taken into consideration by different investors and support the implementation of alternative economic opportunities to reduce the pressure and the dependence on natural resources.

At the international level, developed countries are more concerned by the negative impacts of the industrialization (pollution), developing countries worry about the efficient use of natural resources to alleviate poverty without jeopardizing the future generations. Even though the concerns are a bit different; both developed and less developed countries are interested in collaboration in order to maximize the outcome.

The international network for environmental activists might be a very efficient lobbying body that channels the voice of the poorest in the Third World.

It has been observed that the business companies are interested in Third World markets that offer cheap labor, raw material at good prices and a good market for consumption. They need to secure their raw material as stated by Caroline Whitfield "It's in our commercial interest to secure our supplies for the future. If our business is to be sustainable, we must ensure that fish stocks are sustainable too."

Eco-efficiency is efficiently achieved through partnership. The concept combines the economic, environmental and social imperative. Partnership is the best way to meet all actors' needs and interests and have greater impact. Multilevel strategies are required. "...the achievement of sound environmental practices depends upon a constructive partnership between businesses, governments and local communities..."

A global partnership where power and responsibilities are equitably shared, based on a win-win strategy is the best and effective strategy with great benefits for environmental protection for sustainable development.

It can mobilize greater amounts, and wider variety, of skills and resources than can be achieved by acting alone; address problems in a more integrated, multidisciplinary, and comprehensive manner.

It can eliminate unnecessary duplication of cost and effort, which is especially important where there are shortages of financial resources or relevant skills; -It can help traditional adversaries, or organizations, which have had little cause to interact in the past, to broaden their perspectives and to respect each other's needs and capacities.

The multiple face-to-face interactions which occur between partners can also facilitate the flow of information and promote technology transfer.

The global partnership definitely gives more power and room to local communities to voice their concerns and make sure they have the attention required.

The big challenge is to achieve a real, equal partnership where power is equal shared between all partners. Local communities are poor and do not have all information required. The coalition between local communities and network worldwide in order to

face the multinational companies and financial markets may be one strategy to balance the power in negotiations and actions.

In developing countries, governmental regulation toward private sector is needed to make sure that the minimum standard in environmental protection is observed. Some suggestions from the readings are applicable in less developed context such as negotiated policies that provide regulatory flexibility with accountability and market-based policies that create incentives to take positive environmental action and disincentives to negative environmental impacts.

In case where Government and business companies do not reach negotiated policies and market-based do not work, Governments have to use regulatory standards in order to protect resources and local people against the powerful companies.

Local Governments in developing countries face a dilemma: because of the high level of poverty they need to attract and offer favorable conditions to investors, but at same time to apply eco-efficiency in order to gain the maximum from enterprises and give less. Unfortunately, in many cases, they give priority to foreign companies at the expense of environment and local communities.

The real partnership where local communities and NGOs are powerful will support Government position for the good of the nation.

Financial markets are still quite timid to invest in environmental issues because the field is new and risky, but since the matter becomes an indicator of sustainable development and involves market-based strategies, financial markets won't take long to get in. On the other hand, there is a hope for developing countries since their economically growth is faster than developed countries. So the higher risk is offset by the promise of higher returns.

The involvement of financial markets is very crucial in developing countries to achieve eco-efficiency and growth without depleting natural resources. Local governments have to create an institutional framework and political regime that insure both investors and local community.

Greater rewards for greater eco-efficiency are the best way to attract financial markets.

