DVA 1501 Assignment 3 2024

Development Studies (University of South Africa)

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Introduction to Development Studies

Assignment 3

Sustainable Development

Contents

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Introduction

We live in a world with technological advancement like never before. Globally we have seen a major increase in life expectancy, and a decrease in mortality rates (Ndlovu, S., Ndlovu, M., Makhubedu, K., Sentime, K., Maphosa, B., Mazibuko, S., Du Plessis, G., Zulu, N. 2021:119).

However, as a species we face major economic challenges like poverty and inequality (Ndlovu et al 2021:67), environmental challenges like deforestation and pollution, as well as social challenges like health and education (Ndlovu et al 2021:72).

In this essay I will explore the concept of sustainable development, the three pillars of sustainable development and the different approaches to achieving development in a sustainable manner to preserve our natural resources for future generations.

Sustainable Development

Ndlovu et al (2021:67) remarks that in order for one to understand the concept of sustainable development one needs to understand the two main terms namely, sustainability and development.

For development to occur notable improvements need to be made in the well-being of people.

Sustainability emphasises that human societies must live and meet their needs within the limitations of the global environment. This means that humans must find solutions that can improve human welfare without resulting in environmental degradation.

The United Nations WCED (in Ndlovu et al 2021:68) define sustainability as development that meets the needs of present generations without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own needs.

Ndlovu et al (2021:68) stresses that sustainable development is "in an ongoing process of evolution" and agrees that humans must continuously ensure that developmental activities does not reduce the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The three interdependent pillars of sustainable development

Ndlovu et al (2021:71) emphasises that the quality of life must be improved for all without increasing the use of natural resources beyond the environment's ability to supply said resources. For this to happen the main focus of sustainable development must be on three interdependent pillars, namely economic, social and environmental.

A system that is economically stable is able to successfully do the following:

- continuously supply goods and services,
- maintains a manageable level of government and external debt
- avoids extreme sectoral imbalances that damage agricultural and/or industrial production

A system that is environmentally stable do the following:

- maintains a stable resource base
- avoids the overexploitation of non-renewable resources
- maintains biodiversity, atmospheric stability and ecosystem services

A system that is socially sustainable do the following:

- fairly distributes opportunities among all persons
- adequately provides social services such as health, education and gender equality

The social dimension focuses on reconciliation of the environment, development and governance related to the provision of the above-mentioned social services.

Approaches to Sustainability and Environmentalism

Ecocentrism

According to Wealth (2018) ecocentrism is a term that means values centred on ecology and states that ecocentrics see themselves as being subject to nature, rather than in control of it. Furthermore, ecocentrics will contend that humans must strive towards self-reliance and using low-impact technology and respect the natural world for its processes and products.

Society must shift focus to be more nature-centred instead of human-centred. This would ensure that unspoiled areas are preserved and degraded areas restored.

Technocentrism

In contrast to the above technocentrics firmly believe that humans have control over nature and that human technology are fully capable of influencing, controlling and even protecting the environment (Wealth:2018). They are of the opinion that scientific and technological advancement is the solution to environmental problems in developed and developing countries.

Anthropocentrism

Similar to technocentrism, anthropocentrism is also human-centred (Ndlovu et al 2021:69) and believe that human inventiveness, creativity and resourcefulness play a significant role in morality and conduct.

Amongst others anthropocentrism is competitive, exploitative, seek progress, manipulative and believe that the environment is a given (Ndlovu et al 2021:70).

Gaianism

The Gaia hypothesis is also regarded as an ecocentric approach and state "that the earth is a self-regulating system" (Ndlovu et al 2021:69).

Communalism

Communalists are of the opinion that people, through their beliefs, values, and behaviours have a direct impact on nature and simultaneously societies are products of said nature (Ndlovu et al 2021:69).

Industrialists, capitalists and lumber barons, for example are consciously intervening with nature in their quest to develop and in doing so have distorted the society– nature relationship.

Communalists maintain that fairness is the key and seek a reconciliation with nature. "They favour the use of renewable resources, self-reliant development and appropriate technologies" (Ndlovu et al 2021:69).

Accommodation

The accommodation approach value all life and emphasises that although people have the right to use resources, it needs to be done in a sustainable, responsible and careful way (Ndlovu et al 2021:70).

Interventionism

In contrast to the accommodation approach above the interventionists believe that supply and demand will balance out the exploitation of resources (Ndlovu et al 2021:70). The money generated by businesses and the markets will fund research and innovation to overcome the exploitation of these resources.

Interventionists trust that innovation, efficiency and the free-market system will ensure sustainable development.

Approaches I subscribe to

I agree with Wealth (2018) that all these approaches have positive viewpoints. Human progress, innovation and technology are vital to societal development and the technologists and interventionists play a central role in this aspect. I do, however worry that moguls like Elon Musk are taking it too far and their innovations and technologies will in the long run prove too costly to the environment.

At the other end of the spectrum ecocentrics, gaianists and communalists can live a far more peaceful life, away from the air, soil and noise pollution created by capitalists and industrialists, living in equilibrium with all living and non-living things. Our earth, wildlife, ecosystems, and oceans need a break from the burden of our existence. However, the extreme "deep ecologists" (Ndlovu et al 2021:69) may not realise the major impact innovation and technology had and continue to have on the overall health and wellbeing of human beings.

Personally, I subscribe to taking a balanced approach to sustainable development. Walk to town whenever possible, plant a tree, grow a vegetable garden, and reduce overall consumption, but also support necessary technological advancements that will improve our wellbeing on this planet and preserve the world for future generations.

Conclusion

In this essay I addressed the necessity of sustainable development, the three pillars of sustainable development and the different approaches that can be followed to conduct development in a sustainable manner.

The human species still have a long way to go to overcome the social, economic and environmental challenges we face while still preserving and restoring the natural resources for future generations.

However, if the human species can find a way to work together, we will achieve our common goals.

References

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