



**UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK**

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**Are Economic Growth and Environmental  
Sustainability Compatible?  
A Study of Theory, Policy and Practice**

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**Bachelor of Arts in European Studies**

# Title Page

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A study of theory, policy and practice

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# Correction Sheet

## **Declaration**

I hereby declare that this project is entirely my own work, in my own words, and that all sources used in researching it are fully acknowledged and all quotations properly identified. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, by me or another person, for the purpose of obtaining any other credit/grade. I understand the ethical implications of my research, and this work meets the requirement of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee.

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Ella Harrington  
7<sup>th</sup> March 2013

## **Abstract**

Sustainable development has been recognised as the dominant paradigm of development in both the developed and the developing world. It adopts a triple bottom-line approach as it integrates economic, environmental and social factors. The aim of this study is to determine the extent to which economic growth can be pursued while simultaneously ensuring environmental sustainability. This research question will be explored in terms of theory through the examination of the concept of sustainable development. It will then be discussed at policy level by an analysis of the Millennium Development Goals. Finally the case study of Ghana will be chosen in order to determine if economic development and environmental sustainability are compatible in practice.

‘We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children’  
-Ancient Indian Proverb

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Dedication

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this project to my family in Ahotokurom and Abee, Ghana who have provided me with inspiration and motivation since the day I met them.

## Key to Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CFCs	Chlorofluorocarbons
EAP	Environmental Action Plan
EC	European Commission
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EPC	Environmental Protection Council
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
GPRS I	Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy
GPRS II	Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy
GSGDA	Ghana Shared Growth and Development Agenda
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Countries
HDI	Human Development Index
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITNs	Insecticide-Treated Bed Nets
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MEST	Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology
NDPC	National Development Planning Commission
NEP	National Environmental Policy
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WB	World Bank
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCS	World Conservation Strategy
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development

## **Introduction**

Sustainable development promotes economic growth, environmental sustainability and social development in both the developed and the developing world. As the current dominating paradigm of development, the principles of sustainable development have been adopted worldwide and have had a significant impact on international agreements and national policies and strategies. Sustainable development emphasises the necessity to achieve further economic growth in an environmentally-friendly manner as past patterns of economic development have had serious implications on the global environment. The aim of this project is to determine the extent to which economic growth and environmental sustainability are compatible and can be simultaneously sought and achieved. The mainstream and critical perspectives of sustainable development will be discussed in the literature review in order to provide a broad understanding of the various approaches and understandings of the concept. Chapter One examines the theory of sustainable development by providing an in-depth analysis of the origins, aims and evolution of the concept. This will highlight how the proponents of sustainable development deem it possible to achieve economic growth while ensuring environmental sustainability. Chapter Two focuses on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a key policy framework; the MDGs have been promoted to a high position of priority in the field of development and as a result have been accepted as a major global challenge. By examining the objectives of the MDGs the degree to which they have integrated the 3 pillars of sustainable development can be determined and it can be established whether they have attributed equal importance to the achievement of economic development and environmental sustainability. The limitations and contradictions in the attempt to simultaneously seek economic growth and environmental sustainability are also highlighted

## Introduction

as they appear to be much more prevalent when attempting to implement sustainable development in practice.

To provide a greater understanding of the impact of sustainable development on the developing world, the case study of Ghana has been chosen in Chapter Three. A case study provides the reader with an in-depth comprehension of a topic; by studying the impact that the theoretical concept of sustainable development has had on a specific country the objectives and limitations in achieving the objectives of sustainable development become much clearer. Chapter Three examines the progress that has been made in Ghana toward achieving the MDGs and discusses how sustainable development has been integrated within the national strategies and environmental policies of the country. Ghana has been chosen as a case study as the country has made considerable efforts to accelerate the economic development of the country; Chapter Three analyses whether equal efforts have also been made in the implementation of sustainable development practices and if Ghana's development strategies and environmental policies have fully integrated the principles of sustainable development. The implementation of Ghana's environmental policies at ground level will be examined by focusing on the issue of deforestation in the country. Chapter Three will also highlight the difficulties and limitations that Ghana and other developing countries encounter in the attempt to achieve further economic development in an environmentally-friendly manner. It will be apparent that in practice attempts to simultaneously achieve the objectives of the 3 pillars of sustainable development have several limitations especially in the developing world. At this stage of the project it will be possible to determine the degree to which economic growth and environmental sustainability are compatible and if they have been assigned equal importance by the global community. The findings of the project will be highlighted in the conclusion.

## **Methodology**

A vast array of both primary and secondary sources has been consulted in researching this project. Primary sources such as various UN reports, WB statistics and Ghana's poverty reduction papers were examined in order to gain an in depth understanding of the chosen project topic. The most recent versions of these reports, statistics and papers were studied in order to make the project as relevant and up to date as possible. A wide range of secondary sources were consulted through the examination of existing literature on the project topic. These secondary sources included textbooks, journal articles and the internet. The information provided by these primary and secondary sources has been combined in order to produce an original project and answer the research questions posed in the initial states of the project.

## **Literature Review**

Sustainable development has been firmly introduced into the political arena of international thinking since the interdependency of economic growth and environmental sustainability was recognised. The evolution of the concept and its emergence as a global challenge has been largely shaped by three mega-conferences; The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. The documents produced by these conferences are all focused around a remarkably consistent core of mainstream ideas (Adams 2009, p. 59). There remain many definitions of sustainable development emerging from various disciplines with different assumptions about the relationship between society and nature however the definition provided by the Brundtland Report in 1987 is the most widely accepted and cited. The Report produced by the WCED defined sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED 1987). Understandings of sustainable development have been altered over time due to the evolution of environmental and development studies culminating in the widespread recognition of that economic and social development must be achieved in an environmentally-friendly manner (WCED 2007, p. 260).

There has been extensive academic literature produced on the concept of sustainable development; this literature has emerged from various disciplines such as development studies, environmental studies, sociology and economics which adopt differing views of the emergence, practice and goals of sustainable development. Differing approaches towards sustainable development have also emerged between mainstream perspectives, such as those of the UN and the WB, who approach sustainable development primarily in terms of

economic conditions and critical perspectives, such as Environmental Marxists and Poststructuralists, who adopt a more ecologically focused approach. The substantial debate surrounding sustainable development is reflected by the broad range of literature available on the subject (Castro 2004, pp. 195-196). However most if not all approaches to sustainable development have reached a consensus that it is mainly concerned with maintaining conditions for the future generations. Most definitions acknowledge the three interdependent pillars on which sustainable development is based; the environmental, economic and social dimensions and they recognise that the ultimate goal is to simultaneously achieve maximum progress across all three areas. The majority of approaches also accept the necessity of establishing a compromise between economic development and environmental sustainability so that economic growth can be pursued in an environmentally sustainable manner in both the developed and the developing world (Castro 2004, p. 196, Elliott 2008, p. 45).

Mainstream approaches emphasise that environmental degradation in the developing world is caused by a combination of poverty, poor governance and the ignorance of the general public. Mainstream sustainable development also accepts the persistence of contemporary neoliberal capitalism and the approach of dominant developmentalism rather than challenging them (Adams 2009, p. 116). The most established mainstream perspective of sustainable development is provided by the approach of the UN which is widely recognised as the initiator of serious international discussion on sustainable development as a global challenge. The UN views poverty and inequality as an underlying cause of environmental degradation, therefore it focuses on addressing the underlying causes of poverty and inequality in order to prevent further environmental degradation and ensure greater environmental sustainability in the future (WCED 1987). The UN proposes that greater economic growth in developing countries through the creation of freer markets and by the

transfer of knowledge, capital and technology from the developed world will reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and inequality. The WB adopts a similar neoliberal approach to sustainable development and emphasises the importance of the free market and market mechanisms in achieving environmentally sustainable practices. The approach of the UN and the WB is based on mainstream environmental economics which argues that economic growth in the periphery is necessary to prevent further environmental degradation. Environmental economics highlight that the effects that environmental policies have on the economy need to be determined in order to design appropriate environmental policies which will ensure environmental sustainability without limiting economic growth. It views nature as capital or an asset; the aim of sustainable development therefore requires that the change in stocks of capital over time is not negative. This view has been criticised on many levels; philosophically as nature cannot be viewed as a commodity of the economy and methodologically as a price cannot be set on nature (Castro 2004, pp. 200-202).

It is argued that the mainstream approach to sustainable development is more concerned with sustaining economic development than with achieving environmental sustainability. Those critical of the approach have claimed that it seeks to manage environmental conditions in order to ensure maximum long-term capital accumulation rather than to achieve practices of sustainable development. The view of the mainstream approach that global environmental factors can be addressed by slightly adjusting existing market mechanisms and without altering the fundamental character of the capitalist economy has also come under severe criticism, particularly from those who approach sustainable development from a critical perspective (Castro 2004, p. 207, Escobar 1995, pp. 75-77). Castro claims that mainstream perspectives of sustainable development completely ignore the ethical issues of subjectivity, knowledge and power which need to be addressed if progress is to be made toward achieving

practices of sustainability. Adopting Foucault's studies, poststructuralists have criticised development studies as attempting to produce docile bodies, objectifying the poor and the developing world and for using state power as an instrument to enforce development upon these societies (Castro 2004, pp. 207-208).

Further criticisms focus on the power of discourse within sustainable development studies; Ferguson (1990) highlights how the WB and other institutions construct a particular object of knowledge, for example deeming an area as poor or underdeveloped, providing an agenda for governments and other agencies to take action by extending state power (Castro 2004, p. 207). Escobar argues that the Western world is attempting to enforce modernity upon the countries on the periphery of capitalism and that development officials are attempting to force these societies into the pre-existing models of the West. He rejects the modern economic practices of capitalism as universal truths claiming that they actually represent an economistic culture of modernity (Escobar 1995, pp. 40-44). Frank similarly criticises the assumption that all states will go through the same process of evolution as the west and the belief that they will all eventually converge, both economically and politically. Economists have come under criticism for failing to take culture into account in their approach to sustainable development; they view culture as a given and assume that the cultures of the periphery need to be replaced by the culture of capitalism. The poststructuralist approach is seriously opposed to this view of culture and argues that development attempts need to take cultural factors into account to avoid destroying the culture and identities of entire countries during the development process (Castro 2004, pp. 209-212).

Environmental Marxists also provide a detailed critique of the possibilities of achieving environmental sustainability in a capitalist society. They take an opposite position from environmental economists in most issues; according to environmental Marxists mainstream

sustainable development is basically economic growth on capitalist terms and economic growth cannot be avoided or prevented under the current capitalist system (Castro 2004, pp. 214-216). Environmental Marxists highlights that capitalism and sustainable development have contradictory goals; capitalism causes a metabolic rift in relations between humans and nature as long distance trade moves energy and matter from one place to another and that the fundamental features of capitalism such as capital accumulation and the forced transformation of societies cannot continue if sustainable development practices are to be implemented. Environmental Marxism recognises that sustainable development cannot be achieved in a capitalist system as this would be based on viewing the environment as a commodity; nature as capital that produces goods and services (Marx 1981, p. 754). It is essential to consider the environmental Marxism perspective of sustainable development as it seriously challenges the mainstream approach and provides a real alternative in the establishment of a truly democratic, just and sustainable society (Castro 2004, pp. 220).

It is necessary to consider both the mainstream and critical perspectives of sustainable development in addition to the various approaches of different disciplines in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the concept. In practice, mainstream sustainable development dominates; this is reflected by international agreements such as the MDGs and the national policies and strategies of developed and developing countries that have been implemented in an attempt to achieve the three pillars of sustainable development. The MDGs and national economic and environmental policies have attempted to reconcile economic growth and environmental sustainability; while mainstream sustainable development deems this to be challenging but possible, the critical approach argues that the mainstream approach has overlooked significant issues and is contradictory in its aims. Other critical perspectives highlight that sustainable development cannot be attained while neoliberal capitalism prevails.

## **Chapter One**

### **1 The Concept of Sustainable Development**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Sustainable development has become the dominant paradigm of development in both the developed and the developing worlds. This chapter will explore the origins, meaning and evolution of sustainable development and will demonstrate how the concept of sustainable development has combined the ideas of developmentalists, economists, conservationists, ecologists and environmentalists. It will also discuss the advancement of development and environmental studies which led to the recognition of the interdependent relationship between economic growth and environmental sustainability. It will explore the emphasis sustainable development places on achieving economic growth in an environmentally-friendly manner and how it has been accepted as a global challenge. It is essential to consider the emergence and evolution of the concept in order to grasp an in-depth understanding of its complexities and the various perspectives that exist. Finally this chapter will examine the challenges that the implementation of sustainable development practices encounter.

#### **1.2 Origins of Sustainable Development**

The history of the concept of sustainable development is closely linked to the changing perceptions of environmental concern, nature conservation and development during the last century. The flourishing of the sustainable development concept and its emergence as a new paradigm of development can be explained by the rise of international environmentalism and development studies in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century (Elliott 2008, p. 14). The emergence of sustainable development can be explained in relation to nine themes; firstly the rise of environmentalism as a global concern and the growing awareness that human actions have

had serious ecological implications. The recognition of the necessity of nature preservation and conservation in both industrialised and non-industrialised countries emerged post World War Two; this formed the most deep seated root of sustainable development thinking as sustainable development became viewed as a means to promote preservation and conservation. It was also acknowledged that the needs of the Third World should be incorporated within plans for environmental conservation. The development of ecology underpinned broader thinking about the environment and the impact of human actions on it. It also introduced the idea of the balance of nature; that the stable state of equilibrium of ecological systems can be upset by human actions. Furthermore the emergence of ecology was significant as it encouraged communication between environmental protectionists and economic developmentalists. This growing interest in the study of the diversity of global nature and ecological managerialism also led to the recognition of the need for development planning. The evolution of sustainable development was also influenced by the growing awareness of global environmental problems. Finally the increase in the international organisation of scientific concern about the environment led to the establishment of theoretical and practical links between ecological science and development. The interdependent relationship between economic development, conservation and ecology also became increasingly accepted. Sustainable development therefore has deep and complex roots as a combination of the above themes have significantly shaped the concept and its core beliefs (Adams 2009, pp. 27-55).

### **1.3 Changing Perceptions in Development Studies**

Sustainable development has been significantly shaped by changing perceptions in development and environmental studies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There have been many changes in thinking in relation to the meaning, purpose and actual practice of development

since the emergence of development studies in the 1950s. During the 1960s development prioritised economic growth and the use of modern scientific and technical knowledge to achieve progress in the developing world (Elliott 2008, pp. 14). The global development problem was perceived through the lens of modernisation theory during the first development decade; modernisation theorists such as Walt Whitman Rostow argued that the underdeveloped world needs to catch up to the modern, Western world by the combination of economic growth and political and social reforms (Bichler and Gaderer 2009, p. 409). This has been viewed as an optimistic time in development studies as it was thought that development could be achieved by simply modernising the less developed countries through the transfer of finance, technology and experience from the developed world. Developing thinking became more influenced by scholars within the developing world during the 1970s; they studied the socioeconomic structures and economic conditions of their countries by focusing on the exploitative and dependent relations they have with the developed world. Dependency theory became dominant in development studies; the view that the underdevelopment of the developing world has been caused by the development of the developed world rather than inadequacies in developing countries (Haynes 2008, pp. 24-27). Dependency theorists claimed that ‘development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin’ (Elliott 2008, p. 18). In opposition to modernisation theory, they highlighted that developing countries cannot imitate the process of economic growth that has been previously experienced in Europe and North America. Dependency theory also argued that the structural disadvantages of periphery countries such as isolation from the capitalist core, the international division of labour and the global terms of trade form the major barriers to their development rather than the lack of capital or skills. However dependency theory is criticised for underestimating the internal problems of the local economies of developing countries (Elliott 2008, pp. 18-20).

During the 1980s development studies became more concerned with the basic development needs of the developing world and the importance of self-reliance and internal forces of change in order to meet these needs (Haynes 2008, p. 28). Another Development accepted that economic growth remains fundamental to development but highlighted that development attempts need to be closely linked to the specific local and historical sociocultural and institutional conditions of a country or community and focused on the use of internal natural and human resources. Development became more inclusive; Participatory Development encouraged development from below and within rather than being a top-down or externally imposed process. However the 1980s are referred to as the 'lost decade' in development studies as, with the exception of the Asian Tigers, the developing world experienced development reversals and was greatly affected by the global economic recession and the debt crisis. By the close of the decade development studies were in a deadlock due to the perceived inadequacy of existing theories. However it had become apparent that development needs to be sustainable; that it needs to be related to the environment and not solely to economic and social factors. The interdependent relationship between economic growth and environmental sustainability became increasingly recognised as the concept of sustainable development began to gain global attention. This was reinforced by the growing awareness of climate change and the need to effectively address this issue at a global level. The 1990s marked the re-emergence of neoliberalism and the view that neoliberal policies such as the free market are the best way to initiate and sustain economic development in the periphery countries (Elliott 2008, pp. 21-26). Many of the critical approaches to sustainable development oppose this view; for example Environmental Marxists argue that a sustainable society is not possible under the current neoliberal capitalist system (Castro 2004, pp. 215). Post-development Theory which emerged in the late 1980s contests the actual assumption that

development is a desirable process; it views development as a reflection of Western world hegemony over the developing world (Elliott 2008, p. 27).

#### **1.4 The Rise of Environmentalism**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century significant changes occurred in the way in which society views its relationship with nature. The emergence of Environmentalism in the 1960s reflected the growing concerns of the developed world in relation to the undesirable effects that industrial and economic development have on the environment. New Environmentalism highlighted the detrimental impact that environmental degradation could have on human survival. Development and conservation remained to be viewed as incompatible as the consumption of finite resources, pollution and environmental deterioration were perceived as unavoidable consequences of industrial development. Scepticism of the environmental movement continued throughout the 1970s in the developing world due to the belief that it would limit their development objectives and remove their sovereign control and independence, which in many cases they had only recently gained. However at international level environmental issues became viewed with rapidly increasing importance and urgency (Elliott 2008, pp. 30-32). This is reflected through the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 which produced the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). While this was significant in introducing the idea that environmental and development objectives can and should be integrated, it was more concerned with the effects of industrialisation on the developed world rather than wider issues of poverty and the environmental concerns of the developing world (UNEP 1972).

By the 1980s the need to integrate environmental and development aims had gained widespread recognition and international action was taken to reflect this recognition. The UNEP commissioned the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural

Resources (IUCN) to produce a report outlining world conservation problems and proposing solutions to them. This report entitled the 'World Conservation Strategy' (WCS) is referred to as the 'launch pad' of sustainable development as it viewed development as a major means in achieving conservation rather than an obstruction to it (Elliott 2008, pp. 34, IUCN 1980). The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) produced the report 'Our Common Future', also known as the Brundtland Report in 1987; this report built on the ideas of sustainable development proposed in the WCS. By the 1990s the idea that development must be achieved in an environmentally friendly manner had become standard within development and environmental studies. Environmental concern had expanded to address environmental problems at a global level and development agencies and environmental groups had largely accepted the need to adopt sustainable development practices; they were finally 'dancing to the same sustainable development tune' (Adams 2009, p. 4). This progression in thinking is reflected by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 which introduced new ways of viewing the link between the environment and poverty and put sustainable development at the centre of international debate. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 reinvigorated the global commitment between the developed and the developing world in achieving sustainable development. There has been increased environmental concern throughout the past decade especially due to obvious changes in our environment; as a result climate change has become a dominant concern amongst the global community. However development and environmental studies remain to be far from a unified field and it is argued that the political challenge needs to be accepted by leaders from both the developed and developing world in order to fully integrate the economic, environmental and social objectives of sustainable development so that development that is sustainable can be achieved (Adams 2009, pp. 2-5).

## 1.5 The Evolution of Sustainable Development

The progression of sustainable development has been largely shaped by three mega-conferences; The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972, The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and The World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. These conferences and the documents they produced have all been focused around a consistent core of mainstream ideas. The Stockholm Conference was a key event in the emergence of the concept of sustainable development on a global scale. The conference was primarily based on the development and environmental debates of the first development decade. The Founex Meeting which took place before the Stockholm Conference attempted to reassure Third World countries that greater environmental protection would not affect their economic development; this marked the growing recognition of the concerns of the developing world and expanded the scope of the upcoming conference (Adams 2009, pp. 59-61). The conference opened with the declaration that;

In our time, man's capability to transform his surroundings, if used wisely can bring to all peoples the benefits of development and the opportunity to enhance the quality of life. Wrongly or heedlessly applied, the same power can do incalculable harm to human beings and the environment (UNEP 1972).

The conference agreed upon 26 Principles and 109 Recommendations for action and led to the creation of the UNEP to act as a governing council for environmental programmes. However it is criticised for being primarily concerned with First World Environmentalism and only belatedly and partly addressed the environmental and development problems of the developing world. There was also little discussion of the link between poverty and environmental degradation. The conference was significant as it claimed that development and environmental issues could be integrated in order to optimise both the economic and the ecological systems. It also led to a greater awareness of the needs of the developing countries

and the recognition that environmental problems also need to be viewed from a Third World perspective (Adams 2009, pp. 62-65).

As the need for an international conservation strategy was recognised, the UNEP commissioned the IUCN to produce a document that would combine environmental conservation and economic development. The 'World Conservation Strategy' was published in 1980; it was strongly influenced by Ecodevelopment which combined economic development with environmental ideas and principles. The strategy reflected the growing awareness of the complexity of the ecosystem, the impact of human actions on it and the necessity of environmentally sound development projects. It also highlighted that development should be viewed as a means to achieve conservation rather than posing an obstacle to it (Adams 2009, pp. 65-66). The WCS contained three parts; objectives for conservation, a strategy for action to be taken at both national and subnational level and a strategy for international action. The strategy established the basic triptych of mainstream sustainable development; the recognition that development planning needs to consider economic, environmental and social factors (IUCN 1980). However it has been criticised for a number of reasons; it failed to recognise the political nature of development and to address the need for political and social changes and international economic management. It also failed to produce an understanding of the interaction between nature and culture and assumed that conservation can bypass societal structures and inequalities. The WCS is also criticised for adopting a strong neo-Malthusian approach to development; accepting the need for population policies and regulation (Elliott 2008, p. 35).

Sustainable development had been firmly introduced into international development thinking by the end of the 1980s; this was largely due to the work of the WCED which was established by the UN General Assembly in 1983. The WCED had three principle objectives;

to re-examine environmental and development issues and suggest realistic proposals, to propose new effective forms of international cooperation and to raise the levels of understanding and commitment to action of individuals, voluntary organisations, businesses and governments. The Commissioners came to recognise one central theme; that present development trends have allowed for an increase in poverty and growing inequalities between the rich and poor. This realisation highlighted the need for a new approach and broadened the view of development in the developing world from solely focusing on economic growth; this new development path would be concerned with the sustaining of global human progress into the distant future and not just temporarily in a few places. At this stage sustainable development was recognised as a goal for the developed as well as the developing world (WCED 2007, pp. 260-61).

The WCED produced the Brundtland Report, entitled 'Our Common Future' in 1987. The report recaptured the ideas of Stockholm more expertly and effectively than the WCS and placed environmental issues on the formal international political agenda. It also produced the most widely cited and accepted definition of sustainable development; 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED 1987). However this definition has been criticised for being too vague and for not defining what is meant by 'needs'. Adams argues that this definition is more of a slogan than a basis for theory. The report was deliberately broad and resisted a move toward limiting its concern to economic or environmental matters; it explicitly stated that development and environmental issues cannot be separated and recognised that environmental problems cannot be effectively addressed without considering the underlying factors allowing for the persistence of poverty and inequality. 'Our Common Future' integrated the objectives of the three pillars of sustainable development to a much greater

extent than the WCS. The report is criticised for its belief that poverty causes environmental degradation in developing countries and that economic growth can remove the pressures on the developing world which lead to environmental degradation. However it does not consider the pressures which economic development places on the environment and does not explain how economic growth can be accelerated while respecting environmental constraints (Adams 2009, pp. 76-80). The report is also criticised for producing a ‘watered-down’ version of sustainable development; the new version of sustainable development that it promoted did not contain the environmental discourse of resources scarcity and limits to growth which sustainable development had previously focused on. While the Brundtland Report was significant in providing a more credible view of sustainable development it did not significantly alter the position of sustainable development within the overall landscape of development thinking (Carruthers 2007, pp. 290).

A revision of the WCS was published in 1991, entitled ‘Caring for the Earth: A strategy for sustainable living’, it took a much more participatory and consultative approach. The report contained nine principles of sustainable development which blended an ethical, humanitarian, environmentalist, conservationist and pragmatic approach. The central argument and aims of the report were similar to those of the WCS; to improve conditions for the world’s people by adopting a new sustainable living ethic and integrating conservation and development. It reflected a maturing in the IUCN’s understanding of development and environmental conservation (IUCN 1991). The report was greatly overshadowed by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro the following year. The UNCED, commonly referred to as the Rio Conference, built on the work of the Brundtland Commission and consolidated sustainable development’s position on the international agenda. A preparatory commission was held prior to the conference; during

these series of meetings conflict re-emerged between the interests of the industrialised world and those of the non-industrialised countries. The PrepCom agreed on 27 principles which became adopted at the conference as the Rio Principles. The conference opened with the statement ‘human beings are at the centre of sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature’ (UNEP 1992). The principles of the Rio Declaration have been criticised for being bland and uncontentious; attempting to provide something for everybody involved. A further weakness of the declaration was the United States’ decision to opt out of a number of the agreed principles; for example Principle 3 which refers to the right to development as they claimed that development is a goal not a right (Adams 2009, pp. 86-90).

The conference also produced ‘Agenda 21’ which is named by the goal to make the planet sustainable in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and contains actions to promote sustainability. The scope of the agenda was enormous and it is criticised for being a list of good intentions rather than consisting of mandatory steps to achieve environmental sustainability (Adams 2009, p. 93). Agenda 21 viewed environmental sustainability and economic growth as mutually reinforcing while they had been previously viewed as polar opposites. This new version of sustainable development fit conveniently into place alongside neoclassical capitalism and liberal democracy. As a result the report is criticised for maintaining the water-downed version of sustainable development initially proposed by the Brundtland Report. As this new sustainable development did not as severely threaten the political and economic priorities of the developed countries they were more willing to grant it a much higher institutional and policy profile (Carruthers 2007, p. 292). Due to opposition from the non-industrialised countries the Rio Conference did not lead to the signing of a Forest Convention but a list of non-legally binding Forest Principles. A Convention on Biological Diversity was negotiated at the

conference with aims to conserve biological diversity, promote the sustainable use of species and ecosystems and encourage the equitable sharing of the economic benefits of genetic resources. The conference also led to the development of a Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); while the convention framework was not legally binding it was significant in reflecting the urgent need to address the issue of climate change and it was signed by over 150 states. The Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC set a binding obligation on developed countries to reduce six greenhouse gases; this marked a significant advancement in attitudes toward the need for environmental conservation, however progress so far has been problematic and varied (Adams 2009, pp. 95-103).

The Rio Conference achieved considerable progress however there was widespread disappointment due to the lack of actual progress in the aftermath of the conference. This failure was largely due to the lack of financial support; poverty and wealth inequalities worsened throughout the 1990s causing the developing world to become sceptical once again. Rio failed to resolve disputes between developmentalists and environmentalists and debate between them intensified during the decade. The need for a new mega-conference was recognised in order to 'rekindle the flame of the Rio Accord' (Adams 2009, p. 108). This took the form of the WSSD in Johannesburg in 2002 which was attended by 82 heads of state and gained worldwide attention. The main aim of the Summit was to rejuvenate the global commitment to partnership between the developed and the developing countries in the achievement of sustainable development. The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation recommitted to poverty-related targets and goals and the conference explicitly recognised the link between economic and social development and environmental sustainability through its declaration that 'the eradication of poverty is now seen as an underlying theme in all work on sustainable development' (UN 2002). Overall however the conference produced less than its

predecessors and led to several failures and disappointments. By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the eradication of poverty was viewed as a global priority; this was highlighted by the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York in 2002. The Summit announced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and made pledges in relation to other worldwide issues including peace and security. It also focused on five main areas of environmental concern; water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity (UN 2000).

## **1.6 Challenges to Sustainable Development**

The implementation of sustainable development has faced various obstacles since its emergence as a paradigm of development. A major challenge is the use of resources; while economic development processes are closely linked with the extraction of resource stocks, sustaining the environment depends on the conservation of these resources. All forms of economic and social activity make varying demands on the resource base and past economic development can be closely associated with rates of resource extraction. It has been recognised that there is a negative relationship between the possession of natural resources and development; the more a country depends on natural resources for economic development the lower the economic growth rate of that country tends to be. Issues surrounding resources pose a further obstacle to development that is sustainable as many of the worlds most persistent and critical conflicts are resource related and are being fought in countries and areas of great environmental value. These resources are often the sole source of income for developing countries and conflict arises over efforts to maintain or gain control over them. These conflicts have disastrous consequences for sustainable development as they erase years of development efforts and also have long-term economic, environmental and political implications. The main consumers of these resources which cause so much conflict are the developed countries. National elites, foreign investors and the developed world continue to

benefit from the extraction of resources in the developing world while the costs are disproportionately felt by the local people. Inequalities in the access to resources also pose a major challenge to sustainable development; for example they enable a minority of people to waste resources and use them in an environmentally damaging manner. As a result large numbers of people are confined in poverty and are left with no choice but to exploit and degrade their limited access to resources in order to survive. These immoral inequalities are threatening the environmental basis for livelihoods in addition to global sustainable development aims and will continue to do so unless they are effectively addressed (Elliott 2008, pp 45-56).

The persistence of global poverty is having serious implications in the implementation of sustainable development practices. Poor countries are highly dependent on natural resources for their survival and have limited options in relation to the management of resources as their environmental concerns are primarily associated with their immediate survival needs. This has had detrimental effects on the environment of the developing world and several growing phenomena have been recognised; for example decreases in biodiversity, over-salinization of soils and water logging due to the increased irrigation and the decline and extinction of wildlife species (Udoh 1996, pp. 1-4). As a result the poor are regularly viewed as both the victims and unwilling agents of environmental degradation and poverty have become associated with ecological marginality. The poor are concentrated in areas of the world that are environmentally poor; for example in rural areas they are dependent on infertile or over-used land and in urban areas there tends to be a concentration of poor people in areas of low commercial value. Therefore the underlying causes of poverty need to be tackled in the attempt to achieve sustainable development and there needs to be a global commitment to overcoming poverty by focusing on the welfare of society's poorest people as their

environmental concerns and needs are vastly different to those of the developed world (Elliott 2008, pp. 60-63).

Mainstream sustainable development argues that poverty and sustainable development are interlinked; therefore sustainable development can be achieved through the eradication of poverty and poverty can be alleviated through the implementation of sustainable development practices. Mainstream thinking considers the continuation of capitalist economic growth in an environmentally sustainable manner as the method by which both sustainable development and poverty eradication can be achieved. However this mainstream approach, which dominates global and national commitments to sustainable development, has been rejected by those with a critical perspective of sustainable development. For example, Escobar views the consolidation of capitalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the main cause of the modern mass poverty phenomenon and he argues that it is impossible to achieve poverty eradication and sustainable development under the current capitalist system. Therefore capitalism poses a major challenge to both poverty eradication and environmental sustainability from a critical perspective. The portrayal of poverty by capitalism is also criticised; capitalism has led to the transformation of the poor into those needing the assistance of the rich and they are viewed as a social problem which must be solved by the intervention of the developed capitalist world (Escobar 1995, pp. 21-24). Globalisation has presented a further challenge to sustainable development; while the world has become more global it has not become more uniform. The processes of globalisation operate through existing patterns of inequality and uneven development which have allowed for increasing inequalities between and within countries. The inclusion of the poor in the benefits of globalisation has become recognised as a global challenge and is crucial to the future prospects of sustainable development (Elliott 2008, pp. 75-77).

## **1.7 Conclusion**

It is necessary to examine the origins, evolution and various perspectives of sustainable development in order to gain an in-depth understanding of this complex concept. By exploring the origins of sustainable development, the manner in which the concept has blended the ideas of various disciplines in order to maximise economic and social development in an environmentally-friendly manner is highlighted. By considering the challenges that the implementation of sustainable development practices encounter, the limitations of simultaneously seeking economic growth and environmental sustainability can be recognised. This theoretical knowledge of sustainable development can then be applied to analyse how sustainable development practices have been implemented and to determine how compatible the objectives of sustainable development are, both in policy and in practice.

## **Chapter Two**

### **2 The Millennium Development Goals**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the most broadly supported and specific poverty reduction aims that the global community has strived to achieve. They have been widely accepted as a policy framework for poverty reduction and sustainable development. The main objective of the goals is to improve the lives of the world's most vulnerable people. This chapter briefly discusses the origins and aims of the MDGs and gives an overview of the progress towards achieving the goals to date. The chapter then analyses the incorporation of sustainable development within the goals and whether environmental sustainability and economic growth have been granted equal importance by the targets of the MDGs. As a final point the criticisms of the MDGs from various perspectives are examined. This chapter demonstrates the extent to which economic growth and environmental sustainability have been reconciled within one of the most dominant development paradigms in the world.

#### **2.2 A New Development Paradigm**

The MDGs are the result of the acceptance of a shared global challenge; a challenge to the developing countries to commit to poverty reduction and adopt and maintain good governance and a challenge to the developed countries to support the economic and social development of the developing world. They have become a dominant force for change and progression by placing human development, poverty, people and their lives, at the focus of the global development agenda, marking the move away from the perception of economic growth as the central objective of development (WB 2005). The MDGs are built upon the assumption that all individuals are entitled to their basic human rights, a vision which they share with the

human development paradigm. The goals have been shaped by a combination of the human development approach and results-based management (Hulme 2007, p. 2). They are significant in that they are not just aspirations but contain a concrete framework of accountability in the achievement of specified goals; they are considerably more powerful and accountable than previous UN declarations as time limits and quantifiable outcomes are specified. The goals have achieved global political consensus on common objectives; this reflects the recognition by world leaders of their collective responsibility for the world's citizens irrespective of country borders and for the first time the required input of the developed world has been considered alongside the developing world's objectives. The MDGs are viewed by many as a new development paradigm as they are major indicators of how the world is progressing in relation to human development (Fukuda-Parr 2004, pp. 395-8).

The MDGs were announced at the Millennium Summit held at the United Nations headquarters in New York in September 2000. The summit marked the largest ever gathering of world leaders. The UN Millennium Declaration was agreed by 189 countries committing to a new global partnership to reduce global poverty and to a series of time-bound targets; these commitments were named the Millennium Development Goals. The Declaration stated that:

We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected. We are committed to making the right to development a reality for everyone and to freeing the entire human race from want (2000, p.4).

The MDGs consist of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 indicators and have a deadline of 2015. The 8 MDGs cover several issues that need to be addressed in order to improve the lives of those living in the developing world; each goal has set targets that need to be met to achieve the indicators by which to measure progress (UN 2000).

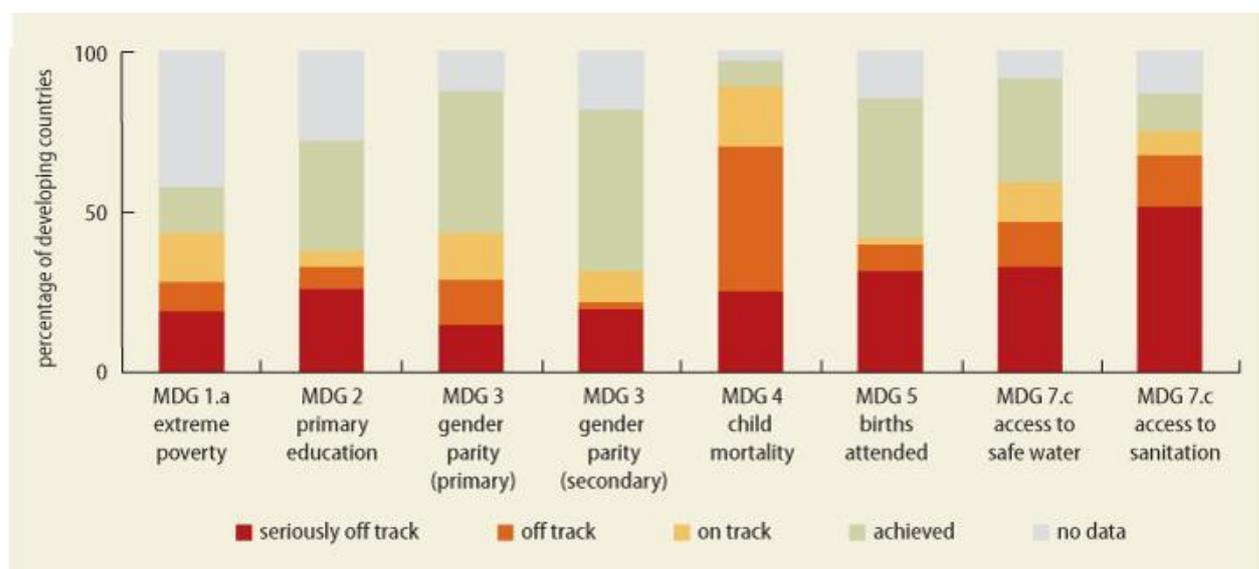


Illustration 1 (UNDP 2000)

### 2.3 Overview of Progress

The MDGs have made significant progress since their introduction and the UN have declared that meeting the remaining global targets by 2015 will be challenging however it remains possible to do so. The MDGs Report 2012 outlines the progress that has been achieved in meeting the targets of each goal. For the first time since poverty records began there has been a reduction in the number of people living in extreme poverty in every developing region, reversing the long-term increase trend in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report highlights that a number of important targets have been met before their deadlines; the proportion of people living in extreme poverty is half that of 1990 figures fulfilling the aim of Target 1 and the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water has also been halved meeting Target 10. There have been significant improvements made to the lives of over 200 million slum dwellers worldwide exceeding the figure set by Target 11 a decade before the 2020 deadline. Target 4 in relation to eliminating gender disparities has been partially met as equality in primary education for boys and girls has been achieved. Progress towards reducing child mortality has accelerated with figures falling from 12 to 7.6 million and in the last decade Sub-Saharan Africa has doubled its average annual rate of reduction. While there have

been many significant achievements in meeting the targets before the 2015 deadline, progress in achieving some targets has been slow and disappointing and there have been great disparities in the rate of progress both within and amongst countries and regions (UN DESA 2012).



Source: Staff calculations based on World Development Indicators database.

Note: The data cover 144 developing countries and the latest available information as of 2009.

Graph 1 (European Journalism Centre 2010)

Although broad progress has been achieved there have been varied performances towards achieving targets between countries and regions. While overall maternal mortality figures have nearly halved this reduction has not been rapid enough to meet the aim of Target 6 which is to reduce the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters by 2015; the maternal mortality rate of the developing world is currently 15 times higher than that of the developed. The 2010 target to achieve universal access to treatment for AIDS sufferers was not met however there has been a significant increase in the number of people receiving antiretroviral therapy. Almost half of the population of developing countries currently lack access to improved sanitation facilities; the percentage with improved access is predicted to be 67% by 2015, considerably short of the target of three-quarters. Hunger remains to be a major global

problem; the most recent estimations of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) of the UN reveal that 15.5% of the world's population are suffering from hunger. Disparities between falling poverty rates and the persistence of hunger have highlighted the need for an improved understanding of the dimensions and causes of hunger in order to introduce effective policies and measures to significantly reduce the global hunger problem (UN DESA 2012, pp. 4-5).

#### **2.4 Sustainable development and the MDGs**

The targets of the MDGs need to be met by environmentally sustainable means; the implementation of sustainable development practices is crucial in achieving and maintaining the progress outlined by the MDGs as the poor are the most affected by environmental degradation and natural disasters and are often dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. The MDGs and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing; the MDGs have attempted to concretise and operationalise the abstract concept of sustainable development and political, socioeconomic and environmental sustainability are required if the MDGs are to be achieved. The interconnectedness of the MDGs and sustainable development reflects the wider environment-poverty nexus as human poverty assumes a primary position in the MDGs and environmental sustainability is a key dimension of sustainable development. The environment affects poverty in various ways; providing sources of livelihoods to poor people, affecting their health and influencing their vulnerability and poverty also has serious implications for the environment; forcing people to degrade their environment to survive, compelling countries to focus on economic growth at the expense of the environment and encouraging societies to give low priority to environmental issues. Therefore the achievement of the MDGs and the successful implementation of sustainable development practices are

highly dependent on one another (Jahan 2003, pp. 2-4). The UN Millennium Declaration highlighted the magnitude of protecting our common environment;

We must spare no effort to free all of humanity, and above all our children and grandchildren, from the threat of being on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities, and whose resources would no longer be sufficient for their needs (UN 2000, p. 6).

Most countries have adopted sustainable development principles to varying extents and have agreed to international environmental accords which include a broad range of conventions, such as those aimed at reducing pollution, addressing the urgent threat of climate change, protecting biodiversity and combating desertification (EC 2013). However land is still being degraded, forests are being lost, fisheries continue to be overexploited, plant and animal species are facing extinction and climate change remains a major global concern; therefore ensuring environmental sustainability remains to be an imperative global challenge (WB 2005 p. 43).

MDG 7 focuses on the importance of sustainable development; it highlights the shared responsibility of the developed and developing countries to ensure environmental sustainability by protecting the environment and using resources wisely. Goal 7 sets 3 targets; Target 9 addresses the need to integrate sustainable development principles into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of resources. It contains 5 indicators; proportion of land area covered by forest, ratio of area protected to maintain biological diversity to surface area, energy use per \$1 GDP, carbon dioxide emissions per capita and consumption of ozone-depleting CFCs and the proportion of the population using solid fuels. Target 10 aims to halve the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Target 10 has 2 indicators; the proportion of the population with sustainable access to an improved water source and the proportion of the population with access to improved sanitation. Target 11 attempts to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum

dwellers by 2020; it has 1 indicator which is the proportion of households with access to secure tenure (UN 2000).

Progress in implementing Goal 7 has been overwhelmingly slow both in the developed and the developing world; as a result global commitment to meeting the targets of MDG7 has been questioned on many occasions. Target 9 promotes the integration of sustainable development principles into country policies and programs in order to reverse the loss of environmental resources, however rapid deforestation has continued on a global scale. While net forest loss worldwide has decreased considerably it is estimated that currently a massive 5.2 million hectares of forest land is being lost every year. Between 1990 and 2008 greenhouse gases increased steadily in the developed world before experiencing an unprecedented short-term reduction in 2009 due to the decrease in economic activity as a result of the economic crisis. Emissions have also continued to increase in the developing world in recent years. However the need for stronger action to address the issue of climate change has been recognised by the global community; it was agreed that a new legal protocol on climate change should be implemented by 2015 at the UN Climate Change Conference held in South Africa in 2011. The major gap between the previously agreed emissions reduction and the actual reductions needed to have a positive impact on the environment was addressed. The severity of the situation has been recognised but it is too soon to judge whether effective action will be taken within developed and developing countries especially amongst growing fears that greenhouse gas emissions will steadily increase as the global economy recovers (UN DESA 2012, pp. 46-8).

Target 10 aims to reduce the loss of biodiversity and has also experienced varied success; since 1990 protected areas have increased by 58% but this growth in protection has varied widely across countries and regions. Although a significantly higher proportion of

areas are being protected biodiversity is still being lost and many important sites for species conservation remain unprotected. However the IUCN has recognised that, while the status of the world's birds, mammals and amphibians continues to decline, without the conservation efforts of the MDGs and other agreements these trends would have been much more devastating. The over-exploitation of marine fisheries remains a major issue, reaching a new peak in 2008. It is estimated that only 13% of fish stock in 2009 was underexploited; under relatively low pressure allowing for increased production. This highlights the urgent need for new policies and programs to effectively monitor and stop such exploitation. Varied progress has also been made toward meeting Target 11; the first half of the target has been achieved as the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water was halved by 2010. However access remains low in Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa which are not on track to meeting this target and major inequalities also persist within regions between urban and rural areas and between the rich and poor; therefore continued efforts are required in order to achieve universal coverage. The sanitation target remains far out of reach though significant improvements have been made in most developing regions. Almost half of the people of the developing world still lack access to improved sanitation facilities and open defecation remains a widespread health and environmental hazard as 15% of the developing world's population have no sanitation facilities. While Target 11 has been achieved as the lives of over 200 million slum dwellers have been improved, rapid urbanisation is having serious implications and the absolute number of slum dwellers continues to increase (UN DESA 2012, pp. 50-6).

Major environmental investments need to be identified in order to achieve the MDGs by environmentally sustainable means. Whether all the targets of the MDGs can be attained through environmentally sustainable practices and whether they reconcile the differences or

fuel the divide between poverty reduction and resource conservation remain to be greatly debated issues. The downgrading of the environment into one goal has been greatly criticised and is considered to be a major weakness of the MDGs as a framework for poverty reduction and sustainable development as environmental sustainability and poverty reduction have not been fully integrated across the MDGs. Poverty reduction issues need to be taken into greater consideration within MDG7; for example reversing the loss of environmental resources without causing harm to people's livelihoods and the greater integration of both global and local priorities. Environmental issues also need to be integrated within the other MDGs as natural resource management underpins the achievement of the majority of the MDGs. Sustainable development emphasises the integration of three pillars; economic growth, social exclusion and environmental sustainability, however the necessity of this integration is not reflected by the goals (Roe 2003, p. 66-70). The UN Report 'Sustainable Pathways to attain the Millennium Development Goals' highlights the importance of environmental sustainability in achieving all goals, however it also recognises the limitations of achieving all the MDGS in an environmentally-friendly manner. The report demonstrates that reaching certain targets will ultimately lead to unavoidable environmental trade-offs; for example reaching the hunger target will require a massive increase in the consumption of water through agricultural expansion and increased irrigation which will both have serious implications on the ecosystem (Stockholm Environment Institute 2005).

The recognition that environmental objectives need to be assigned a higher profile alongside poverty-reduction objectives than that provided by the MDGs is reflected by the plan to adopt a new set of global goals when the MDGs expire in 2015. These goals will be entitled the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and will equally encompass the three dimensions of sustainable development. In relation to economic growth they aim to further

the advance of the world's agenda in the fight against poverty, hunger and disease by achieving the unmet targets of the MDGs and ensuring that by 2030 all people will be able to meet their basic needs. In terms of environmental sustainability the SDGs aims will include the move towards low carbon energy systems, sustainable food systems and the adoption of a pace of change that will enable the world to avoid the most dangerous planetary thresholds. Social exclusion will be addressed by the SDGs as each country will promote the well-being and capabilities of all their citizens while giving special attention to the vulnerable groups of society (Sachs 2012, pp. 2206-2211).

## **2.5 Criticisms of the MDGs**

The MDGs have encountered numerous criticisms from differing perspectives. Various essentialist criticisms of the MDGs have been identified; for example arguments that they are too narrowly focused, quantitative rather than qualitative and pragmatic rather than ambitious and idealistic. It is also argued that the MDGs may prove to be counter-productive as they give rise to false hope and expectations and failure to meet targets may result in disappointment and a loss in motivation within countries deemed to be 'failures' in 2015. This may undermine the slow but essential reforms that have been achieved within the institutions and policy processes of many developing countries (Alston 2003, pp. 12-13). Further critiques of the goals highlight the major weaknesses in theory, method and scope they contain which carry the potential for distorting meaningful intellectual and research agendas for development and could contradict progress made by other initiatives. The type of development deemed desirable by the MDGs is overwhelmingly viewed through the perspective of the Western world and the definition of poverty provided and accepted by the MDGs is perceived by some as too narrow as it is based on the developed world's perception of poverty. It is also argued that rather than producing a global development agenda the

MDGs are predominately occupied with actions that must be taken by the developing world while the role of the developed countries is to merely assist them; presenting the idea of 'our' agenda for 'them'. The MDGs seemingly dismiss the persistence of poverty, inequality and deprivation in the developed world (Saith 2006, pp. 1167-84).

The MDGs have also been criticised in relation to how their indicators are measured; it is argued that the goals have been promoted to a dangerously high position of priority in the field of development as they are actually imprecise and possess a great lack of scientifically valid data. While the progress of the MDGs is portrayed in terms of achieving measurable targets within specified time-limits it has been argued that the subject matter of certain targets is immeasurable or so inaccurately measured that an exact account of progress cannot be attained. While some of the goals can be adequately measured, for example the proportion of people living in poverty can be measured though examining incomes, it is much more difficult to obtain accurate data to measure other goals especially in relation to the health MDGs. The majority of the available data on the health MDGs is acquired through estimations, censuses and household surveys. It is almost impossible to accurately measure malaria and tuberculosis incidence and death and child and maternal mortality in developing countries where the most basic life indicators, birth and death registers, are not consistently and accurately measured. The MDGs' focus on universal time-bound targets is further criticised due to the vast differences in the ability of developing countries' governments to attain targets (Attaran 2005). Langford suggests that the targets need to be adjusted to take the differing resource availability of countries into account; while low and middle-income countries have significantly different resource levels they have the same targets (Langford 2010, p. 88).

The MDGs have also come under severe criticism for being under-ambitious; it is argued that Goal 1's aim to halve the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger actually lowers previously agreed goals, such as those agreed at the World Food Summit in Rome in 1996. Pogge views MDG1 as a large-scale crime against humanity as the goal tolerates and encourages the acceptance of the fact that in 2015 half of today's poor, approximately one billion people, will continue to live in poverty and deprivation. Pogge criticises the aim of halving the proportion rather than the number of people living in extreme poverty and hunger as the proportion of people represents a significantly lower reduction and a less ambitious goal due to projected population increase. He argues that the target of halving the proportion is too limiting as in global economic terms the world poverty problem is negligible; the developing world would need an extra \$40 billion per year to reach the \$1 a day benchmark; this is an insignificant percentage of the annual global social product of \$31,500 billion. It is also argued that the benchmark set by the WB of less than \$1 a day is too low and as a result the number of people that cannot meet their basic daily needs could be much greater than current figures suggest. Pogge and other critics of the MDGs suggest that the apparently committed attitude and generous gestures of the developed world in assisting the developing world may simply be an attempt to conceal and protect their own interests (Pogge 2003, pp. 4-18).

A number of human right-specific criticisms of the MDGs have also been observed; the content of the MDGs have no particular focus on human rights and as a result have been criticised for sidelining them. The MDGs are also problematic from a human rights perspective due to their selectivity which leads to the exclusion of certain rights. Many targets of the MDGs are perceived as being incompatible with human rights as they settle for half measures, for example halving extreme poverty and hunger while human rights groups are

committed to respecting the rights of every individual (Alston 2003, pp. 14-15). Langford highlights that the incorporation of human rights could make a significant contribution to the target-based approach of the MDGs. The targets need to meet the legal standards advocated by human rights groups and aim for equality not just improvements in order to lessen the disparities which exist within countries and regions but are not reflected by overall figures. It is argued that the current top-down approach needs to be reformed by increasing participation in the selection of targets so that grassroots groups, southern-based NGOs, human rights groups and the governments of the developing countries will be more involved in the process. The MDGs have also been criticised for choosing trade-offs of human rights in order to meet MDG targets; the attempt to meet some targets has led to the violation of certain rights, for example clearing slums through forced evictions and the violation of housing rights. Human rights need to be completely integrated within each step of the process toward achieving the MDGs (Langford 2010, pp. 83-9).

The MDGs have also come under significant criticism from a conservationist perspective; while effective natural resource management is central to the achievement of the MDGs, only two indicators of MDG7 specifically address resource conservation (indicators 25 and 26). Conservationists argue that these indicators are inadequate as they focus on the quantity rather than the quality of natural resources and do not sufficiently address issues such as their management and governance regimes and the land and resource rights of the people living in and around these areas. These simple measurements also fail to address how the costs and benefits of forests and protected areas are distributed among society which is a key dimension of sustainability; while the international community, national governments and private sector are benefitting, the local people continue to bear a disproportionate amount of the costs. The MDGs' approach to conservation is too narrow as it assumes that increasing

forests and protected land areas will automatically address the issue of resource loss while ignoring the value of other productive landscapes such as rangelands and coastal strips which also have large amounts of biodiversity and in some cases more potential to contribute to poverty reduction. While the protected area approach has significant social, economic and environmental benefits, the concentration of the MDGs on this approach has had serious implications on the developing world; it has had negative impacts on the food security, livelihoods and cultures of local people and has led to forced displacement. The MDGs appear to be inadequate from a conservationist perspective; therefore the indicators need to be expanded considerably to reverse environmental resource loss and greater integrated and concerted action is required between the conservation and development communities in order to simultaneously achieve the global imperatives of poverty reduction and environmental sustainability (Roe 2003, pp. 56-71).

The motives of the developed world in relation to their desire to meet the MDGs have also been questioned. It is argued that the achievement of the MDGs appears desirable to the world powers as it will stabilise the ongoing and unmoderated processes of neoliberal globalisation, although evidence and many academics have highlighted that it is virtually impossible to achieve sustained growth and egalitarian, pro-poor and rights driven development within contemporary neoliberal capitalism. The MDGs have ignored the issue of structural inequalities and therefore do not recognise the need for a new framework to replace the 'neoliberal straitjacket'. Neoliberalism arguably views the poor as the last unconquered market and focuses on making poverty reduction profitable for the developed world and private organisations. The developed countries are prepared to support the development agenda of the MDGs as long as it does not threaten or disturb global and local economic orders and power structures; this argument is also reflected through the developed world's

support for the new watered-down version of sustainable development which is much more compatible with their own interests. The capitalist world has debatably adopted the MDGs in order to address the global poverty issue within its own ideological, political and economic framework which will allow for the stabilisation and sanitisation of contemporary capitalism on a global scale (Saith 2006, pp. 1190-97).

## **2.6 Conclusion**

The Millennium Development Goals have been given high priority in the field of development and have made significant improvements to the lives of millions of people worldwide. They are undoubtedly committed to the goal of poverty eradication; however they appear to have prioritised poverty reduction and economic growth over ensuring environmental sustainability in the developing world. The recognition that the MDGs have not effectively integrated the objectives of the three pillars of sustainable development is reflected by the need to introduce the SDGs when the current goals expire in 2015. By examining the progress and failures of the MDGs the limitations that exist in the attempt to achieve further economic growth in an environmentally-friendly manner are highlighted.

## Chapter Three

### 3 Ghana Case Study

#### Map of Ghana: Administrative Regions/Capitals

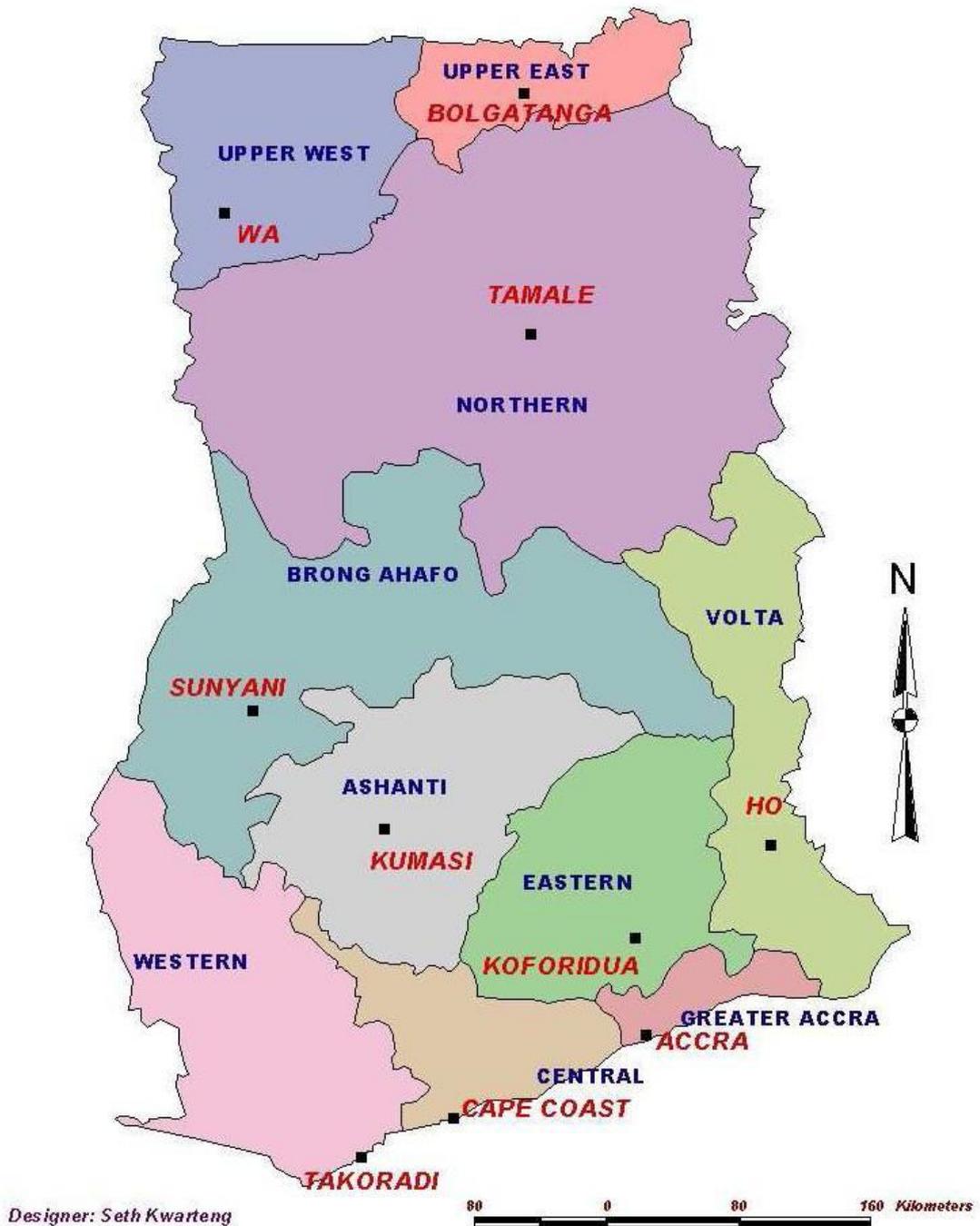


Illustration 2 (NDPC and UNDP 2010)

### **3.1 Introduction**

The most effective manner by which to analyse the implementation of sustainable development and the progress made by the MDGs is by examining the actual impact they have had a country. This chapter will discuss the case of Ghana; the improvements that have been experienced in the country due to the MDGs and how Ghana has integrated the principles of sustainable development into its national policies and strategies. The chapter will then discuss the actual implementation of sustainable development in practice by exploring the issue of deforestation in the country. It will then be possible to determine whether the country has given equal priority to economic and environmental issues by examining Ghana's progress toward achieving further economic growth and ensuring environmental sustainability. Finally this chapter will highlight the difficulties that Ghana and other developing countries encounter in the attempt to achieve greater economic development in an environmentally-friendly manner.

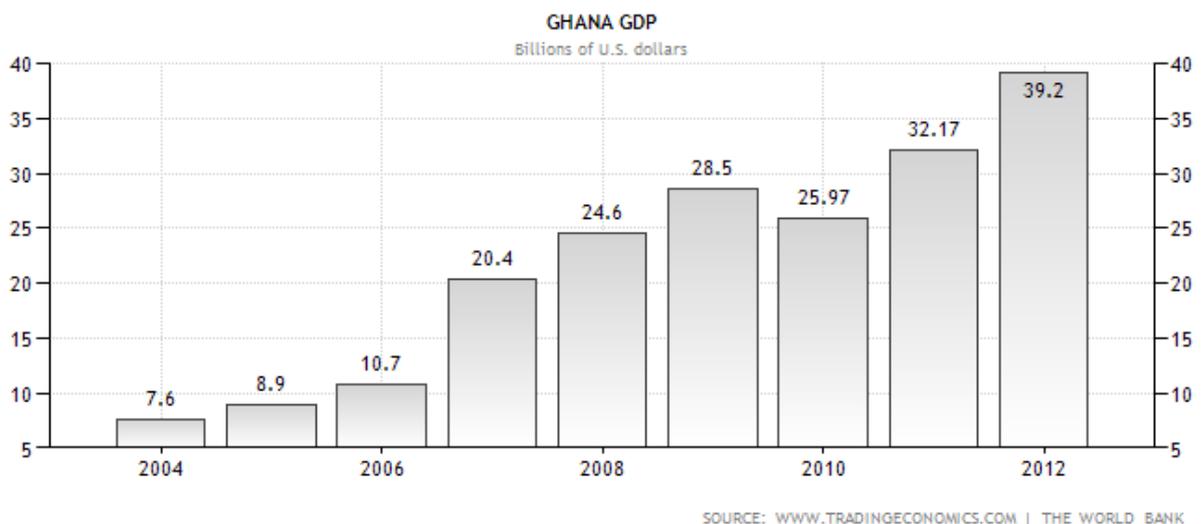
### **3.2 Country Overview**

Ghana is referred to as the 'shining star' of African independence; although the country experienced a period of political and economic turmoil following independence in 1957, it has made considerable strides toward economic stability and consolidating democracy over the past two decades. Ghana is now one of the few Sub-Saharan African countries to be considered a consolidated democracy. It also faces no external threats and has played a key stabilising role in West Africa. Ghana's political rights, civil liberties and freedom of press rankings are among the best in Africa and the country continues to make progress in relation to the protection of human rights. However a number of political challenges remain; for example excessive executive powers and weaknesses in the accountability, professionalism and effectiveness of the civil service (Government of Ghana and EC 2007, pp. 3-7). Ghana

has also achieved considerable economic growth during the past two decades and the country attained the status of a low-middle income country in 2011. Overall substantial progress has been made in achieving macro-economic stability and poverty reduction goals (WB 2011). Ghana's exports as a share of GDP have increased significantly and diversified over the last 15 years, however traditional exports such as gold, cocoa and timber continue to dominate. The country's budget expenditures have continued to increase in accordance with the national plan and poverty-related expenditure has also increased. Ghana has an open and liberalised trade regime and continues to make progress in simplifying the tariff system and non-tariff regulations. It is also a strong advocate of regional cooperation and integration; it is a major trading partner with its three neighbours, it is committed to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and was the first country to ratify the treaty establishing the African Economic Community. Ghana continues to face many economic obstacles; for example large fiscal and balance of deficits remain and despite economic reforms the structure of the economy has not changed substantially remaining largely dependent on agriculture. Ghana has also made considerable efforts toward greater social development and has made significant progress toward meeting several of the MDGs. However a number of challenges remain and the gap between Ghana's HDI position and its gradually increasing GDP per capita rank remains a major concern (Government of Ghana and the EC 2007, pp. 9-17).

Ghana has implemented several policies and programmes to accelerate the growth of the economy and improve the standard of living of all Ghanaians. These efforts include the GPRS I, 2003-05, GPRS II, 2006-09 and GSGDA, 2010-13. Both the GPRS I and GPRS II made substantial progress; they provided a platform for dialogue between the Ghanaian government and development partners, mainstreamed the MDGs and other international

commitments into the national agenda and contributed significantly to the allocation of resources. The current strategy, the GSGDA is a medium-term development policy framework which reflects the ‘Better Ghana Agenda’ and is based on a number of themes; these include ensuring and maintaining macro-economic sustainability, accelerating agricultural modernisation and natural resource management and transparent and accountable governance. It aims to achieve a number of economic and social goals; putting food on people’s tables, providing citizens with secure and sustainable jobs and reducing gender and geographical disparities in the distribution of natural resources. The government has stated that the ultimate aim of the GSGDA is to ‘lay the foundation to move Ghanaians closer to the long-term aspiration of a just, free and prosperous society’ (NDPC 2010, pp. 1-2).



Graph 2 (WB 2012)

Ghana has made impressive strides toward becoming a developed and modernised country; it is a consolidated democracy and has achieved considerable economic stability; Ghana’s GDP has risen dramatically since 2004, experiencing a temporary decline in 2010 due to the global economic, energy and food crises. The rate of social development in the country has also been encouraging (WB 2012). While the country’s commitment to achieving

greater economic growth and the MDGs is undeniable, Ghana's progress in addressing the environmental pillar of sustainable development has been mixed and in many cases it appears that the country continues to prioritise economic and social development over ensuring environmental sustainability. Many areas of Ghana's economy and the livelihoods of Ghana's most vulnerable people are dependent upon the exploitation of natural resources; therefore practical and realistic policies based on the interests of the people that will be the most affected by them need to be adopted so that the country can make progress toward achieving the three pillars of sustainable development simultaneously. The acceleration of economic growth through current unsustainable practices may improve the standards of living for the present generation in the short-term but this will inevitably degrade the environment and have serious implications on the ability of future generations to meet their needs. However it has also been recognised that enforcing sustainable development practices could have a negative effect on the immediate ability of Ghana's poor to meet their daily survival needs. Therefore an effective balance in the formulation of both international agreements and national policies and strategies is crucial in ensuring that equal progress is made in achieving the objectives of the three pillars of sustainable development.

### **3.3 Progress Toward the MDGs**

Overall Ghana has made significant progress toward meeting the targets of the MDGs; however the country's performance in relation to some targets has been disappointing. Ghana is on track to achieve MDG 1 and 2 by 2015 and Goal 6 remains potentially achievable. Goals 3 and 7 are likely to be partially achievable and although there have been marginal improvements in relation to Goals 4 and 5 they remain unlikely to be achieved by 2015. The country has mainstreamed the MDGs into the successive medium-term national development policy frameworks; the GPRS I, GPRS II and GSGDA. Ghana has also greatly benefitted

from the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) initiative and other international development assistance support such as the UN funded Millennium Challenge Account Program (NDPC and UNDP 2010).

Ghana was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to achieve Target 1 as it halved the proportion of people living in extreme poverty in 2006; the proportion of the population living in extreme poverty declined from 36.5% in 1992 to 18.2% in 2006 and the overall poverty rate declined from 51.7% to 28.5% during the same period. However the decline in poverty in recent years could be significantly less as a consequence of the economic, food and energy crises between 2006 and 2008. It has been recognised that this economic growth has not been directly reflected by improvements in human development as the country continues to face many challenges in relation to the provision of health and other social services and there are great disparities in district and regional poverty levels. The country has seen great progress in reducing child malnutrition; Ghana has achieved Target 3 as the occurrence of underweight children has declined from 31% in 1988 to 13.9% in 2008. Ghana has also made significant improvements toward fulfilling Goal 2 and is on track to reach the target of universal primary enrolment by 2015. However progress in relation to completion rates has been mixed; particularly the survival rates of Junior High School students and of female students. Ghana has also shown progress toward meeting MDG3 as it is on track to meet the target of gender parity in education. However encouraging progress in increasing the number of women in public life suffered a major setback in 2008 as the seats held by women in the Ghanaian Parliament decreased from 25 to 20; this figure places Ghana under the international average and further action programmes need to be introduced to reverse this trend. In relation to Goal 4 there have been significant reductions in both infant, neo-natal and under-five mortality rates however Ghana is unlikely to reduce figures to reach the target of 53 deaths per 1,000

live births by 2015 unless effective child survival interventions are urgently and significantly increased (NDPC and UNDP 2010).

While maternal health in Ghana has improved over the past two decades, these improvements have occurred at a slow pace. Maternal mortality rates fell from 740 per 100,000 births in 1990 to 451 per 100,000 births in 2008; if current trends continue the 2015 figure will be significantly higher than the target of 185 per 100,000 births. The HIV prevalence rate in Ghana decreased consistently from 2002 to 2008, from 3.6% to 2.2%, but increased to 2.9% in 2009; therefore efforts need to be promoted and sustained in order to meet the target of MDG6 to halt and reverse the spread of HIV by 2015. The high prevalence rate of the disease amongst pregnant women remains to be a major concern. The use of ITNs had increased encouragingly until 2008 when drastic declines in use were recorded; this highlighted the need for wider access to prevention and treatment measures and greater investments in malaria control programmes in order to meet the malaria targets of MDG6. Ghana is on track to meet the target of halving the population without access to improved drinking water however the country is not on track to achieve Goal 7 in full. The proportion of Ghanaians with access to improved sanitation has also increased but not at a rapid enough rate to meet the 52% target by 2015. Ghana is faced with significant challenges in relation to Target 9 of MDG7; reversing the loss of environmental resources through actions such as the protecting of the country's forests and reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Negative trends have been recognised in recent years in relation to Ghana and MDG8. While aid flows to the country appear to have increased in nominal terms between 2001 and 2008, there are great concerns in the level of increase in real terms and the quality of the aid. In real terms ODA has stagnated at approximately 8.7% of GNP between 2002 and 2008 after an initial encouraging rise from 6% to 15% of GNP between 1999 and 2001. The domestic energy crisis in 2006 in addition to

the global financial, food and oil crises have also had a negative impact on the country particularly on Ghana's public debt position (NDPC and UNDP 2010).

### **3.4 Ensuring Environmental Sustainability**

Ghana has made considerable efforts in fulfilling its commitment to sustaining the environment and achieving further economic growth in an environmentally-friendly manner. The implementation of sustainable development practices has been recognised as an urgent issue in the country as the livelihoods of Ghanaians are highly dependent on natural resources which have been constantly overexploited by non-sustainable practices. The current non-sustainable management of soils is having serious implications; for example rapid erosion, desertification, loss of productive capacity and fertility loss. Fresh water resources are under increasing risk due to the persistence of practices such as inappropriate management, high rates of logging and surface mining. Ghana's biodiversity remains under great pressure due to competition for land and over-exploitation of natural resources. The current rate of biodiversity destruction will lead to further food insecurity, increased rural poverty, the erosion of genetic resources and disability of nature to cope with natural and human-made changes. Declining fish stocks due to unsustainable management and over-fishing will have serious consequences for Ghanaians as fish are a critical source of food security. The over reliance of Ghanaians on wood fuels for cooking and heating is also causing further environmental degradation; for example deforestation, desertification and soil erosion. The country's environmental degradation is endangering its poverty reduction strategies, economic development, and social well-being and is also increasing the country's sensitivity to human and natural disasters. Ghana's environmental policies need to be effectively implemented in order to successfully address the many serious environmental problems the country currently faces (EC 2006, pp. 7-13).

Ghana has a comprehensive environmental policy, a good environmental legislative framework and a number of laws and institutions with responsibility for protecting the environment and natural resources; however in practice the effectiveness of these has been limited. Article 36(9) of the Constitution of the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic contains the provision on the environment. It states that:

The State shall take appropriate measures needed to protect and safeguard the national environment for posterity; and shall seek co-operation with other states and bodies for purposes of protecting the wider international environment for mankind (The Constitution of the Republic of Ghana 1992).

This provision forms the basis on which policy actions and legislation are initiated to promote sound environmental protection and management. Ghana's National Environmental Policy (NEP) is the result of a series of government actions initiated in 1988 in an attempt to put environmental issues on the policy agenda. The NEP's main aim is to effectively and efficiently use natural resources and ensure environmental sustainability for both the current and the future generation. The policy is based on achieving the triple bottom-line objectives of sustainable development; these objectives include the maintaining of ecosystem and ecological processes, the preservation of biological diversity and the integration of environmental considerations in sectoral and socioeconomic planning at all levels (MEST 2012). The NEP was implemented in 1991 and subsequently an Environmental Action Plan (EAP) was drawn up to identify specific actions to protect the environment and ensure the better management of natural resources. The EAP addresses sustainable development issues as defined by the WCED in 1987 and provides a framework for integrating environmental issues into development strategies and actions. The main objective of the EAP is to 'define a set of policy actions, related investments and institutional strengthening activities to make Ghana's development strategy more environmentally sustainable' (EC 2006, p. 46). The plan was implemented over a 10 year period and several actions were taken; the adoption of the

NEP, the restructuring of the Environmental Protection Council (EPC) and transforming it from an advisory to a regulatory body and supporting District Assemblies to build effective environmental management capacity. Ghana has also ratified a number of MEAs however it has yet to internalise many of these into national legal framework (EC 2006, pp. 13-14).

Since the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 the country has made many efforts to incorporate sustainable development practices within national strategies and policies. Considerable progress has been achieved in the past two decades as the necessity to integrate economic growth and environmental sustainability became a global and national challenge. The integration of the three pillars of sustainable development within the Ghana's national development strategies began with the GPRS I; this strategy emphasised various issues including the necessity of sound economic management in maintaining and accelerating economic growth. However the GPRS I was criticised for being primarily concerned with achieving the MDGs and thereby placing less emphasis on the environmental pillar in comparison to the economic and social pillars. As a result a post-strategic environmental assessment of the GPRS I was carried out. GPRS II integrated the three pillars to a greater extent while accelerating economic growth to ensure Ghana achieved middle-income status. The current strategy, the GSGDA, has expanded the integration of the three pillars and focuses on addressing the intra-generational component of sustainable development. It emphasises the necessity to integrate the pillars at all levels; policy, programmes and projects (Ecoecon Consult Ltd. 2011, pp. 10-12). The GSGDA highlights that environmental management is a development issue that must be addressed effectively in order to sustain the development of the economy. The GSGDA adopts 10 areas of focus in order to achieve sustainable and equitable development; mineral extraction, biodiversity, protected areas, forests and land management, marine and coastal ecosystems, wetlands and

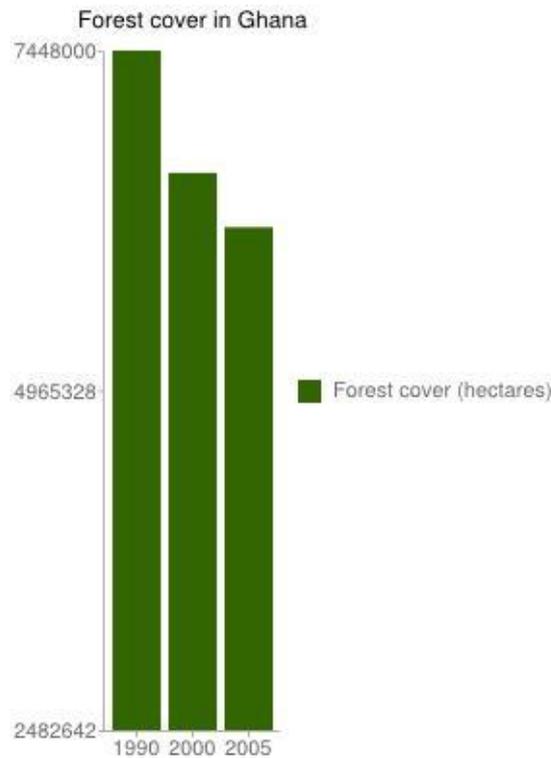
water resources, waste, pollution and noise, community participation, natural disasters risks and vulnerability and climate change vulnerability (NDPC 2010, p. 43).

Although progress has been made in Ghana's sustainable development agenda due to national strategies and policies and the ratification of global conventions, major challenges remain especially in relation to the implementation of the environmental pillar. These issues include a lack of commitment to environmental issues by leaders at the highest level, inadequate vertical and horizontal coordination with other strategies to ensure full integration of the sustainable development pillars and a lack of participation in plans and programmes. It is argued that the main challenge does not lie in the adoption of policies and strategies but in the effective implementation of these at ground level. While Ghana appears to be making considerable strides in ensuring environmental sustainability at the policy level, in reality this progress is less impressive due to the persistence of unsustainable practices in areas such as forestry, agriculture and sanitation. The effective implementation of environmentally-friendly practices is essential in maintaining Ghana's economic and social development (Ecoecon Consult Ltd. 2011, p. 22). The country's current development pattern is placing the environment under extreme stress; this is having further negative effects on the country's economic growth as poor management of natural resources is estimated to cost the country at least 1.1% of GDP every year (Government of Ghana and EC 2007, p. 3). It has also been argued that Ghana's sustainable development agenda needs to address the gender gap in Ghanaian society. In general Ghanaian women have a greater workload than their male counterparts and many of these responsibilities are directly affected by the degradation of Ghana's environment; for example collecting water and subsistence farming. The pollution and drying-up of local water sources is having serious implications for the daily lives of Ghanaian girls and women who are responsible for travelling long distances to collect safe

water. This not only affects the health of these women but prevents many Ghanaian girls from attending school and is therefore having a negative impact on the social development of the country (Archer 2005, pp. 24-26).

### **3.5 The Deforestation Issue**

There are clear discrepancies between Ghana's environmental policies and strategies and the execution of these at ground level. The persistence of deforestation in Ghana highlights the weaknesses in the effective implementation of the environmental policies which relate specifically to Ghana's forests. Ghana has the third highest rate of deforestation in Africa, coming after Togo and Nigeria, at 2% annually (GhanaWeb 2011). The country lost 33.7% of its forest cover between 1990 and 2010 and currently 69% of Ghana's total land surface is estimated as being prone to serious soil erosion largely due to the degradation of forests and poor land management (Mongabay 2011, NDPC 2010, p. 45). The degradation of Ghana's forests is caused by the interaction of economic, social and political factors. The country remains dependent on the extraction of forest resources and the cutting down of forests in several ways. The direct causes of deforestation can be attributed to human activities such as fuel wood production, agricultural activities, cocoa cultivation and providing pasture for livestock while the indirect causes include international trade, misguided policies and rapid population growth. This degradation is having enormous ecological and socioeconomic effects; biodiversity loss, soil erosion, silting of rivers, declining productivity and food insecurity. The lack of effective afforestation activities is also having a serious impact on the country's forests. It is estimated that Ghana's current tropical rainforest is 25% of its original size and if the present deforestation rates continues the entire forest cover of the country could be lost within the next 40 years (Teye 2005, pp. 9-10).



Graph 3 (Montabay 2011)

Ghana's environmental policy and the GSGDA contain provisions to protect the country's forests and Ghana has also agreed to various international commitments such as the International Forest Principles and indicator 25 of MDG7 in relation to the land area covered by forests. While most of the forests in question are protected by legal means, in reality many of these laws are not being properly enforced due to a number of factors. It is argued that the institutions in charge of managing the forests are weak and lacking human and technical resources. Bribery and corruption are major factors in the ineffective implementation of forest protection; bribery is common between forest guards and illegal operators and there are great discrepancies between the number of trees cut down and the number of culprits arrested (Teye 2005, pp. 18-19). The Ghanaian police have also come under criticism as in general they have been lukewarm or uncooperative toward environmental issues and often fail to make arrests or prosecute offenders. Their attitude has demoralized informants and committed forestry officers and has worked to the advantage of the illegal operators who continue to ignore the

law. Ghana's actual forestry laws have also been criticised due to a number of reasons; for example the low fines imposed on illegal timber operators have proven to be ineffective as in many cases it is more profitable to break the law and pay the fine than to abide by the rules. The exclusion of the local people in the design and implementation of forest protection policies is also a contributing factor to their failure as this centralised top-down approach has led to a conflict of interests between those creating the policies and the people whose daily livelihoods are most affected by them. The lack of coherence and the discrepancies that exist between Ghana's forestry policies and the actual impact they are having in practice is also reflected in many other areas such as agricultural practices, water resource management and overfishing. The underlying reasons for this must be addressed so that Ghana can implement more effective environmentally sustainable practices in the near future (Glastra 1999, pp. 62-67).

It is argued that wider external factors also have an impact on the ability of Ghana and other developing countries to simultaneously achieve environmental sustainability and economic growth. The developed world has supported Ghana's timber industry for years; almost a half of the country's timber is exported to Europe. The implementation of Ghana's Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980's placed special attention on the timber industry. By the 1980's the timber industry had practically collapsed however the IMF and WB promoted the expansion of the export industry in SAP in order to acquire additional foreign exchange and accelerate economic growth. A number of actions were taken through the WB's Export Rehabilitation Project; renewing sawmills, modernising logging operations and rebuilding trading harbours. As a result the economy improved but this was at the expense of Ghana's forests. Ghana's SAP clearly prioritised economic growth over sustaining the environment as significant GNP increases were achieved through unsustainable rates of

logging (Glastra 1999, p. 60). It has also been argued that the persistence of environmental problems in Ghana and other developing countries is due to the current economic and political climate. If poverty and inequality exacerbate environmental degradation and the elimination of poverty and inequality is not possible within the current capitalist market then attempts to simultaneously seek and reconcile economic growth and environmental sustainability are impossible without making significant structural reforms. Therefore it has been argued that the encouragement and assistance provided to Ghana and other developing countries to achieve further economic growth in an environmentally-friendly manner may be more for the benefit of neoliberal capitalism and the developed world than improving conditions for the current and future generations of the developing countries (Saith 2006, p. 1195).

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Ghana has made significant strides towards modernisation and development since it gained independence in 1957. The country's economic growth in the past two decades is impressive and Ghana's attainment of middle-income status in 2011 was a momentous achievement. Although the standard of living of many Ghanaians has improved considerably the country still faces major challenges that need to be addressed in order to further reduce poverty. The discrepancies between Ghana's economic growth and effective implementation of environmentally sustainable practices highlights the difficulties that most developing countries face in the attempt to ensure environmental sustainability while continuing to promote economic growth. Although Ghana has made many efforts to achieve further economic development in a more environmentally-friendly manner it is apparent that the country's policies need to be reformed to better reflect the needs of those who remain dependent on natural resources for their daily survival. It is also evident that existing policies need to be implemented and monitored more effectively at ground level.

## **Conclusion**

The significance of adopting practices of sustainable development is apparent as the interdependency of economic growth, environmental sustainability and social development has been widely recognised. The successful implementation of the three pillars of sustainable development can have immense advantages for both the developed and the developing world in addition to the global environment. However in order to reach its full potential in simultaneously achieving the economic, environmental and social objectives the current dominating development paradigm needs to be fully integrated within international agreements and national strategies and policies. Therefore the acceptance of sustainable development as a global challenge must be reflected in the actions taken by and the commitments of the developed and the developing countries. Some contradictions in the objectives of sustainable development have also been highlighted; while further economic growth needs to be achieved in an environmentally-friendly manner, there are limitations to the extent to which this is possible. For example, many developing countries depend on the extraction of natural resources to fuel their economy and some of society's poorest people remain dependent on the exploitation of natural resources in order to meet their most basic needs. Therefore ensuring environmental sustainability under these circumstances presents a major challenge and significant structural reforms of these countries will be required to do so; lessening the dependency of developing countries' economies on the extraction and export of resources and taking the interests and needs of the local people into account when designing environmental policies, as their daily lives will be the most affected by them. Environmental issues also need to be fully integrated within the poverty reduction and development strategies of the developing world and the environment of these countries needs to be protected without inhibiting or greatly affecting economic growth.

## Conclusion

The MDGs have been given a position of high priority in international development and their accomplishment has been accepted by the developing and the developed world as a global challenge. Therefore, as a key policy framework for poverty reduction and sustainable development the degree to which the MDGs have integrated the pillars of sustainable development is having a significant impact on the developing world. At policy level there appears to be certain limitations in achieving further economic development while guaranteeing the sustainability of the environment. The MDGs have arguably prioritised poverty reduction and economic growth over ensuring environmental sustainability; the environment has been limited to one goal and environmental issues have not been integrated within the other goals. However it has also been highlighted that reaching the targets of some of the most urgent goals will lead to unavoidable environmental trade-offs; for example reducing world hunger will require a massive increase in water consumption through methods such as agricultural expansion and increased irrigation which will have serious implications for the environment.

The case study of Ghana has highlighted the actual adoption of sustainable development practices and the MDGs in a developing country. Ghana's economy has grown and modernised considerably in the past two decades however the country appears to be less committed to environmental issues. Ghana has made considerable efforts to integrate sustainable development practices within national strategies and policies. As a result the country has a comprehensive environmental policy, a good environmental legislative framework and a number of laws and institutions with responsibility for protecting the environment and natural resources. However the actual implementation and impact of these has been limited; therefore the main challenge does not lie in the adoption of policies and strategies but in the effective implementation of these at ground level. In practice Ghana

## Conclusion

continues to prioritise economic growth over ensuring environmental sustainability as while Ghana's economy continues to expand, the environment continues to be degraded.

This project has highlighted the importance of sustainable development as it attempts to maximise economic and social development in an environmentally sustainable manner. While considerable efforts and progress have been made in adopting an environmentally-friendly pattern of development it has been highlighted that further actions and commitments are required by the global community in order to ensure that equal priority is attributed to both environmental issues and economic development. The project has also determined that several contradictions exist between the economic and environmental objectives of sustainable development.

A number of research limitations were observed upon completion of this project. A general limitation of this study is the restricted time period. If time permitted, a broader study examining the impact of sustainable development on various industries based on the extraction of natural resources and exploitation of the environment could be pursued. If further research were to be carried out a number of developing countries could be studied as this would provide an effective basis for comparison as the extent to which the principles of sustainable development have been adopted in different countries could be analysed.

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