

Research Topic

An Analysis Of The Impact Of HIV/AIDS On The Environment And Sustainable Development In Southern Africa: Focusing on South Africa and Zimbabwe

Research Background

Six years ago, leaders from all United Nations countries agreed on a vision for the future – a world with less poverty, hunger and disease, greater survival prospects for mothers and their infants, better educated children, equal opportunities for women, a healthier environment and a world in which developed and developing countries worked in partnership for the betterment of all (UNDP, 2007). This was a vision for sustainable development. For many countries particularly in sub Sahara Africa, that vision seems to be more of a dream that may never come true. It is general knowledge that sustainable development cannot take place without sustainable management of the natural resources. Most countries in Southern Africa depend more on their natural resource base for economic and social needs than any other region in the world. About two-thirds of people in sub-Saharan Africa live in rural areas and rely on agriculture and other natural resources for income (Energy Information Administration, 2006). The environmental resource base of the region is shrinking rapidly and ecosystems have come under severe pressure. Deforestation continues at higher rates in many areas and water resources have become inadequate in quantity and quality (African Environment Outlook, 2002). In South Africa and Zimbabwe the problem is further aggravated by the growing poverty affecting the majority of the population and the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS threatening the survival of most nations in Southern Africa.

An often-quoted definition of sustainable development is that from the Brundtland Report “Our Common Future”(1987) where sustainable development is defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The environment on the other hand, includes many things, the land, water and air, all plants, animals and microscopic forms of life on earth, the built environment (manmade surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging from the large-scale civic surroundings to the personal places) and the social, economic, political and cultural activities that form part of everyday life (Brundtland Report, 1987). There are close linkages between poverty and environmental degradation. In South Africa and Zimbabwe for instance, poor people, whether in rural or urban areas, have fewer resources and are often forced to live in marginal areas. Ecosystems in such instances are overexploited causing environmental problems. Habitat (1989: 6), defines an environmental problem as "either an inadequate supply of a resource essential to human health or urban production (e.g. sufficient fresh water) or the presence of pathogens or toxic substances in the human environment that can damage human health or physical resources such as forests, fisheries or agricultural land". The environmental problems differ between urban and rural areas. In urban areas such problems include the crowded and cramped living conditions and the presence of pathogens in the human environment because of lack of basic infrastructure; the dangerous and unhealthy sites of some neighbourhoods and the irregular or no collection of garbage in some neighbourhoods; the city-wide problems of the disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes, and water, air, and noise pollution. In Zimbabwe, urban agriculture is another environmental problem as people, because of rising costs of living, have resorted to growing crops in all open spaces including riverbanks (urban agriculture). In rural areas, environmental problems can include, overgrazing, loss of soil and soil fertility through overuse of agricultural land, deforestation through land clearing for agriculture and for energy, and lack of clean water and sanitation facilities. Poverty has been linked to environmental degradation and environmental degradation in turn has been linked to the exacerbation of poverty. With HIV/AIDS wrecking havoc in Southern Africa especially in South Africa and Zimbabwe where prevalence rates stand at 18.8% and 20.1% respectively (UNAIDS, 2006), this cycle of poverty becomes a vicious circle that can retard sustainable development or cause to undo developmental achievements of past years.

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By the end of 2006, out of an estimated 39.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS globally, 24.7 million were in Sub Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2006). The region has an orphans crisis with more than 12 million children under the age of 18 having lost one or both parents threatening these young people's livelihoods and their future well-being. The historical past, socio, political and economic conditions in South Africa and Zimbabwe, found a fertile ground for the dreadful epidemic. Empirical evidence globally has shown inextricable links between poverty and HIV/AIDS. In South Africa, more that 50 of the population live in poverty and in Zimbabwe the figure is more than 80%. Whilst most of the poor people live in rural areas, the continuously rising poverty has accelerated rural-urban migration especially young people as they seek alternative livelihoods in urban cities. There is a general agreement on the relationship between poverty and HIV/AIDS and between poverty and environmental degradation. It is difficult to imagine what the impact and effects will be given this vicious cycle that seem to be undoing or threatening to undo development in Southern Africa particularly in South Africa and Zimbabwe. There is some interconnectedness between environmental, health, population and economic issues. Poverty problems cannot be treated separately by fragmented institutions and policies; they are linked in a complex system of cause and effect. An impact in one sector or institution has ripple effects in other sectors and institutions. In order to meet or come near to meeting the MDG of sustainable development, countries, including both South Africa and Zimbabwe will need a systemic holistic sector-integrated approach that take into account the interconnectedness of the various sectors and how they impact on and affect each other.

The Research

The study examines how HIV/AIDS is impacting on the environment and sustainable development in South Africa and Zimbabwe and how the two countries are responding to such impacts. The research stems from awareness that, for developing countries to achieve sustainable development and meet the Millennium Development Goals, a strong human capital base is a necessary condition without which no sustainable development can take place. The survival of this human capital is dependent on a healthy environment, which in turn is only possible to sustain if there is an adequate human capital base that is healthy, educated and devoid of poverty. Sustainable development is all about man's well being. Man lives and survives within the environment and must have knowledge and information on how to live in harmony with the environment. The research will be two separate case studies of current projects one in South Africa and one in Zimbabwe. The separate projects will be analytically evaluated to highlight the critical importance of adopting a contextual systems integrated approach to development interventions.

The Rationale

There is not enough country specific information and data on impacts of HIV/AIDS and perceived country risks that take into account ripple effects between sectors. The study is meant to highlight the interconnected links between the environment, the wellbeing of man and sustainable development. Man's wellbeing is affected by what happens in the health, education, agriculture, and other sectors and what happens in these sectors is affected by man's wellbeing. Through an analytical evaluation of current or ongoing projects, the study is meant to demonstrate why a systems approach to interventions is critical. The other objective is to make a contribution by providing country specific analytical data and information on which to build further research on the use of a systems-based approach to HIV/AIDS impact on the environment and sustainable development.

Research Questions

The questions the study tries to answer are:

1. What will be the acute, long-term and cross-generational impact in a wide range of sectors particularly environment, health, education towards their contribution to sustainable development in the case study countries?
2. What are the future implications of a non-systems approach to sustainable development?

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3. How will such impact affect the capacity of the state to deliver goods and services and ultimately meet the MDGs?
4. What are the fiscal implications from a national perspective?

Research Methodology

The study will be descriptive, evaluative and analytical of an ongoing project using a Systems-based analytic model (adopted and adapted to the project context). The methodology will include use of both primary and secondary data.

- Will carry out literature reviews, examining and describing the two countries' HIV/AIDS impact mitigation policy and strategic approaches to discern or assess the degree to which project interventions harmonize with the country developmental plans and policies and review of the specific project documents to see determine to what extent information from different stakeholders could be availed for national planning and action.
- Fieldwork will be done in South Africa - conducting structured interviews with the respective project planners, implementers and project beneficiaries. Also key informant interviews will be conducted with identified individuals or organizations.

Time Frame

The fieldwork is estimated to take approximately 4 weeks in South Africa. Much of secondary data will be obtained and reviewed prior to country visit.