LINKING ENVIRONMENTAL AUDITING TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

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INTRODUCTION

FOR almost two decades, Tanzania has been taking steps to move form the traditional mode of government where everything is decided at the government headquarters to a new mode which entails giving responsibility to lower levels. The old mode of government also meant to deliver social services from the headquarters of the relevant ministries, a situation which slowed down the pace of development.

The steps taken involve making reforms in the various sectors including local government reform programmes, reforms in the health sector as well as the financial sector.
These reforms are meant to bring social services close to the people and give them the opportunity to fully participate in the decision making process. There have also been efforts to promote democracy and attract investments in order to speed up the country's development.

Alongside these reforms the government has taken measures to institute good governance, transparency and accountability in an effort to speed up the development process so as to raise the quality of life of about 80 percent Tanzanians who are dependent on the environment and natural resources found therein for their livelihoods. To this end, public expenditure studies are now taking place in various districts in the country in a bid to enforce accountability and transparency in managing public funds.

Although the country's biodiversity holds great potential for sustained growth, challenges including destruction of natural resources and the natural environment in general, continue to be an obstacle towards development.

Human capacity limitations and obstacles to growth such as poor technology, corruption and ignorance have also played a part in slowing down the

development process that would otherwise help to raise rural incomes and thus alleviate poverty.

But to achieve these levels of development there (must be in place) is need to promote better marketing practices, policies and legal frameworks conducive to conserving biodiversity. These are, to a great extent, lacking not only in Tanzania but also in many African countries.

Moreover if the 80 percent Tanzanians are to benefit from the natural resources in a sustainable manner then community efforts must be facilitated in conserving biodiversity in targeted areas such as wildlife, fishery, and forestry. This can be done through environmental education, social mobilization and public outreach.

ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND POVERTY ALLEVIATION

The war on poverty has until recently been guided by conventional approaches of aid kits, debt relief, trade reforms and donor dependency. However in recent years, leaders of governments and countries have realized that these approaches have failed to produce the intended results.

For one thing these approaches entail a lengthy process before the funds reach the intended beneficiaries. Funds are thus not received timely. For another, not all such money reaches the targets as some finds its way in the pockets of well-placed individuals who use it to strengthen private businesses.
The result in that for almost four decades during which donors have been handing down to developing countries donations in all its various forms, the countries, Tanzania included, have failed to attain significant levels of development.

When 189 heads of state and government met in New York in September 2005 (World Summit 2005) to take stock of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it became apparent that the financial and human capital alone is not enough to bring changes in the economy of developing countries. Instead the focus should now shift to local natural resources that are embodied in the environment.

The new paradigm calls for both environmental organizations and development groups to consider the environment as the springboard for development and underlines the importance of managing properly at the local level, natural resources such as soils, forests, water, fisheries as a most effective means for the people to create wealth for themselves and alleviate poverty.

Conserving soil fertility provides on alternative source of income for small scale farmers through the sale and trade of cash crops as well as food crops. Improved use of seeds increases farm productivity and crop yields.

Thus with greater income form the environment, poor families experience better nutrition and health and so take the first steps to lift themselves out of poverty.

It means therefore, that the way we treat the environment and how we use the natural resources will have a telling effect on poverty alleviation, improving the quality of life and ensuring sustained economic development. This requires not only good national and regional policies but also supportive global policies and practices, policies that capture the benefits of a complex relationship between health, development, poverty alleviation, water, land, forests, wildlife and human well-being (the interdependence of environment and development).

Moreover, building an economy that would lift the majority out of poverty should begin with natural resources. The majority of the poor depend on fields, forests and waters for their livelihoods; this is the asset base which they can use to create wealth and move from subsistence economy to a higher level. So if the resource base is not properly managed, there is no way it can be used to alleviate poverty and enhance national development.

It should also be remembered that harvests from forests, fisheries and farms are sources of rural income and act as a cushion when other sources of employment fail, thus programmes to reduce poverty must take into account the important link between the environment and the livelihoods of the rural poor.

However, the inherent interdependence between rural livelihoods and sustainable natural resources management is rarely recognized appropriately. In particular, the key role of local communities and rural producers as custodians of natural resources or the extent to which their livelihoods depend on biodiversity and ecosystems services, sustainable agriculture, forests and fisheries management remains undervalued.

Yet the livelihoods and food security of the poor often depend directly on healthy ecosystems and the diversity of goods and ecological services they provide. The management of soil, water and the provision of other ecosystem services, directly impacts crop yields as well as the availability of other biodiversity incomes. Thus healthy ecosystems are fundamental for eradicating extreme poverty and hunger.

SOME POTENTIALS AND REALITIES ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES.

Tanzania is endowed with abundant natural resources which if properly used can enable the country to lift the majority of its people from poverty and raise the quality of their lives.

The resources include about one million square kilometers of land a good part of which is suitable for agriculture. There are also38.5 million hectares of woodlands and forests.

The has at least nine perennial rivers , a similar number of basins and three

major freshwater lakes. It has also fifteen national parks and several game reserves including the Selous which is said to be the biggest in the world..
The country has also a huge deposit of minerals including gold, diamond, tanzanite and coal.
Yet with all the abundant resources, Tanzania is still ironically a poor country.

THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND.

There is severe deforestation due to logging, lumbering, charcoal burning and other activities. Land degradation is also very high, with 61 percent of the total land area being affected by desertification.
The rate of deforestation stands at 3,226 sq. km.
Flows in rivers have been reduced drastically due to deforestation and drought, among others.
Siltation has reduced the depths of rivers and lakes alike with the result that fish catches have gone down and some species have disappeared. Pollution has also affected fish stocks in the water bodies.
Human encroachment and climate change exert pressure on wildlife. The former drives animals from their habitats while the latter creates scarcity of water and fodder.
But even without these threats, the country has not realized the full economic benefits of wildlife through tourism.
The same is the case with the mining sector which has yet to contribute significantly to the country's economic development.

WHY WE ARE HERE

Poor policies that do not give environmental conservation its due importance have contributed to this situation. Until recently, each sector had its own policy which often overlapped with others or contradicted. These were also fragmented with the result that they were not effective as guidelines for conserving the environment. The environment was seen as “that other thing” and the minister for environment was considered so low that the government could do without him(her).

But there is also lack of political will. The Environment Management Act 2004 (EMA) became effected in July 2005 but to-date it is still on paper as it is not being enforced. A neighbouring country which enacted its environmental law that same year is way ahead of us. It has successfully banned the use of plastic bags, there are no heaps of garbage on the streets and it takes tree planting very seriously. By end of July this year it will get rid of all “smoking” vehicles from its roads.
On the other hand we are still battling to ban the production and use of plastic bags, the deadline of which was set to be October last year. The difference between us and this other country is that our neighbours have the will to act while we are not.

There is also the issue of corruption. Laws are broken, rules and regulations are purposely overlooked (bent) to serve personal interests. The procedure to issue licenses for harvesting forest products, for example, have had to be changed three times in as many years. Most of the revenue from natural resources goes uncollected and the little that is collected is misappropriated.
A recent report published by an NGO cites two things: one is that the country loses 73bn shillings (about 70 million USD) every year from illegal trade in unprocessed logs with the Far East particularly China. The other thing is that government officials at various levels and some businessmen are behind this illegal.
Assuming that we lose a similar amount from ivory and other trophies, fisheries, minerals and other natural resources, it is unlikely that we will be able to turn these resources into wealth and lift Tanzanians out of poverty. Fortunately, four weeks into the report none of those implicated in the scandal has raised a finger against it. This means the report is true and should be relied upon.

May be the biggest reason behind this situation is lack of awareness on the conservation of environment. Many communities do not know the importance and benefits accruing from a healthy natural environment.
However there are also those who know the importance and benefits but have not been mobilized,(convinced) to participate actively in conservation.
Lack of knowledge and awareness are a big problem.

SO HAS THE MEDIA NOT PLAYED ITS ROLE?

The media in Tanzania continues to play an important role in disseminating environmental information to different sections of the public. We know that information is key to changing the public's behaviour on the way they treat the environment.
We also acknowledge the important role of the media in raising awareness on conservation and soliciting the active participation of the public in a bid to alleviate poverty through sustainable consumption of natural resources. Information enables policy and decision makers to make informed decisions.

The targeted audience is mainly, however, the rural population who comprise about 80 percent of the country's population and who are also the majority of the poor. These are the stewards of the environment and the natural resources embodied therein. Unfortunately they are also the ones who suffer heavily from the effects of environmental destruction.

With over 100 newspapers and scores of television and radio stations, Tanzania's vibrant media has to a great extent managed to disseminate environmental information and raise awareness on conservation of water sources and resources, conservation of soil fertility, conservation and protection of forests and sustainable consumption of fisheries.
Yet there are daunting challenges which the media is facing. These have

hampered it from carrying out its noble duty of raising awareness on environmental conservation.

Getting the correct, accurate information and timely is still a problem. The essence of environmental reporting is to solicit action, to make decisions. This is only possible if the information is disseminated in time.
Government officials still withhold information. Sometimes they provide wrong information to cover their bad decisions and actions. The “logging report” in which figures of log exports provide by the government are by far lower that those given by the recipient countries like China serves as a good example.
NGOs are a good source but some of them don't give correct information for their own benefit. Individual journalists face severe financial constraints and are thus unable to visit sites.
On the other hand, media owners have their own policies which focus on making more money than educating the public on environmental issues. The owners are more concerned with making profits rather than nurturing the journalists so that he can produce quality work. This has made a good section of the media remain private but not independent.
The editors are also a problem. Some of them lack even a working knowledge of environmental issues and so many "spike" a good story. There are cases when editors have thrown a good environment story and replaced it with a business story that should have actually been an advert. And this is done to earn themselves a good name in the company books so that they may get hefty gifts at Christmas.
Many journalist are poorly trained, often, professional standards are low. Thus both freelance and employed journalists prefer to chase easier stories.
Such journalists are not willing to work hard and produce high quality and well researched stories and features ending up reporting what a minister or another person says at a press conference, a public rally or a meeting.
Most of our environmental journalists have no flair and passion for the environment. They merely report to earn a living. Reporting the environment "mechanically", results in “dry” stories and features that do not appeal to the interests of the audience.

Corruption also affects the performance of the media in the country. It cuts through all the levels – from an individual journalist, through the editor and the media owner to the government official and other authorities.

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

We have to take an integrated approach to environmental conservation where all sectors work together. Everyone shares responsibility for a sustainable environment, and all sectors must work towards this common purpose. Yet each will be held accountable for their decisions and actions.

There is also need to cooperate with neighbours, bearing in mind the transboundary nature of the environment.

The government has to avoid policies programmes that have a negative impact on the environment. Raising the price of kerosene, for example, has a direct impact on forests and woodlands. Policies must also target to rehabilitate and reclaim damaged sections of the environment. some seriousness in tree planting campaigns is required.
We have to institute a high degree of accountability among government officials and other authorities. This will help to stem illegal extraction of resources and plundering.
There is need to embark on a policy of inclusion; communities must participate in deciding on environmental issues, they must get due rewards for their stewardship.

The media must spearhead new efforts to raise awareness of environmental conservation. It is the agent of change towards sustainable management of the environment and natural resources. It is the catalyst for sustainable development. But the environment scene is vast and constantly changing, thus journalists must keep up-to-date with developments through reading and questioning. They must strive to learn more and be better informed of the issues so as to be able to educate the public.

Journalists must communicate. Environmental information should help communities to make decisions (leaders, politicians alike), so it should be simple and clear. They must also be responsible, know the facts and have the figures accurate.

Media practitioners must be trained to unpack various concepts of the environment (such as IWRM, climate change, environmental auditing, etc) research papers, scientific findings, reports and repackage them to suit the interests of various stakeholders (communities, politicians, government etc).

They need to get skills that will help them go beyond event-based reporting and the journalistic 5 Ws and H. Coverage should provide a more detailed, analytical insight into issues and focus on implications and likely impact of events.

Without the media playing its right role, policies will be formulated and written, new institutional arrangements will be put in place but the main actors, the community, will remain uninformed and thus will not understand their roles in the emerging environment management paradigm.

ENVIRONMETAL AUDITING FOR A SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

The public in Tanzania is still wary of auditors. The common belief is that once an auditor completes working on the accounts books of a government department of

a company , the officer responsible is closer to a police cell and may be on his way to jail. The Auditor General's report, until recently, was locked away in cupboards as soon as it was published.

This need not be the case. Auditors have the responsibility to study, investigate announce their findings and suggest remedies where need be. Where some people are arrested as a result is not really their concern.

So the public wants to hear from environmental auditors the threats to the environment and natural resources such as climate change, invasive alien species and stockpiles.

They also want to hear from the auditors risks posed to the environment by various human activities. New factories are being built as chemical fertilizers and pesticides continue to be used, all of which have a big effect on the health of the environment.

The public wants to hear from the environmental auditors suggestions on how to address challenges facing the environment today and in future.

Environmental auditing would thus enable governments and other authorities to take the necessary steps so as to realize sustainable development.

By using the media to reach out to the public, the advice arising from the auditing should enable governments, organizations, communities and individuals to take appropriate concrete measures to ensure healthy ecosystems which would raise incomes, improve the quality of lives and sustain future generations.

ENDS.