

# Findings

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## **Towards Environmentally Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa**

Environmental degradation primarily affects the poor, both in rural and urban areas. Reversing the downward spiral of this degradation is essential to any strategy for reducing poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa .

This study, *Toward Environmentally Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A World Bank Agenda*, outlines the World Bank's strategy for improving its assistance to SSA countries as they move toward environmentally sustainable development (ESD). It assesses the environmental situation and long-term trends in Africa, draws lessons from Bank experience, and proposes new directions.

The study focuses on three questions:

- What are the key environmental issues and challenges in Sub-Saharan Africa?
- How has the World Bank responded to those challenges, and what are the lessons learned?
- What should the World Bank do to help African countries make their development sustainable?

### **Poverty: A Cause and Effect of Environmental Degradation**

Of the 30 poorest countries of the world, 21 are in Africa. The entire region had an average income level of about \$500 per capita in 1992, and a negative per capita income growth rate during 1980-92. Poverty is exacerbated by an annual population growth rate of 2.7 percent for

the region.

Poverty is linked to environment in complex ways, particularly in natural resource-based African economies. About two-thirds of the population lives in rural areas, deriving their main income from agriculture. Land degradation, deforestation, lack of access to safe water, and loss of biodiversity, compounded by climatic variability, are the concerns that invariably arise from assessments of their natural environment.

Degradation of resources reduces the productivity of the poor who most rely on them, and makes poor people even more susceptible to extreme events (weather, economic, and civil strife). Poverty makes recovery from these events extremely difficult and contributes to lowering social and ecological resistance. The poor, with shorter time-horizons, and usually less secure access to natural resources, are unable, and often unwilling to invest in natural resource management. Moreover, poor people are often the most exposed to environmental damage since they cannot purchase safe water or have the option of living in a less polluted area.

### **Environmental "hot spots"**

In the next three decades, population growth, migration, and settlement will dramatically change the face of Sub-Saharan Africa. By the year 2025, the population is expected to total more than 1 billion ( 1,000 million ) people. This number will continue to grow, with resulting increases in food requirements and environmental pressures.

This rate of population growth and migrations, both national and transnational, put tremendous strain on traditional social fabrics and concentrate the environmental pressure in certain hot spots. African coasts are attracting increasing numbers of people, and much of the continent's urban population now live in coastal cities. Coastal zones are often affected by a wide range of interdependent environmental issues relating to agriculture, forestry, and fisheries and water management, as well as infrastructure, urban and industrial development.

### **Challenges for Environmentally Sustainable Development**

African countries will face six major environmental challenges while making their transition to environmentally sustainable development.

- Achieving food security through sustainable agricultural intensification by promoting environmentally sound technologies, while maintaining and in some cases rebuilding natural capital, especially soils.
- Facilitating a demographic transition to a more stable population level, thereby easing pressure on the environment and allowing living standards and education levels to improve.
- Influencing migrations toward better population distributions which geographically

match development potential, while mitigating environmental costs.

- Making urbanization sustainable by improving planning and services, building on the positive aspects of market growth in cities, and mobilizing labor and people's participation, while interrupting the downward spiral of deteriorating living conditions.
- Managing energy, water, and other natural resources in an integrated fashion to ensure their long-term sustainability
- Speeding Africa's development of modern education, information, and communication systems, since knowledge that combines science and technology with local know-how, cultural values, and diversity is and will remain vital for addressing environmental issues.

## **Ten lessons for the Bank**

The study identifies 10 lessons for integrating environmental concerns into Bank assistance to SSA governments.

- In-country environmental planning through, for example, National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs), or their equivalents, helps to raise environmental awareness, introduce new environmental policies, and build institutional capacity. This planning should be pursued at the local, national, and sub-regional levels.
- Country Environmental Strategy Papers (CESPs) are instrumental in defining the Bank's environmental work in many SSA countries. This planning should systematically integrate environment into Bank assistance strategies and influence its dialogue with African borrowers.
- Macroeconomics tends to focus on fiscal balance and economic growth, while environmental planning focuses on long-term environmental issues and the importance of investing in natural, human, and social capital. Sustainable development requires greater consistency between World Bank recommendations on macroeconomic policy and those on environmental management.
- Addressing environmental issues requires cross-sector and trans-boundary approaches and operations.
- Environmental considerations must be integrated into sector investment lending since this lending comprises the bulk of the Bank's portfolio.
- Adjustment lending, by correcting price and policy distortions, is a powerful tool for improving environmental management.
- Even though it only makes up about 10 percent of the Bank's portfolio, environmental investment lending needs special attention since it is targeted to institutional

development and capacity building, the foundation of environmental management.

- Environmental assessment (EA) is essential in project design but it has to be better integrated into project financial and economic analysis. It must also be applied overall in sectors and incorporated into geographic information.
- The Global Environment Facility is key to leveraging support for global environmental issues and pioneering new approaches at the national and sub-regional levels.
- The World Bank must invest more in environmental training to achieve the full integration of environmental concerns into its development assistance.

## **A World Bank Plan of Action**

The World Bank agenda calls for assisting African countries in their transition to environmentally sustainable development. The plan focuses on the poorest segments of society, which are the most affected by environmental degradation. Poverty reduction will lead to improved environmental quality and the reverse. Specific actions include:

- Helping African countries seek environmental planning as a participatory process at the national and local levels.
- Promoting national environmental support programs (ESPs) to implement NEAPs.
- Developing the environmental content of investment lending.
- Creating a regional framework for donor coordination in assisting African countries to address soil fertility problems more effectively.
- Vigorously incorporating environmental concerns into adjustment lending .
- Enhancing the capacity to prepare and manage cross-cutting operations to complement the sector approach.
- Strengthening environmental training, public information, and communication
- Developing financial instruments for effective financing of environmentally sustainable development.

Sub-Saharan Africa offers a great diversity of ecosystems from sparsely populated rain forests to densely populated savannas and drylands as well as from flat coastal zones to plateaus and highlands. This diversity calls for specific strategies and programs. This study, while providing a regional perspective, also discusses the geographic specifics and environmental priorities of six sub-regions based on ecological zoning by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The sub-regions are:

- The Sudano-Sahelian Belt;
- Humid West Africa;
- The Congo Basin;
- East Africa;
- Southern Africa; and
- The Indian Ocean Islands.

The plan will focus on the following *regional* environmental priorities:

*Sudano-Sahelian Belt.* The priority will be to reverse the spiral of land degradation. The Bank, working with other donors, will provide governments cost-effective support to programs which address drought preparedness, integrated water resource management, and fuelwood supply. Special attention will be given to sanitation and waste management, a critical environmental risk in drought-prone areas.

*Humid West Africa.* The focus will be on integrated coastal zone management, conservation of the remaining primary rain forest, and protection of the high watersheds of major river systems, as well as improving urban and industrial environmental management.

*Congo Basin.* The Bank's main concern will be to conserve the second largest contiguous primary tropical rain forest in the world, monitoring its evolution, and planning its sustainable use.

*East Africa.* Bank assistance will continue its focus on reversing land degradation through erosion control, agroforestry, and intensive sustainable agriculture, while helping to preserve the region's unique biodiversity, which remains the primary source of foreign exchange through tourism.

*Southern Africa.* Improving urban environmental management through pollution control and better living conditions will be essential in the countries where cities already hold more than half the population, for example, South Africa. In the countryside, efforts should balance conserving biodiversity and making agriculture more sustainable, especially maintaining soil quality.

*Indian Ocean Islands.* Bank assistance will focus on reversing land degradation while intensifying efforts to protect unique biodiversity in Madagascar. Controlling urban and industrial pollution will be a priority on the small islands.

The Bank agenda reinforces and carries forward the message that the Earth Summit of 1992 emphasized : Without improving environmental management, development will be undermined, and without accelerated development in poor countries, the environment will continue to degrade.

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