

CHALLENGES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF RELIGIONS AND VALUE-BASED APPROACHES

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Abstract: The dominant development paradigms tend to focus on wealth, production and consumption. They rely solely on science and technology to resolve challenges related to development and environmental conservation while dismissing local knowledge. Indigenous values, traditions and moral responsibilities concerning the preservation of the earth's resources are not fully accommodated in sustainable development strategies. In practice the roles, strengths, and essence of traditional knowledge are excluded from development interventions. Religion and beliefs, in particular, significantly influence billions of lives, in providing a respectful code of conduct and advice. If traditional knowledge and spiritual values are neglected, advanced technologies and discoveries alone will not ensure the sustainability of the earth's resources. In this regard, this paper addresses some challenges to sustainable development, specifically, the excessive use of resources and the impact of conflict and war on development. In addressing these issues the paper will devote attention to Islamic teachings, which refer explicitly to natural resources and how mankind should utilize and protect these during peace and war. The paper provides suggestions on how religions and indigenous values can contribute to resolving current environmental problems.

Keywords: sustainable Development, excessiveness, wars, conflicts, religions, Islam,

INTRODUCTION: DEVELOPMENT AND LOCAL VALUES

We live in an era of economic and technological advancement. However, these achievements have not been backed

by moral values (Grander, 2006:3). Moral values structure relationships, which contradict the individualist bias of neo-classical approaches (Friedmann, 1992:47) that dominate current global economies. We need to understand that the tendency in development theories and practices is to privilege market relations (Folbre, 2002) and not human relationships. Despite the confirmation from various schools of thought of the importance of people's beliefs and social norms, the current economic development practices have little space for human values and traditions. In fact they are still influenced by supply and demand indicators when addressing the relationships between communities and natural resources; humans are seen as 'resources'. The Asian Development Bank states that "sustained economic growth depends crucially on how well human resources are developed, and how efficiently land, capital and technology are mobilized. Educated manpower may be wasted if capital and raw material are lacking, if economic policies are inappropriate, if entrepreneurship is lacking or if political structure are unstable" (The Asian Development Bank 1990:170 cited in Hossain, et.al 2010:49). This carefully phrased statement reflects an economic, rather than sustainable development, point of view. The concept of sustainable development informs us that "humans are more than economic beings, and that our progress, therefore, involves more than creating ever-greater levels of wealth" (Gardner, 2006:5). Beyond materialistic concepts and indicators, education and manpower skills should be based on a set of ethics and values. Development strategies and plans need to set limits on the use of environmental resources because we face devastating environmental problems. Environmental changes such as loss of habitat,

declining species, green cover and rising sea levels may be irreversible if we fail to make serious and significant efforts to control the ongoing damage.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND RELIGIONS

The Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development is debated and examined in most literature on sustainable development. According to the Commission, sustainable development is that which "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p 43). For many Muslims theorists this definition is welcomed from an Islamic understanding, as it seeks a balance between economy, society, and the environment (Hassan, 2006). The basic principle of sustainable development is to meet the present generations' needs while protecting and preserving ecosystems to meet the future generations' needs. This concept is simple and applicable. The problem arises from the term 'needs', which itself is left undefined, as how much could meet these needs? It is difficult to enforce limits on an individual's needs without people themselves setting these limits. The following quote refers to human actions constructed around 'choices': "achieving progress toward sustainable development is clearly a matter of social choice, choice on the part of individuals and families, of communities, of the many organizations of civil society, and of government" (Hardi and Zdan, 1997:17). This concept could initiate debate on how people make choices: what factors affect their choices and what are the consequences of these choices on the environment? If these choices harm the environment, what are measures are needed to change people's attitudes and behavior? There is some agreement that economic, political and social aspects have great influence on the sustainability of development. Nevertheless we remain trapped in a vicious circle and endless debate about sustainable development and little has been done in practice. In reality, sustainable development lacks the collective practical solutions to achieve its objectives and sustain its positive initiatives. This paper emphasizes social dimensions and what human values can contribute to resolving challenges in development efforts. The World Hunger Organisation reported that there were 925 million hungry people in 2010; 98% were in developing countries. Income inequality is rising, the average income in one of the 20 wealthiest countries is 37 times that in the 20 poorest countries, which is twice the 1970 ratio (World Bank, 2003). Moreover, there are many political and social problems that undermine sustainable development objectives such as conflict, war and violence. On the other hand, the debts and destruction accumulated during the Cold War will remain a burden for generations to come. Future generations will have to pay the price of debt for wars

they did not fight, for ideas they do not hold, for a regional and global system that no longer exists, and for decisions made by leaders no longer in power (Willett, 1999).

In relation to the natural world, all major religions set principles of interaction with natural environments. The issue of natural resources occupies a prominent place in the Quran and the Prophet Mohammed's teachings. Utilization, management and conservation of natural resources, such as water, soil and plants, is repeatedly mentioned in different ways. Islam offers specific guidance for managing and protecting natural resources, yet many Muslim countries and individuals have done little to preserve these resources.

Natural resources are the means of human survival. One of the examples mentioned in the Quran concerns the birth of Jesus, which was one of the great events in the history of mankind. According to the Quran, he was born under a tree. A voice called to Mary as she gave birth, saying, 'Grieve not! Your Lord has provided you with water stream under you; and shake the trunk of palm tree towards you; it will let fall fresh ripe dates upon you. So eat and drink and be glad' (Quran, Surat Maryam 19:24). We can observe the presence of nature at this moment; it provided shelter, food and drink. Mary was asked to shake the trunk of the palm tree, which by all means would not be possible for a woman in that situation. This indicates that to achieve something we need to make an effort. Therefore in order to maintain the productivity and creativity of the earth we need to act in a responsible way. Some religious institutions in the United States and United Kingdom, such as churches and mosques, are making significant efforts to preserve the environment. Gardner reports that in the United States there are more than 307,000 houses of worship, many of which are involved in environmental-related activities. However, many other religions institutions are not yet involved. Tomalin (2004) points out that religious institutions in India have paid little attention to environmental issues. Currently there is concern about excessive use of natural resources. Stress on the environment is increasing: fisheries are overexploited; soils degraded, coral reefs destroyed, tropical forest lost, and air and water polluted (World Bank, 2003). Excepting substantial changes in demographic trends, by 2050 the global population will reach nine billion, with 2.5 billion more people concentrated in currently developing countries. Larger populations put more pressure on ecosystems and natural resources, intensify competition for land and water, and increase demand for energy (World Bank, 2010). Overall, the past 100 years were the most violent, environmentally destructive and wealth-skewed in record (Gardner, 2006:24).

BENEFITING FROM RELIGIONS AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

To challenge this situation people must contribute valuable local knowledge. Local knowledge includes concepts, beliefs, values, goals and processes (van Vlaenderen, 2004). Development planners and experts should respect and acknowledge the value of indigenous knowledge. This may create mutual respect and trust, and facilitate acceptance of the new technologies introduced by development projects (Brohman, 1996). It is widely believed by development theorists that effective development plans and interventions would benefit from some understanding of indigenous knowledge and practices (Sillitoe, 2002).

Using indigenous knowledge in development programs may make it more appropriate to local conditions and provide local solutions to local problems. Indigenous technical solutions can sometimes be more appropriate than foreign-introduced technology (Uphoff, 1991). Opening space for indigenous knowledge may create self-worth and self-esteem among local people and therefore enhance popular participation and empowerment. People will not be willing to share their knowledge if they are not welcomed to do so and their knowledge is not respected (Keough, 1998:189).

Stimulation of local experimentation has been found to be useful in exploring indigenous knowledge, strengthening people's confidence in their own solutions, and producing options that are appropriate to ecological, economic and socio-cultural conditions (Hagmann et al., 1998:48/51). Indigenous people are guided by values that inspire them to do good; there is great value placed on collective acts, cooperation and solidarity in the community. The household, extended families, neighbors, friends and communities are not framed as merely consumers and producers; they take part in various activities and share products. The power of communities can support scientific and technological solutions to current environmental problems.

As part of current efforts to solve environmental problems, academics and professionals have debated technical and scientific solutions. While politicians debate financial obligations and carbon tax measures, the majority of the population is left out, confused and helpless. This majority could make a significant contribution if guided and provided with information. Fortunately, within development theory and practice we are in an era of 'sustainable development'. The concept has become a powerful and amiable notion. Sustainable development is not just a new concept, but a new development paradigm that implies changes in personal attitudes as well as adjustment of

existing institutional structures (Rodriquez, 1997:35). It is widely believed that the vision and goals of sustainable development should be grounded in the historical, cultural and political development of each country.

The wisdom of religious and indigenous practices could fill some gaps, particularly those dealing with natural resources. It is a local wisdom which warns us that "lack of respect for growing living things soon leads to lack of respect for humans too" (Chief Luther Standing Bear, a native American). Also, an ancient Chinese poem is very informative in proclaiming, 'If you are thinking a year ahead, sow a seed. If you are thinking ten years ahead, plant a tree. If you are thinking a hundred years ahead, educate the people' (Kuan Tzu, 500 B.C.- Chinese poet). However, if you did not have enough time to live and but had enough to plant a tree could you do it? The Prophet Mohammed said "if the Day of Judgment erupts while you are planting a new tree, carry on and plant it". These pieces of wisdom and advice may inspire local people and get them involved in productive efforts. On the other hand, social analysis techniques provide information about people's culture, priorities and options, and therefore sustainable development planners could use this information in designing effective strategies.

From the field

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) reports cases from all over the globe which show us how ordinary people communicate with nature and learn to manage its resources wisely. They set limits to ensure the utilization of natural resources in a rational way. For example, the Maasai deliberately water cattle every other day in the wet season, so as to accustom them to this system of watering every second day which is necessary in the dry season. This practice helps to increase mobility and dispersion of cattle during the wet season, which is typically beneficial to a range of plants. The Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula traditionally built horse-shoe shaped, low stone barrages in such a way as to maximize water storage, and minimize evaporation and muddiness. The Lahawin of eastern Sudan shake down the leaves for their small stock with special sticks rather than cutting down branches, but recently outsiders and merchants have instead been cutting down the trees, (Niamir, 1996).

Indigenous local systems play a crucial role in preserving and utilizing environmental resources in a more sustainable way. It might be useful here to report a case from the Sudan, where I undertook an empirical survey in Kordofan state. In this area grassroots organisations and the Native Administration (NAD) provide many services and manage people's affairs with regards to environmental resources. NAD in particular is responsible for maintaining customary law, including allocation and management of land and natural resources, such as forests and rangeland. For

example, from mid-July to mid-January some areas are set aside for grazing while others are preserved for farming and gum arabic plantations. The village Sheikh marks the start of this period with Rafaa el-asa (stick rising) which is a symbolic action referring to punishment for those who break the law. Customary law states that, after the farming season, agricultural land is subject to public grazing rights. At the same time some resources, particularly land, are also set aside to help those who have limited or no assets to meet basic needs and stabilize their livelihood. Some public land is planted through collective voluntary work to provide more income to those who serve the community, such as teachers, health workers and midwives. However, when there are disputes in relation to land resources, the local communities prefer to resolve conflicts through El-Goodeya (an indigenous conflict resolution system) which is an informal part of the Native Administration.

El-Goodeya means 'mediation-acceptance and generosity'. This system is a unique traditional Sudanese approach that was adopted by local communities in rural areas to resolve conflict. The mediators might be the village Sheikh, or a religious or community leader, but must always be the most respectable members of the community. The mediation takes place in the Sheikh's or religious leader's house. According to local social norms, conflicting parties must respect the mediators' decisions, even if it is not regarded as the best solution by one or both parties (Egeimi, 2001:19-21). People refer to the mediator as 'the one who has a needle that he uses to cure a wound', similar to the task of the surgeon. The mediators are responsible for implementing El-Goodeya procedure and ensuring that its rules are respected and accepted by all parties.

Conflicts around land, natural resources and social matters are usually presented in front of an El-Goodeya council responsible for assessing the situation and making suggestions, which are normally accepted by the different parties. For example, if there is any damage to resources, particularly forests and agricultural land, the council will estimate the damage and determine appropriate compensation. If the council's suggestions are not accepted, the case is transferred to a higher level, this being the local court governed by Umda. In fact, the Native Court, which is led at the locality level by Umda under the traditional system, does not look at any case unless it is presented through the Sheikh and forwarded by the El-Goodeya council. If the complainant does not accept the Native Court's judgment the case is transferred to the formal court.

Mediation normally starts with formal introductory statements praising the concept of resolving problems peacefully in order to please God. People have trust and great respect for the mediators. In most cases, the parties end up forgiving each other and resolving their

conflict. The Sheikh of El-Naem village (Focus group discussion) commented that "those who refuse El-Goodeya are always losers, because God loves those who accept El-Goodeya". It is therefore a social value to accept El-Goodeya instead of going to the formal court. These practices maintain the culture of peace and sustain livelihood assets and practices.

During the same fieldwork I observed the work of a national NGO, the Popular Development Works (PDW), which has established links with grassroots organizations and implemented many successful projects in Um-Ruwaba locality of North Kordofan. This organization relies on personal contact and builds on the experiences and practices of locals. Its work is based on collective participation, equality, and engaging social groups in water conservation, reforestation, and entertainment activities.

CURRENT CHALLENGES AND PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Excessive use of resources, ethnic conflicts and wars have a negative impact on natural resources, and hence sustainable development efforts. These current problems are beyond the ability of a lone provider; instead, addressing these problems requires collective and diverse inputs. In addition to technical solutions and political actions, there is a need for the wisdom of religious and local traditions. I share Gardener's concern regarding the reputation of 'religions'. Suppression and injustice on the one hand and irrational understanding on the other have pushed many groups to use religious messages to justify their actions. This has created confusing images and distracted some religious institutions and groups from making more verbal and practical contributions. However, many religious groups and institutions are currently involved in practical activities.

Excessive Use of Resources

With population growth and a rising standard of living in many countries, there is excessive use of resources on one side, and poverty and inequality on the other. In 2010 there were 925 million hungry people who could not meet their minimum nutritional requirements (FAO), while millions of others consume excessively. Conservation depends on consuming less and more efficiently; excessive consumption is a serious issue that feeds economies' machines. There are several ways to challenge this; among them is the potential adoption of the simple life, which requires individuals' determination to set limits to their 'wants.'

An interesting piece of advice from the Prophet Mohamed was that "the stomach is the home for disease and staying on a diet is the ultimate cure." The Prophet Mohamed talked about an appropriate way of life in relation to eating by saying that "we will not eat unless we are hungry, and when we eat- we will not eat

excessively.” On another occasion he said “But if you feel the need to eat a lot- then make sure that you fill a third of your stomach with food, a third with water and leave a third to breathe.”

According to Islam, the earth and natural resources are not owned by humans; people are chosen by God as trustees. To deserve that trust they must act responsibly and avoid aggressive and excessive use of these resources. In Islam, the interest of the community overrules the individual interest. All resources of public interest, such as water and range land, should be under government control.

There is a need to understand the consequences of misuse and overconsumption of precious resources such as water. According to Population Action International, based on the UN Medium Population Projections of 1998, more than 2.8 billion people in 48 countries will face water stress or water scarcity by 2025. Of these countries, 40 are in West Asia, North Africa or sub-Saharan Africa (UNEP, 2008). There is a need to educate people on the importance of these resources to the challenges we are facing, and how we can conserve them. In the Quran the word ‘water’ is mentioned 66 times; one of the most informative verses, which is memorized by millions, is “We made from water every living thing,” (Al-Anbiya 21:30). This powerful verse alone should shape our understanding of the significance of this resource and why we need to ensure its sustainability. Muslims are strongly advised to conserve water resources by the Prophet, who said: “do not waste water even if you are making ablution from a running river.” These principles provide a framework for developing mechanisms to address the abuse of natural resources, especially among wealthy Muslim nations and individuals.

The current calls for an eco-friendly lifestyle need support and inputs from religious and educational institutions. There are many eco-products, such as solar energy devices and water harvesting techniques. For example, an Australian company is supplying rainwater tank storage and management systems that meet local needs and demands. This simple technology aims to utilize and save rain water, which reduces the use of other resources for pumping ground water. This minimizes the washout effect and flooding damages, and saves water for dry periods. This type of technology may serve and save lives in tropical zones. Religious and financial institutions can help in supporting the adoption of these initiatives in needy communities

The impact of low-quality products

The competition for economic gain and our unlimited demand for goods have resulted in mass production and low-quality products. Current markets are flooded with cheap and low-quality products, which has pushed

quality products out of the market. There is a need for greater financial support, regulations and rules to support the production of high-quality products that last longer.

Ethnic Conflicts and Wars

In the last century, the huge advances in the achievement of human rights, rights of minority and marginalized groups, the spread of knowledge, technological innovations in military and communications, and energy discoveries, were almost spoiled by those without ethics-based guidance (Gardner: 24-25). In particular, the outbreak of ethnic conflicts and wars has resulted in the loss of life and property. These have contributed significantly to the destruction of resources and the depletion of sustainable livelihood assets. Millions of people have been killed, displaced, injured, or traumatized in ethnic conflicts. The most sophisticated and mass-scale wars were launched against nations and groups, which again resulted in the killing of millions and the destruction of infrastructure and of all means of sustainable development. The recent case of unjust war in Iraq produced 4.5 million refugees and displaced people (Lendman, 2010), while over 150,000 are estimated to have been killed since 2003 (iraqbodycount.org, 2010). In addition to its economic and health impact, the war contributed to the destruction of Iraqi cultural heritage. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992) concludes that peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible. Specifically it suggests that states should recognize and support the identity, culture and interests of indigenous people, and should also respect international laws protecting the environment in times of armed conflict.

However, two decades after the Rio Declaration the situation has worsened; recent reports show that today, more than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by fragility, violence, or conflict. The organized violence that disrupts governance and compromises development includes local violence, involving militias or between ethnic groups; gang violence; local resource-related violence; violence linked to trafficking, particularly of drugs; and violence associated with global ideological struggles (World Bank, 2011:54). The costs of violence for citizens, communities, countries, and the world are enormous, both in terms of human suffering and social and economic consequences (World Bank, 2011:58/59). Some countries, financial firms and manufacturers have benefited from this suffering, which raises questions of the morality of their wealth and their advanced technologies. Arms deliveries to the world by major suppliers (the USA, Russia, France, the UK, China, Germany, Italy and other European countries) between 1999 and 2006 amounted to (US\$? Weapons?) 222,800 (Federation of

American Scientists). This amount of destructive wealth is growing at the expense of human lives and the earth's resources.

In 2006 Oxfam called on governments to ban arms sales that fuel poverty, conflict and human rights abuses by supporting an Arms Trade Treaty. It estimated that global military spending in that year would reach US\$1,059 billion, outstripping the highest figure reached during the Cold War in real terms, and roughly fifteen times current international aid expenditure.

In an era of conflict and war; religions, ethics and social movements can contribute to resolving conflict. Forgiveness and learning to co-exist in harmony are shared values of all major religions. Islam, in particular, encourages peace and harmony between nations and permits war only in exceptional circumstances, for defense or stopping aggressions. In the case of unavoidable wars, Islam defines a set of conditions and principles that prohibits armies or individual fighters from killing women, children, elders and worshippers of all religions. It also prohibits cutting trees or destroying places of worship. However, the existence of current conflicts and wars, with their unacceptable and destructive practices, urges humanity to explore and adopt new moral values and a culture of peace, which all religions, traditional beliefs and human ethics have as their foundation. This situation has encouraged some people to organise themselves and work for a more ethical world. An active campaigner against arm trading is the UK-based organization The Campaign Against Arms Trade, that raises public attention about arms production and export, and their devastating impact on human rights, security and development. As we continue to wage war on one another and to employ machines that result in much suffering, there is a need for greater campaigns to put an end to unjust and unethical acts.

In resolving conflicts, the current tendency is to involve international organizations through expensive peacekeeping missions and formal external mediators. Unfortunately these operations have failed to resolve ongoing conflicts, which justify the need for new values-driven mediators.

PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS

Moral commitment

There is a need to adopt a moral-commitment approach as one of the mechanisms for addressing sustainable development issues. The moral component of development can be central to the strengthening of development efforts (Folbre, 2002:66). Moral commitment towards human life and the earth's resources would contribute to sustainable development in a more humanistic way. This approach requires commitment from all development actors: government

institutions, educators, donors, development agencies and local NGOs. The development community must be willing to provide opportunities for educators and religious scholars to take part in addressing these issues. If development organisations advocate sustainable development ideology they must change their ways of thinking and of operation.

Education and awareness

Education and awareness includes the dissemination of information, ideas and skills that contribute to preserving resources. The involvement of educators to educate about sustainable development would benefit the course of sustainable development. Educators are in contact with a significant portion of the communities which need to be aware of the current challenges and become involved in various activities. In 1989 the Forest National Corporation (FNC) in Sudan, through support from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), developed extensive programs to protect forests and increase vegetation cover. These programs included a weekly radio program titled 'Let the Trees Grow'. Religious educators, teachers, school children, journalists and singers were all involved in national and regional campaigns to promote the planting and protecting of trees. Inspiring messages from the Quran, the Prophet Mohamed's teachings, poems, and proverbs were developed into attractive posters, television captions and songs. Almost everyone in Sudan at some stage repeated a beautiful and appealing environmental song, which began with the lyrics, 'plant a seed, to grow a tree, a tree and a tree equal two trees and a tree and a tree it makes a forest. Fence your home with trees; it will protect yourself from wind and dust'. As a result large numbers of people; community organisations, farmers and individuals took part in the planting of trees and began using alternative energy sources instead of firewood and charcoal.

A role for religious institutions

Formal religions institutions shape people's values and behavior. Despite the effort made by Green Faith groups and many Western religion institutions, there is still no evidence of religious institutions, especially in Muslim-majority countries, using their potential to take part in preserving the earth resources. Fortunately, there are millions of people who are ready to serve a noble cause. We have seen many people who, driven by religious values and ethical principles, act collectively to create change in other's lives. Over time and across the globe, these values have provided a framework for many events of struggles for justice and dignity. They also provide guidance in supporting victims of war and natural disasters.

Using religious education to convey the message regarding resource conservation and sustainable

development would appeal to believers and those with ethics. Religions can offer inspiring messages and move communities and individuals towards conservation of resources, and hence sustainability. There is a suggestion that education for sustainable development calls “for giving people knowledge and skills for lifelong learning to help them find new solutions to their environmental, economic, and social issues” (McKeown, 2002). These institutions have the skills and experience to deliver the environmental message.

The Alliance of Religions and Conservation organization (ARC) is a UK-based charity that works with the world’s major religions to help them develop environmental plans based on their beliefs, practices and teachings. ARC provides information about religious groups’ initiatives and work. It reported that Ghanaian churches have started planting two million trees around the country and train communities and fire fighters to nurture and protect them. In Nigeria, 120,000 students in 1,250 Muslim schools are each given two tree seedlings. One is to be planted in the school and the other in their homes. Their effort in protecting these trees contributes 50% of the marks they need to graduate. In African countries Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda, Muslim and Christian organizations conducted many joint activities to serve the environment. The ARC director Martin Palmer commented “the way to the heart of Africa is through faith and faith will be the engine that changes the way Africa’s environment is managed by its own people” (ARC,2011). During 2011 more than 450 Sikh temples, schools and organizations around the world participated in Sikh Environment Day. These initiatives and activities bring hope that religious groups and institutions can make significant contributions.

The potential of religious institutions and groups has not been fully utilized and accommodated in sustainable development efforts. These institutions should make more contributions towards conservation efforts. They may need to act through formal “committees, missions and professionals.” On the other hand, international development organisations and sustainable development campaigners should take further steps in involving these institutions in raising public awareness and in funding technical and practical efforts. Involving religious groups in formal and informal efforts will transform grassroots participation and accelerate change. Moreover, religious institutions can: (a) Support and adopt alternative and more efficient eco-friendly products. (b) Religious institutions own millions of premises all over the globe, including worship houses, clinics, schools, and social and faith-based organizations. These institutions should adopt and promote energy-saving technology and recycling efforts. They can also get involved in planting trees

by establishing nurseries, planting in their yards, and distributing seedlings at no or low cost. (c) Islamic institutions include the Organization of Islamic Conference, which has 56 member countries, and financial firms, which may be either commercially-driven or for development. These institutions should get involved in supporting new and affordable green technologies, finance reforestation and plantation programs, and support climate change victims. (d) There must be high contributions from Christian and Jewish groups because of their influential positions in the countries largely responsible for climate change; most of the victims of climate change are least responsible for the causes (Gardner, 2006:24). (e) Religious institutions and groups should promote the concept of ‘living simply’. Living simply involves a “rethinking of our possessions” and leads us to “live richer lives without being destructive either to the planet or to other human beings by freeing our thing-addition” (McGinnis, 1981). This concept has its roots in all major religions and indigenous spiritual traditions. (f) There is a need for conducting research into the role of religious groups, what contribution houses of worship are making, and how to release their potential and involve them in conservation and sustainable development efforts.

CONCLUSION

The creativity and talent of mankind has created wealth through the technologies of advancement, but at the same time has also created misery and destruction. There is no doubt that technological discovery, economic restrictions and political measures cannot reverse this damage without support from human ethics and moral commitment. However, for the past three decades, the theoretical role of social factors in sustainable development has gained significant popularity and acknowledgement. Development theorists have begun to link the relationships between people and the earth’s resources to more than just supply and demand factors. Religious and traditional beliefs have emerged as one of these alternative factors. Religious and value-based traditions have shaped the relationships between mankind and other creatures and have contributed to resource conservation in many societies. In this regard, this paper has explored some current challenges that risk development processes and jeopardize sustainable development efforts. This paper has identified the excessive use of resources, wars and conflicts as immoral acts which pose unaddressed challenges to humanity.

In order to resolve these challenges, this paper has argued that religions, spiritual indigenous traditions, and people’s wisdom can provide a platform for understanding relationships between people and the environment, as well as offer a framework for raising

public awareness and developing action plans to ensure conservation and sustainability. Sustainable development is as important for achieving peace and strengthening relationships between communities as peace and security are for achieving sustainable development. In this regard, religious groups and educators should get involved in promoting a culture of peace in which tolerance and justice are fundamental principles. Moreover, sustainable development planners, specialists and campaigners should pay attention to religious institutions and the role they can play in preserving our planet.

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