Sustainable Development as a Framework for GHG Mitigation Strategy

Open Statement
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Introduction

1. I wish to start this discussion by thanking the President of the UN General Assembly, for the kind invitation extended to be at this informal thematic debate on climate change.

2. The general consensus in most developing countries is that rapid economic development through poverty alleviation, health care, economic growth, etc. should take priorities. Presently, the developing countries (especially Africa) contribution to global emissions is low: about 2.0 tonnes of CO2 emissions per capital in 2002 compared to 11.2 tonnes per CO2 emission per capita in developed/industrialized Annexe 1 countries. However, it is expected that as these countries continue on the path of sustained economic growth, their contribution will increase correspondingly.

3. The above reality creates a tendency for many developing countries to feel that climate change issues in general are not important or at best minor issue in national policy discourse. Mitigation strategies are thought of as issues to be solely dealt with by the Annexe 1 countries.

4. Yet, there is increasing empirical evidence that developing countries are the most vulnerable to risks associated with climate change. In most vulnerable communities, the impacts pose a real threat to survival. This is why climate change is a global issue that needs to be adequately addressed so that it will not constitute a barrier to the developmental aspirations of the developing countries.

Sustainable Development and Climate Mitigation Nexus

5. There is a complex relationship between sustainable development and climate change mitigation. There are multiplicity of developmental pathways which leads or corresponds to different emissions. These developmental pathways are determined largely by a variety of factors such as the structural evolution of the economy, technological patterns and activities in sectors such as energy, transportation, agriculture and forestry, building and consumption patterns, etc. It is the activities in some of the key sectors such as energy, transport, agriculture and forestry, which largely determines the level of

emission. For example about 70 per cent and 85 per cent of GHG emission and CO2 emissions respectively are energy related.

6. Given the above nexus, it becomes obvious why policies that pursue sustainable development in all its dimensions – economic, social and environment – will have effect on GHG emissions. As a matter of fact, development pathways that are sustainable create conditions in which mitigation can be effectively pursued.

7. On the other hand, mitigation options and strategies that reduce GHG emissions sometimes have ancillary benefits or co-benefits which can contribute to sustainable development goals. We must quickly add though that there are occasions where pursuit of sustainable development goals will increase the emissions of GHG. A case in point is the critical issue of increased energy access to modern fuels needed for sustainable economic development by developing countries. The fuel substitution process associated with increased energy access will undoubtedly increase GHG emissions.

Win-Win Options and Strategy

8. The optimal approach to the nexus of sustainable development and mitigation strategies is to capitalize on natural synergies between mitigation strategies and options and development priorities to simultaneously advance both objectives, i.e. the pursuit of win-win options.

9. A few examples of such 'win-win' options are as follows:

(i) Energy efficiency improvements in all sectors (building, transportation, industry and energy supply):

The pursuit of energy efficiency is mostly cost effective, reduces or eliminates local pollutant emissions and consequent generate positive health impacts. It also creates business opportunity and jobs and improves energy security. Furthermore, the programmes can be implemented at all levels of government and industry.

(ii) Fuel substitution from high carbon fuels with lower carbon fuels for example, in the transportation and building sectors

The promotion of public transport and non-motorized transport has large and consistent social benefits. Moreover, switching from solid fuels to modern fuels for cooking and heating indoors can reduce indoor air pollution and increase free time for women in developing countries. However, though diesel engines are generally more efficient than gasoline engines and thus have lower CO2 emissions, they can nevertheless increase particle emissions.

(iii) Increased use of renewable energy technologies

This has the advantage of reducing local air pollutant emissions. It can also create new indigenous industries and hence increase employment. The off-cuff however, is that fossil –fuel exporting countries like Nigeria may face reduced demand for their exports and this may hurt their development aspirations.

(iv) Afforestation

Implementing afforestation policy can help reduce wasteland, arrest social degradation and manage water run-off. The policy can further lead to increase employment and boost rural industry activities. If suitably managed, it can also generate revenues through ecotourism. The main challenge, however,is that the use of scarce land could compete with agricultural land and diminish food security while increasing food costs.

(v) Cropland management

Improvement in nutrient management can improve ground water quality and environmental health of the cultivated ecosystems. The trade-off that policy may have to contend with here is that changes in water policies could lead to clash of interests and threaten social cohesiveness.

(vi) Waste Management

Waste management through recycling, and reuse could provide local employment as well as reductions in energy and raw materials for recycled products. However, if this is not properly done, uncontrolled waste scavenging can results in severe health and safety problems for those who are involved in the activity. Moreover, development of local recycling industries requires capital which is scarce in developing countries.

Conclusion

10. Implementing the synergies between sustainable development and climate change mitigation options will require improved decision-making which is no longer the sole purvey of national government. What is needed is multilayer partnership. On a national level, the partnership between various levels of government, private sector, non-governmental organizations and civil society. Because some actions require integration of efforts at the regional levels there is a need for regional cooperation and partnership. A case in point is the multisectoral regional energy access programme in the ECOWAS subregion.

Finally since ultimately climate change is truly a global challenge; there is a need for multilateral partnerships at the global level. Developing countries will surely need assistance in terms of funding, capacity building and technology transfer, if they are to confront the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development and climate change mitigation.