Africa’s sustainable development challenges

The overriding sustainable development challenge in Africa is poverty eradication. Indeed, the “African Ministerial Statement to the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) identifies poverty eradication as an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Africa is the only region in the world where poverty has increased both in absolute and relative terms.

Apart from being the poorest region in the world, Africa remains the least developed, the most technologically backward, the most indebted, the most food-insecure and the most marginalized. Furthermore, malnutrition, disease, environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, poor and inadequate infrastructure, unemployment and weak institutional capacities continue to pose serious development challenges for Africa. This state of affairs is exacerbated by recurring natural disasters and the AIDS pandemic, which is reversing decades of economic gains and imposing costs on Africa at least, twice those in any other developing regions, thus undermining sustainable economic growth. It is striking that Africa is the only continent not on track to meet most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015.

Sustainable development thrives best in an environment of good governance, peace and security, but armed conflict remains a major obstacle to development in several parts of the continent. The maintenance of an environment of peace and security is therefore one of Africa's foremost development imperatives. Apart from its costs in human and material terms, conflicts impede production, damage infrastructure, prevent the reliable delivery of social services and disrupt societies. Africa is the most sub-divided continent, with small and fragmented economies that undermine the continent’s position in the global development arena. In spite of the long-standing commitments and the emphasis placed by African leaders on the process of regional integration, this has been slow and therefore, remains a major challenge for Africa.

It is therefore no coincidence that the Africa Chapter of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) of WSSD, states in its preamble that since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), sustainable development has remained elusive for many African countries, with poverty remaining a major challenge.

Policy responses to Africa’s development challenges

Africa’s development challenges are somehow rooted in past policies and strategies. In the 1960s and 1970s, many African countries pursued national development planning as the main strategy for development. For
many countries, this strategy of growth was State-based with the rationale that the State was big enough to mobilize resources for the daunting task of development. Besides, private capital and the relevant institutions were not well developed to partake meaningfully in development activities.

Most African countries relied mainly on the exploitation of natural resources for development. Many newly independent countries used the revenues generated from the natural resources to build their infrastructures, industry, education and health while increasing formal employment. However, the sharp oil price increase in the 1970s negatively affected improvements in sustainable development that had been made.

Also, the heavy dependence on natural resources led to resource depletion and environmental degradation and worsened the exposure of weaker economies to external shocks, thereby increasing poverty and reversing social development (World Bank, 2003). Many countries experienced reduced economic growth in the latter part of the 1970s and early 1980s.

As a result of poor economic performance, the majority of African countries embarked upon Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) during the 1980s and 1990s and Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSs) from 1999. The SAPs were meant to correct the macro-economic imbalances that had occurred as a result of state-controlled economic policies in most countries. They were also supposed to generate quick growth to compensate for the long-term low average growth rates for the continent. However, these policies failed to integrate environmental and social concerns, thereby exacerbating inequalities, poverty and environmental degradation. Even the macro-economy sector suffered, as not much attention was paid to important sectors such as agriculture, industry and employment.

The shift to PRSs occurred as a result of the acknowledgement that many adjustment measures had generated negative impacts for the poor. Furthermore, it was recognized that there was a correlation between adjustment programmes and growing poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. The PRSs were originally conceived in the context of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative and hence did not adequately incorporate environmental and social concerns.

The SAPs and earlier generations of the PRSs suffered from lack of effectiveness, policy coordination, and lack of ownership. Policies had contradictory sectoral impacts because they were not harmonized. Furthermore, most African countries have not put in place strategies and policies to coordinate the agricultural, industrial and social sectors to generate significant value addition, employment, and incomes and to eradicate poverty. However, countries are building upon their experiences, and as they move towards the ‘second generation’ of PRSs more broad-based sustainable development concerns are being, particularly in the context of the MDGs (ECA 2006).

The foregoing demonstrates that development can only be meaningful and sustainable, if policies not only take into account economic concerns, but social and environmental concerns as well. Furthermore, policies should embody holistic, broad based and participatory approaches, to promote ownership and engender action by all, and for all.

**The sustainable development concept**

The international community has come a long way to reach a common global understanding on the concept of sustainable development that now figures prominently on the agenda of all significant international development initiatives, in particular the major UN conferences and summits (see “The international agenda on sustainable development”, below). This development paradigm resulted from a gradual shift in development theories and their focus. In the 1950s and 1960s, development mainly focused on economic growth and increases in
outputs based on efficiency theories. A main tenet of this development concept was that strong economic growth would have trickle-down effects thus benefiting all segments of society. However, observations in the 70s of the growing gap between the rich and the poor, between and within regions resulted in the shift to addressing equity issues with emphasis on social development and income distribution as key elements. At around the same time, observations on the impact of economic growth on the environment brought into focus the importance of integrating environmental concerns in the development agenda.

These observations led to the questioning of the traditional perception of development, which jeopardizes the integrity of the environment, fosters social inequalities and injustice and disregards the welfare and needs of future generations. Therefore, the sustainable development paradigm took the international community well beyond the traditional compartmentalized treatment of social, economic and environmental concerns, and advanced a more holistic and integrated approach to development. It has led to profound changes in the way development is understood, conceptualized and measured worldwide.

Munasinghe's illustration aptly depicts the interlinkages and interactions among the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development (Figure 1.1)

**Fig 1.1: Sustainable Development Illustration**

Source: Munasinghe, 1996
The economic approach to sustainability is based on the Hicks-Landahl concept of the maximum flow of income that could be generated while at least maintaining a good stock of assets (or capital), which yield these benefits (Solow 1986, Maler 1990). This is based on the underlying concept of optimality and economic efficiency applied to the use of scarce resources.

The social concept of sustainability is people-oriented, and seeks to maintain the stability of social and cultural systems, including the reduction of destructive conflicts (Munasinghe and McNeely 1995). Equity is an important aspect of this approach. Preservation of cultural diversity and cultural capital, and the better use of knowledge concerning sustainable practices embedded in less dominant cultures, are desirable. Modern society would need to encourage and incorporate pluralism and grassroots participation into a more effective decision-making framework for socially sustainable development.

The environmental view of sustainable development focuses on the stability of biological and physical systems (Munasinghe and Shearer, 1995). Of particular importance is the viability of subsystems that are critical to the global stability of the overall ecosystem. Furthermore, “natural” systems and habitats may be interpreted broadly to also include man-made environments like cities. The emphasis is on preserving the resilience and dynamic ability of such systems to adapt to change, rather than conservation of some “ideal” static state. Natural resource degradation, pollution, and loss of biodiversity reduce system resilience.

Reconciling these various concepts and operationalizing them is a major challenge, since all three pillars must be given balanced consideration. The interfaces between the three pillars are also important. The economic and social elements interact to give rise to issues such as intra-generational equity (income distribution) and targeted relief for the poor. The economic-environmental interface has yielded new ideas on valuation and internalization of environmental impacts. Finally, the social-environmental linkage has led to renewed interest in areas like inter-generational equity (rights of future generations) and popular participation. However, tradeoffs will always be necessary depending on the complexity of issues being addressed, the circumstances and the current state of knowledge.

The foregoing suggests a broad integrated conceptual approach in which the net benefits of economic activities are maximized, subject to the maintenance of the stock of productive assets over time, and providing a social safety net to meet the basic needs of the poor. Sustainable development therefore calls for integrating economic growth, social development and environmental management as interdependent, mutually supportive and reinforcing pillars of long-term development. It calls for participatory and multi-stakeholder approaches to dealing with development issues, involving a wide range of actors: government, private sector, civil society organizations, institutions of higher learning and research and development partners.

It is therefore encouraging to note that at WSSD, African Ministers reiterated their commitment to address all three components of sustainable development in a balanced way, and as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars. The Ministers noted that achieving sustainable development objectives requires concrete global partnerships between governments on the one hand, and between governments, business and civil society on the other.

**International agenda on sustainable development**

The sustainable development agenda figured prominently in a series of international conferences beginning with the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment (1972). The Conference set the stage for global environmental assessment, and for addressing the links between environment and development. It was therefore an important milestone in drawing attention to the need for holistic and integrated development planning, as well as addressing intergenerational equity issues. Another milestone in the history of sustainable development
development is the World Conservation Strategy (WCS), published in 1980 by the World Conservation Union (IUCN). This strategy asserts that conservation cannot be achieved without development that will alleviate the misery of the hundreds of millions of people living in poverty. Stressing the interdependence of conservation and development, the WCS first gave currency to the term “sustainable development” (IUCN, UNEP, WWF, 1991).

However, sustainable development gained worldwide attention through the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) entitled “Our Common Future”, otherwise known as the “Brundtland Report”. The Brundtland Report (1987) defines sustainable development as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The Brundtland Report brought sustainable development to the center-stage of the development debate. It questioned the pathways of development followed by the rich and the poor countries, and called for revisiting societal goals to take into account environmental integrity, social justice and equity, the welfare of current and future generations, and public participation in development. Furthermore, the report provided a new approach and conceptual understanding of the development process, and created demand for new concepts, tools and measures, and new data, information, and knowledge for advanced policy analyses.

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, represented a turning point in the global environment and development discourse. The outcomes of the Conference were: The Rio Declaration- a set of 27 principles on the environment and development agenda; Agenda 21- a global plan of action addressing environment and development concerns; The Forest Principles- a non-binding statement of 15 principles for the sustainable management of forests; The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); and The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

A five-year review conducted in 1997 revealed that little progress had been made in implementing Agenda 21. The desired momentum for accelerated implementation and a political declaration affirming a renewed commitment failed to be generated. Against this backdrop, the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in 2002 conducted a further 10-year review of the implementation of the outcomes of UNCED, particularly Agenda 21, and reinvigorated global commitment to sustainable development. The findings of the regional reviews conducted in the run-up to WSSD confirmed a generally low level of implementation of Agenda 21, which was particularly glaring for the Africa region.

The outcomes of the Summit were three, namely: the Political Declaration, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) and the Type II Partnerships Initiative. The Political Declaration reaffirmed global commitment to the objectives of sustainable development. The JPOI contains targets and timelines to engender actions on a wide range of issues, most of which converge with and reinforce the MDGs. The Partnership Initiative that complements the JPOI attracted over 200 commitments at the time of the Summit and included major initiatives by development partners. The Summit therefore resulted in concrete government commitments for action and partnerships to achieve measurable accomplishments. To better focus efforts to address the development needs of Africa, the international community identified Africa and the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) for special attention and support.

**NEPAD: Africa’s sustainable development framework**

The African Heads of State at the African Summit held in Lusaka, Zambia, 2001, adopted the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). NEPAD is a comprehensive and integrated development plan for the continent that makes peace, security, democracy, good economic and corporate governance preconditions for sustainable development on the continent. This continental sustainable development
framework outlines the sectoral priorities for actions and policy interventions, and identifies strategies for resource mobilization (Box 1.1).

The NEPAD Secretariat, established to coordinate the implementation of the NEPAD Framework, has been working closely with the African Union Commission (AUC) and the G8 to strengthen mechanisms for supporting peace and security. A critical component of the implementation plan is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) that was approved by the Heads of State and Government Implementation Committee (HSGIC) in March 2003 (ECA 2003). With the support of UN Agencies and other development partners, the Secretariat has elaborated Action Plans in key areas. The seven RECs recognized by the African Union, as the implementing bodies of NEPAD, have been involved in the design and implementation of programmes and sub-regional projects. The African Capacity Building Foundation is conducting capacity building needs assessments for all RECs. This includes determination of funding required to implement programmes.

At the national level, many African countries have taken steps to create national NEPAD focal points for co-ordination, monitoring and integrating NEPAD programmes and their national development plans at country level. Examples of these countries include Algeria, Rwanda, Nigeria, Mozambique, South Africa, Senegal, Ghana, Kenya and Gabon. These countries have designated ministers or set up ministries as focal points for NEPAD in their respective countries. (NEPAD Secretariat, 2004).

**Box 1.1 NEPAD Priorities**

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<td><strong>a. Establishing the conditions for sustainable development by ensuring:</strong></td>
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<td>• Peace and security;</td>
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<td>• Democracy and good, political, economic and corporate governance;</td>
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<td>• Regional co-operation and integration;</td>
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<td>• Capacity building.</td>
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<td><strong>b. Policy reforms and increased investment in the following priority sectors:</strong></td>
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<td>• Agriculture;</td>
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<td>• Human development with a focus on health, education, science and technology and skills development;</td>
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<td>• Building and improving infrastructure, including Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Energy, Transport, Water and Sanitation;</td>
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<td>• Promoting diversification of production and exports, particularly with respect to agro-industries, manufacturing, mining, mineral beneficiation and tourism;</td>
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<td>• Accelerating intra-African trade and improving access to markets of developed countries; and</td>
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<td>• The environment.</td>
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<td><strong>c. Mobilizing resources by:</strong></td>
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<td>• Increasing domestic savings and investments;</td>
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<td>• Improving management of public revenue and expenditure;</td>
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<td>• Improving Africa’s share in global trade;</td>
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<td>• Attracting foreign direct investment; and</td>
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<td>• Increasing capital flows through further debt reduction and increase ODA flows.</td>
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The transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the African Union (AU) in July 2002, under the banner “Peace, Prosperity, and Development” (NEPAD Secretariat, 2003), is a significant development in

1 Arab Maghreb Union (AMU); Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS); Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA); Southern African Development Community (SADC); Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD); Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa (UEMOA); and the Customs and Economic Union of Central Africa (UDEAC).
the implementation of Africa's sustainable development agenda. The Union has made key changes in the way it leads the resolution of conflicts and manage peace building in war torn and conflict countries. Key organs of the Union have been reinforced in terms of their mandates, budgets and leadership (Nkuhlu, WL, 2005).

African Civil Society Organizations (ACSOs) have over the years, become more involved in sustainable development issues. The Informal Regional Network of African Non Governmental Organizations was launched in 2002. The WSSD process served as a valuable lesson for African CSOs on the need to be better organized in terms of pushing the continental agenda forward. (NESDA/WSSD Civil Society Secretariat, 2003). Furthermore, the NEPAD Secretariat continues to interact with civil society groups at various levels. A civil society desk has been established at the NEPAD Secretariat with a view to having a one-stop focal point for civil society (NEPAD Secretariat, 2004). The NEPAD Business Group (NBG) was also launched in 2002 under the leadership of the African Business Roundtable.

As the regional arm of the UN in Africa, ECA has supported these initiatives and has played an important role in fostering Africa’s development within the United Nations system. In addition to the national and regional initiatives, the international community has reaffirmed, in the context of several major conferences and summits, its determination to support these efforts. So far, these initiatives have led to some improvement. African countries have recorded higher growth rates since the late 1990s; they have held many democratic elections and overall improved their governance structures. However, for a majority of countries, and more specifically sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the progress achieved remains insufficient to reach the development goals of the region, including the MDGs. Therefore, it is imperative to strengthen these efforts and strive for better outcomes.

The role of ECA in monitoring and assessing sustainable development in Africa

In recognition of the strategic positioning of Regional Commissions to effectively bridge global consensus with national priorities and concerns, WSSD mandated the Regional Commissions to promote the balanced integration of the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. It was indicated that this should be done through, inter alia, facilitating and strengthening the exchange of experiences, including national experiences, best practices, case studies and partnership experiences related to the implementation of the sustainable development agenda.

In light of this, the Africa Committee on Sustainable Development (ACSD), at its third meeting in October 2003, requested the Sustainable Development Division (SDD) of ECA to undertake a review of progress made by member States in the implementation of the outcomes of WSSD. Furthermore, General Assembly Resolution 58/218 of 23 December 2003, as reaffirmed by Resolution 59/227 of 22 December 2004, requires Regional Commissions to take action to ensure the effective implementation of, and follow-up to WSSD outcomes.

ECA’s mandate in relation to WSSD outcomes and related issues is being addressed in the context of the MDGs and NEPAD. In addition to this work, the Commission carries out policy analysis and advocacy that highlight linkages and synergies among the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The development of tools and analytical materials for advocacy form an important part of this process. Other key activities include assessing the institutional and strategic frameworks for sustainable development in member States.
Work carried out by ECA on ensuring that the social, economic and environment dimensions of sustainable development are mainstreamed in countries development strategies has revealed that countries are in various stages of putting in place sustainable development committees. Efforts are also being made by countries to put in place sustainable development strategies.

ECA has also been a strategic partner in assisting with the review of performance of member states under the APRM. Already Ghana, Kenya and South Africa have acceded to themselves to the APRM process.

The Sustainable Development Report on Africa (SDRA) Process

The production of the "Sustainable Development Report on Africa (SDRA)" was launched in the 2004-2005 biennium, as one of ECA’s flagship publications to be produced biennially. The report is intended to be an important medium for monitoring and assessing sustainable development in Africa, and is among other things, aimed at promoting a balanced integration of the three pillars of sustainable development. To this end, the SDRA provides an assessment of progress made by member States in the implementation of WSSD outcomes; provides recent documentation of experiences in the implementation process; and promotes knowledge networking among member States to deepen and enhance the learning and implementation process. The SDRA is, therefore, a development assessment report for Africa that treats the three pillars of sustainable development in an integrated and balanced manner, and is therefore addressing an important niche.

The SDRA is divided into two parts. Part I deals with the assessment of the status of sustainable development in the region using indicators that cover the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of sustainable development. In order to put in place credible and authoritative monitoring and assessment systems, ECA will identify and develop suitable indicators and frameworks for the different dimensions of sustainable development, and further develop separate sustainability indices for each dimension. The ultimate aim is to develop a sustainable development index for Africa. An initial set of indicators has been developed in Chapter II of this edition.

Part II focuses on Africa’s development challenges and priorities with an emphasis on promoting sustainable growth and development in selected sectors. The selection of sectors will be informed by decisions of the Africa Committee on Sustainable Development (ACSD), which take into account the multi-year programme of work of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNCSD).

However, the SDRA process recognizes that many partners have been working on various aspects of sustainable development. The intent therefore, is to foster collaboration and build on the work of many partners active in the field of sustainable development, for an efficient and sustainable process. Indeed, UNCSD called for collaboration with its Secretariat, regional and sub-regional organizations and bodies, as well as regional offices of funds, programmes, international finance and trade institutions and other organizations of the UN system in the follow-up and assessment of WSSD implementation.

In this regard, partnership with the African Union Commission (AUC), NEPAD-Secretariat, RECs and the African Development Bank (AfDB) is pertinent. These regional and sub-regional bodies will enhance the Report’s responsiveness to the continent’s sustainable development priorities. Furthermore, partnerships with sister UN Agencies such as DESA, UNDP, UNEP, bilateral and multilateral development agencies such as the OECD and the World Bank will be pursued to bring to bear their experience, expertise, and relevant comparative advantages.
The SDRA targets a broad audience including, policy makers, technical experts, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs) the private sector, academia, training and research institutions in all 53 member States of ECA. It also targets UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral development partners.

**Current issue of the SDRA- The Process and Focus**

As indicated above, this maiden issue of the SDRA comprises two parts. Assessment of the status of sustainable development in Part I of the Report, was done with the help of indicators covering the social, economic, environmental and institutional dimensions of sustainable development. The indicator sets used are based on those developed by the Division of Sustainable Development (DSD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), under the auspices of UNCSD. The selection was done taking into account priority development issues and regional specificities. This was supported by data and information obtained from a wide range of international sources and from the nine country reports - Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tunisia and Zambia, commissioned for the purposes of this study.

Information provided in the country reports includes: data and information on selected indicators covering the four dimensions of sustainable development; the principal development strategies implemented since the 1960s and the extent to which they incorporated the three pillars of sustainable development; and implementation and capacity issues. The information obtained was supported by an extensive desk research. However, data paucity in some cases, could not allow for the rich analysis and assessment initially envisaged. Furthermore, while attempts have been made to bring out the interlinkages between the different pillars, as well as between the different thematic issues within each pillar, the absence of indicator aggregation to indices and ultimately to a sustainable development index did not allow for the desired level of integrated analysis. As mentioned above, work will gradually be directed towards this end, and in so doing, it is envisaged that the integrated analysis will be progressively richer with subsequent reports.

Part II of the report focuses on land-based resource management for sustainable growth and development in Africa. This focus is informed by the decision of the third meeting of ACSD, and justified by the overwhelming reliance of African economies on land-based resources and the need to harness and manage these resources in a sustainable manner, for the benefit of the continent and its people. The themes addressed are land policy, food security, mineral resource, water and energy resources, with sustainability being a common thread. Research methods entailed extensive desk reviews, supported by information contained in the nine country reports.

The draft report, which was compiled following the analysis, was peer reviewed internally and externally prior to finalization. With regard to the external review, in addition to sending the drafts to selected institutions and individuals, two adhoc expert group meetings were organized. The first provided guidance on the structure and content of the report, research methodologies and other pertinent issues. The second entailed an in-depth review of the first draft of the report by selected experts. Following a revision of the first draft, an in-house review was conducted to solicit further comments and to promote buy-in by other ECA Divisions and Sub-Regional Offices (SROs).
The report outline

Part I- Assessment of the Status of Sustainable Development in Africa

This part contains an Overview/Executive Summary and three other chapters. Chapter Two explores the international agenda on indicators and appraises the various tools and measures for structuring and conducting sustainable development policy analysis. It examines the general characteristics of sustainable development indicators and proposes an initial set of indicators for this maiden SDRA.

Chapter Three builds on the issues and concepts analyzed in Chapters 1 and 2 and provides an overview of the status of sustainable development in Africa based on selected indicators. The analysis focuses on social, economic and environmental sustainability. The chapter addresses institutional sustainability as a cross cutting and necessary prerequisite for achieving sustainable development in Africa. It concludes with recommendations, policy implications and the way forward.

Part II- Land-based resource management for sustainable growth and development in Africa.

Chapter Four examines the issues and challenges that Africa faces in the management of its land resources under the current land tenure systems. It examines Africa’s efforts in addressing these challenges. The analysis points out the possibilities for moving towards equitable and efficient land reforms in order to achieve sustainable development including meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Chapter Five advances the concept of Public-Private Trade and Investment Partnership (PPITP) as a tool for harnessing land and water resources to minimize risks and uncertainties in agricultural production thereby ensuring agricultural sustainability and attainment of food and nutritional security.

Chapter Six articulates the linkages between energy and sustainable development and explores Africa’s energy resources endowment. The challenges of harnessing energy for sustainable development and policy implications are presented and analyzed.

Chapter Seven articulates some of the challenges of public policy in the mining industry and reviews some practices for enhanced public participation in the environment, social and economic aspects of the mining cycle. It discusses the potential challenges in the way of barriers to and opportunities for increased participation and what this entails in terms of improving policies, legal and regulatory frameworks.
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