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MAKING SUSTAINABLE CITIES: LOCALIZING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (GOAL 11) IN GHANA

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Introduction

The concept of sustainable development arose through the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and the 1980 World Conservation Strategy to the early days of the International Conservation Movement (National Research Council, 2003). If at all possible, the sustainability framework seeks to address the damage to socio-cultural integrity and environment that has accompanied accelerated unhindered economic development in many regions of the world in years around the Post-World War II (Planning Commission, Government of India, 2012). However, the sustainable development concept comes with varying meanings to various interest groups; nevertheless, the universal consensus gives credence to fairness to future generations (Brundtland Report, 1987). Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2008) recounted that essentially, the concept, at the expense of potential short-term benefits, propagated and advocated the need to protect the interest of future generations. Global efforts to achieve sustainability were streamlined and formally instituted with the rolling out of the Sustainable Development Goals. The goals are 17 covering many facets of development and have 169 targets. They have become an enhanced form of commitment from countries towards coordinated efforts to end poverty and hunger, protect the environment, and end discrimination in all forms. Though all the goals are relevant and the achievement of one goal has a rippling effect on the others, the SDG 11 – making sustainable cities and towns has been identified as the fulcrum towards achieving many others. The ten

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(10) targets under the SDG 11 especially 11A – strong national and regional development planning- make spatial planning and its tenets indisputable to the attainment of sustainable development. This is such that, well-thought-out spatial plan fosters inclusive and sustainable urbanization. Subsequently, the attainment of the targets ensures available and sustainable management of water and sanitation (SDG 6), mitigate climate change impacts (SDG 13), protect, restore and promote sustainable use of forest, and biodiversity (SDG 15), inter alia. This notwithstanding, operationalization of these remains inconclusive making its achievement fraught with diverse challenges.

Sustainability is not inconsistent with growth, profit, and development (Gellermann et al, 2015) just that, growth in a broader perspective should be the sort that empowers the poorest and vulnerable in society and aids their increase in economic activity for improvement in their living conditions (OECD, 2008). Actions over the past few decades supported by hard evidence of the volatilities of climate have more than ever demanded the application of sustainable development approaches to reverse the disturbing consequences for the systems that support the progress and continuity of human life and society. The sustainable development concept which during the initial stages was solely concerned with environmental issues has tended to embrace economic and social dimensions along the way (Murray, 2001).

The need

The global south especially Africa is still faced with issues of urbanization. This contemporary phenomenon remains a great challenge for the city and regional planners who ought to first wrestle with the increasing population, manage and provide adequate amenities, in the absence of appropriate institutional mechanisms (World Bank, 2013; Government of India, 2014). With more than half of the World's population currently living in towns and cities (Merrifield, 2013), settlements in urban areas have become an essential form of living for mankind (Sîrodoev, Schvab, Ianos, & Ion, 2015). As has been indicated, there is a close relationship among phenomena such as population growth, urbanization, migration issues, and urban expansion. This has brought about several spatial challenges including congestion, sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, inter alia as documented by several writers (Allison, 1975; Cobbinah, Poku-Boansi, & Peprah, 2017) which is heightened in intensity and repercussion in the urban areas. Salvaging the situation calls for several actions that come with adequate spatial planning, an indispensable tool for making cities safe, sustainable, resilient, and inclusive. Although spatial planning in Ghana dates back to the 90s, the effectiveness of spatial planning in Ghana mostly in small towns are hindered by lack of up-to-date demographic data, low capacity of institutions, low awareness of the tenets of spatial planning, inadequate funds,

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and attention and political interference from the traditional institutions (Elliott, 2006; Taylor, 2010). Modern technology is very indispensable in carrying out effective spatial planning. This is seemingly not made use of by planning institutions and authorities in charge of spatial planning (Oduro, Ocloo, & Peprah, 2014). To bring simplicity to the operationalization of the SDGs especially SDG 11 in Africa (Ghana), concrete efforts ought to be put in place such that tenets are identified and incorporated into practices carried out by related institutions that find expression in the lives of the populace affected by planning. For instance, the incorporation of climate issues in local plans (Cobbinah & N-yanbini, 2019). One of such tools is the Medium-Term Plans (MTDPs) of the various Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assemblies (MMDAs). These plans guide the course of development mostly over four years.

Localization of SDG in Ghana

As it has already indicated, the targets of the SDGs are supposed to be integrated into the Medium-Term Development Plans of the various MMDAs in order to make it practical and operational. However, corroborating findings made by Cobbinah & N-yanbini (2019) who looked at the perception of Planners on issues on climate change, a perusal of the MTDPs that the issues pertaining to the SDGs, such as climate change, were not included in the preparation of development plans. Secondly, targets that were even in the plans were not cogent and comprehensive enough to foster smooth implementation. Lastly, some planners indicated their understanding of climate change issues, incorporated them in developing their plans but were not implemented due to undue influence at the local level. A similar instance is revealed by this study as issues on SDG 11 are not incorporated in various MTDPs and those that had aspects of it are not cogent enough for smooth implementation.

Based on the issues discussed, these recommendations can bring about coordinated efforts in making cities and towns safe, resilient, inclusive, and sustainable: towards achieving SDG 11. First of all, Ghana (as well as other developing countries) should embark on spatial documentation of land rights at the local level. In order to curtail land litigations and destruction of land uses, rights to land in all forms should be documented. This will help reduce land litigations and contestations that make spatial planning difficult at the local level. Again, there should be public education on the tenets of spatial planning and spatial development. Developers will appreciate it if such education is done in local languages and localized to suit prevailing community settings. There should as well be the incorporation of Geospatial Technologies and remote sensing in land use planning. This will help in shortening the time and processes in development control especially, with regards to permitting and land disposition.

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With the use of remote sensing, there will be effective monitoring of spatial development and the application of development control mechanisms. Additionally, there should be conscious efforts to build the capacities of personnel in charge of urban planning in the use of various modern software. Lastly, land use planning should be part of the Functional Organization Assessment Tool (now District Assemblies Performance Assessment Tool-DPAT) which are indicators used by the local government in assessing the performance of various MMDAs. This influences the disbursement of the District Development Funds. Land use planning being part of the FOAT with clear indicators will compel political authorities to be committed to issues of spatial development.

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