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# Indigenous Perspective and Green Economy: The Pathway to Sustainable Environment

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*Abstract:* **During the last fifty years man has altered natural resources in a faster and more extensive way than in any other period of its history. Ecosystem assessment shows that our natural habitat is over-exploited and the speed of use of resources are higher than they are regenerated. This is due to population growth explosion and man's growing need of fibres, freshwater, lumber and fuel. Climate change is also a single threat to a sustainable environment. It is generally recognized that the need to transition towardgreen growth is the key to sustainable development and prosperity. Green growth is prevents environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and unsustainable natural resource use. It aims at maximising the chances of exploiting cleaner sources of growth, thereby leading to a more environmentally sustainable growth model. Inclusive green growth is not a new paradigm. Rather, it aims at achieving sustainable development by reconciling developing countries' urgent need for rapid growth and poverty alleviation. There is the need for rural poor to have a voice about progress which affects them, listening to what the rural poor have to say, learning from them, and respecting their realities and priorities.**

*Keywords:* **Green Economy, Indigenous Knowledge, Sustainable Environment**

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the next three decades, the world economy is expected to quadruple with the global population growing from 7 billion today to over 9.2 billion. A growing population with higher average income requires more food, more industrial products, more energy and more water. This creates formidable challenges for sustainable economic and environmental development. The OECD Environmental Outlook to 2050 shows that the additional strain that population growth will place on the earth's material and energy resources and the environment may be disastrous.

The world is in a multiple ecological, economic and climatic crisis [1]. The integrity of ecosystem is being eroded; there is high degree of desertification, shortage of food, water, energy and a worsening global economic recession [2]. Millions of people in Africa live on less than $2 per day,many of whom depend on natural resources for livelihoods and conserving natural resources can therefore have significant positive impacts on thewelfare of those living in poverty. Therefore, maintaining a healthy natural resource base is critical for the benefit of all people,especially the rural poor.[3].

Gross Domestic Product is the prevailing growth measures but rarely translates into poverty reduction [4]. According to [5], GDP hasbeen developed to measure overall economic activity. It is not designed to measure well-being. GDP does not tackle the evolution of inequality and poverty. Increase in Gross Domestic Product of developing world has achieved wealth for them yet it has not trickled down development pathway in order to benefit the poor group [4]. In order to improve the welfare of the citizen in health, education and infrastructure, green economy transition path must be traced to suit its developmental challenges. There is therefore the need to redefine and identify a more people oriented approach to development. According to Goldtooth [6], full recognition of land tenure of our Indigenous communities is the most effective measure for protecting the rich biological and cultural diversity of the world.

Because the share of the poor in global GDP is marginal and is reduced with the erosion of natural capital, package of green investments coupled with policyreforms aimed at making growth socially inclusive offers economically viable options to reduce poverty and hunger, and address challenges of climate change while simultaneously providing new and sustainable pathways to economic development and prosperity [7].

The outcome of the Rio+20 Summit titled 'the future we want', reinforced the global commitment towards balancing the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development through the green economy approach, including enabling policy, legal, regulatory and institutional frameworks [2]. According toOcampo [4], the concept carries the promise of a new economic growth paradigm that is friendly to the earth's ecosystems and can also contribute to poverty alleviation. Viewed in this framework, it is compatible with the older concept of sustainable development that has been mainstreamed into the United Nations' work for decades.

A green economy offers considerable opportunities for mobilizing resources toward a low-emission, climate-resilient development pathway. The fundamental question is how the welfare of future generations is taken into account in current economic decisions, which also affects

the choice between consuming today or saving and investing to increase the consumption of future generation.

This article is posed to answer this question and to achieve the following objectives: to examine the relevance of the indigenous people in green economy and to describe the various practices in greening the economy.

## II. The Need for Sustainable Environment

Natural resources are essential for life. It is essential for sustainable economic development and accounts for a quarter of wealth created in the low income countries [8]. Yet in many countries of the world natural capital has steadily eroded over the past few decades due to poor waste management; overexploitation of natural resources; abundance of invasive species; and increasing damage from natural disasters and climate change [2]. Resource-extractive activities, including commercial fishing, logging and mining, have resulted in extensive environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity. Nigeria in particular faces serious deforestation and degradation problems. In addition, deforestation destroys the capacity of trees to mitigate climate change and this puts pressure on the environment [9].

In addition, the loss of natural capital is becoming a threat to food, water and nutritional security. In particular, the degradation of oceans due to overfishing, pollution and other factors diminish the productive capacity of marine environments as a source of income, cultural identity and food security [10]. The way resources are used has to be changed if we want to guarantee our planet ability to regenerate resources and to maintain ecosystem services [5].

## III. Green Economy as a Tool for Sustainable Development

According to Patrick [5], the "green economy" has become a topic of growing discussion in light of the environmental crisis. It is an important tool for achieving sustainable development.The sustainability goal is to raise the global standard of living without increasing the use of resources beyond globally sustainable levels [11]. Sustainability implies proactive decision-making and innovation that minimizes negative impact and maintains balance between ecological resilience, economic prosperity, political justice and cultural vibrancy to ensure a desirable planet for all species now and in the future [12].

For the purposes of this paper, UNEP's definition of a green economy will be adopted. According to the body, green economy is one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks andecological scarcities. Simply put a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon**,** resource efficient and socially inclusive [13]**.** Also UN Issues Management Group on Green Economy defines a green economy is one whose growth in income and employment is driven by public and private investments that reduce carbon emissions and pollution; enhance energy and resource efficiency; and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services [2].

The green economy approach was developed to minimize the trade-off between economic development and the environment. It aims at eradicating poverty as well as sustained economic growth, enhancing social inclusion, improving human welfare and creating opportunities for employment and decent work for all, while maintaining the healthy functioning of the Earth's ecosystems [2]**.** A Green Economybalances natural resource values with other values, and takes into account the loss in value of ecosystem services due to environmental impacts.Thus implicit requirements for more comprehensive valuation of ecosystem servicesfit well with other aspirations of the Green Economy in respect of clean, renewableenergy [14].

The concept of the green economy has gained dominance as an alternative paradigm that offers the promise of growth while protecting the earth's ecosystems. It should be seen as consistent with the broader and older concept of sustainable development. According to [4], a green economy should not only maintain, but should enhance the value that the poor in developing countries derive from economic activities that environmentally sound. It should help reduce energy poverty through the provision of low-cost distributed renewable energy systems. This means that, while underscoring the links between the economy and the environment, it should not lose sight of the equity dimensions, including the needs of the poorer members of society throughout the world.

By integrating the three pillars of sustainable development into a green economy framework, decision-makers can make policy decisions based on a more complete picture [2]. This is because green economy approach is not merely a way to reduce resource-intensiveness or pollution but also a way to achieve resilient, inclusive and sustainable development through enhancing livelihoods and fostering new economic opportunities [2].

## VI. Perspective From Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous peoples are historic and contemporary stewards of biodiversity. Any attempt to achieve a Green Economy must also include attention to empowering local stewards and indigenous institutions [15]. The prevailing system dominated by unrestricted resource extraction, unsustainable consumption and production fails to respect inherent human rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples. We believe that our respect for natural law and cultures and our harmony with nature are crucial in bringing about a more just, equitable and sustainable world[15].[16] Suggests that there is an important role for Major Groups and Stakeholders to participate in policy formulation, advocacy and lobbying, as well as in the implementation of UNEP's Programme of Work and

relevant assessment platforms such as the Inter-governmental Platform for Ecosystem Services. To [17], indigenous knowledge represents a possible alternative for progress among the world's rural poor. According to [18], this implies a change that comes from within communities themselves and deploying indigenous knowledge to bring about economic and social progress.

Also, for the sake of the future generation of man, the world must forge a new economic system that restores harmony with nature and among human beings. There must be a new paradigm enforced by law that redefines humanity's governance relationship to the sacredness of Mother Earth and the natural world [19]. These fortified international and national frameworks for collectively demarcating Indigenous peoples' territories and land has proven to be one of the most effective measures protecting the environment from unsustainable mineral extraction, conserving and restoring biodiversity, and preserving a better world for future generations [6].

According to [19], the remapping of development must start by examining local construction and history of the people, that is, the conditions for and of change. This is typified by some of the work conducted on the indigenous knowledge of soils [17]. Much of this work show how the people classify soils, and, in particular, the factors used in such classifications. Soil colour and texture emerge as key common factors in indigenous soil knowledge. Local communities have their own indigenous ways to manage their immediate environment in order to sustain available resources [20].Supporting the above view, [2] says a green economy requires local strategies with locally relevant policies that are based on the terrestrial and marine environment; cultural and social traditions; and other contextual factors.

According to [20], it is a clear indication that traditional knowledge is valuable resource for resource management and environmental security. This is not far from the fact that Indigenous peoples and traditional communities around the world have over the centuries developed a close and peculiar connection with the lands, waters and environments in which they live and work [21] More so, findings have shown that ecological agriculture sequesters carbon from the atmosphere more cheaply and more effectively than the proposed Carbon Capture and Storage. Thus, indigenous knowledge is considered the essential factor for preserving biodiversity, promoting sustainable development, and mitigating climate change [21].

## V. Practices for Greening the Environment

### *5.1 Agriculture and Forestry*

Agriculture plays a significant role in economic growth and wellbeing. This is because the agricultural sector accounts for a significant proportion of the national income in many developing nations.Agriculture is a major source of employment and is one of the key sectors relevant for a transition to a green economy [13]. The rising demand for food, due to rising populations, and declining availability of arable land has put pressure on agricultural systems. Introduction of a variety of intensive farming system innovations as seen in conventional commercial agriculture is highly energy and input intensive and often relies on extensive use of environment damaging chemical fertilizers, mechanisation, herbicides, and pesticides [22].

It is also clear that climate change as the dominant environmental concern will have a profound influence on the conditions under which farmers and rural populations need to develop their livelihood strategies, manage their natural resources and achieve food security. According to [23], enhancing food security requires agricultural production systems to change in the direction of higher productivity. More so, productive and resilient agriculture requires transformations in the management of natural resources and higher efficiency in the use of these resources and inputs for production [23].

It has been demonstrated that use of green farming methods (such as integrated pest management, integrated nutrient management, low-tillage farming, agro-forestry, aquaculture, water harvesting, livestock integration, nitrogen fixing crops, etc.) enhances productivity. Studies have estimated that for every 10 per cent increase in farm yields, there has been a 7 per cent reduction in poverty in Africa; and more than 5 per cent in Asia [3].

Therefore, greening agriculture, fisheries, energy and tourism has strong potential for development gains in developing countries. Greening agriculture requires increasing the efficient use of inputs (water, energy etc.); reducing waste and environment impact; and developing practices that are sustainable in the long run. Research and capacity building in the areas of soil fertility management; efficient and sustainable water use; crop and livestock diversification; and improving market access for smallholder farmers and cooperatives can result in a systemic shift toward greener agricultural practices over time [2].

Greening of forestry is another key element of moving toward a green economy. In addition to providing income through tangible products such as timber, forests safeguard biodiversity, regulate carbon storage, and protect watersheds. In the forestry sector, unregulated and illegal logging, and the conversion of natural forest into commercial land for agriculture and livestock has depleted much of the primary forest area in most developing countries [2].

### *5.2 Low Carbon Investment*

Greening of economy often focuses on reducing CO2 emissions and waste. The need for greening through reducing emissions and waste is not as obvious in the developing world as it is in developed countries. Greenhouse gases create market failure because they are an externality to production and economic activities The prime remedy is to price emissions so as to create a powerful incentive to achieve emissions reductions in the most cost-effective way. A carbon tax or emissions trading system are possible tools [24].

For decades, carbon capture and storage (CCS) which captures CO2 from an industrial point source and stores it in a geological reservoir has been a technology in the portfolio of mitigation options. Yet in recent years significant drawbacks are associated with CCS options. Such storage facility is confronted with the possibility of leakage, long-term liability issues, problems with public acceptance of onshore storage locations and limited cost-effective storage capacity in some essential regions. Carbon capture and utilisation (CCU) is a partial alternative to geological storage. This has the Potential of contributing to a green economy. According to [10], reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) mechanism and probably, carbon finance may produce carbon credits as an offset for emissions.

*5.3 Renewable Energy*

The currentenergy system is both unsustainable and highlyinequitable, leaving 2.7 billion people dependent ontraditional biomass for cooking. Economics around the world have recognised the 'crippling effect' of heavy reliance of fossil fuel for energy. Therefore, reducing dependence on fossil fuel by improving energy efficiency and adoption of alternate energy sources will help protect development from global energy crises. According to [25], investing in renewable energy is a cost effective option for reducing energy poverty**.**

Renewable energysolutions and supportive energy policies promise to makea significant contribution to improving living standardsand health in low-income areas, particularly in ruralareas. In addition, expansion of renewable energy sources could translate to economic opportunity and job creation in the people. Some of the approaches which are cost effectivesolutions include modern forms of biomass, off-gridsolar photovoltaic and wind turbine. A wind turbine is a devise that converts kinetic energy from the wind into electrical power. [26]

## VI. Conclusion

The 'green' growth' offer policy-makers a more optimistic view about growth prospects. Low-carbon green growth is a pattern of development that decouples economic growth from carbon emissions; pollution and resource use, and promotes growth through the creation of new environment friendly products, industries and business models that also improve people's quality of life. It tackles climate change interlinked market failures. Market failures arise when the competitive markets do not result in efficient pattern of production and consumption. Therefore, a move towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient, and socially inclusive green economy holds clear benefits to local communities and for reducing poverty.

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