Environmental planning in Africa - action or words?

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Abstract

Environmental action plans and conservation strategies were prepared, published and adopted by the governments of a large number of African countries from Burkina Faso to Zimbabwe during the decade from the mid-1980s. These plans have generally had limited impact on environmental policies and practices. A sample of 12 country cases is considered in this paper. Some of the weaknesses of the plans and strategies are explored, in terms of participation in preparation processes, the institutional arrangements proposed for environmental regulation and management, outcomes and priorities identified, as well as the analytical frameworks used. It is argued that in addition to being highly «donor driven», a major drawback of such plans in Africa is the use of linear and mechanistic approaches which ignore the complexity, diversity and variability of social, economic and ecological contexts.

Keywords

Africa, economic policies, environmental planning, institutions, natural resource management, World Bank.

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For around a decade from the mid 1980s environmental planning was «à la mode» in Africa. From Burkina Faso in the Sahel to Zimbabwe in Southern Africa, national environmental action plans and conservation strategies were drafted, debated and distributed, often with the backing of major international institutions and agencies including the IUCN (the World Conservation Union), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. But despite good intentions most of these planning efforts appear to have had little impact in terms of reducing environmental degradation in the countries concerned. The purpose of this article is to review environmental action planning processes in Africa and to outline some of the difficulties which have arisen in these attempts to plan for better, sustainable, resource use and management. The review leads to consideration of some explanations for the shortcomings of environmental plans; in which it is argued that planning processes have not been unable to transcend traditional perceptions of environmental problems and remain dominated by positivist and mechanistic approaches.

With the persistence of widespread rural poverty and food insecurity, concerns about the depletion and destruction of natural resources through land degradation, deforestation and water pollution as well as about problems of urban environmental management, the agenda of «sustainable development» has become an important influence on policy making in Africa. The issues have been extensively investigated, and are concisely summarized by Reed (1996). Recognizing that improved management of natural resources and better land use practices underpin agricultural output increases and enhanced rural living standards while industrialization and urbanization entail significant environmental costs, governments and international agencies have sought various means to promote «sustainable» growth patterns in Africa and elsewhere. The proliferation of environmental action planning efforts since the mid 1980s must be seen in this context. The preparation and follow up to the Rio conference on environment and development (UNCED) in 1992 also encouraged this process, as the links between economic, social and environmental development objectives became increasingly apparent (Munasinghe & Cruz, 1995; Bryant & Bailey, 1997).

But the dominant approach underlying African economic development strategies in the late 1980s and 1990s focused

not so much on «sustainability» but on «market forces» and reduced state intervention as means of promoting growth. One of the contradictions which arises repeatedly in investigating environmental action planning is that such processes appear to run counter to a development strategy based on restricting the scope of state intervention in economic affairs. However, as the examples of «national conservation strategies» and «national environmental action plans» (NEAPs) in Africa indicate, policy issues in sustainable development are much more complex than «adjustment» packages imply. Thus, it is important to relate «macro» policy debates to «micro» studies of land use changes and household production and resource allocation decisions at the level of rural communities. Research into the dynamics of land use systems and agricultural practices in the drylands of the Sahel (Reenberg, 1998) and elsewhere (Leach et al., 1997) has shown that a wide variety of bio-physical and socio-economic factors influence the use and misuse of land, water and vegetation resources. Key determinants of natural resource management strategies include input and product pricing, access to markets, the quality of infrastructure and investment opportunities. Economic policies and institutions constitute a significant «enabling environment» in terms of changing livelihoods and improving living standards.

The challenge of environmental planning is to provide frameworks and to set priorities through mechanisms at the macro-political level, while at the same time allowing for communities and land users to play a decisive and influential role. A decentralized and contextual approach must be built into the planning process, in which developing environmental management capacity amongst resource users is a key. This is because the decisions which are most likely to affect sustainable development are not taken at the national level but at the local level. Unfortunately, since much planning «remains largely sectorised and unintegrated, is usually centralized and top-down, there is little effective participation in land use planning by the supposed beneficiaries» (Dalal-Clayton & Dent, 1993:1).

Furthermore, externally directed policies and development strategies often miss the point with regard to the complexity, variability and fluidity of local ecological and socio-economic phenomena (Leach & Mearns, 1996; Leach et al., 1997). As such, the enabling environment has often proved to be a «disabling» environment! Or as Dalal-Clayton et al. (1994:1) pointed out in a review of action plans and conservation strategies:

> «Many difficulties and uncertainties are encountered in developing a strategy for sustainable development, whether at the national or local level. Some observers suggest that genuine sustainable development can never be achieved, given the seeming intractability of the problems involved, the many contradictions and conflicts which sustainable development seeks to tackle, and the propensity of people and nations to pursue their own interests.»

In this context, it is worth stressing that when examining the conduct of environmental planning in Africa, it is important not to assess or measure such planning efforts against «impossible» criteria or scales which may imply lofty or overambitious expectations of what a planning process may be able to accomplish. Plans are part of the elusive «enabling environment.» There are, thus, certain limits to what can be expected from a plan, particularly in so far as sustainability and the environment are concerned; concepts which encompass the vast and complex interrelationships between man and nature. Moreover, there is a paradox, in that although there is a need for environmental planning, there are such great practical and theoretical problems in implementing an environmental strategy that effective planning is almost impossible. Nevertheless, while accepting that no planning is perfect, there are features of the process which are usefully susceptible to investigation.

Questioning action plans

As noted above, environmental planning and the preparation of «sustainable development strategies» in one form or another in Africa have been backed and promoted by a variety of agencies including the World Bank. In the 1980s, the IUCN (World Conservation Union) supported the drafting of national conservation strategies in several countries including Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, while the FAO was involved in preparing tropical forestry action plans and other UN agencies assisted in formulating action plans to combat desertification (Dalal-Clayton et al., 1994:9-10). Towards the end of the decade, as the World Bank was re-organised with a view to - inter alia - enhancing its reputation as an development finance agency which took environmental problems seriously (Wade, 1997), the opportunity to combine these disparate efforts was seized.

As a result, although support for planning was generally out of fashion in the World Bank, considerable human and financial resources were channeled into producing national environmental action plans (NEAPs), often in collaboration with other agencies. The pressure exerted on the World Bank in the United States through the «environmentalist lobby» was an important contributory factor. By the mid-1990s at least 30 African countries were involved in the «NEAP process», together with many other countries in Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America (Lampietti & Subramanian, 1995, World Bank, 1996a).

For the protagonists of - or apologists for - this form of planning, a NEAP would «provide a framework for integrating environmental concerns into a country's economic and social development, and to embed that framework in the fabric of government and peoples so that it is their process; they have 'ownership' of it and it is an authentically national effort» (Falloux & Talbot, 1993:19). This would be «a demand driven effort» requiring «the mobilization and meaningful participation of all levels of society, government and non-governmental» (ibid:19). Furthermore, in this initial formulation and on the basis of experiences with environmental planning in several countries at the end of the 1980s, it was anticipated that NEAPs would be holistic (cross sectoral) processes, focusing on the underlying causes of degradation and environmental problems which include a range of social, cultural and economic factors, and leading to action with the participation of donors through an environmental investment programme (ibid:21-28).

Some years later it seems that this vision of an effective planning process leading to the adoption and introduction of sustainable development strategies - backed with significant international aid - has become somewhat tarnished. One major problem with the World Bank support for environmental action planning in Africa was that the preparation of the plan became a condition for a country to obtain further structural adjustment loans (World Bank, 1992). In this context, an internal operations evaluation of support for NEAPs and for environmental impact assessment in project aid concluded by underlining the absence of national «ownership» of these action plans and the failure to ensure «country-driven» planning (World Bank, 1996a). It was noted that conditionalities associated with preparing a plan as a requirement for lending «eroded borrower support.» Furthermore, «many governments initiated NEAPs because they thought that the plans would lead to additional funding for natural resource management and environment protection from the Bank and bilateral donors» (ibid, 1996a:77-78). Despite the «action process» objective, the NEAPs were found to have frequently produced little more than «one-off events» usually in the form of a document, to have relied far too much on external consultants and to have had limited impact in terms of capacity building within governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Nevertheless, the relatively massive planning effort which was undertaken in many countries across the continent cannot be dismissed without some further investigation. The World Bank (1996a) operations evaluation included only Madagascar and Mauritius as African examples in a limited sample of case studies. What results of the action planning process have been observed in other countries? Was the effort and investment, in terms of consultants, studies, reports and workshops, worthwhile? Has the production of an action plan significantly affected the process of environmental policy making? Were the «right» issues identified in the action plans? How are environmental problems subsequently being tackled, and are the NEAPs being used to this end?

Some answers

In order to review the results of environmental planning, information has been gathered about NEAPs and other related initiatives in a number of African countries. Some variables associated with analyses of environmental plans in a sample of 12 countries are shown in Table 1. This sample includes those which might be classified as «non-NEAP» in that they were prepared prior to and independent of the operational directive issued by the World Bank (1992) or were drafted as «national conservation strategies» or «anti-desertification plans» in the 1980s. The plans for Ethiopia, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, Tanzania (NCS) and Zimbabwe are in this category. The NEAPs in Bénin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda were all finalized between 1993 and 1995 with the backing of the World Bank in compliance with the 1992 operational directive. The environmental management plan (NEMP) in Eritrea which was completed rapidly in 1995, may be in a different category, as according to Gebremedhin & Yohannes (1997: 12) it «was prepared solely as a result of domestic initiative, since Eritrea did

Table 1: Comparison of selected environmental plans and strategies.

Country	title of plan	completion	process (donor involvement)	participation & consultation	outcome (institutional)	follow up	impact on economic policies	technical solutions in action plan	community based initiatives in action plan	priorities, costs & benefits identified
Bénin	Plan d'Action Environnemental (PAE)	1993	commission supported by World Bank	some, through regional workshops	document adopted & agency set up	environmental legislation and sectoral studies	minimal	numerous, within each sector (urban, agriculture, etc)	some focus	no
Burkina Faso	Plan d'Action National pour l'Environnement (PANE)	1994	first draft revised after UNCED (World Bank)	minimal	document adopted & agency set up	legislation, information campaign	minimal	focus on information & monitoring	limited	no
Côte d'Ivoire	Plan d'Action Environnemental (PAE)	1995	commission supported by World Bank	broad	proposals for agency in plan document	proposed revision of numerous laws	minimal	focus on information & education	some focus notably in urban areas	no
Ghana	Environmental Action Plan (EAP)	1991	Environmental Protection Council	district & regional workshops	reorganisation of environment agency	strengthened control & law enforcement	some through EIAs	various proposals in different sectors (notably urban)	some, through District Assemblies	yes, within limits of data availability
Eritrea	National Environmental Management Plan (NEMP)	1995	rapid drafting by Ministerial Council	district & regional workshops	document adopted, agency proposed	preparation of guide to impact assessment	minimal	various proposals in different sectors	some	yes, but very broad
Ethiopia	National Conservation Strategy (NCS)	1994	small secretariat drafted plan (with IUCN support)	limited, due to political instability	environmental protection authority set up	various proposals, but few results	minimal	focus on information & training	limited focus (key issue is land tenure)	no
Madagascar	Plan d'Action Environnemental (PAE)	1988	commission (with World Bank, UNDP, USAID)	some, with key protection agencies	environmental agency set up (ONE)	coordination & capacity development	minimal	focus on natural resource monitoring, etc.	limited	no
Malawi	National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP)	1994	task forces supported by World Bank	some, through district workshops	environmental affairs unit set up	legislation & capacity development	minimal	various proposals in different sectors (agriculture)	focus on more district level activities	no
Mali	Programme National de Lutte contre la Désertification (PNLCD)	1987	technical studies by ministerial unit & various donors	limited, "une affaire des forestiers"	various projects & test zones proposed	negotiations on broader action plan (NEAP?)	minimal	focus on forestry and natural resources	limited	no
Tanzania	National Conservation Strategy (NCS) & National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP)	1993 (NCS) & 1995 (NEAP)	different plans backed by different parties & donors	limited consultation	institutional confusion & competing mandates	further studies to resolve institutional problems	minimal	proposals for capacity building, little sectoral focus	limited	no
Uganda	National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP)	1993	lengthy process backed by IUCN, UNEP & others	regional workshops	document adopted & authority set up	EIA guidelines & state of environment	some, with policy commitee	capacity building focus	district environmental plan proposed	no
Zimbabwe	National Conservation Strategy (NCS)	1987	prepared by Ministry of Natural Resources	limited, due to lack of funds	creation of new ministry	District Action Planning (DEAPs)	minimal	focus on training in NCS	communities involved in DEAPs	no

not plan to seek loans from the World Bank and hence was not concerned about the requirements for access to IDA funds.»

Table 1 presents some information which enables a summary comparison of these cases of environmental plans or conservation strategies in the sample of 12 African countries. Several comparative topics are shown, including the process of preparing the plan (donor support, consultation, etc.), the outcome and the follow up. It is particularly important to note that there is little evidence of any action plans or conservation strategies having affected economic policies in these countries, which may be in part due to the absence of priorities and cost-benefit analyses in the majority of the plans under consideration. Similarly, the notable lack of community involvement in most of the planning processes examined in the sample implies some fundamental weaknesses.

Preparatory processes

The process of drawing up, approving and publishing environmental action plans has varied from one country to another, although some common steps can be identified. Usually, an external agency such as the IUCN or the World Bank, together with other donors agreed to support the preparation of the conservation strategy or plan with the establishment of a technical preparatory secretariat assisted by a team of - frequently external - consultants. The secretariat was often linked to an existing authority, government department or agency with a mandate to deal with environmental affairs. Background papers were written by selected working groups of environmental specialists and studies were carried out to describe and analyze the environmental problems in the country in question. A round of «participatory consultation» was then launched in order to clarify key issues and examine proposals for conservation and environmental management activities. The results of these studies and consultations were then combined into an action plan document which was generally approved or adopted by the government (République du Madagascar, 1988; Republic of Ghana, 1991; République du Bénin, 1993; Republic of Uganda, 1993; Burkina Faso, 1994; Republic of Malawi, 1994; Transitional Government of Ethiopia, 1994; République de Côte d'Ivoire, 1995).

Competing plans and strategic frameworks

In the case of Tanzania considerable confusion about the status of different conservation strategies and action plans arose (Dalal-Clayton, 1994:32-33; Dorm-Adzobu & Gilbert, 1994:26-28). Although the National Environmental Management Council (NEMC) established in the early 1980s had prepared a conservation strategy for sustainable development (United Republic of Tanzania, 1994), the World Bank argued that there was not enough emphasis on environmental policy issues and subsequently supported the Ministry of Natural Resources in rapidly drafting a NEAP in 1995. But the failure to integrate these planning processes «led to competition and conflict between the people and institutions involved» (Bakobi et al., 1997:131).

In other countries conservation strategies were adapted and modified to fit the requirements of the NEAP. «State of the environment» reports prepared for the UNCED gathering in Rio were also frequently incorporated in the plans. This entailed, for example, a revision of the original 1991 «Plan d'Action Nationale pour l'Environnement» (PANE) in Burkina Faso, in order to try to incorporate concerns and approaches to sustainable development arising from UNCED (Marcussen & Speirs, 1998). There are also examples of countries where no NEAP was produced, as in Mali where an anti-desertification strategy (PNLCD) was adopted in the late 1980s and in Zimbabwe where the national conservation strategy has been used to promote «district» environmental planning (DEAPs).

Institutional arrangements and capacity

One recurrent thorny issue in drafting action plans concerned the question of appropriate national institutional arrangements for environmental planning as well as coordination between different agencies and organisations responsible for environmental protection, conservation and resource management in various sectors including agriculture, forestry, wildlife, industrial and urban development. The World Resources Institute (WRI) and the Network for Environment and Sustainable Development in Africa (NESDA) devoted considerable resources to exploring this issue of «institutional mechanisms» in a series of country studies (Dorm-Adzobu, 1994a & 1994b; Dorm-Adzobu & Gilbert, 1994; Dorm-Adzobu & Hoben, 1994; Dorm-Adzobu & Veit, 1994). These investigations focused on the capacity, coordinating role and regulatory mandate of the main environmental authority or agency. The risk of creating parallel institutions which would have limited ability and restricted mandates to deal with environmental problems was also examined.

In terms of institutional strengthening, as Brinkerhoff

(1996) pointed out in an assessment of coordination issues in environmental planning in Madagascar, the key problem is one of «capacity development», in that the administrative and technical capacities to manage environmental affairs were «consistently overestimated» in the NEAP process. The need for more «capacity development in environment» - supporting the acquisition of environmental skills and knowledge - in both governmental and non-governmental agencies and organisations has subsequently become an increasing priority (OECD, 1997). It is not enough to create a ministry, environmental authority or protection agency, the heart of the matter is to ensure that the regulatory body is able to function effectively.

Participatory approaches

This relates to an important weakness inherent in the NEAP process as undertaken in many countries; namely the extent to which «grassroots organisations», communities, NGOs and environmental interest groups were effectively involved in the consultations to prepare the plans. The descriptive reviews of the conservation strategies and NEAPs published by the IUCN in 1997 suggest that for various different reasons participation was fairly minimal. All too often the work was carried out by a small team of consultants and a technical secretariat supplemented by limited consultation with various specialists (Bakobi et al., 1997; Lemma et al., 1997; Vokhiwa, 1997). However, in Eritrea, Ghana and Uganda as well as in Bénin and Côte D'Ivoire, district and regional workshops were organised in an attempt to include a broader range of views on environmental issues in the plan.

The idea of involving communities and their organisations in analysing and assessing environmental problems and proposing solutions was also the key to the «DEAP» (district action planning) approach adopted to move beyond the impasse of the National Conservation Strategy (NCS) in Zimbabwe. As Mukahanana et al. (1997:176) point out:

> «The DEAP process is distinguished from top-down planning in that it recognises that development initiatives that exclude primary stakeholders tend to fail. It is a user-driven process which seeks to engage and motivate people in taking action at the local level. This provides a bottom up basis to link up with top-down planning processes such as NEAPs and other requirements for national policy frameworks.»

Blueprint approaches

Although there are variations, the environmental action plan documents which were produced and adopted by numerous African governments in the period from around 1987 to 1995 tend to follow a fairly standardised model and structure. The reports include sections presenting the main problems identified in the course of the preparation process, generally distinguishing between environmental degradation related to rural natural resource management which often focus on deforestation and soil erosion, and environmental concerns arising through industrialization and urbanization including problems of pollution, waste disposal and the provision of services in human settlements. Issues related to energy supplies and consumption patterns as well as to the management of water resources and the conservation of «biological diversity» are also often included in the «diagnosis» sections of the plan. On this basis, an «implementation strategy» is outlined which usually includes a lengthy assessment of the institutional capacity for environmental management, reference to the weaknesses or non-existence of environmental legislation and regulatory frameworks and a call for improvements in environmental information systems in the country concerned. To back up the implementation of the plan, investment requirements are listed often in the form of a «project matrix», indicating budgets for assorted activities ranging from drafting environmental legislation and running awareness campaigns to funding water cleansing and waste treatment facilities.

It is at this point that the main purpose of the «action planning» process becomes apparent. Despite the «diagnosis» and assessment of main environmental problems in the country concerned, many of the plans seem to boil down to shopping lists indicating various projects to be presented to the «donor community» for funding. Thus, the World Bank followed up support for NEAPs with funds for «environmental management projects» in many countries including Bénin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi and Uganda (World Bank, 1996b:50). Even in Eritrea, where the environmental management programme (NEMP) stressed «self-reliance», a list of financial requirements and requests for support formed an important part of the plan (World Bank, 1996c; Gebremedin & Yohannes, 1997).

Priorities and cost-benefit assessment

In this context it is important to stress one of the major

criticisms which has been leveled at NEAPs. The listing of investment requirements has generally not included any identification of priorities or any assessment of the costs and benefits of different strategies for improved use and management of resources. Data collection difficulties have often been cited as one of the reasons for this weakness. But the impact of «action planning» becomes vague and diffuse when the effects of different measures on the incomes and livelihoods of the people are not included in the strategies proposed.

On the other hand, in assessing the impact of these environmental planning efforts in Africa, the importance of outlining a range of problems and taking initial steps to devise means of tackling these concerns must not be underestimated. Despite the numerous «capacity weaknesses» and constraints, the preparation of conservation strategies and NEAPs has focused greater attention on resource use and environmental management issues. The agenda of «sustainable development» has also found its way into the legislative system in many countries through the preparation of regulations pertaining to environmental impact assessment in connection with investment schemes, or the introduction of laws designed to deal with, inter alia, pollution and waste disposal. Building on previous experiences with agreements on the protection of endangered species and threatened habitats such as wetlands, African countries have also been encouraged to become parties to other international conventions, notably on climate change, biodiversity and desertification. However, although these may be highly laudable measures, and there is every reason to include African countries in the debate on these issues, the focal concerns in sustainable development seem to be elsewhere.

Causes and effects of environmental degradation

From another angle, it is important to note that environmental action planning as a set of «development policy narratives» has also been criticised. Thus conservation strategies and NEAPs have been attacked for failing to incorporate new research results and stressing conventionally accepted ideas and models of the environment and socio-economic as well as political processes. Although new theories and «narratives» about a number of resource management issues have emerged during the 1990s, these are not readily taken into account in the official action plans which tend to repeat assumptions about the extent of deforestation and desertification, the negative impact of population growth on the environment and the state of environmental awareness amongst resource users.

Recent research on these questions in a variety of locations and ecosystems suggests that the causes of environmental degradation and resource depletion in Africa may be more complex, the phenomena themselves may be subject to fluctuations and changes and the narratives used to describe the environment are frequently oversimplified or misleading. The dynamic linkages between human activity and the environment are thoroughly explored in these studies (Tiffin et al., 1994; Hoben, 1995; Fairhead & Leach, 1996; Swift, 1996; Benjaminsen, 1997; Thomas, 1997). Unfortunately, these perspectives are rarely reflected in the environmental action plans.

Policy fragmentation

Another difficulty which has arisen in environmental action planning, is that the plans have remained marginal and not integrated within economic policy making processes. By the mid-1990s, having played a significant role in getting NEAPs onto the policy agenda, the World Bank was still concerned about the need to «mainstream» the environment. Other pressing economic and social problems continue to take precedence over the environment, and the NEAPs are often ignored. Perhaps this is not surprising, as Larson (1994: 684) suggested in a review of the impact of the NEAP in Madagascar:

> «Key environmental problems are driven by land use decisions of large numbers of geographically dispersed rural and urban inhabitants. Their decisions are driven by a lack of agricultural development, stagnant urban economies, population growth and political uncertainties. These basic development problems are not easy or even feasible targets for specific «environmental» policy changes. If this is the case, as it seems to be in Madagascar, then it is perhaps unrealistic to hope that NEAPs as constituted can provide a framework for understanding and alleviating a country's key environmental problems.»

Conclusions

On the positive side of the balance sheet, NEAPs have been part of a broad «post-WCED» (Brundtland) and «post-Rio» (UNCED) awareness raising exercise in Africa

and elsewhere, about the dangers of environmental destruction, pollution, natural resource mis-management, and so on. In some cases, as noted above, the plans have led to the creation and strengthening of environmental agencies and institutions as well as the drafting and adoption of environmental legislation. But the whole process has suffered from a «donor driven» syndrome, in which, as Hoben (1998:131) argues:

> «The impetus to address environmental problems in Africa has been almost entirely exogenous. African governments have once again been policy takers. Overhung by debt and more dependent than ever on foreign assistance, they have had little choice but to take on and institutionalize the donors' new enthusiasm for environmental management and sustainable agriculture. New ministries and agencies devoted to environmental management have blossomed across the continent. New governmental positions have been created in this new growth sector, even as others are being abolished by policy reforms designed to reduce public expenditures and the size of government.»

Many donor agencies are heavily committed to «environmental projects» of one sort or another as a follow up to the NEAPs. But generally the «hard» policy issues are elsewhere, in public sector reform, in promoting private investment and trade liberalisation measures and so on. In this context, until environmental issues are fully integrated in the economic policy making process, plans and legislation will make little difference to the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in rural communities, or to the survival strategies of the urban poor.

The World Bank has also changed the tune on environmental planning and policy. For example in a recent study of «green accounting» and indicators of sustainable development, it is noted that: «for too long now ministries of finance have paid scant attention to the exploitation of the natural resource base or the damaging effects of environmental pollution, while countries have been developing National Environmental Action Plans that read as if they were written by the environment ministry for the environment ministry, with no links to the economics ministries» (World Bank, 1997:7). Similarly, in a survey of the links between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the sustainability concept, Munasinghe & Cruz (1995:43-44) noted that both NEAPs and «Country Environmental Strategy Papers» prepared by World Bank consultants «rarely responded adequately to the growing need for greater understanding of the links between economic policies and the environment.» In addition, «none have conducted a systematic analysis of the economic policies underlying environmental degradation and, therefore, of the appropriate ways in which environment should become part of countrywide economic planning.»

But the wider problem associated with both the donor-driven character of most environmental planning and with the failure to link economic policy making to appropriate analyses of underlying environmental issues, is that the perspective adopted is traditionalist and positivist. «Old professionalism» has prevented plans and planning processes from becoming more relevant, meaningful and effective instruments for countering environmental degradation. There has been a tendency to see the field of planning as entirely open, to be filled effectively by anyone and any donor, if only the tools of planning are perfected and the process is carried out with the necessary professionalism.

According to this view, planning for improved management of natural resources and to counter the effects of degradation is entirely feasible. The plan, the planning process and external intervention share an approach and a view of development which assumes a mechanical and essentially linear relationship between policy, implementation and outcomes (Long & van der Ploeg, 1989: 227). Thus development is thought to be about system, order and continuity, and development problems - such as environmental degradation - are elements which disrupt this order. «Planned intervention» operates through projects, which - as shown above with reference to the propensity to solve environmental problems by suggesting projects and sourcing donors for funding - have formed an important part of all the plans. Such «planned intervention», even in a wider sense including programmes and policies, is the means by which ruptures and discontinuous elements can be rectified and order, or equilibrium, can be restored.

> «The modern ideologies of prevention are overarched by a grandiose technocratic dream of absolute control of the accidental, understood as the irruption of the unpredictable... It pretends to eradicate risk as though one were pulling up weeds» (Castel, 1991, quoted by Hewitt, 1995:115).

As with development projects generally, plans and planned intervention are expressions of a firmly rooted belief that reality can be empirically disaggregated, data collected, analysed and again synthesized in a manner which facilitates policy formulation, which in turn leads to implementation and fairly predictable outcomes.

But this approach to development intervention is linear and has a harmonious and stereotyped view of the social, political and economic context in which interventions are expected to work. At the same time, it is a view which runs counter to numerous empirical studies of «planned intervention» in Africa, which emphasize the contextual; complexity, diversity and variability which can not easily be incorporated into or combined with the positivist approach to planning and development intervention (Elwert & Bierschenk, 1988; Crehan & van Oppen, 1988). The limits inherent in applying linear modernization paradigms in the context of African political uncertainty and disorder have also been stressed in recent investigations of «atypical» African social and economic change (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Furthermore, as a number of «political ecologists» have observed, devising appropriate, sustainable, development strategies in Africa and elsewhere requires challenging much conventional thinking on the complex of interactions between «man and nature», bringing power struggles and inequalities of access to resources into dynamic environmental equations (Escobar, 1996; Peet & Watts, 1996; Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Leach et al., 1997).

Thus, environmental planning attempts have failed because on the one hand they have remained too remote from economic policy making and on the other hand they have not taken complex social and political processes sufficiently into account. Further efforts to tackle the serious environmental problems of the continent will have to be based on more down to earth assessments of the possibilities for action through local capacity development, investment and legislation. Only then will action plans adequately reflect social, economic and political realities.

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As with development projects generally, plans and planned intervention are expressions of a firmly rooted belief that reality can be empirically disaggregated, data collected, analysed and again synthesized in a manner which facilitates policy formulation, which in turn leads to implementation and fairly predictable outcomes.

But this approach to development intervention is linear and has a harmonious and stereotyped view of the social, political and economic context in which interventions are expected to work. At the same time, it is a view which runs counter to numerous empirical studies of «planned intervention» in Africa, which emphasize the contextual; complexity, diversity and variability which can not easily be incorporated into or combined with the positivist approach to planning and development intervention (Elwert & Bierschenk, 1988; Crehan & van Oppen, 1988). The limits inherent in applying linear modernization paradigms in the context of African political uncertainty and disorder have also been stressed in recent investigations of «atypical» African social and economic change (Chabal & Daloz, 1999). Furthermore, as a number of «political ecologists» have observed, devising appropriate, sustainable, development strategies in Africa and elsewhere requires challenging much conventional thinking on the complex of interactions between «man and nature», bringing power struggles and inequalities of access to resources into dynamic environmental equations (Escobar, 1996; Peet & Watts, 1996; Bryant & Bailey, 1997; Leach et al., 1997).

Thus, environmental planning attempts have failed because on the one hand they have remained too remote from economic policy making and on the other hand they have not taken complex social and political processes sufficiently into account. Further efforts to tackle the serious environmental problems of the continent will have to be based on more down to earth assessments of the possibilities for action through local capacity development, investment and legislation. Only then will action plans adequately reflect social, economic and political realities.

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