



The Environment and Sustainable Development in Algeria: A Delicate Balance

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Abstract

The environment has become one of the most pressing global concerns, particularly as humanity increasingly recognizes its fundamental role in sustaining life and ensuring long-term prosperity. Sustainable development, which aims to meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own, is inextricably linked to environmental preservation. In Algeria, environmental challenges such as resource depletion, pollution, and climate change pose significant threats to sustainable growth. This paper explores the intricate relationship between the environment and sustainable development, highlighting Algeria's efforts to integrate environmental considerations into its national development policies. By examining key initiatives, policies, and challenges, the study sheds light on Algeria's approach to balancing economic progress with ecological responsibility.

Keywords: Environment, Sustainable Development, Algeria, Environmental Policies, Resource Management, Climate Change, Ecological Sustainability.

Introduction:

The environment today is one of the most pressing global concerns, especially as it has become a major challenge for human survival and well-being. As a fundamental pillar of development in societies, the environment reflects the progress of nations in all fields. Its concept is directly linked to the optimal use of available resources. Sustainable development, in particular, is closely associated with environmental concerns, as it seeks to meet the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This is achieved by avoiding the depletion of natural resources, environmental pollution, excessive public debt burdens on future generations, and neglecting human resource development, which could create difficult conditions in the future due to current decisions.

Sustainable development, therefore, aims to achieve developmental goals while ensuring environmental protection and sustainability. However, environmental degradation remains a significant obstacle to development, especially when developmental needs exceed the capacity of available environmental resources to regenerate.

Recognizing this reality, sustainability has been a central theme in global environmental conferences, leading to the implementation of numerous international and national projects to integrate environmental considerations into development strategies. Algeria, like many other countries, has taken steps to incorporate environmental sustainability into its development policies.

Accordingly, this research paper explores the following questions: What is the relationship between the environment and sustainable development? What is the current state of the

environment and sustainable development in Algeria? And how has Algeria integrated environmental sustainability into its development policies?

To answer these questions, this study is divided into three sections. The first section defines the concepts of environment and sustainable development, the second examines the relationship between the environment and sustainable development, and the final section discusses the integration of environmental considerations into Algeria's sustainable development strategy.

Basic Concepts of Environment and Sustainable Development:

1.1 The Concept of Environment

The environment is defined as the domain or medium in which humans live, influencing and being influenced by it. This domain can expand to encompass a vast area or contract to a very limited space, such as the confines of a home. The environment includes everything surrounding the Earth, existing on, within, or above it. It comprises the atmosphere, water, energy, plants, and animals, all of which collectively form the environment (Al-Nashif, 2002, p. 13).

Furthermore, the environment is described as everything external to human existence and all surrounding entities. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we inhabit and cultivate, as well as all living organisms and inanimate objects, constitute the elements of the environment. It is the framework within which human life and various activities unfold (Dandash, 2005, p. 52).

To fully comprehend the concept of the environment, it is insufficient to merely examine the etymological roots and interpretations of the Arabic term without linking it to Western terminology to arrive at a globally accepted definition. The term "Environment"

(Environnement) refers to all factors interacting with humans in their surroundings, including the Earth's surface and subsoil and the resources contained therein. Additionally, it encompasses the atmosphere with its various components, other living organisms coexisting with humans on the planet, and the artificial environment comprising human-made structures that facilitate daily life. The aesthetic environment includes historical sites and artifacts, while the social environment covers population distribution, community organization, and production levels, contributing to sustainable development (Al-Baz, 32, p. 61).

At the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, held under the theme "We have only one Earth," the environment was defined as the set of material and social resources available at a given time and place to fulfill human needs and aspirations (Ahmed, 2006, p. 12).

Thus, the concept of the environment extends to encompass various aspects of life, including natural, social, cultural, and economic dimensions. These interconnected elements create a habitat where humans and other organisms meet their needs and engage in activities that influence and are influenced by the environment (Ibid., p. 14).

Divisions of the Environment :

Scholars and researchers have categorized the environment in different ways. Some have divided it into two primary types: the natural environment and the constructed environment (Rashwan, 2005, p. 28).

1- The Natural Environment

The natural environment consists of elements that exist independently of human intervention, such as deserts, seas, climate, topography, surface and groundwater, and vegetation. It directly

or indirectly influences all living organisms, including humans, animals, and plants (Ahmed, 2006, p. 13).

2- The Constructed Environment

The constructed environment comprises the physical infrastructure built by humans, as well as the social systems and institutions they establish. This category includes land use for agriculture, residential areas, resource extraction sites, industrial zones, commercial centers, schools, universities, and transportation networks (Ibid., p. 14).

Another classification, based on the recommendations of the Stockholm Conference, identifies three fundamental environmental components: the natural environment, the biological environment, and the social environment (Al-Baz, 32, p. 61).

- **The Natural Environment:** This consists of four interrelated systems: the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, the lithosphere, and the biosphere. These systems include essential elements such as air, water, soil, minerals, energy sources, and flora and fauna. The interactions among these systems create the necessary biological conditions for human survival and the continuity of economic activities. Plants produce organic matter and energy, herbivores consume plants, carnivores feed on herbivores, and humans utilize both plant and animal resources, maintaining a dynamic relationship with their environment (Rashwan, 2005, p. 28).
- **The Biological Environment:** This subset of the natural environment encompasses all living organisms, from humans and their communities to diverse species within the biosphere.
- **The Social Environment:** This refers to the framework of relationships that define human interactions. It is the foundation of any social organization, whether among individuals in a specific environment or between diverse communities across different

civilizations. These relationships form the basis of social systems. Throughout human history, individuals have developed a cultural environment to enhance their existence, modifying the Earth and even venturing into space exploration (Ahmed, 2006, p. 13).

The environment, as studied here, pertains to Planet Earth and its various domains, including the lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, and biosphere. These interconnected spheres collectively shape the conditions for sustainable development and human progress.

Sustainable Development :

At its core, development results from human efforts to transform natural elements in the environment—such as geological structures—into wealth, meaning goods and services that meet human needs. This transformation depends on human labor, scientific knowledge, and technological tools. However, development alters the environment, potentially disrupting its natural balance. If environmental degradation exceeds the ecosystem's ability to recover, the damage becomes irreversible. This is where the concept of sustainable development emerged as a crucial solution (Environment and Development Journal in the World, Special Volume, Issues 52-53, 2003, pp. 22-23).

The term "sustainable development" has gained significant traction in contemporary discourse. It was officially introduced in the 1987 report *Our Common Future*, issued by the World Commission on Environment and Development. This commission was established by the UN General Assembly in December 1983 under the leadership of Norway's Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, with a membership comprising political and economic elites. The objective was to sustain global economic growth without making radical changes to the international economic system. The report integrated economic, social, and environmental needs into a single definition, stating that "sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the

present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (G. Ferone, D. Debas, A.S. Genin, Ce que développement durable veut dire, Editions d'Organisation, 2005, p. 8).

Categories of Sustainable Development Definitions

There are two broad categories of definitions for sustainable development:

Simplified Definitions – These definitions, often slogan-like, lack depth and analytical rigor.

Examples include:

Sustainable development is development that does not contradict the environment.

Sustainable development is renewable and continuous development.

Sustainable development puts an end to the mindset of infinite natural resources.

Comprehensive Definitions – These definitions highlight a balance between economic, social, and environmental progress. Some key interpretations include:

Sustainable development involves fulfilling present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own (Osama Al-Khouli, The Concept of Sustainable Development, Center for Printing and Publishing Studies, Beirut, 1999, pp. 44-45).

It assumes the preservation of natural resources for future growth and development.

It promotes balanced and harmonious economic and social development while ensuring environmental protection.

It is based on incentives that reduce pollution, decrease excessive energy consumption, and impose taxes to limit water waste.

Perspectives on Sustainable Development

The World Resources Report (1992), which focused on sustainable development, compiled around 20 different definitions of the concept. These definitions were categorized as follows:

Economic Perspective – In developed countries, sustainable development entails reducing energy and resource consumption. In developing nations, it focuses on utilizing resources to improve living standards and reduce poverty.

Social (Human) Perspective – Sustainable development seeks to stabilize population growth and improve healthcare and education, particularly in rural areas.

Environmental Perspective – It involves protecting natural resources and optimizing the use of agricultural land and water resources (Othman Mohammed Ghoneim & Magda Ahmed Abu Zant, *Sustainable Development: Its Philosophy, Planning Methods, and Measurement Tools*, Al-Safa Publishing House, Amman, First Edition, 2007, pp. 28-30).

Technological Perspective – It advocates transitioning to clean industries that utilize green technology and clean energy, thereby minimizing harmful emissions that contribute to climate change and ozone depletion.

The Brundtland Report underscored the interdependence of economic, social, and environmental aspects in achieving sustainability. It emphasized that no sustainable development strategy can be effective without addressing these three dimensions.

Key Objectives of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development aims to achieve several objectives, including:

Improving the Quality of Life – Through strategic planning and developmental policies, it seeks to enhance economic, social, psychological, and spiritual well-being. The focus is on qualitative rather than quantitative growth, ensuring fairness, inclusivity, and democratic participation.

Respecting the Natural Environment – Sustainable development acknowledges the intricate relationship between human activities and nature. It treats natural systems as the foundation of human existence and works towards fostering a complementary and harmonious relationship between the built and natural environments.

Raising Public Awareness of Environmental Issues – It encourages a sense of responsibility among individuals, motivating them to actively participate in finding solutions to environmental challenges through involvement in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of sustainable development programs.

Rational Resource Use and Management – Since resources are finite, sustainable development aims to prevent their depletion or destruction by promoting responsible utilization.

Integrating Modern Technology with Societal Goals – Sustainable development seeks to employ technological advancements in ways that serve broader societal needs.

Adapting to Evolving Needs and Priorities – It aims to continuously adjust societal demands and priorities in line with available resources, ensuring a balance that facilitates economic growth while addressing environmental concerns effectively.

From the above, it is clear that sustainable development works to increase awareness of the importance of available resources and ensure their efficient use. Moreover, its goals evolve in response to emerging global challenges, making it a dynamic and forward-looking approach to development.

The Relationship Between Environment and Sustainable Development:

The 1992 World Development Report states that development and sound environmental management are two complementary aspects of the same agenda. Without adequate environmental protection, development will collapse, and without development, environmental protection will fail (World Bank, 1992).

There is now a broad consensus that sound and balanced environmental management is essential for development. At the same time, environmental protection and halting environmental degradation have become key objectives of development efforts in both developed and developing societies. This has led to an increased focus on sustainable development, which aims to meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Khawaja, 2002, p. 184). Achieving this goal requires not only the prudent use and conservation of existing resources to prevent pollution, waste, and destruction but also consideration of the rights of future generations by working to expand the current resource base.

Furthermore, any plans for environmental improvement must include programs to reduce poverty, as poverty is a direct cause of environmental degradation and the erosion of economic growth (Nour, 2002, p. 117). Thus, poverty alleviation and improved income distribution for low-income populations are crucial not only from a social justice perspective and as a driver of development but also for environmental protection and ecological balance. The philosophy of development is based on the principle that environmental considerations are fundamental to economic growth. The depletion of natural environmental resources, which are the foundation of agricultural and industrial activities, has clear negative effects on development and the economy (Taraf, 1998, p. 82). Therefore, the primary consideration of sustainable development is balancing the economic system with the environmental system, avoiding the depletion of natural resources while ensuring environmental security (Taraf, 1998, p. 83). The idea of sustainable development relies on the concept of prudent environmental management, which requires changes in how costs and benefits are distributed and in national accounting methods to reflect environmental resources and factors as part of comprehensive development planning (UN Program, p. 15).

Sustainable Development in International Environmental Conferences:

Since environmental issues are directly linked to development, as mentioned earlier, most global environmental conferences have addressed development as a core topic. The concept of development has been associated with economic growth levels, which in turn depend on environmental factors. A new socio-economic philosophy has emerged from the evolution of sustainable development applications, focusing on poverty reduction through the promotion of sustainable living patterns that rely on managing natural resources and investing in the capabilities of the poor to improve their living standards sustainably (Gharib et al., 1997, p. 137). In this context, we summarize the key international environmental conferences and their approaches to poverty reduction.

2-1 Stockholm Conference (1972):

Held in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972, this conference was attended by representatives from 113 countries and various United Nations agencies. It was the first international conference sponsored by the UN to discuss environmental issues. The conference concluded with the first international document on environmental affairs and an action plan with 109 recommendations urging governments, UN agencies, and international organizations to address environmental problems (Rio Declaration, 1992, p. 153).

One significant outcome of the conference was the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which generated significant momentum in recognizing and addressing emerging environmental problems at both national and global levels. Key commitments included:

- 1) Ensuring sustainable productivity in the use of natural resources and ecosystems.
- 2) Reducing environmental pollution.

3) Establishing adequate environmental protection standards.

In 1983, the World Commission on Environment and Development was established to propose long-term environmental strategies and explore ways for the international community to address environmental and development concerns more effectively. After three years of work, the commission published a comprehensive set of recommendations in 1987 under the report "Our Common Future," which emphasized the need to integrate ecological and economic dimensions into sustainable policies (Khneish, 2005, p. 32).

2-2 Nairobi Conference (1982):

Held in Nairobi, Kenya, from May 10 to 18, 1982, under UN sponsorship, this conference addressed environmental and development issues, particularly the rising global population, especially in developing countries. The conference called for international and regional cooperation to combat poverty and pollution, highlighting that widespread poverty, illiteracy, disease, and malnutrition contribute to social tensions and conflicts. The Nairobi Declaration emphasized providing financial, technical, and scientific assistance to developing nations to combat desertification, drought, and poverty while improving environmental conditions. However, many of its provisions were not implemented due to global political conflicts and the division of the world, which weakened the UN's ability to enforce the declaration (Ministry of Environment, 2004, p. 155).

2-3 The Earth Summit (1992):

Officially known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), this summit took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from June 3 to 14, 1992, under the theme "The Earth in Our Hands." It saw broad participation from world leaders, scientists, experts, non-governmental organizations, and civil society representatives. The conference

aimed to bridge the gap between developed and developing nations by addressing environmental protection and sustainable development.

Key outcomes included:

- **Rio Declaration on Environment and Development:** Signed by representatives of 178 countries, this declaration consisted of 27 principles aimed at fostering global cooperation for sustainable development. It emphasized human-centered development, knowledge exchange, the right to environmental information, environmental protection during conflicts, and the need for national and international laws to penalize polluters and compensate victims of environmental disasters (Dardar, 2002, p. 132).
- **Agenda 21:** A comprehensive strategic plan addressing social and economic dimensions, resource protection, and the role of different human groups in sustainable development. The agenda also introduced the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to monitor and coordinate sustainability-related activities within the UN system.

Despite its success, the conference revealed tensions between industrialized and developing nations. Developed countries advocated for the "polluter pays" principle, seeking to impose a carbon tax on oil-producing nations and restrictions on deforestation in tropical countries. However, developing nations rejected these proposals, viewing them as threats to their economic survival.

2-4 The Johannesburg Summit (2002):

A decade after the Rio Summit, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from June 26 to July 4, 2002, with over 20,000 participants. The

summit served as a wake-up call regarding the deteriorating global environmental situation and revisited the commitments made in Agenda 21. Key objectives included:

- ❖ Reducing the gap between wealthy and poor nations through international cooperation.
- ❖ Establishing a global action plan for sustainable development.

The summit reaffirmed the need for defining economic and social development goals with long-term sustainability in mind, improving living standards without harming the environment. The guiding formula was: **Sustainable Development = Protection + Progress.**

While governments viewed the summit as a success, non-governmental organizations criticized it for failing to produce concrete measures to combat poverty and address global challenges such as disease, conflict, and corruption.

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3- Environmental Dimension in Algeria's Sustainable Development Strategy

3-1 Environmental Reality in Algeria:

Like other countries, Algeria has faced environmental challenges that emerged gradually after independence due to rapid industrialization and urbanization aimed at developing national infrastructure and improving economic conditions (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 27).

The most pressing environmental issues include:

- ❖ **Air Pollution:** Caused by vehicle emissions, industrial gases, and the burning of solid waste near residential areas (Bouteraa, 2012, p. 41).
- ❖ **Water Pollution:** Agricultural chemicals have contaminated surface and groundwater in various regions (Aouj, 2001, p. 358).
- ❖ **Waste Management:** The increasing volume of waste due to urbanization, coupled with low public awareness of proper disposal methods (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 28).
- ❖ **Desertification:** Exacerbated by climate change, deforestation, and poor land management, leading to significant ecological challenges (Abdawi, 2005, p. 75).
- ❖ **Water Table Rise:** Particularly affecting areas such as Ouargla and El Oued due to natural and human-induced factors, including excessive irrigation and inadequate drainage systems (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 28).

3-2 Prospects for Sustainable Development in Algeria:

Algeria has recognized the need to balance environmental protection with economic development through responsible resource management. To achieve this goal, various policies and initiatives have been implemented to improve living conditions while preserving natural resources (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 27).

Key initiatives include:

❖ **Completed and Ongoing Projects:**

- Coastal protection programs.
- Biodiversity conservation projects.
- Environmental impact studies.
- Safe drinking water supply projects.
- Urban improvement initiatives.
- Waste management projects (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 28).

❖ **Support for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs):**

- Creation of 600,000 SMEs by 2020 to generate 6 million jobs while ensuring quality and productivity (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 28).
- Establishing industrial zones compliant with environmental regulations.

❖ **National Environmental Protection Plan (2001-2011):**

- A ten-year strategy aimed at improving public health and environmental quality.
- Focus areas include reducing pollution, improving water quality, increasing recycling rates, and expanding green spaces (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 28).

❖ **Law 03-10 on Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development:**

- Adopted following Algeria's participation in international environmental summits, particularly the 1992 Rio Summit (Ministry of Environment, 2005, p. 28).

- Establishes principles such as biodiversity conservation, pollution control, and environmental accountability.
- Introduces regulatory measures including environmental impact assessments and penalties for ecological damage.

By implementing these measures, Algeria aims to integrate sustainability into its national development framework, ensuring long-term economic growth while preserving environmental integrity.

Conclusion:

The relationship between the environment and sustainable development is a uniquely intricate one. The environment is a critical aspect of human life, with humanity itself being a fundamental component of development. The true measure of this relationship is seen in real-world practices. Human existence inherently demands continuity and expansion, leading to the depletion of environmental resources, which, in turn, negatively impacts development.

Therefore, the responsibility of sustainable development lies in balancing economic and social systems while simultaneously ensuring environmental protection and conservation. This is particularly significant when environmental considerations are integrated into development strategies, as seen in Algeria. While certain indicators reflect Algeria's strong ambition to advance sustainable development, comparisons with neighboring countries highlight a considerable gap in this area, revealing that ambition alone is insufficient.

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