

Geography 507: Sustainable Development and Intra-Generational Poverty
Spring 2008
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Course Outline and Objectives

The Brundtland Report is often given credit for situating sustainable development in social consciousness with its well-known dictum that biospheric resources must be exploited efficiently to ensure a certain minimum standard of living for this and future generations. Wealth redistribution between developed and Third world countries is viewed to be axiomatic of and integral to this reformed (reformulated) economic order. A new discipline, Ecological Economics, focusing on the discursive relationship between sustainable development as an intellectual and policy enterprise, emerged from this vision of equity. The intellectualization of sustainability was furthered by the creation in 1989 of a new journal titled, *Ecological Economics*. In its inaugural issue, Robert Costanza, the Editor-in-Chief, echoed Brundtland by recognizing 'wealth distribution' to be a necessary condition for sustainable development. Unfortunately, this imperative has been missing in much of the discourse and practice of sustainable as they pertain to Third World regions, including Africa.

This seminar is used to critique both the conceptual and policy dimensions of sustainable development as applied to the Third world, in general, and to Africa, in particular. The critique is guided by three assertions: first, that concepts like resilience, stability, strong and weak sustainability, used only for ecosystems, could contribute towards a more comprehensive model, which could be used also to contemplate on poverty systems; second, that the inability of sustainability discourse to tackle poverty systems could be traced to its dialectical entrapment in the principles of neo-liberalism, which are antithetical to poverty-alleviation; and third, that the practice of sustainable development has been co-opted by a global environmental movement, which often pursues a post-colonial/neo-colonial agenda that is inconsistent with poverty-alleviation.

Seminar readings and discussions will be framed around a number of issues, including, the political economy of SD; SD, knowledge, global power and the environmental NGOs (discourse and practice); SD and a 'new' landscape discourse; ecosystems and poverty systems; SD practice, poverty systems and conservation systems.

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Annotation and Critique:** students will turn in a concise annotation of the readings for each week and critique one of those readings (typewritten, double-spaced, 12 point font). **55%**
- **Class Discussion Leader:** each student will lead one or more class discussions. The discussion leader will: (i) prescribe one reading on the subject for the class at least one week ahead of time; (ii) provide a 1-page summary of the key points of the week's readings for each member of the class; (ii) use the handout as a guide to steer the class discussion. **25%**
- **General Class Discussion:** the instructor will pay attention to the quality, soberness and incisiveness of the contribution of participants to class discussions. It would be helpful if participants refrain from wasting the time of the class by engaging in waffling 'hot air' tirades **(20%)**