



Abdihakim Warsame  
 mustafe.cismaan@gmail.com  
 abdihakimw@gmail.com

## **Introduction:**

Sustainable development came to global attention with the Brundtland Commission's report on the global environment and development which was published in 1987 (Redclift, 2005). This report was created in response to the worldwide situation affecting human beings, the environment and non-human species. For more than 20 years, the SD concept has been increasingly recognized and adopted in response to the growing effect of global challenges. Many international organizations have been working toward expanding SD, and many definitions of SD have arisen.

Following are some of the definitions of SD created by persons prominent in the field. Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UNWCED, 1987; the Brundtland Commission's report – Our Common Future). A key concept of sustainable development will be the integration of community and stakeholder concerns into economic and ecological concerns. The goal of sustainable development is to ensure that four elements – basic needs, ecology, ecoefficiency, and community empowerment – plus the transgenerational element are considered in the decision-making process (Blackburn, 2000, p. 175). Sustainable development is the bridge between environmental, economic and social goals; between north and south; between governments, civil society and business; between science and policy; and between policy and action (Department of Economics and Social Development. Two perspectives on the concept of sustainable development have become central in recent years. The first refers to the concept of greening the state; and the second emphasises the potential to globalize the concept of sustainable development.

This paper is conceptual. It aims to address the following questions:

- 1) What are the challenges and opportunities of greening the state?
- 2) What can be the perception we can have on the potential to globalize the concept of sustainable development?

## **Challenges and Opportunities of greening the state**

The concept of greening the state had become an identifiable focus and interest for many states, and that has made states recognized as being environmental actors. It was late in the 1960s and 1970s when governments across the developed world have moved decisively to put

in place the different measures of environmental foundations that we know today (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 63). This has made the environmental policies of some of the developed world become successful and manage some specifically identified burdens. Indeed the concept of greening the state had been characterized by both remarkable success and remarkable failure. There are many possibilities of greening the state, but reform in the government, societal and the market level is required to make greening the state possible (ibid). The possibility of greening the state can be reached and achieved if broad outlines of the many policies and institutional changes are done. Indeed many have already tried in different jurisdictions. Some of the changes done are for example abolishing subsidies for environmentally destructive behavior. Some countries have gone far to the extent of shifting their government's tax systems to encourage green practices ( VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 63-64). As I have mentioned earlier, the possibility of greening the state requires not only reform in government institutions but also societal reforms.

It is a fact that the environmental state or greening state have undergone many phases. The first phase being cleaning up pollution and protecting the environment, the second phase promoting sustainable development and lastly transforming societal practices to respect the ecological practices (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 77). Scholars have given such societal transformations the name of transformative orientation. The concept of transformative orientation focuses on the aspect of changing or altering already established practices of societies to manage the destruction/burdens that productions and consumptions of societies impose to the environment.

The central concept of these societal changes is producing deliberate societal changes to produce communities that can protect the environment and realize the sustainable development goals. Since the concept of greening the state is a global concern, the possibility of greening the state requires taking into consideration the array of the interconnected systems that operate at the different spatial and temporal scales that are being experienced by different peoples in different ways (Meadowcroft, 2012: 5). One fundamental aspect that we need to understand is that the environment and societies interact with each other through many channels and therefore the possibility of greening the state and protecting the environment requires an overall balance of societal changes at all levels (ibid). As mentioned earlier the state is central to the concept of greening the state. However, the possibility of greening the state requires states actions. For example, putting in place money, even the attention of political leaders to eclipse the human interactions with the environment and manage the environmental issues (ibid).

As argued by Meadowcroft ( 2012) environmental issues and particularly the increase of climate change had become a legitimate and salient concern for states. A similar concept is discussed by Hysing ( 2015) in his article "lost in transition" on how the role of the state is very crucial and central to the possibilities of greening the state. The central concept here is the importance of the state in environmental governance. The author relates the concept of social transformations to the state and argues that it is hard to transform societies without the actions and involvement of the state. Hysing (2015) further argues that the possibility of

greening the state can be achieved if the state takes different roles and responsibilities. For instance, the concept that we need to understand is, the state should not be replaced but instead reformed. The reforms, in this case, should happen in the state's way of interacting with societies (governance) and the state's political orientation, that is sustainable development. Despite the many calls of the importance of the state in making possible the concept of greening the state, there are a lot of criticisms from the neoliberals' side that states have rolled back and instead favoured markets and became defenders of capitalist society. As stated in, the role of the state making possible the concept of greening the state had faced many challenges both in the political and economic institutions. These are challenges that arise from the different competing interests and diverging goals of the globalized world.

The notion of the market and the cooperation among states is central to the possibility of greening the state. In 1968, economist Garrett Harding published a paper "the tragedy of the commons." The most interesting discussions in his paper were, what sustainability can mean to the increased population of the world. One key concept he discusses is in today's societies one first needs to decide with his customers what sustainability means to them concerning his company (Emery, 2013: 16). Here, it is essential to remember that some retailers in the market are serious about saving the planet and long-term planning for future generations while others are not.

Despite the many possibilities of greening the state, there are also problems, obstacles, as well as possibilities and prospects in the different countries around the globe. Even though many are serious about the concept of greening the state, what we need to understand is due to the complexity of the subject we are discussing the problems, obstacles and even the possibilities vary. Problems and obstacles of greening the state might vary and can be understood to the specific country or might be understood to as the industrialized world and the developing world. The concept of greening the state and sustainability have always demanded the discontinuity of existing routines of states (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 78). And one of the problems and obstacles in the developed countries is, for example, the lack of securing economic and social advances without continuing environmental degradation. This had demanded the developed states of making a significant transformation in the different levels of the existing social practices of these countries. How and which areas these transformations are needed is yet unclear. But some of the areas are, for example, the shift in technology, the social organization of countries' productions and their consumptions and lastly, the substantial innovations in international governance are areas that needed reform (ibid). A similar concept is discussed by Lundqvist (2004) that scientific knowledge is recognized as very crucial, but it is not enough to convince the public and design policy options for environmental protections.

The other challenge that developed states face in greening the state is the achievement emissions reductions on the scale that now appears essential. Indeed, of their many trials and strategies in protecting their environments and greening their states in their technology, market, and the social transformations, this still demands a radical restructure of energy systems, and there is no easy technological fix to this issue. Some of the countries have shown a good record and success in implementing environmental policy makings. Sweden is a good

example that has made strong political commitments to bring down GHG emissions 2020 and even 2050 which is beyond the objectives set by the European Union environmental bodies ( Meadowcroft, 2012: 99). It is a fact that environmental problems are not one country's problems but rather that needs to be tackled collectively. One of the many challenges of greening states had been the lack of international coordination to combat cross-country environmental problems ( Hysing, 2014: 262-263). Bäckstrand (2003) discusses that the concept of greening the state had always been very complicated and resulted in uncertainty among societies. For example, it has been complicated that societies accept the truth of scientific expertise. The descriptions of the environmental challenges mentioned above can be traced and identified in the developed world, but there are also many obstacles facing the developing world. One concept that we need to understand and note is that we cannot expect greening of states in the developing regions to resemble that of the democratized industrialized states (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 80). One major challenge of the developing world in greening the state comes from the processes of democratization in, and these regions present some critical junctures in the institutionalization of environmental capacities and reforms.

One central concept that is most discussed in the scholarly field of environmental issues is how greening looks like in tiny countries where governments in power even lack the capacity of implementing some of the fundamental capacities associated with the state building. Despite the obstacles and problems that different parts of the world face in greening the state, there are possibilities and prospects and even key-reforms that can be put in place in greening the state. The fact, the possibilities, and prospects might differ and vary as the challenges differ and vary. It might be hard to measure precisely how much gains have been made, but some gains and prospects have already been made.

There are many possibilities and prospects in the country or regional level when it comes to the concept of greening the state. For example, the European Union countries that have heavily promoted international level agencies of all types that were engaged in promoting and monitoring environmental protections (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 210).

The EU countries encouraging decentralization and public participation have also encouraged the EU environmental policies to succeed. The central and overall concept of EU success record in for greening the state is that the EU had been very active in improving their environmental protections. The fully democratic systems and economic success have also made EU countries have the strong rule of law and active civil society groups that made these countries have stronger environmental protection policies.

In contrast to the EU actions and policies in improving and protecting their environment, the US environmental actions have been characterized by bottom-up dynamics and have been inactive and even worked against other domestic efforts and initiatives that aimed in setting GHG regulations ( VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 351). For example the concept of greening the state and Latin American countries that democratization had a key factor and necessary in greening the state. The existing literature suggests that democracy, especially the electoral

democracy, has not been enough for strong transmission of the environmental ideas and demands in Latin America (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 217). Academics suggest that the possibility of the greening of the state in Latin America is through organizing and empowering the independent organizations, social movements and NGOs to bring their environmental issues and concerns to the political agenda (ibid).

In general, existing data from all regions suggest that improving political measures can favour the environmental programmes and outcomes (ibid). It was during late in the 1960s and 1970s that the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD) established central ministries and agencies that have set up a framework to protect air and water pollution laws to protect the environment globally (Meadowcroft, 2012: 2). These are some of the good examples of the key reforms that have already been done and are today's foundation of global environmental issues and discussions. Some key reforms are at the institutional levels.

To induce institutional changes leads us to the question what institution could mean in this case. As defined and explained by Olsson & Hysing (2017), institutions can be defined with structural features and can be both formal (organization and legislation), and it can also be informal and be networks and norms. Key-reforms can be done and are needed in the institutional level of continuing the environmental concerns globally and expand them in many states into a range of environmental policies that are broad and can be included economic instruments such as the emissions trading and the green taxation policies implemented in many states in the developed world (Meadowcroft, 2012: 2-3).

Building on the concepts and explanations of Eckersley (2004) and Meadowcroft (2005) states can reform their environmental policies by adopting normative orientations towards the institutional policies of greening the state. Although states have faced challenges of the normative orientation concept, this could not stop states place the ecological concerns at the core of their state activities and transforming theirs into environmental aiming goals and initiatives. The standpoint and the central argument of the normative concept are through institutional reforms including all sectors of the society in protecting the environment.

In summary, the concept of greening the state depends on how the three fundamental pillars of the concept find common ground on working towards the same goal. These are the state, society, and market at all levels. But through our discussions and the different arguments produced by different scholars in the existing literature environmental concepts and the idea of greening the state requires international cooperation and efforts and even reforms in states institutional policies globally.

### **What Perception we can have on the potential to globalize sustainable development.**

The perception we can have on the potential to globalize sustainable development. The perception we can have on the potential to globalize sustainable development requires our understanding of the two projects globalization and sustainable development. These two

concepts are informed by totally different sets of values and principles. The two overlap structurally but diverge ideologically on many economic, social and ecological issues. The two concepts also provide an illuminating insight into the structural affinity as well as subsequent potential clashes and conflicts between the two concepts (Bakari, 2013: 23). The concept of sustainable development is a contested subject as being explained by Jordan 2008; Hopwood et al. 2005). The author argues that sustainable development is a contested concept beset by fundamental disagreements over its meaning, the importance of the subject and even the scale of the necessary reforms needed to be done. However, the potential to globalize sustainable development requires some key strategies and reforms in the institutional level of states, social transformations, and even the market as well as cooperation and international efforts.

Some development theorists suggest and call the state intervention arguing, that the success of the concept of sustainable development and the potential of globalizing depends on how states in the global world intervene the public interests by controlling market forces and avoiding drawbacks of excessive material economic growth typical in most of the industrialized countries in the world (Bakari, 2013: 32). The notion of sustainability and sustainable development have been central to the evolution of environmental policies and have triggered heated debates of its essence and validity within the contemporary socio-economic paradigm of development (Meadowcroft, 2012: 2).

Globalizing the concept of sustainable development started in the early 1980s when the world commission of environment produced a report titled "our common future." This report has included all sides whether poor or rich, developed, non-developed. This was a global initiative aimed at lifting the concept of sustainable development to international concern. The report had further pointed out areas of human livings and the consumption of resources both the developing nations and the developed nations and putting more emphasis on the importance of giving the poor a priority. From the above explanations, the potential of globalizing sustainable development depends on how societal needs are met without damaging the global and local ecosystems that might undermine environmental foundations and the long-term welfare of societies (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 1-2). For this reason, the potential to globalize sustainable development can be met if there is a reconsideration of traditional trade-offs between the social welfare of societies, economy and the environmental protection measures (ibid). In addition to this, the concept, sustainable development can successfully be made as a global issue if there are international initiatives that understand well what is required to bring positive changes in a given social system ( VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 13).

It is a fact that globalizing the concept of sustainable development requires a politics of environmental limits. But one factor that challenges the idea of the politics of environmental limits is the increase of global capitalism ( Meadowcroft, 2012:286). The central concept of the challenge of capitalism as a hinder to the potential of globalizing sustainable development comes from capitalism which involves accumulations of environmentally economic growth (ibid). Furthermore, the current existing global economic systems have in most cases short-

term profits but to orient the societal economy into different directions the world first needs to solve the capitalist drive of accumulating of profits and expanding markets that do not favor environmental protection and sustainability. Another promising initiative discussed by scholars in making sustainable development globalized and a global concern is international commitments of nation states that make sustainable development on the top agenda of their government policies. It is not enough to make the concept appear as top government policy or agenda, but implementation, transparency and making the concept succeed globally requires a mode of trans-community interdependence which is not bounded by political-geographical borders ( Meadowcroft, 2012:286).

Despite the many potentials and possibilities of making the concept of sustainable development globalized, there are also many obstacles and prospects in developing the process. For example, the concept of the north-south divide over the problem cannot be neglected and is a concept that has triggered a heated debate in the academic field. To begin with, the obstacles of globalizing sustainable development, many obstacles that hinder the concept depend on the political, social and economic situation of that world or that specific region or country.

One of the major problems over the past five years is the political situation of the world economy has been in a very difficult situation. These difficulties of the political economy have caused rising resource prices and concerns over the shortages of these resources. There was a lack of commitment of some nations as well globally that gave more concern to other issues like economic regeneration and political fallout than the environmental issues (Meadowcroft, 2012:5). As I have explained the concept of sustainable development is a global issue, but one of the major obstacles that hinders the concept to be globalized is the lack of will of some nations, for example, the US which is unwilling to take action to bring down their domestic emissions (ibid).

Moreover, the concept of sustainable development may be conceptualized as an overall process of societal change, but if this is the case, then the concept of sustainable development has multiple dimensions and scales in many different levels. The problem here is we might have the impression that the concept of globalizing sustainable development has failed while this might not be the case and the concept might be progressing and succeeding well in some areas. As I have explained earlier the concept of sustainable development is a contested concept and scholars like (Lundqvist 2004) explains one of the biggest challenges facing the concept of sustainable development being globalized is the complexity and the uncertainty of the concept. The major obstacle here comes from the problems and solutions of the concept itself are very limited and are regularly contested as well. One major issue that makes the concept of sustainable development a regularly contested subject is, the scientific knowledge which is necessary is not enough ingredient that makes success in the designing of policy options for the concept of sustainable development.

Voss et al. (2007) further argues that interdisciplinary science is ill-equipped to handle sustainable development since the concept lies at the intersection of societies, technology, and

nature. One more thing that complicates the scientific knowledge is, the public cannot simply accept scientific knowledge (Bäckstrand 2003). The concept of sustainable development is not only a local issue but rather an idea that extends beyond political boundaries and might even challenge the capacity and autonomy of some of the most powerful states (Hysing, 2015: 9). However, as a consequence, it is widely discussed that the potential of globalizing the concept of sustainable development faces a challenge from the coordination and cooperation of sovereign states. The widely considered explanation that many argued is that the international coordination and collaboration between different sovereign states had been very slow and cumbersome. Biermann & Pattberg (2012) further discusses that to successfully globalize the concept of sustainable development the international environmental governance needs to be strengthened.

The above explanation leads us to the notion of cooperation among states and how cooperation is very crucial in globalizing the concept of sustainable development. To understand cooperation in this context, we need first to understand the definition of cooperation. Defining cooperation helps to understand what counts as cooperation and what is not counted as cooperation (Milner, 1992: 467). Cooperation is defined as goal seeking behavior of states and striving to reduce the gains available to others and increasing their want-satisfaction. From the definition above cooperation or international cooperation is an obstacle for the concept of sustainable development to be globalized. International cooperation might be negotiated; it might come under anarchy, or imposed by the strong parties.

Despite the many potentials of making cooperation successful the challenge had been some states were pushing to realize their absolute gains. Following economic reasons many have argued that states act rationally to increase the net benefits, they receive thus challenging the globalization of sustainable development (Milner, 1992: 470). For example, this might bring the question of sustainable development having and meaning different things to many.

Despite the many obstacles of the potential of globalizing the concept of sustainable development, there are many prospects and promising initiatives around the globe. Evidence of existing literature shows how many states are reluctant and very slow of the concept. But one greater prospect in the future that signals positive human lives is the increase of environmentalists concerns in the world. Environmentalists have been actively working together and forming movement organizations (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012:117). I think the concept of sustainable development became an issue many understood of its importance and this is a big gain. Scholars like Jacob (1999) explains how the concept of sustainable development has gained room both in the national and international level and becoming a key principle in the international platform. This has made the concept of sustainable development as an array of processes of development that touches many if not all, aspects of human life (Bakari, 2013: 32-33). One of the biggest initiatives taken was during the Rio declaration drafted in the 1992 earth summit in Rio de Janeiro which have delineated government's roles as follows: "*States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and*



*consumption” “enact effective environmental legislation and “cooperate to discourage or prevent the relocation and transfer to other states of any activities or substances that cause severe environmental degradation or harm to human health” (Bakari, 2013: 32-33).*

From the above quote, it is clear that the global initiative had been growing. These global initiatives have led remarkable success in the environmental policies of some of the developed world. Some of the developed countries have for example managed to identify some of the environmental burdens (VanDeveer, & Steinberg, 2012: 76-77). Despite the many remarkable successes made by making the concept of sustainable development a global issue, the north-south tension of the idea had existed for a long time cannot be forgotten.

As a result societies and policymakers have been discussing and arguing for a long time on how the world can find a balance for the concept of sustainable development both in the north-south blocs. One of the summits where the concepts of sustainable development had been discussed was the 2002 world summit in Johannesburg. This summit was accompanied by lower expectations than its predecessor. (Earth Summit in Rio). As discussed by Leisinger (1995), there was a general sober atmosphere during the summit in Johannesburg because of the many promises made in the Rio summit – the gap between the rich and the developing nations, the threats to the biodiversity emissions of greenhouse gases all became worse and more environmental destructions had been reported. The fact is the key players like the US had been reluctant and there were no commitments from many states in respect to the environmental matters decided.

The concept of sustainable development and the north-south politics also constitutes how the concept is incompatible with the different political and strategic interests of both blocs (Bakari, 2015: 42). Despite the north-south division, indeed the concept had been increasingly perceived as an important concern both in the north-south blocs. Showing the importance of the concept, the project has at the same time been faced with suspicions and apprehensions especially in the southern bloc (ibid). It was not a surprise that the concept of sustainable development was not getting much support from the developing world because some have just gained independence and were therefore sceptical of the concept and the motives behind which according to them seemed to limit their development objectives. The Blocs have been having to show mutual mistrust, especially the developing countries attitudes towards or remained a mixture of apprehensions and expectations which made them inactive. When it comes to the implementations of the concept and globalizing sustainable development, the north-south bloc's suspicions and disagreements became a challenge. For example, the developing countries have stressed the north's historical responsibilities and accuse them of causing global environmental problems and thus arguing the industrialized countries have to fix the damages and even demand compensation from them.

## References:

- Bakari, M. (2013). Globalization and Sustainable Development: False Twins? *New Global Studies*, 7(3), 23-56.
- Biermann F and Pattberg P 2012 *Global environmental governance revisited* in Biermann F and Pattberg P eds *Global environmental governance reconsidered* MIT Press, Cambridge 1–
- Bakari, M. (2015). Sustainable Development in a Global Context: A Success or a Nuisance. *New Global Studies*, 9(1), 27-56.
- Bäckstrand K 2003 Civic science for sustainability: Reframing the role of experts, policymakers and citizens in environmental governance *Global environmental politics* 3 (4) 24– 41
- Chichilnisky, Graciela. (1997). What is sustainable development? (Special Issue: Defining Sustainability). *Land Economics*, 73(4), 467-491.
- Emery, D. (2013). Sustainability: A real-world definition. *The National Provisioner*, 227(4),
- Eckersley R 2004 *The green state. Rethinking democracy and sovereignty* MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Hysing, Erik (2014) A Green Star Fading? A Critical Assessment of Swedish Environmental Policy Change, *Environmental Policy and Governance* 24(4): 262–274. DOI: 10.1002/eet.1645.
- Hysing, Erik & Olsson, Jan (2017). *Green inside activism for sustainable development: political agency and institutional change*. New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg
- Hysing, Erik (2015). *Lost in Transition? The Green State in Governance for Sustainable Development*. In:
- Bäckstrand, Karin and Kronsell, Annica (Eds.) *Rethinking the Green State. Environmental governance towards climate and sustainability transitions*, London: Routledge, pp. 27–42. ISBN: 9781138792517.
- Jordan A, Wurzel R K W and Zito A 2005 the rise of ‘new’ policy instruments in comparative perspective: Has governance eclipsed government? *Political studies* 53 477– 496.
- Jacobs, Michael (1999), *Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept*, in Dobson, Andrew, *Fairness and Futurity, Essays on Environmental Sustainability and Social Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Read: 26-09-2018).
- Lundqvist L J 2004 *Sweden and ecological governance. Straddling the fence* Manchester University Press, Manchester.
- Leisinger, K. (1995). Sustainable Development: A Common Challenge for North and South. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 15(8/9/10), 27-64.
- Meadowcroft, James. (2012). *Governance, democracy and sustainable development moving beyond the impasse*. Cheltenham: Elgar.
- Milner, Helen (1992). Review Article. *International Theories of Cooperation among Nations. Strength and Weaknesses*, in *World Politics*, vol 44, no. 3. P 466-496

Meadowcroft J 2005 From Welfare State to Ecostate in Barry J and Eckersley R eds *The state and the global ecological crisis* MIT Press, Cambridge 3–24 Meadowcroft.

VanDeveer, S., & Steinberg, P. (2012). *Comparative Environmental Politics Theory, Practice, and Prospects (American and comparative environmental policy)*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Voss J-P, Newig J, Kastens B, Monstadt J and Nölting B 2007 Steering for sustainable development: a typology of problems and strategies concerning ambivalence, uncertainty and distributed power *Journal of environmental policy & planning* 9 (3) 193– 212