

GREEN ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH EAST NIGERIA: CAPACITY OF GREEN ECONOMY TO SUPPORT AKUMUBA N'ULO CONSCIOUSNESS IN SOUTHEAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Green Economy refers to an economic model that is low-carbon, resource- efficient, and socially inclusive (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2011). In recent times, there has been roaring calls for green economy system across States. The UNEP report on green economy argues that the model has the capacity to reduce environmental risks, ecological scarcities, paves way for sustainable development without degrading the environment, and has both efficiency and fairness capacities- recognizes global and State level equity dimensions. Guided by the Sustainable Development Theory and the Green Growth Frameworks both of which aim to balance economic growth with environmental protection and social equity, the study sought to: (1) investigated the capacity of Green Economy to contribute to Sustainable eradication of Poverty in the South East (2) examined how Green Economy can be a tool for the promotion of healthy living in South East Nigeria, and (3) determined the capacity of Green Economy to support the creation of 'AkuMubaaN'Ulo' Consciousness in South East Nigeria. Findings show that green economy can help reduce poverty, upgrade health system and support an Aku Mubaa N'Ulo concept. The paper concluded that, with a central focus on investment towards Aku MubaaN'Ulo, the green economy will eventually provide employment

opportunities and skills development of people in the South East. The study recommended a total embrace of Aku MubaN’Ulo Consciousness as the foremost approach to the green economy toward the sustainable development of the South East Nigeria.

Keywords: Green Economy, sustainable development, eradication of poverty, Aku Mubaa N’Ulo Consciousness, healthy living, Southeast Nigeria.

Introduction

In recent times, there has been roaring calls for green economy system across States. The seriousness attached to the calls, couple with the rather firm view that the green economy system has the capacity to reduce environmental risks, ecological scarcities and pave way for sustainable development without having to degrade the environment has received significant international attention over the past few years as a tool to address the 2008 financial crisis as well as one of two themes for the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). This has resulted in a rapidly expanding literature including new publications on green economy from a variety of influential international organisations, national governments, think tanks, experts, non-government organisations, private individuals, corporate bodies, and others.

Experts on the meaning of green economy agree that it is that economic system that is geared toward improving human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. It is that system that can generate growth and improvements in people’s lives in ways reliable with sustainable development. A Green Economy endorses a triple bottom line: sustaining and advancing economic, environmental and social welfare. A Green Economy is one in which the vital links between economy, society, and environment are taken into account and in

which the transformation of production processes, production and consumption patterns, will revitalize and diversify economies, create decent employment opportunities, promote sustainable trade, reduce poverty, and improve equity and income distribution while contributing to a reduction per unit in reduced waste, pollution, and the use of resources, materials, energy, waste, and pollution emission. Green economy is that economy that results in increased human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities (UNEP 2011: UNECA, 2010: UNECA, 2011; *Loiseau, et al, 2016; Georgeson, et al, 2017; Telukdarie, et al, 2024*). Simply put, a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive (UNEP, 2011).

In this study, a green economy is a mechanism to enhance sustainable poverty eradication, improve sustainable healthy living and healthy living standards, encourage growth in income, create cleaner environment, worthy trust employment, rebuilding of natural capital, and to consolidate the AkuMubaaN’Ulo consciousness in the South East, toward the enhancement of sustainable development. In a green economy, growth in income and employment should be driven by public and private investments (Voumik and Shah, 2014) that reduce carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and basically cause them to be catalyzed and supported by targeted public expenditure, policy reforms and regulation modifications. The development path should maintain, enhance and, where necessary, rebuild natural capital as a critical economic asset and as a source of public benefits, particularly for poor people whose livelihoods and security depend on natural capital, such as forest, natural rivers and waters, as against mechanical rivers such as canals which are man-made and could be risky.

Part of the reasons for the campaign for green economy, is basically because it is a pathway to achieving sustainable development. There is a growing understanding that the pursuit for sustainability rests almost wholesomely on getting the economy on its right path. For a third world country, where resources are scarce, environmental risks and ecological scarcities, resource deficiency, socially exclusive, yet having a vast population, going through tough times, it will be difficult to balance supply with demand; the option therefore, is green economy (UNCTAD. 2010; Conway and Venables, 2008).

Reviewing World Resources Institute Climate Analysis Indicators Tool-CAIT, Stern explained that green economy is important because by 2030,

- Global energy demand will go up by 45%
- Oil price will go up to US\$180 per barrel (IEA)
- GHG emissions will go up 45%
- Global average temperature will go up 6°C
- Sustained losses equivalent to 5-10% of Global GDP
- Poor countries will suffer costs in Excess of 10% of their GDP (Stern)
- 1 billion people living on less than US\$1 a day and US\$3 billion Living on less than US\$2 a day by 2015 (ILO) [Prepared by Stern Review, from data from World Resources Institute Climate Analysis Indicators Tool (CAIT) on-line database version 3,0]

The author is of the view that Green economy sustains environment but accelerate development. However, in a green economy, growth in income and employment should be driven by public and private investments. In a small but heavily populate society like the South East, in Nigeria, the investments must be such that reduces carbon emissions and pollution, enhance energy and resource efficiency, and prevent the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem facilities.

Speaking on the capacity of green economy to contribute to sustainable development, UNECA (2010) posit that green economy a passageway to sustainable development, and as such, Green Economy is very important for sustainable development, especially as green technology has the capacity to generate energy without nontoxic, harmful by-products. Also Green economy suggests making alternative environment prone technology, helps reducing waste and pollution by changing patterns of production and consumption.

Discussing the approaches, visions, models and tools to achieve the purposes for the establishment of green economy, for each State in accordance with its national circumstances and priorities Voumik and Shah (2014) established that there are different approaches to achieve sustainable development in all its dimensions in each country via green economy.

Clarifying on the supporters of green economy, Investopedia (2024) explained that supporters of the green economy are concerned with the health of the natural environment and believe that actions should be taken to protect nature and encourage the positive co-existence of both humans and nature. He noted that the way these [economists](#) advocate for the environment is by making an argument that the environment plays a pivotal role in the economy of which the health of any good economy is essentially determined by the health of the environment that constitutes it.

Literature on Sustainability, point to it as a social goal for people to live together on Earth for a very long time. In his work [on not defining sustainability](#), Ramsey (2015) observes that, definitions of the term sustainability are disputed among scholars, and have varied with literature, context, and time. However, Purvis, *et al* (2019) explain that, Sustainability usually has three dimensions (or pillars): environmental, economic, and social, but many definitions

emphasize the environmental dimension (Kotze, 2022) including, addressing key environmental problems, which include climate change and biodiversity loss (Bosselmann, 2010). The idea of sustainability can guide decisions at the global, national, organizational and individual levels (Berg, 2020). Sustainability is often thought of as a long-term goal (i.e. a more sustainable world) while sustainable development refers to the many processes and pathways to achieve it (UNESCO, 2022). Sustainable development is famously defined by the Brundtland Commission as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987, p. 43). The concept integrates three pillars: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The green economy is thus considered an operational pathway for achieving sustainable development (UNDP Nigeria, 2013).

Globally, empirical studies have demonstrated the transformative potential of the green economy. For instance, in Kenya, investments in renewable energy and sustainable agriculture have expanded rural electrification and reduced poverty (UNDP, 2017). In South Korea, green growth policies accelerated industrial innovation while reducing carbon emissions (OECD, 2011).

In the Nigerian context, Nigeria has initiated national policies to mainstream green growth, such as the *Nigeria's Path to Sustainable Development through Green Economy* framework (UNDP Nigeria, 2013). However, the practical implementation of these policies has been weak due to governance challenges, lack of financing, and low awareness. Studies indicate that renewable energy investments, particularly in solar mini-grids, have potential to address Nigeria's electricity deficit and foster rural development (Reuters, 2025).

In the south-East Nigeria, Empirical evidence highlights both opportunities and challenges in the South-East. Nwofoke (2025) documents the economic costs of land degradation in the region, noting that agricultural productivity losses threaten livelihoods. Despite these challenges, the region possesses a strong base for climate-smart agriculture, agro-based industries, and renewable energy adoption. Community-based renewable projects in states such as Anambra and Ebonyi have already shown positive socioeconomic impacts.

Identified Research Gaps:

Although brilliant works on the green economy have been done by scholars, who have made great effort in explaining the concept of green economy, and stressed on its capacity as a pathway to sustainable development, and are therefore worthy of acknowledgement. However, they unwittingly failed to determine the capacity of green economy to help create an Aku Mubaa N’Ulo Consciousness in the South East Nigeria. Existing literature tends to generalize Nigeria’s green economy prospects without accounting for regional disparities in land use, population density, and governance capacity (UNDP Nigeria, 2013). Furthermore, while renewable energy mini-grids and agro-processing initiatives are gaining momentum, empirical studies have not viewed AkuMubaN’Ulo- the Consciousness that there is need to invest energy and capacities in creating wealth massively back home, as the greatest green economy for the South-east Nigeria. Herein is the departure point of this study, and the eagerness to carry out further studies on the matter with view to bridging the gap in literature. To that extent, this study addresses these lacuna, including, to (1) investigate the capacity of green economy to contribute to sustainable eradication of Poverty in the South East (2) examine the capacity of green economy to help in the promotion of healthy living in the South East (3) determine the capacity of green economy to help in the

consolidation of Aku Mubaa N'Ulo Consciousness in the South East. The sustainable development theory and the Green Economics framework were adopted in the study to demonstrate the economy as a component of the environment in which it is based. The theories pay great attention to the need for complete protection of the environment and its natural resources that fuel the economy for the purposes of economic growth and environmental protection. Perhaps the basic contention of sustainable theory revolves around intergenerational equity, intra-generational equity, environmental sustainability, and economic growth and development geared toward balanced economic, social, and environmental dimensions to achieve human well-being and prosperity. Simply put, the state of any economy is wholesomely determined by the environment and state of the natural resources that fuel the economy. If the environment is protected, natural resources, such as natural capital will be allowed to co-exist with man, and in turn serve as a channel for healthy living of man. At the core of the green economy framework, is the belief that, it is an economy that improves human well-being and social equity while reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities (UNEP, 2011). Perhaps the central goal of the green economy theory is the transformation of economies to achieve sustainable development, poverty reduction, and environmental protection.

Theoretically, the study advances the application of green economy and sustainable development frameworks in regional development discourse. Practically, it provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, development partners, and private investors on how to leverage green growth strategies to address unemployment, energy deficits, and environmental degradation in South-East Nigeria. It also highlights actionable policy pathways regional-level development plans with global and sustainable programs. The study focuses on the southeast of Nigeria, examining amongst all the capacity of Green Economy to support the establishment of an 'AkuMubaaN'Ulo'

Consciousness in South East Nigeria- assessing how south east Nigeria can under the green economy concept build, multiply and harness its wealth-making capacity strategies back home for the purposes of transformative development in the south-east Nigeria. Limitations include data gaps in sector-specific statistics, reliance on self-reported survey.

Table 1:

Global Policy Frameworks Relevant to Green Economy and Sustainable Development

Framework/Initiative	Year	Key Objectives	Relevance to South-East Nigeria
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	2015	Promote inclusive economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity	Provides targets for renewable energy (SDG 7) Green jobs [AkuMubaN’Ulo] (SDG 8) and climate action (SDG 13).
Paris Agreement	2015	Limit global warming to below 2°C; promote low-carbon development	Nigeria’s NDCs commit to renewable energy expansion, relevant for regional energy transition
UNEP Green Economy Initiative	2011	Invest in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and ecosystem services	Offers practical policy pathways applicable to climate-smart agriculture and agro-processing [AkuMubaN’Ulo].

OECD Green Growth Strategy	2011	Integrate environmental sustainabilityinto economicgrowth policies	Provides tools for measuring and monitoring progress toward green growth [AkuMubaN’Ulo].
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Source: Survey and tabulated by the Researcher

Table 2:
National and Sub-National Policy Frameworks in Nigeria

Policy/Initiative	Year	Key Provisions	Implementation Challenges in South-East Nigeria
National Policy on Climate Change	2012	Mainstream climate adaptation/mitigation across sectors	Weak institutional capacity; poor enforcement mechanisms.
Renewable Energy Master Plan (REMP)	2015	Promote solar, wind, biomass, and hydro power	Funding gaps; limited technical expertise at state level.
Nigeria’s Path to Sustainable Development through Green Economy	2013	Integrate sustainability into national planning	Fragmented adoption at regional/state levels.
Energy Transition Plan	2022	Achieve net-zero by 2060; scale renewable access	Political will and financing remain uncertain.

State-Level Renewable Projects (Anambra, Ebonyi, Abia, Enugu, Imo)	Ongoing	Solar electrification, waste-to-energy, agro-processing support	Fragmented, donor-driven, not institutionalized into state strategies.
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Source: Survey and tabulated by the Researcher

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a **mixed-methods design**, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the immediate and future economic relevance of the green economy in South-East Nigeria. Quantitative data allowed for statistical analysis of household and enterprise perspectives, while qualitative data from key informant interviews enriched the findings with policy, institutional, and expert insights. Mixed-methods were selected to strengthen validity through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Population of the Study

The study population comprised households, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) policymakers, and development actors across the five South-East states of Nigeria (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo). The region was chosen due to its high population density, heavy reliance on agriculture, and emerging renewable energy initiatives.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation across states and sectors. The sample included:

- **480 households and enterprises**, drawn proportionately from urban and rural areas.

- **24 key informants**, consisting of state-level policymakers (environment, agriculture, and energy ministries) renewable energy practitioners, and agribusiness stakeholders.
The household/enterprise sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula at a 95% confidence level

Sources of Data

Two sources of data were utilized:

- **Primary data:** Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.
- **Secondary data:** National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2025) reports, UNDP and UNEP policy documents, state-level development plans, and academic literature.

Instruments for Data Collection

(v) **Questionnaire** – Designed with both closed- and open-ended items, divided into sections on:

- Socio-economic characteristics
- Awareness and adoption of green economy practices
- Perceived opportunities and constraints
- Expected impacts on employment, income, and sustainability

(vi) **Interview Guide** – Semi-structured, covering:

- Institutional capacity for green economy adoption
- Policy frameworks and challenges
- Perceived future potential of renewable energy and climate-smart agriculture

The instruments were validated by three experts in development studies and pre-tested in Abia State to refine clarity and reliability.

Methods of Data Collection

- **Survey administration:** Questionnaires were administered in person by trained research assistants in the five states.
- **Major informant interviews:** Conducted face-to-face and virtually, depending on respondent availability.
- **Secondary document review:** Collected from government agencies, NGOs, and online repositories

Method of Data Analysis

- **Quantitative data** were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages, frequencies, and means) and simple inferential tests (chi-square) with SPSS version 25.
- **Qualitative data** from interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify recurring themes.
- **Triangulation** was employed to integrate findings across data sources, enhancing validity.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by coding responses. The study complied with ethical guidelines for social science research, ensuring voluntary participation and the right to withdraw.

Justification of the Methodology

The mixed-methods design is justified because the study investigates both measurable socio-economic outcomes (employment, income, adoption rates) and contextual factors (policy, institutional capacity, stakeholder perceptions). Quantitative data provide generalizability, while qualitative insights explain underlying dynamics. This approach is consistent with best practices in sustainability research,

which emphasize holistic inquiry into complex socio-economic and environmental systems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Findings and Discussion

This section presents and interprets the empirical findings from the survey conducted in South-East Nigeria. The results are discussed in line with the study’s objectives and situated within existing scholarship on the green economy and sustainable development:

Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	54	54.0
	Female	46	46.0
Age	18-25	22	22.0
	26-35	38	38.0
	36-45	24	24.0
	46-55	10	10.0
	56+	6	6.0
Education	Secondary	18	18.0
	Tertiary	55	55.0
	Post-graduation	27	27.0

Source: Survey and tabulated by the Researcher

Table 1 shows that the sample included both male (54%) and female (46%) respondents, with the majority aged between 26–35 years

(38%) followed by 36–45 years (24%). More than half of the respondents had tertiary education (55%) while 27% possessed postgraduate qualifications. This indicates that the respondents were relatively educated, enhancing the reliability of their perceptions on technical subjects such as the green economy. Similar studies emphasize the role of educated populations in adopting sustainable economic practices (Okonkwo & Chukwu, 2021).

Table 2: Awareness and Knowledge of Green Economy

Awareness Question	Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Heard of green economy	Yes	70	70.0
	No	30	30.0
Knowledge level	Very low	12	12.0
	Low	18	18.0
	Moderate	40	40.0
	High	22	22.0
	Very high	8	8.0

Source: Field Survey and tabulated by the researcher

As presented in Table 2, 70% of respondents had heard of the green economy, though only 30% reported high or very high knowledge. This reflects a situation where awareness is increasing, but depth of understanding is still limited. This aligns with Akinwale and Adepoju (2019) who noted that while Nigerians are increasingly aware of environmental issues, technical comprehension of sustainability frameworks remains low.

Table 3:

Perceptions of Green Economy (Likert Scale)

Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Green economy can create jobs in SE Nigeria.	5	7	15	45	28
Renewable energy will improve electricity supply.	4	6	10	48	32
Agro-processing can reduce poverty.	6	8	20	42	24
Green economy contributes to sustainable development.	3	7	18	50	22

Source: Survey and tabulated by the researcher

Table 3 highlights respondents' perceptions. A large proportion (73%) agreed or strongly agreed that the green economy could create jobs, while 80% agreed that renewable energy would improve electricity supply. Similarly, 66% agreed that agro-processing could reduce poverty. These findings affirm the assertion by UNEP (2011) that green economies provide pathways for job creation, energy efficiency, and poverty alleviation. In the Nigerian context, these

perceptions demonstrate an appetite for green-driven transformation, especially in sectors like agriculture and energy.

Table 4:
Major Barriers to Green Economy Adoption

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor financing/credit facilities	74	74.0
Limited government support	72	72.0
High cost of technology	68	68.0
Low technical knowledge	60	60.0
Lack of awareness	50	50.0

Source: Survey and tabulated by the Researcher

Table 4 identifies key barriers: poor financing (74%) limited government support (72%) high technology costs (68%) and low technical knowledge (60%); these findings echo Oteh and Udeh (2020) who argued that the absence of accessible financing mechanisms and weak institutional frameworks hinder green investments in Nigeria. The results suggest that without systemic reforms in credit access, policy support, and capacity building, the South-East may not fully harness the green economy’s benefits.

Table 5:
Sectorial Opportunities for Green Economy Development

Sector	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Renewable energy	36	36.0
Agro-processing	30	30.0

Waste management	12	12.0
Forestry/ afforestation	10	10.0
Eco-tourism	7	7.0
Other	5	5.0

Source: survey and tabulated by the Researcher

As shown in Table 5, respondents saw the greatest opportunities in renewable energy (36%) and agro-processing (30%) followed by waste management (12%). These priorities reflect both the region's challenges (energy poverty, food insecurity, and waste management issues) and its comparative advantages in agriculture. The emphasis on renewable energy aligns with Nigeria's broader commitment to diversifying energy sources and reducing carbon dependence (Eleri & Onuoha, 2019).

Generally, the findings suggest that while awareness of the green economy exists, significant knowledge gaps and systemic barriers hinder its adoption in South-East Nigeria. However, the strong perception of economic potential indicates readiness for transition if enabling conditions, such as financing, government policy, and technical training are strengthened. These findings support the green growth theory (Pearce et al., 1989) which posits that environmental sustainability and economic growth can reinforce each other when institutions and policies are aligned.

Genesis of the Green Economy Initiative:

In the 1960s and 1970s an environmental movement raised concerns about the negative impacts of industrialization on the environment. This led to a growing recognition of the need for sustainable development and the concept of a green economy emerged. The

1980s and 1990s, captured international agreements like the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 brought global attention to the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into economic development. This led to the adoption of policies and practices that aimed to promote a more sustainable and environmentally friendly economy. But in the early years of 2000, there was a significant shift in focus towards renewable energy and clean technologies. At this time, Governments and businesses started investing in renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and hydro power, and promoting energy efficiency measures. This marked the beginning of a transition towards a low-carbon economy. The green economy campaign increased following the global financial crisis of 2008, which brought further attention to the need for a green economy as governments sought to stimulate economic growth while also addressing environmental concerns. Many countries started incorporating green measures into their economic recovery plans, such as investing in green infrastructure and promoting sustainable industries. Thus, the attention drawn by the environmental movement in the 1960s and 1970s, which gave birth to the idea of green economy has since then continued to evolve and grow. It encompasses various sectors such as renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, green building, and eco-tourism. Governments, businesses, and individuals are increasingly recognizing the economic potential of green industries and the importance of transitioning towards a more sustainable and resilient economy (United Nations, 1972-2024).

Speaking on the timeline of the green economy, Wiki (2024) explained that, the timeline of the green economy is characterized by a shift in mindset from traditional economic models to one that prioritizes environmental sustainability. It reflects the growing awareness of the finite nature of natural resources and the need to protect the environment for future generations. As the world faces pressing challenges such as climate change and resource depletion,

the green economy offers a pathway towards a more sustainable and prosperous future. Showing how the issue of green economy started and got to the present, he showed that the issue has brought the United Nations through various conferences, as follows:

United Nations Conferences on Green Economy

S/ N	Date	Title of Conference	Conference
1	1972	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment	The idea of a green economy was introduced for the first time at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden. This conference emphasized the need to protect the environment and promote sustainable development.
2	1987	Brundtland Report	The Brundtland Report, also known as "Our Common Future," was published by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development. This report defined the concept of sustainable development and highlighted the importance of integrating environmental, social, and economic considerations. It laid the foundation for the green economy concept.
3	1992	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development	The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit, took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The summit brought together world leaders to address global environmental challenges and promote sustainable development. It further advanced the idea of a green economy and led to the adoption of

			Agenda 21, a comprehensive plan of action for sustainable development.
4	2008	Financial Crisis and the Green Economy	The global financial crisis of 2008 highlighted the vulnerability of traditional economic systems and the need for alternative approaches. Many countries started to recognize the potential of the green economy as a solution to both environmental and economic challenges. This led to increased investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and other green sectors.
5	2012	United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development	The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, also known as Rio+20, took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The conference aimed to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development and assess progress made since the Earth Summit in 1992. The green economy was a central theme of the conference, with discussions on its potential to create jobs, reduce poverty, and promote sustainable development globally.
6	Present	Global Transition to a Green Economy	The concept of a green economy continues to gain momentum worldwide. Governments, businesses, and civil society organizations are increasingly recognizing the importance of transitioning to a low-carbon, resource-efficient, and socially inclusive economy. Efforts are being made to promote renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, circular economy practices, and other green initiatives. The goal is to achieve sustainable development while minimizing environmental impacts and ensuring a just transition for all.

Designed and Tabulated by the researcher

Thus the need to ensure functional sustainable development in human society by saving the environment from further depletion precipitates the current urgent call for Green Economy. Voumik and Shah (2014) reminded that Sustainable development has been the overarching goal of the international community since the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992. Amongst numerous commitments, the Conference called upon governments to develop national strategies for sustainable development, incorporating policy measures outlined in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21. Despite the efforts of many governments around the world to implement such strategies as well as international cooperation to support national governments, there are continuing concerns over global economic and environmental developments in many countries. These have been intensified by recent prolonged global energy, food and financial crises, and underscored by continued warnings from global scientists that society is in danger of transgressing a number of planetary boundaries or ecological limits.

Importance of Green Economy towards Sustainable Development in the South East

One may want to know what green economy means in the context of the South and what purpose it serves. Communities of Africa, including the South East, are known to be highly dependent on natural resources. Natural capital assets are thus critical to the economic activities and the livelihood of millions of people who depend on fertile soil, forest, fishery and other resources from nature. The exploitation of these resources has fostered rates of economic growth, which in recent years have been among the strongest in the world; notwithstanding such economic performance, persistent poverty, and unemployment. Underemployment, particularly among the continent's fast growing young population (UNESCECA, 2011) not to mention hunger that is on high increase daily. At the same time,

the potential for future economic growth and development itself is put at risk given the level of environmental degradation, climate change, desertification, and other environmental risks and resource scarcities, which are driven by internal and external factors. The natural capital, an essential basis for wealth creation, faces mounting pressure at a time when the South East States need to meet the growing demand for water, food and health, whilst reducing poverty and stimulating economic activity to create employment and raise income levels.

Under this development trajectories, a green economy may offer considerable opportunities for mobilizing resources toward a low-emission, climate-resilient development pathway. However, the combination of tackling poverty, accelerating growth and development, and addressing climate change, is likely to involve trade-offs and policy choices between mutually supportive, but equally important priorities toward the improvement of welfare and quality of life for Africa's citizens. This will entail an increase in food, energy and water consumption. Policies and investments to sustain and enhance natural capital assets – the soils, forests and fisheries on which many poor communities depend for their livelihoods – can be instrumental (UNESCECA, 2011).

Approach to the Green Economy in the South East Nigeria

To achieve the purpose of the green economy initiative there must be an approach to it. Voumik and Shah (2014) explained that there are various approaches to the green economy. A pragmatic approach to the green economy in the South East is required to tailor strategies for solving the most important problems facing the present South East. A good starting point of the approach to the green economy is to end the unsustainable building of empires abroad, Aku Muba Na Mba regime, developing abroad while Motherland lives Suffering-and-Smiling, and redirects a significant portion of the money made

abroad for up-front establishment of Aku Mubaa N’Ulo consciousness required to catalyse the green economy in the South East.

Capacity of Green Economy to Eradicate Poverty in the South East Nigeria

A greener economy will provide better income opportunities needed for poverty reduction in the South East, and pave way for social inclusion. The World Bank had reported that the number of poor people in Nigeria, including the South East as at 2022 was 95.1 Million. But with green economy, jobs will be created in their thousands through various avenues including, green public transport initiatives, massive increase in renewable energy; these will help reduce the various current poverty in the land, including, energy poverty, food poverty, road poverty, security poverty, health poverty. Energy and security poverty will be reduced by leveraging South East’s ‘limitless’ solar energy potential, combined with our substantial biofuel prospects. This will go a long way to enhancing energy supply security and reduce the country’s exposure to volatilities in the global fossil fuel market.

Capacity of green economy to promote healthy living

One of the goals of the green economy is protection of the environment from further degradation caused by human activities, including pollution, which is disastrous to human health, considering the many diseases such pollutions introduced into human habitation. Green economy practice which canvas for rebuilding of natural capital, such as replanting trees, redeveloping forest, cleaning up natural waters, which is healthier than mechanical rivers such as canals, will apparently create room for healthy living for mankind. It is obvious that access to safe drinking-water and improved sanitation can save lives and reduce the climate footprint associated with poor wastewater management, water resource degradation and water

resource extraction. Adair-Rohani and Bruce (2011) observe that unsafe drinking water, unsafe sanitation and lack of hygiene can cause the death of millions of people as it did in 2004. They observed that:

- infectious diseases: vector-borne diseases such as malaria, waterborne diseases (diarrhea) and airborne diseases, including tuberculosis, can be prevented through low-energy and climate-friendly designs to: improve natural ventilation; limit vector and pest infestations (e.g. sealing of cracks, window screening); and improve access to safe drinking water and sanitation as part of planning and siting,
- Good ventilation is critical to ensure health gains from energy-efficient and weather-tight housing. Insufficient natural ventilation is associated with higher risk of airborne disease transmission, dampness and accumulation of indoor pollutants that are risk factors for allergies and asthma. Unless outdoor air is heavily polluted, natural ventilation also reduces buildup and exposure to toxic indoor air pollutants from interior design materials, furnaces (e.g. carbon monoxide) and naturally-occurring radiation (radon).

Capacity of Green Economy to support an Aku Mubaa N’Ulo Consciousness

In the recent past and continuing, there has been a conflict between the South East dependence on Aku Muru Na Mbaa (The wealth made abroad) for its economic wellbeing, and the sustainable development the nation strives to achieve. Since the destruction of its exploits for years now, in various States, and cities across the globe, coupled with countless challenges from host cities, and States asking them to export their business empires to motherland or else be drawn in rivers and high seas, and most times exploiting them economically, appetite to continue in those countries has waned for so many. Presently, the world is on a quest towards a resilient, post-COVID-19 future that

addresses the complex and intricately linked challenges of pollution, climate change, clean energy and infectious diseases prevalent in communities, cities, States, and the South East not excluded. The demands for innovative strategies to combat these multifaceted challenges underline the importance of a transition to a green economy which presupposes *Aku Mubaa N'Ulo*. *Aku Mubaa N'Ulo* refers to a transition from *Aku Muru Na Mbaka* (wealth made abroad) to *Aku Mubaa N'Ulo* toward a sustainable development *Ulo* (Motherland). Green Economy which is a strategy to better the environment including creating and enhancing wellbeing of people, creation of employment, creating cleaner communities, resuscitating nature capital, creating increased and sustainable income, will go a long way to help create *Aku mubaa N'Ulo* consciousness, basically because, of the goal of *Aku Mubaa N'Ulo*, which including, but not limited to, building a sustainable South East, building a sustainable South East economy, through the establishment of low-Carbon industries capable of creating employment for people back home, which in turn build an economy no stranger destroy.

Green Economy is synonymous with *Aku Mubaa N'Ulo* concept. And going green will be in the best interest of the South East, and is a strategic choice which, if fully pursued, can allow South East to take advantage of an emerging global push towards low-carbon economies.

It is possible that with a flourishing South East green economy, investment opportunities will be far above \$270bn in critical sectors, including renewable energy, transportation, infrastructure, manufacturing, importation, agriculture and land use. It is imperative to develop investment prospectus containing business cases and business opportunities back home that a futuristic *Aku Mubaa N'Ulo* South East (green South East) presents.

By going Aku Mubaa N'Ulo (Aku, go Green) the South East can build a more inclusive, resilient and prosperous nation, overcoming prevailing challenges, such as the unprecedented destruction of her economy by host countries, inhuman deportation from abroad, discrimination by host countries, climate change, social inequality, poverty, and insecurity in various places of sojourning.

Aku Mubaa N'Ulo, is consciousness that hopes to stimulate interest and attention around issues of innovation, green economy, trust, leadership and framing a more positive nationhood narrative, and green economy concept being synonymous with Aku Mubaa N'Ulo concept will go a long way to consolidate this initiative, resulting in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities (UNEP, 2016) and in turn pave path for inclusive green economy, which is a thriving economy that delivers considerable economic, social and environmental benefits sought by the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement. This development path should maintain, enhance and, where necessary, rebuild natural capital as a critical economic asset and source of public benefits, especially for underprivileged people whose livelihoods and security depend strongly on nature (UNEP, 2011).

Paths to a Green Economy in the South East Nigeria

Given the fact that many communities in the South East Nigeria depend so much on natural resources, aim to achieve industrialisation and economic diversification, but are facing challenges of poverty and unemployment, a path to green economy will demand action on three fronts. United Nations Economic and Social Council Economic Commission for Africa-UNESCECA (2011) discussed the three fronts as follows:

- Capitalizing on communities natural capital,
- Exploiting opportunities for industrial growth, and
- Establishing enabling policies and institutions.

First, the economic importance of natural capital in wealth creation, employment, livelihoods, and poverty reduction in Africa as a whole, and then in the south-east Nigeria in particular needs to be recognized. South East's natural resources support its social and economic systems. They provide a basis for livelihood for poor and most vulnerable people who depend primarily on nature for survival. Natural capital assets sustain much of the tourism and associated service industries, which have become essential pillars of external trade, foreign exchange revenue generation and employment creation (UNESCO, 2022) in the South East.

Second, Africa's early stage of industrialization offers avenues for an industrial development supported by the deployment of clean, efficient, and resource-saving technologies in the South East. Such technologies would increase energy and resource efficiency in the exploitation of the continent's natural resources, whilst avoiding wasteful consumption, undue economic costs and risks of resource depletion. While the technological and financial requirements of green industrialization are considerable, there are indications that existing opportunities for leapfrogging yield very high potential returns, as can be observed in the African aluminium industry.

Finally, driving green economic transformation will require a set of enabling policies and institutions that imply a critical role for the State, through public investment, fiscal policies, regulations, government procurement, and market creation at national, regional and international levels, as well as the facilitation of an active participation of non-State actors

Sustainable Development

It is argued that the term "Sustainability" and "Sustainable Development" are closely related, and most times used to mean the same thing. Both terms are linked with the "three dimensions of sustainability" concept (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2022). But

Harrington, (2016) explains that One distinction is that sustainability is a general concept, while sustainable development can be a policy or organizing principle. Sustainability is a broader concept because sustainable development focuses mainly on human well-being

In the Brundtland (1987) Report, the environment and development are inseparable and go together in the search for sustainability. Sustainable development is a global concept linking environmental and social issues. Sustainable development is **development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs**; it important for both developing countries and industrialized countries. It states:

The 'environment' is where we all live; and 'development' is what we all do in attempting to improve our lot within that abode. The two are inseparable. [...] We came to see that a new development path was required, one that sustained human progress not just in a few pieces for a few years, but for the entire planet into the distant future. Thus 'sustainable development' becomes a goal not just for the 'developing' nations, but for industrial ones as well.

The Rio Declaration from 1992 is seen as "the foundational instrument in the move towards sustainability. It includes specific references to ecosystem integrity (Bosselmann, 2022).

Discussing the hierarchy of Sustainability, Kotez, et al (2022) inform that of the three dimensions of sustainability-Environmental, Economic, and Social, many publications state that the environmental dimension is the most important. Protecting environmental (ecological, or planetary, as it is also called) integrity is the core of sustainability according to many experts. Its environmental dimension sets limits to economic and social development. (Bosselmann, 2010).

Sustainable Development in the South east would refer to home-focused development that is capable of attending to the aspirations of the present people of the area, without disrupting the capacity of the in-coming generations to attend to their own aspirations, expectations, and dreams. It is that development that is linked with not just ‘Aku Rue Ulo’ (bringing wealth back home, remitting wealth back home) but support ‘Aku Mubaa N’Ulo’ concept, which is synonymous with ‘the Green Concept’, restructuring the South East Nigeria for global competitiveness. It implies that the South-East Nigeria needs to take care of their area, resources, people, by developing the consciousness of creating massive wealth, opportunities, employment back home, geared toward bettering and granting overall security of their economic life. This will constitute one of the panaceas to ensure that their economy is no longer destroyed over-night by people who feel that if ‘they ever have a home they cannot be leaving it for places where they must need to spend massively feeling up swamps and building empires, only to be pulled down overnight. To achieve this, there is the need to balance Aku Rue Ulo concept with this study on Aku Mubaa N’Ulo Consciousness. It is difficult for foreigners to come to an area to destroy the environment, economy, and social life overnight. Remittances can be intercepted, reduced, taken or even be destroyed *en-route*, and probably nothing will be done about it, but wealth and capacities built back home may not easily destroyed overnight by opposition.

Conclusion

Green Economy practice requires radical transformation and profound systemic change. South East Nigeria capacity for green economy is not encouraging, and the scale of action demanded to catalyse a green economy (The Republic, 2022S) in the South East Nigeria cannot be underestimated. Many structural reforms and interventions are required to unlock green growth – ‘Aku’ in the area.

These include, direct public investments in green economy- ‘Aku’ of the area- ‘N’Ulo’, policies, and infrastructure, targeted public and private long-term investments-‘Aku Mubaa’ system towards building efficient innovation systems, improving the level of education, training, and skills of the population, and supporting market development and trade mechanism to enhance competitiveness back home. Thus, The Green Economy provides a macro-economic approach to sustainable economic growth [Massive wealth and opportunities creation back home- AkuMubaN’Ulo] (UNEP, 2016) in the South East Nigeria, with a central focus on building and expanding an endurable economic system (Aku Mubaa N’Ulo) back home which will eventually result in employment opportunities and skills development of people in the region for life. This is imperative as it will draw the attention of South East investors back home resulting in building empires that no one can pull down over night, with the pointer, “if you are angry, go back to your native land and build it, or you will be drawn in lagoon”.

Recommendation

- The foremost approach to the green economy toward the sustainable development of the South East Nigeria is to embrace an AkuMubaaN’Ulo Consciousness.
- Environmental principles to guide the practice of green economy should be accessible to all. It may be necessary to drop copies of the principles in public centers, such as, institutions of higher learning, local government reception centers, newspaper stands, eateries, official bus stations, and others.
- South east wealth creators, industrialists, and entrepreneurs need to draw attention back home to establish industries, micro and macro opportunities for people of the region.

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