

The “Necessity” of Democracy for Sustainable Development: A Comparison between the USA and Cuba

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Abstract

Democracy is associated with, and often stated as a condition for, sustainable development. A comparison of Cuba and the United States shows that sustainable development can exist and grow in countries that do not possess a democratic form of governance. The results of the comparison indicate that, to promote sustainable development on a wider scale, it is necessary to focus on the values embedded in the dignity of humankind. To promote such values, it is imperative to present sustainable development as a set of values linked to the rights and dignity of humankind, not as the sole offspring of democratic ideology.

Keywords: sustainable development, democracy, United States, Cuba.

1. Introduction

Experts from both hemispheres have stated unequivocally that democracy is necessary for sustainable development¹ and that, conceptually, democracy is an extension of justice (Tage and Lars, 2003, p. 768). The text of Agenda 21, a UN-produced document that was developed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, reinforced this notion. Agenda 21 is a “comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area with human impacts on the environment” (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2009). In other words, it is a detailed plan of how sustainable development should be pursued at the individual, business and institutional level. Chapter two of Agenda 21 forges a conceptual link between democracy and sustainable development, stating that a necessary condition for sustainable development is “progress towards democratic government” (UNDESA, 2009). The apparent unilateral acceptance and promotion of democracy as a necessary ingredient for sustainable development begs the question: can sustainable development exist under other forms of government?

In the dialogue on democracy and sustainable development, democracy has a somewhat nebulous definition. It is agreed, however, in the publications of the UN Democracy Fund that democracies have a constitutional design, a “legislative guarantee of human rights including freedom of expression and freedom of association, a legal system [that] ensures due process in the resolution of conflicts

and the upholding of human rights, an accountable executive and public administration, and strong political parties” (United Nations Democracy Fund [UNDF], 2010). In addition, democratic governments permit and promote civil society participation, conduct national and sub-national elections, and provide access to information and transparency in the governing process [UNDF, 2010]. This idea of democracy has been fused with the idea of sustainable development. Experts argue that sustainable development is “conducive to democracy” since it emphasizes the role of civil society (Dryzek, 1999, 37). A transparent democracy shares political power by informing the constituent and involving him or her in the decision making process.

The general consensus among academics appears to be that countries espousing the democratic system facilitate and encourage sustainable development more than their non-democratic counterparts. Peter Söderbaum argues that the strengthening of democracy makes the decision process at all levels more visible which, consequently, will “improve the prospects for sustainable development” (2006, 189). Similarly, Andy Spiess argues that good governance is difficult to achieve in an authoritarian government setting and that democratic structures of civil society are essential for sustainable development (2008, 244). Furthermore, some academics, such as Robert Deacon, posit that developed democratic countries practice and encourage environmental sustainability more than their authoritarian counterparts. According to Deacon, democratic countries pollute less because they have stricter environmental policies (Deacon, 2009). Deacon’s research suggests that democracies exceed non-democracy provision “by roughly 100% for environmental protection...and roughly 25-50% for safe water sanitation and education” (Deacon, 2009, 260). It seems that most Western academics and international institutions, such as the UN, support the notion that sustainable development is most successful where participatory multiparty democracies exist.

The seemingly inextricable link between democracy and sustainable development is flawed because it cannot account for the countries in which authoritarian governments have pursued and promoted sustainable development. For example, in a comparison of the top six democracies and the six strictest authoritarian states, ranked by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the authoritarian regimes have a greater average ecological reserve (Economist Intelligence Unit [EIU], 2010). This implies that authoritarian states do not necessarily live in a less ecologically sustainable manner.

This finding inspired further investigation through the subsequent comparative study. Cuba and the United States were chosen for the following study because each of these countries is a prime example of differing governing systems. Though Cuba is commonly referred to as an authoritarian state, it is officially a communist state where one party holds complete political power. Conversely, the United States is a federal republic where power is divided between a federal authority and constituent regions known as states (Index Mundi, 2010). The Economist Intelligence Unit conducted evaluations of each country’s electoral process, pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. Each country was then assigned a score and ranking. The United States ranked 18th in the list of 30 full democracies while Cuba ranked 8th in the list of 50 authoritarian states (EIU, 2010), thus raising serious questions about the necessity of certain government structures for sustainable development.

This paper will endeavor to challenge the notion that democracy is necessary for sustainable development and establish through a qualitative case study that democracy is not inextricably linked to sustainable development nor is it the exclusive ideology or government structure necessary for sustainable development to be achieved. To illustrate this argument, systems of governance, “green” legislation, participation in international law, and sustainable practices in each country will be examined.

2. United States of America’s and Cuba’s Systems of Governance

The United States Government clearly defines the purpose for democracy. According to United States Government publications, democracies promote decentralized rule, protect basic human rights, “conduct free and fair elections open to all citizens, and protect minorities. Democracy is believed to be a „government in which power and civic responsibility are exercised by all citizens either directly or through their freely elected representatives□” (InfoUSA, 2009). In short, the simplest and perhaps most brazen statement, “democracy is the institutionalization of freedom” sums up the American notion of democracy (InfoUSA, 2009). The American idea of democracy resonates with Söderbaum□ s statement that participatory democracy is founded upon a respect for human rights, the sharing of political power and respect for “different values or orientations as long as these opinions do not contradict democracy itself” (Söderbaum, 183). This participation is deemed as necessary to facilitate sustainable development.

Cuba□ s governmental system also contains mechanisms to promote sustainable development by allowing for public participation. The National Assembly of Peoples Power, the only body that holds constituent and legislative authority, is composed of elected deputies for a term of five years. The NAPP elects a president, one first vice- president, five vice presidents, and a secretary. In addition, 23 ministers are appointed by the president from among its deputies. This elected Council of Ministers forms the government of power (Constitution of the Republic of Cuba 1992, 2009). The Council of Ministers is accountable to the NAPP and as Article 84 of the constitution states, it is the responsibility of the NAPP to “exercise their duties [for] the benefit of the people.” The NAPP is also held accountable to their electors (Articles 78, 79, 84 & 99, 1992). In this system of governance, which is designed with checks and balances of power, constituents get to choose their leaders as long as they are part of the communist party. In these regards, this system allows for power sharing and participation, elements that researchers such as Brown and Söderbaum deem necessary for sustainable development and associate with democratic systems of government.

Just as Americans associate and espouse values for democracy that promote sustainable development, the communist state of Cuba does the same. According to articles 8 and 9 of Cuba□ s constitution, Cuba “recognizes, respects, and guarantees many freedoms and equal rights for all in the economic, political, social, cultural and familial spheres. It is the State□ s responsibility to „organize and conduct the political, economic, cultural, scientific, social and defence activities□” (Article 98a, 1992). In the centrally planned system, it is clearly acknowledged that it is the state□ s responsibility

to help the people and the preserve the environment by promoting sustainable development.

3. USA's Sustainable Development and Green Legislation

In the U.S. Constitution there is very little content devoted to the environment or sustainable development. However, Congress has created many acts to protect the environment and consequently to promote sustainable development. Examples of this relatively large body of green legislation include the National Environmental Policy Act (1970), the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (1976) and the Oil Pollution Act (1990). In Section 101a of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970, Congress declared:

It is the continuing policy of the Federal Government, in cooperation with State and local governments, and other concerned public and private organizations, to use all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans (1970).

This Act, along with the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the same year, illustrates President Richard Nixon's response to public demand for cleaner air, purer water, and preservation of non-renewable resources. It is evident from this act that green legislation was formed to steward resources effectively and improve quality of life. Subsequent Acts reflect a similar spirit. The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act addresses the life span of hazardous waste. It was amended in 1984 and 1986 to include interventions for waste minimization and more stringent guidelines for underground, hazardous waste storage tanks such as petroleum (US Environmental Protection Agency [EPA], 2010). Similarly, the Oil Pollution Act was created in response to the public's growing concerns about the marine ecosystems, especially after the Exxon Valdez spill off the Alaskan Coast in 1989 (EPA, 2010). Thus, the general pattern of sustainable development legislation seems to be that once a need is identified, appropriate legislation is created to address the concern. In this regard, the structure of the American government system facilitates sustainable development.

More recently, in January 2007, President George Bush signed Executive Order 13423 Strengthening Federal Environmental, Energy, and Transportation Management, which created "policy and specific goals for federal agencies" to conduct their respective missions in an environmentally, economically and fiscally sound, integrated, continuously improving, efficient, and sustainable manner" (EPA, 2009). Following his lead, in October of 2009, President Obama signed an executive order on federal sustainability, which allows federal agencies 90 days to "set a 2020 greenhouse reduction goal... targets for efficient, sustainable buildings, reduced petroleum use in vehicles, water efficiency, waste reduction, purchasing green technologies and products, and supporting sustainable communities" (EPA, 2009).

From these executive orders and Congressional laws one can see that concerns for sustainable development continue to be addressed.

4. Cuba's Sustainable Development and Green Legislation

Compared to the U.S., Cuba's constitution addresses the concepts of sustainable development much more directly. Since sustainable development has only recently become a significant political issue at the national and international level, the differences regarding references to sustainable development within the Constitutions are likely due to the fact that the Cuban constitution was drafted in 1976, while the American Constitution was drafted in 1788. However, both constitutions have undergone several amendments since their respective inceptions. Article 27 of Cuba's constitution clearly indicates a desire to pursue sustainable development:

The State protects the environment and natural resources of the country. [It] Recognizes the close links with the economic and social development to make human life more rational and ensure the survival, welfare and safety of current and future generations. The state relies on the appropriate corresponding bodies to implement this policy. It is the duty of citizens to contribute to the protection of water, air, soil conservation, flora, fauna and all the rich potential of nature.²

The Cuban government acknowledges that the welfare of its citizens is linked to the environment and its natural resources. Similar to U.S. Environmental Policy, the government, in cooperation with appropriate bodies, is responsible for policy execution. The Cuban constitution carries this idea one step further and indicates that it is also the individual's responsibility to be a wise steward of the "rich potential of nature."

In the late 1970s, Cuba asserted itself as an international actor by becoming increasingly active in the United Nations (Gleijeses, 2002, 345). Realizing a need to attend to its environmental problems, the government created the National Commission for the Protection of the Environment and the Conservation of Natural Resources (COMARNA) (Houck, 2000, 15). COMARNA was similar to the American EPA as its composition consisted of a consolidation of agencies dealing with the environment.

Further environmental legislation, known as Law 33, was developed to promote sustainable development in 1981. This law addressed water, soils, mineral resources, marine resources, flora and fauna, the atmosphere, agricultural resources, human settlements and landscape and tourism resources (Barba & Avella, 2009). This law, by several accounts, was not effective enough; thus, in 1990 Decree Law 118 was introduced (Barba & Avella, 2009). The intent of this law was to create more environmental responsibility. Decree law 118 distributed specific environmental responsibilities to eight ministries and created a ninth for enforcement (Ministry of Science Technology and Environment CITMA) (Houck, 15). In the early 1990s, there was another period of economic scarcity due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Cuban officials

simultaneously addressed the economic problems with sustainable solutions. Because there was environmental legislation enforced by CITMA, Cuba was able to easily focus on localized centers of food production, which reduced transportation costs and encouraged urbanized farming (community gardens) (Davis et al., 2009, 87-88). This conserved valuable fuel resources while promoting healthier diets.

In a desire to improve what were still viewed as unacceptable environmental conditions, sustainable legislation was refreshed more recently with the introduction of Law 81 of the Environment in July 1997. Despite difficult economic circumstances, Cuba implemented Law 81, which resulted in more rigorous enforcement of environmental standards (Houck, 18-21). As a result, Cuba is experiencing positive change; the marine ecosystem of the Havana harbor is “coming back,” industrial pollution is decreasing and reforestation has brought the amount of tree covered land back up to 21 percent (Houck, 5). It is evident that Cuban environmental law is evolving regularly to meet the new challenges that sustainable development brings.

5. America and Cuban Participation in International Law

Both the United States and Cuba have participated in international conventions related to sustainable development. For example, both governments have joined, ratified and implemented the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (1971), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)(1973) and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes (1992). The mission of the Ramsar Convention is the “conservation and wise use of all wetlands through local and national actions and international cooperation, as a contribution towards achieving sustainable development throughout the world” (Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, 1971). Cuba and the U.S. both possess significant wetlands; thus, their willingness to pursue sustainable development by preserving most wetland areas illustrates both parties’ commitment to sustainable development.

In similar fashion, CITES is an international agreement that seeks to “ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival” (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, 1975). States that agree to be bound by this convention are responsible to create or modify domestic legislation that guarantees the framework of this agreement will be implemented at the international level. Implementation of this convention indicates that both the U.S. and Cuba are making a concerted effort to maximize the benefits of wild flora and fauna, while simultaneously preserving them so that future generations can reap the benefits of these sustainable practices.

During the 1980s, some industrialized countries began shipping toxic waste to developing countries because increasing domestic environmental restrictions was raising the cost of disposal and cutting into profits. The Basel Convention (1992) was created in response to this practice of toxic trading. This international convention created criteria for “environmentally sound management” of toxic waste and a framework for controlling “transboundary moving of hazardous waste” (Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, 1992). Cuba’s and the U.S.’s participation in this convention suggests

that they are concerned about preserving the environment and pursuing a path of sustainable development.

It appears, however, that Cuba is more willing to commit to international initiatives that are linked to sustainable development than the U.S. For example, Cuba signed and ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (1992) while the U.S. has signed but not ratified it. The convention's primary objective is to "halt the loss of biodiversity so as to secure the continuity of its beneficial uses through the conservation and sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources" (Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992). This important conference has been identified by some as the conference that "catapulted" environmental protection and sustainable development forward in Cuba (Houck, 8).

It is difficult to establish why the U.S. has not ratified the CBD. The most common suggestion seems to be that the influence of, "businesses based upon extracting and synthesizing natural information" such as pharmaceutical companies, has made it a challenge for the U.S. to ratify the CBD (Vogel, 1997, 4). In other words, it is suggested that lobby groups for industries, such as the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America (PhRMA), have influenced policy and politics in this regard by coupling advocacy with targeted donations to political parties (PhRMA, 2010). This accepted practice of industrial lobbying in the American democracy does not exist in Cuba's system of governance. However, the current status regarding the CBD is that "the Senate Foreign Relations Committee recommended ratification of the CBD in 1994, but the treaty remains before the US Senate" (U.S. Department of State, 2010). In other words, the CBD has been neglected for over 16 years.

The Kyoto Protocol (1997), an amendment to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change remains in a similar status. Cuba has signed, ratified and implemented the protocol while the U.S. has only signed it. The American failure to ratify is surprising because the United States, like Cuba is a member of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The Clinton-led government failed to ratify the protocol because "meaningful participation by developing countries in binding commitments limiting greenhouse gases had not been met" (Fletcher, 2010). In 2001, the Bush administration announced it was not interested in continuing the discussion of the Kyoto Protocol. Instead, Bush announced a new policy on climate change in 2002 that was based on voluntary domestic measures, not on the international protocol (Fletcher, 9-10). It is ironic that that United States government continues to refuse to implement the Kyoto protocol, yet maintains that the international community "must work collaboratively to slow, stop, and reverse greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in a way that promotes sustainable economic growth" (US Department of State, 2010).

6. Sustainable Practices in the USA and Cuba

Despite the apparent recalcitrance of the U.S. in regards to environmentally oriented international treaties, there are several initiatives that are worth mentioning. These initiatives relate to biofuel and biomass energy. In an attempt to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases emitted and encourage alternative fuel development, the

U.S. implemented the Energy Independence and Security Act (2007). This Act, in an endeavour to push the use of biofuel forward and reduce the consumption of and reliance on fossil fuels, requires the use of 36 billion gallons of cellulosic biofuels by the year 2022. In addition, the U.S. Department of Energy promised to invest \$1.2 billion into the construction of six “commercial scale biorefineries” (Gutterson and Zhang, 2009, 442-445).

Another initiative that has been pursued is the construction of biomass energy plants. The impetus for this action relates to the Energy Independence and Security Act as well as the Energy Policy Act (2005), which encourages energy conservation and efficiency by promoting residential efficiency, increasing the efficiency of appliances and commercial products, reducing Federal government energy usage, modernizing domestic energy infrastructure, diversifying the Nation's energy supply with renewable sources and supporting a new generation of energy-efficient vehicles (United States Government, 2007). There are currently 170 biomass power-plants in over 17 states. These plants collectively create clean energy from a renewable resource and “reduce carbon emissions by 15.2 million tons each year” (Renewable Fuels Association, *Growing Innovation- America's Energy Future Starts at Home*, 2009). Of all the energy consumed (electricity and fuel) in the U.S. during 2008, 7% of it came from renewable resources. The renewable energy came from the following sources: solar (1%), hydroelectric (34%), geothermal (5%), biomass (53%) and wind (7%) (Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2009). Although the renewable energy is a small percentage of the total energy that is consumed, it is obvious that the U.S. is making strides towards a more sustainable way of living. The diversity of the renewable energy resources also shows that many green technologies and sources of energy are being pursued simultaneously to try keep pace with the national legislation that has already been passed.

As in the United States, Cuba has been attempting to reduce greenhouse gases, preserve its environment, and increase its self sufficiency by developing sources of green energy. The impetus for these changes was twofold. First, in the early 1990's with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba was no longer able to purchase subsidized oil from the former Soviet Union. Secondly, Cuba has committed to itself to interventions that promote sustainable development. It appears that Cuba has done more to promote sustainable practices and interventions than the U.S. In 2004, Cuba was operating 85 biogas plants, which on a per capita basis is almost 4 times as many as the United States (Chemi and Hill, 2009, 650). This trend is only growing as it was reported in 2009 and that Cuba had built 700 biomass plants to protect the environment and reduce the consumption of nonrenewable fuel sources (Cuba Verdad, 2009).

In addition to developing biomass power plants, Cuba has tried to reduce its demand for energy. Cuba powers 65% of its sugar mills with “bagasse, a byproduct of sugar production,” and uses the waste fiber for paper products (Brodine, 1992). In addition, Cuba has promoted the use of bicycles with Havana now boasting over 800,000 bicycles. Using today's population, that amounts to more than 1 bicycle for every three people. Ultimately the efforts of the Cuban government have been rewarded. In 2009, Cuba's yearly per capita consumption of petroleum was one 1.0 liters, while the U.S. consumed approximately 3.75 liters of petroleum for every citizen (EIA, 2010).

Moreover, Cuba has equipped approximately 1900 schools and 280 medical facilities with photovoltaic panels and micro hydro plants. In 2004, Cuba boasted, “157 hydroelectric plants, 6687 windmills, 8597 solar panels, 1548 solar heaters, and 112 bio-digesters” (Chemi & Hill, 2009, 650). These initiatives, largely executed in rural, isolated areas away from the main power grid, facilitate sustainable local development by protecting the environment whilst simultaneously providing power for lighting and refrigeration (Chemi & Hill, 2009, 652-653).

This is just a brief glimpse of the strides that are being made in the environmental facet of sustainable development. Since the 1970s, the U.S. environment has “improved dramatically,” especially in the area of air and water quality. Likewise, Cuba has shown remarkable progress in reducing pollution and promoting sustainable development (Houck, 2009, 5). Despite these improvements, overall U.S. consumption patterns remain unsustainable. After comparing the USA’s ecological footprint to its total biocapacity, we find that on a per person basis, there is an ecological deficit of 4.6 global hectares (gha) (Global Footprint Network [GFN], 2009). This means that on average, it takes 4.6 more gha of land than the ecosystem can afford to support the lifestyle of each person in the U.S. When one compares Cuba’s ecological footprint to its biocapacity, Cuba functions at a 1.3 deficit (GFN, 2009). On average, it takes 1.3 more gha of land than the ecosystem can afford to support the lifestyle of each person in Cuba. In essence, both countries are operating at a deficit; however, Cuba’s deficit is considerably lower than the America’s, indicating that Cuba is closer to the goal of living sustainably. According to the World Wildlife Federations 2006 Living Planet Report, Cuba was the only country to meet both criteria for sustainable development. The two criteria measured Human Development Index value and global hectares per person consumption. Four years later, the 2010 report indicates that Cuba has moved slightly over the sustainable limit of gha per person; thus, the country is just shy of maintaining sustainable development (World Wildlife Federation, 2006, 19).

Critics may argue that quality of life is compromised when sustainable development is pursued. If this is true, one would expect the Cuban quality of life indicators to be lower as Cuba appears to be more involved with international environmental legislation and sustainable development interventions. To investigate this notion, basic education, demographic and economic indicators will be examined. These indicators are commonly used to determine how developed a country is. In the U.S., Primary school enrolment is 92% with gender parity, while in Cuba it is 97%. This suggests that education is very important to both countries. The American fertility rate in 2007 was 2.1, while population growth has remained at 1% from 1970-2007. In Cuba, the total fertility rate is 1.5, while the annual population growth rate declined from 1% (1970-1990) to 0.4% (1990-2007). Lower fertility rates are frequently associated with higher education, which also translates to lower child and maternal mortality (UNICEF, 2009). Both enrollment rates and fertility rates suggest that Cuba and the U.S. are on the same level of development.

The American GDP per capita annual growth rate is 2% (1990-2007), while gross national income per capita is \$46,040 USD. In Cuba, the GDP per capita annual growth rate is 3.6% (1990-2007). Cuban income is much lower; however, there are no visible negative implications in regards to the basic necessities of healthcare, shelter, food and education. For example, life expectancy of both the average American and the average Cuban is 78. In terms of the central government

expenditure, the U.S. spends 25 % of its budget on healthcare and 3% on education. In Cuba's central government, 23% of the budget is allocated to healthcare, while 10% of its budget is designated for education (UNICEF, 2009). Both governments also appear to value healthcare similarly, but the Cuban government emphasizes education little more than their American counterpart. These statistics indicate that the quality of life is not affected adversely by the pursuit of sustainable development. As previously mentioned, even though average Cuba's income is lower, Cuba's greater visible commitment to sustainable development has not compromised the quality of life for its citizens.

7. Discussion

This evidence alone should be enough to indicate that democracy is not the exclusive ideology or form of government for sustainable development to thrive. Cuba's constitution specifically addresses environmental protection and sustainability, while the U.S. constitution largely deals with the mechanics of governing a country. In the examination of the democratic and socialist governance structures, it was revealed that both countries have mechanisms for public participation, at least at the theoretical level. In other words, when promoting sustainable development, the existing mechanisms for individual expression and participation should be used. More specifically, countries and international organizations such as the UN should be flexible and work with existing forms of government to promote sustainable development rather than insisting that only a democratic government can achieve sustainable development. The case studies above show that it is possible to promote sustainable development through differing governing systems and political ideologies.

In evaluating the environmental aspects of sustainable development, it appears that environmental protection and green technologies are being developed in both countries. Cuba and the U.S. want to reduce their dependency and increase their self-sufficiency, which simultaneously increases sustainable living and sovereignty. Cuba's smaller ecological footprint seems to further contradict the notion that democracy is necessary for sustainable development. Critics may counter that much more of Cuba's population is engaged in subsistence farming and has a significantly lower income. While this is true, indicators within the social context seem to indicate that income is not necessarily positively correlated to quality of life indicators such as education, life expectancy and health.

Both Cuba and the U.S. have made notable steps in pursuing sustainable development, but Cuba has made more of a symbolic commitment internationally by signing, ratifying and implementing the Biological Diversity Convention and the Kyoto protocol. Basic quality of life, according to UNICEF, is very similar between the U.S. and Cuba except for the significant income difference. Moreover, according to the respective countries' constitutions, both have a system of participatory government where the individual's voice can be heard. Given this evidence, it is clear that multiparty democracy is not necessary for sustainable development.

Since there is no global authority on sustainable development, a solution to the promotion of sustainable development must involve values and concrete incentives in a two-pronged approach. At the theoretical level, the values of

respecting human rights and of stewarding resources in a responsible manner must be promoted. These values must be embedded in the dignity of humankind and divorced from one political ideology. To maximize success, sustainable development must not promote one political system or country over another. Rather, if the rights of humankind are integrated with the basic values of sustainable development and presented in a more neutral manner, states will be more willing to promote them. In practice, this means toning down the overt ideological proponents in international discussions. For example, in documents such as Agenda 21, this would mean emphasizing the same human rights but not presupposing that democracy or “progress towards democratic government” (UNDESA) is the only way to fulfill the listed policy directives and objectives.

If sustainable development is presented as a concept that is intrinsically linked with the dignity of mankind and not democracy, it will be more widely accepted in authoritarian, democratic, and „in-between“ states. Similarly, if leaders at all levels would emphasize the same human rights but not presuppose that democratic government or progress towards democratic government is the only way to pursue sustainable development, we can begin to move towards broader acceptance and greater promotion of sustainable development. It may be a lot to ask of leaders, but it is a step that must be taken if we are to truly pursue sustainable development at a global level.

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