The Limits and Leverages of Ecological Entrepreneurship

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Abstract: The New Environmental Paradigm envisions a green social economy demanding substantial changes in the leadership and managerial attitude, public policy and governance framework, technological innovation, and mass communication and outreach. At the international level, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals seek to address the global challenges related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, peace, and justice. Notwithstanding such ideological grandstanding, ecological entrepreneurs are often stranded at the margins of the mainstream economy. This study posits that the global aspiration for a paradigm shift to an eco-friendly mode of production and distribution founded upon socio-environmental justice cannot be possible as long as all the stakeholders of the mainstream economy including the global policy behemoths do not come forward through consensus and commitment to promote Ecological Entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Ecological Entrepreneurship (EE), sustainability, marginalization, environmental policy, stakeholders, eco-growth

INTRODUCTION

The year 1989 was a turning point for Douglas Rainsford Tompkins (1943–2015), the American conservationist, outdoorsman, philanthropist, filmmaker, agriculturalist, and businessman. The year saw his departure from the business world and becoming an active environmental and land conservationist. Earlier, he and Susie, his first wife, had co-founded and run two companies: North Face, the outdoor equipment and clothing company, and Esprit, the clothing company. "I just realized at least what I was doing was making a lot of stuff that nobody needed and pushing a consumerist society, … So I went to do something else…" said Tompkins, the entrepreneur turned wildland philanthropist, who spent his riches creating the world's largest

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network of privately owned nature reserves (Enders and Franklin 2015). He fervently espoused that people have to pay the rent for living on this earth.

Tompkins was a critic of the modern economic systems and its faith in mega-technologies to save our environment. He believed that a successful economic enterprise must be evaluated based on its contribution to the protection and well-being of life on Earth. Time and again, he reminded people that the earth is going through the Sixth Phase of Mass Extinction, and humans, by and large, have aggravated the conditions by tampering with the climate and the ecosystem. An apologist for minimal economic and technological activities, Tompkins advised: "Don't sell people things they don't need". He went on to say "I don't have a cell phone because I know how horrible it is. Using your cell phone is like putting your head in a microwave every day." (Saverin 2014)

While Doug relinquished the world of mainstream business altogether, many like-minded entrepreneurs are still active in business and intently exploring the greener modes of production and distribution with minimal damage to the ecosystem. They still nourish their faith in the transformative power of business and technology and are negotiating with multiple agencies and stakeholders in quest of a green economy. They are called "ecopreneurs" or "green entrepreneurs" and their enterprise is founded on the principles of Ecological Entrepreneurship (EE).

This paper posits that EE is fundamental to the New Environmental Paradigm. Section two of the paper figures out the factors affecting the growth of EE; section three discusses the recent advances in EE**;** and section four analyzes the limitations of EE. Building upon these three sections, this study concludes that the global aspiration for a paradigm shift to an eco-friendly mode of production and distribution founded upon socio-environmental justice cannot be possible as long as all the stakeholders of the mainstream economy, including the global policy behemoths, do not come forward through consensus and commitment to promoting EE.

A PARADIGM SHIFT: FROM *GROWTH SANS DEVELOPMENT* TO *GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT*

In science and philosophy, a paradigm refers to patterns of thinking based on a set of concepts which includes theories, research methods, postulates, and other distinctly recognized standards contributing to a

field of study. From the point of socio-economic growth and development, two such paradigms are recognized: The Dominant Social Paradigm (DSP) and the New Environmental Paradigm (NEP). The underlying assumptions of the DSP are that humans are superior to other all other species; that the Earth provides unlimited resources for humans; and that progress is an inherent part of human history. In contrast, a recent shift in the worldview, the NEP proclaims that humans are just another species on Earth; that human well-being is dependent not only on economic and technological factors but also by ecological factors; and that judicious exploitation and preservation of the natural environment and its resources is fundamental to the sustenance of life on the Earth.

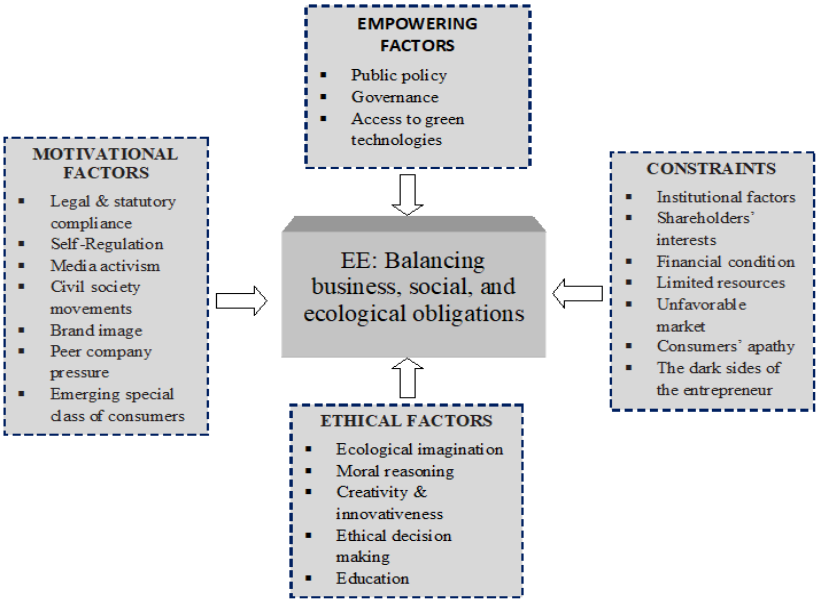
Often used synonymously, "development" and "growth" refer to various dimensions of human progress and fulfillment. Economic growth refers to a quantitative change in the scale of an economy, whereas economic development is a qualitative change that requires adjustments in an economy's capabilities (Rocha 2013). Standing up to the crises created by World War II and the subsequent Cold War, growth-centric progress dominated the world view until 1970. Reduction of poverty, mass employment, growth-centric science and technology, increase in Gross Domestic Production (GDP), and attendant wealth creation became the sole concern of the world leaders. However, having fulfilled their ambitious growth agenda, the world elites came to realize that growth has its limits and that the sustenance of the growth curve depends on social and ecological wellbeing. Some of the major voids created by this phase were the growing economic inequality among people, massive environmental pollutions, worldwide terrorism, and large scale abuse in human rights. The shift in the world view became more pronounced after the 1980s and the development-orientation took place alongside growth. The focus shifted to changing the living conditions of the people, mass welfare, social harmony and inclusiveness, Gross Domestic Happiness, and ecologically sustainable development.

The emerging paradigm envisions a green social economy demanding substantial changes in the leadership and managerial attitude, public policy and governance framework, technological innovation, and mass communication and outreach. At the international level, the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals seek to address the global challenges related to poverty,

inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace, and justice.

In the shifting paradigm, EE stands out as the most ethical instrument in the reframing of the economic system. Buchholz and Rosenthal (2005) argue that imagination, creativity, novelty, and sensibility are central to ethical decision-making. Moreover, since the knowledge of the relationship between business and nature is indispensable for sustainable entrepreneurship (Allen, Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith 2019), entrepreneurs ought to have ecological embeddedness, i.e., an in-depth knowledge and experience of the local ecosystems (Whiteman, Walker and Perego 2013).

Factors affecting ecological entrepreneurship



The figure demonstrates a range of factors that motivate the entrepreneur to adopt ecologically sustainable practices. It also outlines several factors that impede EE. They include financial limitations (Boyd and Gumpert 1983), scarcity of resources (De Clercq and Dakhli 2009), shareholders' expectations (Harris, Sapienza, and Bowie 2009), and above all, at worst, the dominant-negative impulses stalking the entrepreneur (Kuratko 2007). In between, moral disposition, creativity, decision making qualities, and value-based education enable

the entrepreneur to balance the business and ecological concerns to overcome the constraints that create ethical dilemmas or failure.

RECENT LEVERAGES IN EE

This section highlights the global awakenings as well as the policy framework that function as the foundation of EE. It starts with tapping the important drivers of EE and the important turn-around in the global capitalistic think tank. The rise of global consumerism and production has put immense pressure on the eco-system, leading to uncertainties in the supply of natural resources. There are constraints in production, especially in the agricultural and energy sectors that are heavily dependent on natural resources (UNEP 2012). Other important drivers of EE are the rising consumer demand for sustainable products, and the emerging "critical choices" concerning economic development and environmental sustainability. One of the disturbing factors is how to promote the purchasing power of people to sustain a seamless production and consumption of goods and services. This can be possible by the creation of new jobs and skills and opportunities for mass employment.

The UN SDG 4 envisions that, by 2030, there will be a substantial increase in the number of youths and adults who are equipped with technical and vocational skills for sustainable entrepreneurship. SDG 8 pleads for the promotion of inclusive and sustained economic growth, with development-oriented policies that support productive capacities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation and encourage the formalization and growth of micro- and small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) through access to services.

A low-carbon economy (LCE) is a low-fossil-fuel economy that pumps minimal greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and thereby, causing significant reductions in anthropogenic emissions. Implementation of low emission development strategies by governments will lead to climate change resilience and will serve as a precursor to a zero-carbon economy. Low-carbon economies will offer several additional benefits such as energy security and industrial competitiveness, trade and employment, and public health.

Investment in renewable energy (RE) sources and technologies is an important charter of the Millennium Development Goals. RE can contribute to several SD goals such as socio-economic development; people's access to energy; energy security; climate change solutions and downturn of environmental and health issues. Several life cycle

assessments have concluded that GHG emissions from RE technologies are quite lesser than those of fossil fuels. According to Edenhofer et al. (2012), the maximum estimation for concentrating solar power (CSP), geothermal, hydropower, ocean, and wind energy is lower than or equal to 100 g CO2eq/kWh, and median values for all RE range from 4 to 46 g CO2eq/kWh. In the long term, the optimal use of bio-energy can bring additional environmental values.

The Global Green New Deal (GGND) calls for policy guidelines enabling the allocation of funds by governments to provide stimulus to the green sectors catering to economic recovery, eradication of poverty, and reduction of carbon emissions and ecosystem degradations. The concept became seriously pronounced with the global economic slowdown of 2007-2011, which was a massive blow to the Western capitalism. The United Kingdom's Green New Deal emerged as a policy response to economic and financial emergencies and issues such as global warming and peak oil in terms of significant government investment in RE and the creation of new green jobs and markets. Post-2018, renewed interests in the Green New Deal have arisen globally, especially in the United States.

The OECD Green Growth Declaration (2009) recognizes the environmental consequences of the blatant abuse of natural resources and attendant challenges for long-term economic growth and sustainable development. OECD's Green Growth Strategy aims at decoupling economic growth from environmental hazards. Its policy priorities include a new growth accounting framework, industrial restructuring, mass employment, and social equity. The new growth accounting framework insists upon the inclusion of environmental capital/services in production accounting and Quality of Life considerations. Industrial restructuring refers to the use of eco-friendly technologies in businesses, especially in six key sectors such as Energy, Transport, Agriculture, Fisheries, Industries, and Tourism. The OECD emphasizes the creation of green jobs and the related skill development, removal of environmentally harmful subsidies, and eco-innovations.

Greening of deserts is a recent practice by China and other countries to reclaim life in the deserts by massive plantations supported by drip irrigation. This is an anthropogenic ecological restoration inspired by three objectives: promotion of biodiversity, expansion of farming and forestry, and the reclamation of natural water systems. There are several countries covered with large deserts and, therefore,

desert greening is a way forward to solve the crises linked to water, energy, and food in these regions.

At the core of EE lies the '3R' principle of Reduce, Recycle, and Reuse. "Reduce" means cutting back the quantum of trash we make. For example, reduction in energy use by producing better energy-efficient cars or cars that run on renewable energy and switching over from plastic bags to reusable cotton or jute bags. "Reuse" means finding new ways of using the trash that people tend to throw away or switching over from use-and-throw gadgets to durable gadgets. "Recycle" means making new goods and commodities out of the trash so that they can be sold again; for example, collecting the non-bio-degradable trash from landfills and convert them to useful commodities through waste management.

Such awakenings into SD principles have been echoed in the green initiatives by small, medium, and large scale industries from many regions of the globe. For example, dedicated to tourism and coral reef conservation, SD practices in Pemuteran Village, Bali, Indonesia contributes to sustainable tourism in three ways: community participation, environmental protection, and economic benefit. This could be possible by educating the local communities as well as tourists about the importance of ecological conservation.

Belle Verte, a small private company, has been successful in creating sustainable communities in Mauritius through a closed-loop waste management system (Cardiff and Meyer 2018). It raises community awareness on waste accumulation in Mauritius. In collaboration with local institutions and artisans, it not only recycles the waste materials but also has been successful in creating a market for the up-cycled products. Coffee Paste, a creative and applied arts initiative in Surabaya, Indonesia deals with the up-cycling of coffee waste to artful objects. Previously, the coffee ground residuals resulting from coffee processing were discharged into the environment resulting in pollution. By developing artistic products, especially, the traditional Batic designs of Indonesia from coffee residues, this enterprise stands out as a model of EE, preserving the environment and promoting culture and business. Shree Cement, an Indian company, is re-using the flue gases that contain a high amount of thermal energy generated during the clinkerization process of its cement plants through a process called "Waste Heat Recovery". Indirectly, it also saves a large amount of water which would have been required for cooling the waste gasses.

Youth Initiative for Community Empowerment (YICE), an eco-inclusive venture in Uganda, is committed to training, funding, and markets for rural farmers (Ibid.). Its innovative mobile technology has empowered small farmers to make better decisions based on access to vital information on trainings, quality farm inputs, fair market prices for their produce, and the provisions for microloans. In collaboration with national and international actors and institutions, Equity Bank is co-financing the smallholders in Kenya for the enhancement of drip-irrigation systems and capacity building for higher production. It is also supporting farmers to fight back climate change and irregular rainfall. It has reached out to more than 46,000 beneficiaries since 2008 with a total support of US$ 26 million.

HiMin, a Chinese enterprise has developed high-quality solar technology for hot water supply and cooling and heating. The company is looking forward to developing distributed solar energy technologies for power generation and seawater desalination. The Unilever Sustainable Living Plan includes the creation of green markets, sourcing of cent percent agricultural raw materials sustainably, investment in the research and development of sustainable products and resource-efficient factories, and electricity from renewable sources.

LIMITATIONS OF EE

This section discusses the various challenges to EE in terms of the limitations of its principal stakeholders. Stakeholders are the ecosystem players that play a fundamental role in achieving EE goals. They include the core team, partners, beneficiaries, customers, suppliers, investors, the media, NGOs, local communities, and society at large. Stakeholders influence and are influenced by the project objectives and process, and in turn, participate in the exchange of socio-environmental values. However, in reality, all stakeholders do not have any major stakes in strategic decision making. The central governance is usually vested with enterprise leaders: government, corporate, and international policy designers.

Starting with individual efforts concerning the necessary sustainability changes, EE is refurbished and propagated simultaneously by several leaders in dialectical co-production of action and discourse: (1) Global policymakers: The UNO and allies; (2) The Nation States as leaders, (3) Corporate eco-volunteering including international initiatives such as WBCSD, International Council on

Mining and Metals (ICMM), Responsible Care, and Electronic Industry Citizenship Initiative (EICC); (4) Social Enterprises; and (5) Individual ecopreneurs.

The United Nations proclaims that its promotional initiatives "seek to leverage entrepreneurship and creative thinking to strengthen sustainable development around the world" (UN News 2017). For example, Hendriks and Wiemer (2018) reveal that technological intervention, economic development, and reference to nature as capital pervades the UN's SEED discourses in the African context. The underlying values are Anthropomorphization of Nature, the perceived distance between *indigenous* and *civilized* communities, and vague or non-transparent cause and effect relationships regarding climate change. The authors speculate that the case studies aim to euphemize the environmental and social impacts of the enterprises.

SEED (Supporting Entrepreneurs for Environment and Development) is a global sustainability partnership created by three agencies of the UN: The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The program focuses on eco-inclusive entrepreneurship and the green economy to support innovative small-scale and locally driven entrepreneurs around the globe who integrate social and environmental benefits into their business model.

Although the positions of nations on green growth vary, one common feature in the national action plans is that environmental concerns become subordinated to profitability. Despite the increase in consumption and greater resource efficiencies, the environmental and social contradictions of growth and inequality remain, especially around climate change and fossil fuels.

Corporate environmental leadership, more specifically, corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities are criticized as "aggregated anecdotes about uncoordinated initiatives to demonstrate a company's social sensitivity" (Porter and Kramer 2006, 81). In sync with Davies and Mullin (2011) and Agyeman (2013), the authors suggest that corporate-led green initiatives ought to redirect the economy away from quantitative *growth for growth's sake* to inclusive and qualitative focus on people and the environment to attain the social sustainability of the projects.

In recent decades, social entrepreneurs who aim to combine environmental and social benefits have been focused on employment

creation and work experience initiatives for disadvantaged groups and communities. Sustainable waste and resource recovery/management constitute the largest sector of the green social economy and, as such, has received the most systematic attention. Other activities include nature conservation, community-based renewable energy, sustainable housing, transport, food production and distribution, local currencies, and environmental education, awareness, and related social learning processes of sustainability. Despite their steady contribution, social enterprises are so dependent on the government that they fail to offer any innovative or radical environmental solutions (Affolderbach and Krueger 2017).

The performance of the individual ecopreneurs as agents of change is conditioned by wider institutional contexts and the policy frameworks that support as well as contain entrepreneurial activity and innovation (Beveridge and Guy 2005). Contextualizing EE in the UK green building sector, O'Neill and Gibbs (2014) and Gibbs and O'Neill (2012) disagree with the perception of individuals as 'lone heroes' highlighting the value of supporting infrastructures at different spatial scales.

Experts insist upon several social supports to EE such as high quality and reliable information for ecopreneurs; collaboration and networking among ecopreneurs and innovation intermediaries; reconsideration of publicly funded environmental technologies; increase in the speed of commercialization of environmental technologies; improvement in the access to financing and markets; unambiguous policy on government procurement of green products; incentives for customers; and workers' support in terms of skill-oriented training programs (McEwen 2013). The concept 'grassroots innovation' is driven by social need, an ideology that generates alternative (non-monetary) values and runs against existing market regimes providing green and just solutions (Smith, 2005, Seyfang and Smith 2007, Davies and Mullin 2011).

Although such aspirations sound to be magnanimous, they are stuck with the dominant ideology of *growth* and the Schumpeterian (1942) *creative destruction* of nature. According to Kenis and Lievens (2015), besides undermining the core objectives of sustainability, green economic restructuring deepens social inequalities. Green products and policies can breed an elite class of consumers and lead to exclusive, *posh green consumerism*. In a study on the funding schemes of small-scale PV systems in the UK, Grover (2013) reveals that unequal access

to subsidies and uneven distribution of the burden of costs through feed-in tariffs creates disadvantages for lower-income groups and poorer neighborhoods and regions. Green enterprises usually get a range of benefits and incentives from the government, but the majority of these products and services are bought by the rich or the environmentally conscious people.

On a temporal scale, green or alternate technologies also stimulate broader environmental costs, especially in the resource-intensive manufacturing sector. One such example is the environmental cost of the manufacturing, maintenance, and disposal of solar grid panels. On a spatial scale, uneven access to green technologies across the nations and intra-national as well as international environmental politics and power inequality in adopting the pro-environmental changes hinders the EE objectives.

CONCLUSION

Human civilization is caught between the spiraling of businesses and degradation and depletion of natural resources; between the ever-increasing desire for consumerist happiness and the realization of the unsustainability of the same adversely affecting the inter-generational equity. This article posits that ethical commitment, technological innovation, and multi-stakeholder support should go hand in hand to bring the ecopreneurs struggling at the margins of the global economy back to the mainstream.

This study reveals that ecological entrepreneurship is caught between varying tensions related to business activities and environmental philosophies and between crossroads of the green economy and the mainstream economy. Therefore, policymakers ought to recognize the complex and contentious nature of green entrepreneurship.

This article calls into question the effectiveness of EE as a solution to abuses of the natural world in the absence of political will power and appropriate governance and ideological clarity at the macro-level of society. The willingness of the nation-states to switch over from growth to eco-growth alongside capping and closing of growth in the highly polluting sectors such as the fossil fuel industry is important to EE. Inter-institutional and inter-national, multi-stakeholder collaboration for eco-innovations and hassle-free transfer of clean and green technologies is the need of the hour. It can help the ecopreneurs

to get into the center of the mainstream economy and can undertake vital transformative roles in converting growth into eco-growth.

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