

How Will De-growing the Economy Be? A blend of the De-growth Narrative in Enhancing Livelihoods and Development

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Abstract: The paper attempts to tease out the relations between degrowth approach in agrarian studies and its relations with sustainable livelihoods. In doing this, the paper is categorized into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section examines key underpinnings of degrowth in agrarian studies. The third section examines degrowth and sustainable livelihoods considering debates that have emerged so far. The fourth section unleashes strengths and weaknesses of degrowth towards promoting sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing. The final section concludes the paper. Degrowth encompasses the notion that, there exist a strong possibility of living within a sustainable wellbeing in the society with much less resource outturn. Degrowth comes with the proposition that there is an unequal distribution with regards to the energy and material flows within the global economy. This is more often than not highly outsized by the developed industrialized-economies. Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods, as well as equity it, becomes significant to embark on a reconstruction, downsizing and resizing of the global economy to benefit disadvantaged groups. Sustainable livelihoods in this sense refers to where people have the potential to cope and recover in terms of stress, as well as shocks in enhancing and maintaining their assets and resources in their present condition and their lives in the future without threatening the base of natural resource.

Keywords: Degrowing, Degrowth, Livelihoods, Sustainability, Development, Economy.

INTRODUCTION

The paper attempts to tease out the relations between degrowth narrative in agrarian studies and its relations with sustainable livelihoods. In doing this, the paper is categorized into five sections. Following the introduction, the second section examines the key underpinnings of degrowth in agrarian studies. The third section examines degrowth and sustainable livelihoods with a consideration for debates that have emerged so far. The fourth section unleashes strengths and weaknesses of degrowth towards promoting sustainable livelihoods and wellbeing. The final section concludes the paper.

Degrowth encompasses the notion that there exist a strong possibility of living within a sustainable wellbeing in the society with much less resource outturn (Schmelzer and Vetter 2019; Latouche 2009). Degrowth comes with the proposition that there is an unequal distribution with regards to the energy and material flows within the global economy. This is more often than not highly outsized by the developed industrialized-economies (Gerber 2020: 237). Therefore, in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods as well as equity it becomes significant to embark on a reconstruction, downsizing and resizing of the global economy to benefit disadvantaged groups. Sustainable livelihoods in this sense refers to where people have potential to cope and recover in terms of stress as well as shocks in enhancing and maintaining their assets and resources in their present condition and their lives in the future without threatening the base of natural resource (Serrat 2017:21).

PROPOSITIONS AND CONCERNS OF THE DEGROWTH APPROACH

A high empirical argument is advanced by degrowth thinkers across the globe. With degrowth expressed in terms of societal downscaling and physical turnout within equitable and voluntary structure in gradually reaching sustainable steady level; it opens up and advances frameworks for achieving an environmentally and natural resource-responsible society for sustaining people's livelihoods now and in future (Schneider et al., 2010; Latouche 2010). Arguing from an environmental lens degrowth surmise

the point that particular biophysical systems including thresholds for nitrogen cycles, climate change as well as biodiversity have been surpassed (Ward et al., 2016; Steffen et al., 2015). With particular regards to climate change it becomes necessary to point out that, less evidence exist to substantiate that gas emission of the greenhouse would actually be decoupled in economic growth in terms of its absolute premise (Ward et al., 2016).

Furthermore, in achieving sustainable livelihoods for people now and in the future, strong efforts from both global and national-level policy actions is required from a degrowth perspective in reaching global climate-reduction objectives that have been set. Without pro-active measures towards achieving climate targets as stipulated under United Nations Framework Convention on climate change, the future for the next generation stand to be ruined with unsafe environmental, water problems, massive food insecurity and other climate-related problems (Watts 2017). This will affect livelihoods, wellbeing and basic needs. From this, I argue that employing degrowth perspective in downscaling growth in addressing climate and environmental-related problems stands great chance of enhancing livelihoods.

Economic-growth comes as a key driver for the current increasing emissions as well as the non renewable resources depletion. With regards to this, degrowth thinkers have maintained that a low growth in achieving the ecological objectives will aid in sustaining global and national environments (O'Neill 2018; Jackson 2011). This would protect the rights of future generation on sustained wellbeing and livelihoods. In reaching these changes as advanced by degrowth thinkers, it becomes important to embark on strong social transformation (Muraca and Doring 2018). This would require effective agrarian transformations and repoliticisation of our societies. In the next section, I examine degrowth and sustainable livelihoods considering the current debate.

DEGROWTH AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS: ADVANCING THE CURRENT DEBATE

Degrowth thinkers have argued that degrowth stands a strong chance of enhancing people's wellbeing and above all facilitating sustainability of livelihoods. This is seen in the proposition of degrowth in downscaling the economy through equitable-measures with regards to production and consumption (Schneider et al., 2015: 511-512). This provides room for advancing ecological transformations within short and long run and significant for enhancing livelihoods at global and national levels (Alexander 2012; Schneider et al., 2015). This comes as a critique to growth that deteriorates the environment with its consequences for climate-related problems that distract livelihoods and further impacts negatively on life expectancies.

Another point for degrowth thinkers in enhancing livelihoods have to do with a shift from growth-driven consumer capitalism to embrace degrowth-mechanism that employ strategies of less-growth in achieving improved livelihoods. (Piketty and Saez 2014), for instance have argued that, growth has not helped in moving people from global and national inequality and extreme-poverty. The implications of growth on environment has negatively affected people's lives and health (Schneider et al., 2015; Alexander 2012). The implications have included negative effects on climate change, air and water pollution, land degradation which impacts negatively on livelihoods. Marxian degrowth thinkers have maintained that with degrowth strategies in place, a dismantling of existing and recent business and employment models of management and ownership, with the coming of an economy which is managed in cooperative-trend; where deliberations and making of decisions are made and shared in an even structure (Lange 2018: 485-486).

A challenge that come with the transition to degrowth in sustaining livelihoods can be seen in the repoliticisation of the global and local society (Gopel 2016). This is as a result of the fact that the growth idea and its principles have tended to take the minds and bodies of most institutions and people and as such, requires stronger political-economy and social transformation (Asara et al., 2015). Further to this, it is realized that degrowth to some extent have seen marginalization in the mainstream political structure (Buch-Hansen 2018). This indicates that degrowth despite its advocacy for downscaling the

economy through low-growth strategies have not seen much of repoliticisation of society. However, there exist much room for repoliticising global political economy and society in reaching impacts for degrowth in sustaining livelihoods.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE DEGROWTH APPROACH

A major strength of degrowth in relation to sustainable livelihoods is realized in its emphasis on downscaling with low growth in order to meet global climate-targets (Martinez-Alier 2009; Schneider et al. 2015). Research has shown that the existing growth-led paradigm is not compatible with the current environmental objectives. With scientific evidence, it is seen that, global agreements on environmental and climate-target are unachievable with growth and increased GDP across the globe (Antal and van den Bergh 2016). With degrowth notions, environmental objectives are more reachable in enhancing livelihoods. Another good side of degrowth is that it criticizes the growth-led notion by questioning its simplistic linkage of growth and better living standard (D'Alisa et al., 2014). With this argument, degrowth aids in understanding what is meant by living a good life. With this, it brings down the fear of people in living in a future that does not have economic-growth (Kallis and March 2015). The significance of this for policy makers is that advancing effective climate, environmental and social policies must not be a hook on economic-growth (Latouche 2009).

Therefore, motivating the public to imagine on a varying future becomes significant. Also, degrowth is not liable to cooptation in an easy way (Fournier 2008). This is because degrowth encompasses contrast of the existing growth-paradigm in its underpinnings. Degrowth occupies a strong beginning point for social and political debates that are genuine in sparking social change (Fournier 2008). With this, any other approach that goes way off is regarded as expressing something that is different. Notwithstanding the strengths of degrowth, it also has some weaknesses which is necessary to bring out. A critique of degrowth is that the approach fails to empirically analyze qualitative-facets of economic-growth. According to Schwartzman (2012), the emphasis of degrowth towards local economy and not given much attention at considering the need to solve the anthropogenic-change within the trans-national political scope remains a problem. The strong provocation to solve all these will require an aberrant space for extinguishing the capital rule (Schwartzman 2012: 119-21). The transition may require sustainable economic-growth across global-level in anticipating substantial improvement in people's livelihoods, particularly in developing economies.

Degrowth is also criticize that downscaling and embarking on slow-down in economic-growth could exacerbate poverty-levels, vast unemployment and reduction in per capita income (Schwartzman 2012: 120-122; van der Bergh 2011: 881-3). This to an extent explains why people who are aware of the serious damages of the environment as a result of growth continue to argue towards economic-growth within developing countries even if not as much in developed economies.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the degrowth approach in relation to sustainable livelihoods. Degrowth propose for a downscaling of economic-growth with the view of reaching environmental and climate targets. This will help in sustaining the livelihoods of the current and future generation both globally and nationally in the developed and developing countries.

The approach is relevant because with the current economic-growth paradigm, it becomes extremely difficult to reach global emissions and climate-targets; and therefore employing degrowth strategies is necessary for ensuring environmental sustainability and livelihoods. This will require drastic political-economy transformations and repoliticisation of our societies in meeting the needed socio-political and economic support.

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