



## NJPN Comment

# A dangerous phrase

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In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis warned of ‘...those who doggedly uphold the myth of progress and tell us that ecological problems will solve themselves simply with the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change’.

‘Sustainable development’ is one idea which appears to offer a reconciliation between the demand for perpetual economic growth and the stark reality of ecological collapse. Though its origins are obscure, the phrase became prominent after the Brundtland Report in 1987, and it has since been adopted by global agencies such as the United Nations.

I work at a university and offer the notion of sustainable development to my students. They are quite astute on global humanitarian and environmental matters, exhibiting an understanding that the current system is corrupt, manipulated by corporate powers and their political supporters; and that sustainable development is one piece of the rhetoric. The evidence that sustainable development is a sham comes from claims of misrepresentation on UN sustainable development goals having been met. Many academics have long asserted that the phrase is an oxymoron. Perhaps most tellingly is the observation that: ‘No economy has ever grown in size while simultaneously reducing either its carbon or ecological footprint’.

In some ways sustainable development is merely just a new version of ‘development’, which itself came out of The Breton Woods Agreement, and which in turn replaced ‘colonialism’. It enables the stock market driven west to advance the interests of those that they say are less fortunate, and in the process open up new markets for their country, while also gaining/grabbing land and resources.

Capitalism, and its “technocratic paradigm” as Pope Francis calls it, is running unchecked. Sustainable development is just one in a series of manifestations put up by this system to defend itself. But, with the prospect of widespread species extinctions, ecological collapse, over-exploited resources, famine and poverty, as near as the next two decades, unless action is taken it will destroy its creator.

The term ‘sustainable development’ is a therefore one of the most dangerous ever conceived.

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