

A Review of: “We Cannot Continue Like This: Facing Modernity in Africa and the West” by Attie van Niekerk and Sytse Strijbos¹

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The well-structured “We cannot continue like this. Facing modernity in Africa and the West” presents the challenges of sustainable environment, and the broad areas of economic relationship and features between the West and Africa.

The book is the first result of a qualitative and at the same time unique and urgent problem research through the collaboration of three organizations: NOVA, IIDE, CFC and the University of Pretoria. The aim of the volume, produced as a joint effort, is to draw attention and at the same time to create an innovative discourse that promotes sustainable development. Another primary goal is to emphasize that the current modern type of development tools is not sufficient, so they will no longer be effective for societies in the future. According to this, the authors of the book presenting different methods have a common goal, namely to describe and offer alternatives to this challenge. They all agree that the development stage of societies cannot continue in this form. Among the possibilities presented in the chapters, we find references to the appropriate, global economic use of resources, the reduction of harmful substances and emissions, for which the book formulates macro- and micro-level development methods and programs. It is important to note that development programs affecting the whole of humanity have ethical and philosophical-theological significance.

The idea to write the book was born during a 2-day conference held in Pretoria in 2019, with the aim of how to create a more sustainable environment for the society, how to better understand the way of creating more sustainable communities. The book’s authentic and broad scientific ground is due to its authors, some of whom are university lecturers, while others are members of South African NGOs and churches. The basic idea of editing the book is to contribute to the creation of an appropriate dialogue for the representatives of different views of integration in the fields of philosophy, natural sciences, agriculture, and technology.

The first chapter goes back to the 1800s, during which the author explains that there was a time when Christian missions in Africa and modern-type developments seemed to be decidedly simple. A very good example of the connection and relationship between modern development and Christianity is the life of the well-known explorer and missionary David

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Livingstone, who arrived in Africa in 1841 and supported the Clapham military unit belonging to the evangelical denomination, whose leader (William Wilberforce) was a pioneer in the abolition of slavery. Even then, the missionary realized that the spread of Christianity could significantly contribute to the development of the African economy. It is important to emphasize that even in these times it became clear to African church leaders that the language of the biblical message of Christianity must be reshaped, adapted to the values and norms of the African region. In relation to development, the chapter explains that in addition to the role of Christianity, modern science and technology can play a significant role, which must be adapted to local and fundamental values with constructive means. Furthermore, the establishment of sustainable development is significantly hindered by the intense corruption and high crime rates present in the region, one of the reasons for which is the lack of adequate justice and crime prevention.

Chapter 2 of the book presents the role of the economy and technology in societies, according to the development and state of the economy that is a reflection of the particularity of the culture and values of a given society. According to this, economic-based support is more than a necessary tool, i.e. it includes a mutual learning process in which all actors are prepared for changes and take responsibility for each other. The further importance of the chapter is the definition of the concepts of „social business” and „social enterprise”. According to one of the author pairs mentioned as a source, Norberg-Hodge, modernization is not a solution to the eradication of poverty, but it is undoubtedly a significant cause of that.

The following part details the challenge of the energy transition in the South African region and outlines its particularities in relation to the use of coal for local residents, which is available in extremely limited quantities in the western region of Mpumalanga, that is engaged in traditional coal mining, in Ekurhuleni and in the northern parts of KwaZulu-Natal. The decrease in coal consumption in the region has decreased since 2013, a significant reason for which is that some households use electricity for heating during the winter months, mainly due to health and environmental pollution reasons. Unfortunately, most of the households still do not have access to electricity, as coal is cheaper and easier to access. The author of the chapter recommends focusing on the reduction of poverty to solve this issue, through which the use of coal could also be reduced. The analysis of this chapter shows that if there are not going to be any changes in the future, the local residents will not have access to adequate electricity supply and increased and harmful coal consumption can be expected in the region.

Chapter 4 presents one of the biggest challenges of developing countries, the problem of supplying the region with adequate food. From the chapter, we can learn that changes require a change in consumption habits for each society in developed countries. That is, the reduction of overconsumption and meat consumption, according to which farmers should strive to use new technologies and recycling in practice to reduce the lack of nutrients created during cultivation on their land. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to support the production of food in smaller, community-type farms, during which farmers can use the land available to them, thereby reducing the demand for the production of a large amount of food on large

economic farms.

An interesting highlight of the next chapter is the analysis that looks at social enterprises in the Southern African and East African Community, presenting the activities of the Moahisane Development Foundation, which is an extensive economic network.

Chapter 6 raises an exciting question and the possibility regarding the relationship between architecture and religion, for which the author proposes a Dutch practical example. The second part of the volume continues with chapter 7, in which we can read a transdisciplinary analysis made in the city of Molati on the development of the use of local stoves. The purpose of this chapter is to contribute to the construction of a sustainable environment and to present the Brickstar project.

After that, we can get a very appropriate picture of the reasons and possibilities for the modification and independence of engineering education in South Africa in chapter 8. Furthermore, the author highlights the quality of South African universities that offer engineering education, which are accredited by ECSA in accordance with the Washington Agreement. The chapter emphasizes that in the world of the globalized economy, it is extremely important that the engineering courses are internationally recognized and at the same time meet the expectations of the locals.

Chapter 9 formulates an extremely important problem in relation to the construction of society, in which it explains that one of the biggest problems of African societies is that most of the communities live in deep poverty. The chapter highlights the community-forming role of religion and the church, which can motivate community mobilization as a kind of solution to poverty. The author emphasizes that one of the difficulties of community transformation is the development of specific community thinking that results from the process of colonization and segregation, which prevents all types of community transformation and participation in solving community problems. One example of this is the perception of people living in the Soshanguve community, according to which community members are inferior to white people. For this problem, the author proposes the practical possibilities offered by the InnerCHANGE program, which could solve the challenge of transformation by increasing the self-esteem of local communities.

In the last chapter, we can gain a detailed insight into the creation of sustainability in the modern world, in relation to „harmful problems“. The mentioned concept is precisely defined by the author, which also refers to climate change and social problems that have arisen due to complex changes in technology. Furthermore, the chapter refers to social problems arising as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The author provides biblical-theological answers to the emerging situation and new challenges.

All in all, I recommend this book to those who are curious and dedicated to sustainable development in the African region, as the volume summarizes the necessary areas and needs through both theoretical and practical examples. In addition, the volume also presents an



analysis carried out with theoretically based multi- and transdisciplinary methods in relation to the economic characteristics of African and Western societies. The problems and shortcomings described in the book and the solutions offered for them can definitely contribute to building a more sustainable environment in the African region.