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Mainstreaming the 'Brown' Agenda †

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Abstract: 'Sustainable development' is a term that came into use after the Brundtland Commission's report on global environment and development in 1987. This term is also referred to as an 'oxymoron' as it comprises two words 'sustainable' and 'development' that are in many ways contradictory to each other—well illustrated by the clear divisions between the 'green' and the 'brown' agendas. This paper attempts to empirically represent this contradictory nature of the term through a specific case of ecological protection of a river versus human well-being of squatters within the context of a developing country in South Asia. The paper argues for the need to explicitly emphasize the justice aspect of sustainable development through mainstreaming the 'brown' agenda.

Keywords: 'sustainable development'; justice; human well-being; ecological protection

1. Introduction

'Sustainable development' is a concept about reconciling 'environment' and 'development' [1]. This term was first coined after the Brundtland report which connected these two terms basically stating that [2]:

'sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs.'

There is an inherent contradiction in the definition of this term as development or economic growth is one of the primary drivers for depletion of environmental resources. The division in this contradiction becomes even more evident when one compares the stage of development in the north and south. Most of the developed nations in the north are focused more on long-term ecological sustainability which is also known as the 'green' agenda, whereas the developing countries in the south have entirely different issues to deal with such as the immediate environmental impacts of rapid urbanization especially in low-income urban settlements, also known as the 'brown' agenda. Allen and You define the 'green agenda as ecosystem protection and the immediate effects of human activity at the regional and global scale; whereas the 'brown agenda focuses on human well-being, social justice, and the immediate problems at the local level especially in developing countries [3].

This paper describes a critical, representative case study illustrating the conflicting nature of 'green' and 'brown' agendas within the rapidly urbanizing capital city of a developing country in South Asia. The dominance of the former even in this case threatens the livelihoods of a number of riverside, squatter households. This case questions core structural issue in relation to 'sustainable development' as also argued by Redclift 'sustainability of what' and 'who decides' [4]. The paper further argues for a balanced approach with respect to this specific case as well as in the whole global discussion of 'sustainable development' more specifically within the urban planning and design education. Many dichotomies that are created north–south; developed–developing; First–Third; formal–informal, etc.

where there are actually no divides in the real sense simply to shift the focus away from the possibility of a continuum approach rather than that of a divided one. This applies even more to the terms 'sustainable development' as it should require a holistic approach, rather than a skewed one by simply 'greening' the developed countries which does not assure global sustainability (in all its aspects) for future generations.

The main theoretical concepts relevant for this research stem from critical perspectives on the term 'sustainable development' itself and green and brown agendas [4–7]. In addition, sustainable development, governance, and justice [8,9] are core theoretical concepts for this paper. After the first Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, the discussions on sustainable development shifted from 'needs' (as referred to in the Brundtland Commission's report) to 'rights'. Redclift argues that 'the preoccupation with policy notwithstanding, the links between the environment, social justice and governance had become increasingly vague in sustainable development discourses, and the *structural* relationships between *power*, *consciousness* and the environment had become blurred' [4]. The empirical evidence for this paper is part of the PhD research fieldworks conducted by the author. The paper is further divided into three main parts: theory and methods; case; discussion and conclusions.

2. Theory and Methods

2.1. Sustainable Development: An Oxymoron

The term "sustainable development" came into use in connection with environmental, social, and economic policy goals after the Brundtland Report also known as Our Common Future [10]. Redclift (2005) argues that this definition has been brought into service in absence of agreement about a process that almost everybody thinks is desirable. Consequently, the deceptive, outcome-based simplicity of this approach was able to conceal the underlying complexity and contradictions of the process. There are a number of gaps in the definition of sustainable development. Redclift (2005) argues that the first contradiction within the definition is that development or economic growth is itself the primary determinant of the change in the characteristic of 'needs' for future generation. Hence questioning the whole process of economic growth and development in relation to sustainability [4]. Redclift (2005) further also points toward considerable confusion and the failure to address exactly 'what is to be sustained' within various discourses of sustainable development. Furthermore, he also argues that the definition does not cover how 'needs' are defined in different cultures [4].

Nevertheless, the Brundtland report paved way for non-governmental organizations to consider a process to handle the serious elements in environment and development, culminating with the first Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Redclift, 1987; 1993) where the discussions shifted from 'needs' to 'rights' [7,8]. This Rio declaration in 1992 and the later Johannesburg Declaration in 2002 also detailed strategies and guidelines for Three Es (environment, economy, and equity) in order to operationalize sustainable development [11]. He further elaborates on the Three Es [11]

'Environment is what the sustainability advocates have been focusing on historically'.

'Economy within the sustainability rhetoric is the argument that economic growth is a prerequisite to tackle externalities and adversities of growth'.

'Equity is aimed at including all actors at grassroot level in a process of discourse and dialogue, engage them in conflict mitigation and consensus building and eventually leading to decision-making'.

Successively after the Rio declaration, Millennium Development Goals in 2000 identified eight goals, and more recently in 2015 Sustainable Development Goals identified 17 key goals with the aim to achieve global sustainable development. Spaiser et al. (2017) have quantitatively modeled the incompatibility of the Sustainable Development Goals and in many ways have corroborated Redclift's contradictions and have been able to quantify some of the inconsistencies [12].

Although there is clear difference between the issues related to sustainable development in the developed as compared to that of developing countries; a number of sustainability advocates have a skewed view of the world and assume that environmental sustainability in the global north is the answer to universal sustainability. This has given rise to yet another dichotomy between the north and the south—the green and the brown agenda. The 'brown' agenda is concerned with issues of social justice and satisfying the immediate needs of the 'poor' whereas the 'green' agenda is about prioritizing long-term ecological sustainability [13–15]. Furthermore, the 'brown' agenda is mainly about the needs of low-income households mostly associated with inadequacy or absence of services giving rise to immediate environmental health impacts. These are mostly prevalent in the global south. Whereas the 'green' agenda primarily deals with the challenges faced by the north or developed countries in terms of reducing the long-term impacts of 'urban and industrialization-based production, consumption, and waste generation on ecosystem, biodiversity disruption, resource depletion, and climate change.

2.2. Methods

The empirical evidence used for this paper is part of a PhD research fieldwork conducted by the author which adopts qualitative research methodology to understand the formation and development of three specific squatter settlements within Kathmandu, Nepal. The selection for the three specific settlements was based on geographic/administrative locations and entry points. Case selection was based on the objective of this research to investigate the possible differences in methods of land occupancy within Kathmandu Metropolitan City (KMC) and along borders in Village District Councils (VDCs). In addition, this research also tried to understand how households occupied and consolidated their possession of land within the typical, geographic locations: riverside, non-riverside, and steep-sloping land in the capital Kathmandu. Hence, among the three selected squatter settlements, one was riverside within the administrative boundaries of the city and the remaining two were non-riverside—one occupying steep, sloping land within the city boundaries and another within village administrative boundaries adjoining the city. Key methods used for data generation were:
Primary data sources:

- Conversations (a number of squatter households)
- Semi-structured interviews (five government officials and 48 squatter households)
- In-depth stories (six in-depth life stories)
- Focus group discussions (five focus group discussions with local Non – Government Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), grassroot squatter organizations, etc.)
- Baseline survey (detailed baseline survey for all three squatter settlements)
- Direct observations (all the three squatter settlements)

Secondary data sources:

- Reports (policy documents, National Shelter Policy, etc.)
- Seminars (planning seminars and others organized by grassroot squatter organizations)
- Newspaper clippings
- Cadastre maps

The representative eviction case study described in this paper was part of an unexpected event that occurred during the research fieldwork period from November 2011–April 2012, as a first phase of a city-wide eviction plan for all riverside squatter settlements with the aim to clean the holy Bagmati River. The selection of this particular case study squatter settlement for this paper was crucial as it explicitly represented the inherent conflict in the definition of the term sustainable development within a developing country context. During the research fieldwork, official eviction notices were sent to all riverside squatter settlements creating an uncertain, politically charged environment limiting the author to conduct primary data collection and rely heavily on secondary data such as newspaper

articles and official government publications. The author relied on telephone conversations with key informants (squatter households) to corroborate events reported by media. Hence, the author explicitly recognizes the limitation of this paper in terms of use of primary data source and reliance on secondary data sources which also provide enriching avenues of insights.

3. Case

3.1. Context

Nepal is a small landlocked country sandwiched between two global giants of South Asia—India and China. Most of the overall urbanization status of the country is contributed by its capital, Kathmandu. Although Nepal is among one of the ten least-urbanized countries in the world; the pace of urbanization is rapidly increasing with Kathmandu being the epicenter and one of the fastest growing urban agglomerations in South Asia [16]. The total population density of the country is 180 per square kilometer and the average urban population density of Nepal is 1381 per square kilometers [17]. The urban agglomeration of the capital Kathmandu also known as Kathmandu Valley further comprises one metropolitan (Kathmandu Metropolitan City), one sub metropolitan (Lalitpur), three municipalities (Bhaktapur, Kirtipur, and Madhyapur Thimi), and 57 Village Development Committees [18]. The three main urban centers—Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur respectively have population densities above 10,000 per square kilometers. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) 2014, the population density of Kathmandu was 19,726 per square kilometer, followed by Lalitpur at 14,574 and Bhaktapur at 12,462 per square kilometer [19].

Thapa et al (2008) argues that one of the main reasons for the haphazardly urban growth of the capital is due to the concentration of political, economic, and administrative powers within its boundaries [20]. According to Census 2011, the population of Kathmandu Metropolitan City is 975,453 and the whole agglomeration (Kathmandu Valley) is more than 2.5 million [21]. This rapid increase in population and the urbanization of the valley has led to complexities in the urban development processes, increasing the demand for housing, infrastructure, employment opportunities, and social services. Only a fraction of the housing in Kathmandu is institutionally sponsored by the government, educational institutions, and other agencies as site and services, or planned employee housing [22], therefore, most of houses are built by the owners themselves. Here, the issue of both the access to land and housing comes into consideration, which becomes critical especially in the case of low-income urban dwellers; access—both in terms of the necessary financial resources and the availability of land as natural resource in the urban areas.

In the context of Nepal, land has traditionally represented the principal form of wealth, symbol of social status, and source of economic and political power [23]. Therefore, land is both scarce and extremely expensive especially in the capital. There is also a lack of opportunities available for the low-income urban families as most of the financial institutions cater to the needs of the middle- and high-income families [24]. Even renting a room is becoming less of an option for low-income families as they cannot enter the competitive land and housing market. Traditionally, for extremely poor families in search of housing in Kathmandu, it was not only easier to rent cheap ground-floor rooms, but there was also another option of living in *dharmasalas, satals, pauwas,* and *patis* [25]. However, today even these spaces are completely saturated and are being compared to overcrowded slums in contrast to their once quiet sanctuary status. Therefore, the options for both formal and traditional forms of access to land and housing are slowly reducing for the low-income families.

Kathmandu Valley is therefore home to numerous squatter settlements mostly located along its riverbanks. Kathmandu Valley is located in an area contiguous with the Upper Bagmati Basin, a 600 square kilometer area that includes the drainage of the Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers (Figure 1) [26]. Rademacher (2009) further argues that rapid urban growth of the capital stimulated a level of housing demand pushing many to seek informal shelter in the riparian zone, an area of large sand flats caused in part by river morphological change. According to a report by the Department

of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC, 2010) there are 53 squatter settlements in Kathmandu Valley—35 riverside and the remaining non-riverside squatter settlements mostly on unsettled slopes and below high-tension wires [27].
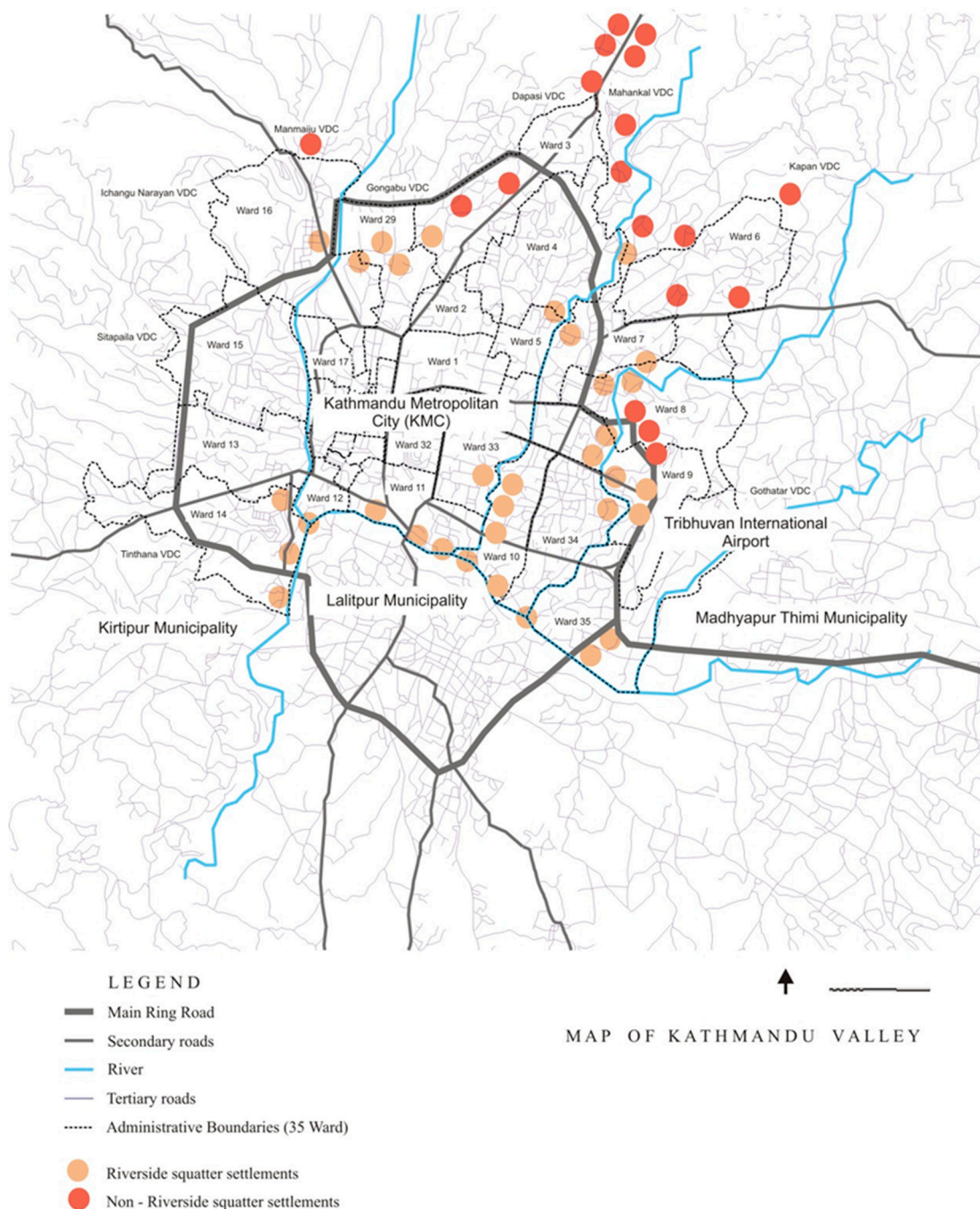
Figure 1. Location of riverside and non-riverside squatter settlements in Kathmandu Valley. Source: author.

In the context of Nepal, squatters are known as "*sukumbasis*" (literally meaning landless people). Ghimire (1992) defragments the word into two where "*sukum*" means possessing nothing and "*basi*" means settlers [28]. *Sukumbasi* is a name given to an individual or a group of people who occupy public land such as forest or land actively unclaimed by other owners. Squatter settlements or "*sukumbasi bastis*" can be defined as parcels of land ("*parti jagga*" in Nepali) for which the inhabitants do not pay taxes, hence considered illegal or informal. Although these types of informal settlements are

estimated to be growing at 12%–13% annually [29]; there is absence of a strong policy on squatters. It was only in the National Shelter Policy (2012) documents that the Government of Nepal for the first time explicitly defined the term squatters as "the number of families, who have settled as landless squatters by encroaching unregistered or barren (*parti/ailani jagga*) land of the urban areas, land located at the banks of river, unsettled slope, etc., is increasing in rapid pace" [30].

The state and development officials often question the authenticity of *sukumbasi* landlessness claims especially in urban areas where land is a very scarce and valuable resource. The capital has witnessed a number of cases of eviction of squatter settlements along the riverbanks; some due to the implementation of large development/infrastructure projects and others for environmental reasons such as cleaning-up of the holy river. Some major evictions of squatter settlements within Kathmandu Valley are illustrated in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. Major squatter settlement eviction cases within the capital Kathmandu. Source: author.

S.no	Name of Squatter Eviction	Year	Reason for Eviction
1	Paroprakar eviction	1995	Government's plan for the construction of a park which was to serve the purpose of a green belt along the riverside
2	Bagmati riverside eviction	2002	Government's plan to heighten security for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit to be held in the capital
3	Bishnumati link road eviction	2003	Construction of Bishnumati link road
4	Thapathali eviction	2012	As part of the government's plan to clean-up Bagmati River

The main discussion of this paper focuses on the most recent eviction on 8 May 2012—the Thapathali eviction case. On 8 May 2012, the Government of Nepal demolished 250 squatter houses and a school from the banks of Bagmati River as part of the first phase of the eviction notice published on 29 November 2011 in the local newspaper (as illustrated in Figure 2). This particular squatter settlement was evicted twice—they were first evicted in 2002 as part of the Bagmati riverside eviction.

Figure 2. Eviction day—8 May 2012. Source: The Guardian (9 May 2012).

3.2. The 'Green' Agenda: Ecological Sustainability of the Bagmati River

This eviction notice was part of the Bagmati Action Plan (2009–2014) with the aim to clean-up the river and revive its lost glory. Bagmati Action Plan (BAP) was launched in 2010 with an estimated budget of approximately NRs. 15 billion (1 USD = 114 Nepalese rupees (11 November 2019)) and was hailed as a national priority. A number of government and non-government organizations were part of the BAP; however, to establish coordination among these various institutions, the Bagmati Civilization Integrated Development Committee (BCIDC) was assigned as a coordinator. Bagmati

Civilization Integrated Development Committee (BCIDC) is an autonomous body established in 1995 for the sole purpose of improving the quality of water in the Bagmati River through priority sewerage and treatment plants. After months of preparation, the BCIDC called other government bodies to assist them to form a High-Power Committee for Integrated Development of Bagmati Civilization (HPCIDBC).

The main long-term objective of this High-Powered Committee for Integrated Development of Bagmati Civilization (HPCIDBC) is 'to keep the Bagmati River and its tributaries clean by preventing the direct discharge of solid and liquid waste into the river and to conserve the river system' within the Kathmandu Valley. In order to achieve this long-term goal, a number of mandatory activities were listed out [31]:

- construction of trunk sewer pipeline along both sides of the river
- construction of secondary sewer pipelines
- construction of wastewater treatment plants
- construction of river training works
- construction of roads and green belts along the banks of the river, and
- public awareness programs

On 6 March 2014, a financial agreement for the implementation of the Bagmati River Basin Improvement Project (BRBIP, which is part of the overall BAP project) was signed between the Government of Nepal and the Asian Development Bank. These are the long-term issues related to the ecological sustainability corresponding to the 'green' agenda; however, this project also has its 'brown' side. According to the chairperson of BCIDC, the biggest challenge to effective implementation of the BAP was the problem of illegal encroachment along the riverbanks. Hence the government's response to this came in the form of the Bagmati clean-up campaign which included plans to evict squatters living alongside the Bagmati and its tributaries.

3.3. The 'Brown' Agenda: Eviction of Informal Housing along the Riverbanks

According to the recent report by DUDBC, there are approximately 35 riverside squatter settlements within Kathmandu Valley. Some of these squatter settlements are located on the riverbed and pose immediate environmental impact on the inhabitants (refer to Figure 3 below). On 29 November 2011, the Government of Nepal published an eviction notice for all the riverside squatter settlements within Kathmandu Valley in the local newspaper, '*Gorkhapatra*'. The Government blamed the inhabitants of this riverside squatter settlement of polluting the river next to live stocks. On 8 May 2012, few months after the eviction notice, 250 squatter houses and a school were demolished from the banks of Bagmati River in Thapathali as part of the first phase of the eviction notice. This first phase of eviction was initiated by a high-level committee comprising representatives from the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Physical Planning and Works, HPCIDBC, and KMC (Kathmandu Metropolitan City). In terms of implementation, Kathmandu Valley Town Development Committee (KVTDC), an autonomous body under the Ministry of Physical Planning and Works was the main state institutions assigned this task. Following the eviction, the Government had also allocated a sum of NRs. 15.000 (1 USD = 114 Nepalese rupees (11 November 2019)) for each genuine evicted squatter household as rent for three months until the resettlement strategy was in place. Out of the 250 households, only 58 registered themselves as genuine landless squatters and came forward to claim this sum of money.

Figure 3. Thapathali riverside squatter settlement—June 2008. Source: author.

As an immediate response to the eviction, amidst severe opposition from the local residents, the Department of Urban Development and Building Construction (DUDBC) managed to build 23 bamboo huts as the first phase of temporary resettlement (Figure 4). Within seven days these temporary bamboo huts were built in supervision of the local police and officials from the DUDBC (interview with DUDBC official). However, these huts had to be dismantled as the families refused to move, demanding homes for all the 250 evicted squatter households. In terms of a more permanent solution, the government had already purchased seven *ropanis* (1 ropani = 5476 square feet) of land at Ichangu Narayan (Village District Council (VDC) of Kathmandu Valley) to resettle registered squatter families. According to the DUDBC, they had already allocated a budget for the construction of houses for approximately 200 families. However, there was no guarantee for this plan as it could also face resistance from the local residents and squatter families may not agree to relocate primarily due to the location of the resettlement—away from their livelihoods.

Figure 4. Bamboo huts as temporary resettlement. Source: DUDBC.

Despite reservations from the HPCIDBC, the KVTDA started the process of relocating evicted squatter families to unoccupied houses in three other riverside squatter settlements. Even this temporary solution faced resistance from the squatters residing in these three settlements as they did not want to accommodate new settlers. However, a few evicted families have been temporarily resettled in one of the assigned riverside squatter settlements. As also illustrated in Figure 5 below, by January 2013 (only eight months after the eviction), some of the evicted squatter families have moved back to occupy the same strip of land.

Figure 5. Re-occupancy of land in the Thapathali riverside squatter settlement. Source: author, 2013.

4. Discussion

4.1. 'Sustainability of What?' and 'Who Decides?'

In the above case, the prioritized sustainable development argument is that of cleaning-up of the Bagmati River. Although nearly all of Kathmandu's sewage flows untreated into the river system, the riverside squatters are often disproportionately implicated in declining water quality. Moreover, few of the squatter households, also claimed that the government used the issue of bird flu (which broke out near one of the riverside squatter settlement in the capital a week prior to the publication of the eviction notice) as part of a bigger propaganda to evict all riverside squatter settlements (Focus Group Discussions, December, 2012). In this present era, the government could not have carried out the mass eviction of all riverside squatter settlements; hence this was part of a strategic, incremental action as a relatively new, previously evicted (Bagmati Riverside eviction, 2002) squatter settlement was chosen.

During the Thapathali eviction, a school and squatter housing units were demolished in the name of cleaning-up the river. How justified and sustainable was this action? Did the quality of water in the river become any better after this eviction? On the contrary, as also mentioned above, a few months after the eviction, the same inhabitants re-occupied the riverbank (Figure 5 above). The eviction response by the government focuses only on the 'green' agenda (cleaning-up of the river) and completely ignores the 'brown' agenda (the immediate environmental impact for low-income inhabitants living along the riverbanks). As in this case, the concept of sustainable development most often compromises the immediate needs of the more vulnerable groups.

The dominance of the 'green' agenda in the sustainability rhetoric is a clear illustration of the skewed nature of the argument. In a similar manner, within the rapidly urbanizing developing countries, there is a demand for sustainable, economic development even if it is at the cost of compromising the immediate needs of its citizens (in most cases the low-income citizens). The action of government only targeting the urban 'poor' living in squatter settlements along the Bagmati River as the main reason for pollution of the river is a skewed view of sustainability as a whole where neither the 'green' nor the 'brown' agendas were achieved through this action of riverside squatter settlement eviction case. Therefore, within the sustainable development argument one can raise questions addressing core structural issues such as 'sustainability of what?' and 'who decides?'.

4.2. Governance and Socio-Economic Equity

Findings from this research also corroborate with research conducted by authors in relation to sustainable development in large southern cities. Myllylä and Kuvaja (2005) through their extensive research in large southern cities such as Cairo, Lagos, Manila, and New Delhi argue that the definition of sustainable development largely based on northern urban discourses is not equipped to deal with challenges faced by their southern counterparts [32]. Leitmann (1999) also argues that the green and

brown dichotomies are not relevant to the southern cities [33]. According to, Myllylä and Kuvaja (2005) one of the biggest challenges of environmental or sustainable urban development in these is not necessarily the lack of environmental infrastructure but existing societal inequalities, hence influencing the distribution of resources [32].

Myllylä and Kuvaja (2005) further call for a locally defined 'sustainable city' model especially in the context of southern cities which require extensive consideration of local societal and cultural condition, distribution of resources in addition to environmental development [32]. Marcuse (1998) analyzed sustainability as a criterion rather than as a goal [34]. He argues that sustainability as a goal limits its benefits to those who already have everything—'preservation of the status quo'. On the basis of Marcuse's analysis, Myllylä and Kuvaja (2005, p. 224) define sustainability not as a goal but rather as [32]

> ' . . . a criterion for motivated and transparent administration as well as efficient, flexible and equal service provision and resource allocation'.

Based on these contextual definitions of sustainable urban development, while examining large urban agglomerations within southern cities, Myllylä and Kuvaja (2005) further deconstruct the term through two key concepts of governance and socio-economic equity. Although both these issues are key to achieving global sustainable urban development, attainment of environmental development relies heavily on the achievement of good governance and social justice within large southern cities in developing countries [32].

Justice is often looked upon as a subordinate to sustainability [9]. This argument is also illustrated in the above case where the dominance of ecological sustainability of the river compromises the issue of social justice for squatter households. Redclift (2005) argues that the move from emphasis on 'needs' to that of 'rights' (Post Rio 1992) also marked the shift from broadly a Keynesian paradigm of international economic relations to the neo-liberal dominance of the market [4]. Here, it is important to note that within the neo-liberal agenda, everything is expressed through the market forces even the 'rights'-based sustainable development argument; hence further reducing the emphasis on justice. Along similar lines, Marcuse (1998, p. 105) strongly argues that 'no one who is interested in justice wants to sustain things as they are now' [34].

5. Conclusions

The above case study from a rapidly urbanizing capital city of a developing country clearly illustrates two sides of the same coin, on one side there is the 'green' agenda (ecological sustainability of the river) whereas on the other side there is the 'brown' agenda (addressing immediate needs of the urban 'poor' encroaching land along the riverbanks). A holistic approach to sustainable development requires a more nuanced and balanced strategy to achieve ecological sustainability as well as human well-being. Sustainable development must address issues of social justice and equality (at all levels) in order to achieve its real objectives. Marcuse (p. 111) builds on the Brundtland definition of sustainable development and reformulates it with more emphasis on long-term implications [34]:

> 'Sustainable development is development that meets specific needs of the present and can be maintained into the future, without detracting from satisfaction of other needs in the present or future'.

This definition of sustainable development does acknowledge that it is to consider 'universal benefits'. Global discussions on sustainable development have moved from simply taking into consideration the ecological sustainability of the 'green' agenda toward a more holistic approach of both the agendas. McGranahan et al. argue that it is important not to create a 'false dichotomy' since at a broader level 'a concern for equity' is central in both [14]. Myllylä and Kuvaja (2005) argue for the need to focus on processes linking the green and brown agendas to each other rather than comparing the controversies [32]. Niemela (1999) calls for an integrated, multidisciplinary, and holistic

approach to understanding sustainable development in relation to ecology as an integral part of urban planning [35].

A holistic understanding of the urban sustainable development is crucial especially for building environment professionals such as urban planners, architects, etc., who are primarily responsible for the present as well as the future development of cities. Mainstreaming the 'brown' agenda within the definition of sustainable development through prioritizing key concepts of governance and socio-economic equity is not only pivotal to the global discussions but is also equally important within the urban planning and design education. A skewed focus on the green agenda will not equip future urban planning and design professionals to understand and intervene sensibly in complex situations as illustrated by the case above. The paper also calls for the need to put forward more empirically based case study research unpacking the term sustainable development especially within large southern cities.

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