

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: THE NEXUS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AND SDGS IN GHANA

Alcançando metas de desenvolvimento sustentável: o nexo entre a aplicação da lei ambiental e SDGS em Gana

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ABSTRACT

The environment plays a vibrant role in sustaining human life such that without a suitable environment, humans will find it difficult to survive. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana mandates an excellent and healthy environment for all. Hence, it's a human right that must be upheld and needs a collective effort to sustain it. Thus, the state, government, and stakeholders must protect and manage the environment to implement sustainable development. The Ghanaian environment can support Ghanaians in line with implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs have since 2015 become the regulating framework driving global development discussions. This paper examines the nexus between environmental law enforcement and implementing SDGs in Ghana. The researchers adopted a complete interpretative document analysis for this study, which showed the careful but rigorous investigation of environmental law enforcement and SDGs. This technique confirmed the genuineness of the information studied and interpreted in the study. The study found that environmental law enforcement and the implementation of SDGs in Ghana are directly linked. Thus, the regulation aligns with the goals of 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of the SDGs directly associated with environmental sustainability. Also, environmental law enforcement in Ghana through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) concerning Environmental Protection and Management is protective and suppressive. This study further unravels that a supervisory outline is mandatory to enable sustainable development within Ghana's environmental protection and law enforcement issues and to guarantee its alignment with SDGs. This should be established based on the participation of stakeholders. As a result, the researchers recommend that the government establish strong management and accountability in sustainable development by measuring, supervising, revising, and evaluating their growth towards meeting SDGs in environmental issues geared towards achieving SDG targets and frequently communicating their development to the public.

Keywords: Environmental law, enforcement, sustainable development goals

ACEITO EM: 13/11/2022

PUBLICADO: 30/12/2022

ALCANÇANDO METAS DE DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL: O NEXO ENTRE A APLICAÇÃO DA LEI AMBIENTAL E SDGS EM GANA ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE

Achieving sustainable development goals: the nexus between environmental law enforcement and SDGS in Ghana

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RESUMO

O ambiente desempenha um papel vibrante na manutenção da vida humana de tal forma que, sem um ambiente adequado, os seres humanos terão dificuldade em sobreviver. A Constituição da República de Gana de 1992 determina um ambiente excelente e saudável para todos. Portanto, é um direito humano que deve ser respeitado e precisa de um esforço coletivo para sustentá-lo. Assim, o Estado, o governo e as partes interessadas devem proteger e gerenciar o meio ambiente para implementar o desenvolvimento sustentável. O ambiente ganês pode apoiar os ganeses em consonância com a implementação dos Objetivos de Desenvolvimento Sustentável (ODS). Os ODS tornaram-se, desde 2015, o marco regulatório que impulsiona as discussões sobre o desenvolvimento global. Este artigo examina o nexo entre a aplicação da lei ambiental e a implementação de ODS em Gana. Os pesquisadores adotaram uma análise completa de documentos interpretativos para este estudo, que mostrou a investigação cuidadosa, mas rigorosa, da aplicação da lei ambiental e dos ODS. Essa técnica confirmou a autenticidade das informações estudadas e interpretadas no estudo. O estudo constatou que a aplicação da lei ambiental e a implementação de ODS em Gana estão diretamente ligadas. Assim, a regulamentação se alinha às metas de 6, 7, 12, 13, 14 e 15 dos ODS diretamente associados à sustentabilidade ambiental. Além disso, a aplicação da lei ambiental em Gana através da Agência de Proteção Ambiental (EPA) sobre Proteção e Gestão Ambiental é protetora e supressiva. Este estudo revela ainda que um esboço de supervisão é obrigatório para permitir o desenvolvimento sustentável dentro das questões de proteção ambiental e aplicação da lei de Gana e garantir seu alinhamento com os ODS. Isso deve ser estabelecido com base na participação das partes interessadas. Como resultado, os pesquisadores recomendam que o governo estabeleça uma forte gestão e responsabilização no desenvolvimento sustentável, medindo, supervisionando, revisando e avaliando seu crescimento para o cumprimento de ODS em questões ambientais voltadas para o cumprimento de metas de ODS e frequentemente comunicando seu desenvolvimento ao público.

Palavras-chave: Lei ambiental, aplicação, objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável

INTRODUCTION

Humans need a beautiful and healthy environment for living, and in return, the environment needs to be sustained to support future generations. The environment is also a substantial part of efforts to sustain human life, such that without a healthy environment, humans will find it difficult to survive (Ahmad, 2015). However, some problems like illegal logging, unrestrained land clearing, and bush fires, among other problems, occur globally as natural disasters, which makes it difficult for sustainable human living (Sambe et al., 2018). Due to the rapid development of urban centers and increasing industrial centers, environmental damage is highly spread, making many countries experience several disasters (Aboagye et al., 2021). The increasing disaster outbreak has drawn much international community's attention, such that the general Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) have captured in their action plans these environmental aspects (Dugarova & Gülasan, 2017). Countries around the globe have enacted several environmental laws and regulations to control and conserve the environment, and these regulations are meted out strictly to ensure environmental protection (Ashour et al., 2015). This has called for the adoption of litigation procedures to resolve environmental disputes when the need arises (Nwazi, 2017).

The case of Ghana cannot be overlooked. As a legal order, Ghanaians are obligated to defend and protect the environment without any fear while upholding all other duties as enshrined in Chapter Six (6), Article 36 (9) of the 1992 Republic of Ghana Constitution. This legal mandate is relevant in all environmental spheres, and one particular way to do that is by enforcing environmental laws and policies (Mensah et al., 2020). Thus, the government, citizens, and stakeholders must protect and manage the environment to ensure sustainable environmental development. Boyle (2012) and Khan & Chang (2018) suggest that since environmental deterioration is carried out in an organized way; therefore, it necessitates all-inclusive efforts to tackle it. The use of natural resources must be in synchronization and balance with the environment's functions. Therefore, developmental strategies, plans and programs must be infused with the responsibility to conserve the environment and realize SDGs. Chapter Six (6), Article 36 (9) of the 1992 Republic of Ghana Constitution, further expounds on the concerns for environmental protection and management. It essentially mandates the government to make a strategic environmental plan to ensure that environmental sustainable development ideologies have become the foundation and are unified into developing the country's policies and strategic program. Thus, the outcome of the planned environmental studies must be used as the foundation for advancing the policies, procedures and strategies in the particular area (Mancini & Sala, 2018; Owusu et al., 2016).

For countries to meet the SDG target set, especially on environmental goals, there is the need to develop a safe disposal system with negligible risk to the environment, health and survival of humans and other living things (Mensah, 2019). Also, hazardous and poisonous constituents and their wastes need to be suitably protected and managed. The recent progress and quickly increasing industrial development are accompanied by the failure to define and realize the precise definition of environmental damages, which, as a result, allows the misrepresentation of environmental protection easily. The Republic of Ghana must ensure that it is free from dumping hazardous and poisonous waste from outside Ghana's territory, implying that there should be a more systematic understanding for stakeholders to prevent them from committing environmental crimes (Bisschop, 2012). Environmental crimes, by their very nature, are transboundary and involve cross-border unlawful groups. In global free trade, the ease of communication of goods and money enables groups' actions involved in an environmental crime (Lambrechts & Hector, 2016). Pre-emptive measures regulating environmental impacts need to be carried out by making maximum use of monitoring and licensing instruments. Countries have adopted preventive measures, including the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), to manage environmental issues and implement environmental laws (Aung, 2017). EIA is also critical in acquiring an environmental permit, which is essential before acquiring an occupational license. The conditions related to a study of environmental effects, environmental regulatory damage can be curtailed (Durden et al., 2018).

When the environment has deteriorated and damaged, there is the need to make repressive procedures ineffective and reliable law enforcement against environmental damage. In this vein, countries including Ghana need to develop a legal system for environmental protection and management that is compelling, firm, and complete to assure legal certainty as a basis for protecting and managing natural resources and other development events (Elegbe, 2016). The laws of the Republic of Ghana, Environmental Protection Agency (Act 490, Part 1, Section 12), relating to Environmental Protection and Management, also uses various legal provisions, including administrative and criminal law. Hence, the law enforcers, primarily public prosecuting attorneys and courts, must find laws and regulations concerning environmental crimes (Gemadzie & Agyekum, 2016). The Republic of

Ghana is dedicated to realizing the 3, 6, 11, 13, 17 Goals and 169 targets of the SDGs global action plan from 2016 to 2030 (Nhamo, 2017).

Although several researches have explored environmental law enforcement, the state of SDGs (Dosu & Hanrahan, 2021; Lariatu, 2019), Ghana has contributed significantly to achieving the target set. Yet, the issue of environmental law enforcement and SDGs have not been extensively discussed. This has been due to the changes in the laws and regulations enacted by Ghana. Additionally, with technological advancement and changes in environmental laws (Twerefou, 2009; Warden-Fernandez, 2001), more theoretical and empirical researches are needed to ascertain the challenges that impede effective environmental law enforcement when countries try to achieve their SDG targets. In this regard, the recent study contributes to the literature by exploring the challenges of Environmental Law enforcement to implement SDGs in Ghana.

Additionally, to the best of the authors' knowledge, no study has examined the challenges of Environmental Law enforcement to implement SDGs in Ghana. Based on this discussion, the study highlights the efforts being made to enforce environmental law in Ghana. Also, the nexus between environmental law enforcement and SDGs implementation in Ghana.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 2015, SDGs have become the standardized framework that has taken the center of global development discussions. Countries and other international organizations concerned with developmental issues have taken the forefront and taken comprehensive action to assemble resources to achieve these developmental goals (Tuokuu et al., 2019). There is increasing recognition in environmental issues, especially environmental law enforcement, to achieve SDGs globally. According to Elder & Simon (2019), in their study, it was concluded that the environment is broadly fused into SDGs, with comprehensive and ambitious targets, which reflect environmental concerns throughout the SDGs. Together with some of the most important ones, many environments-associated goals are placed under "non-environmental goals". Schanes et al. (2018) are also of the view that SDGs also adopt the view that economic growth can be environmentally sustainable using "decoupling" and "resource efficiency" as critical technological solutions. In a study, Menton et al. (2020) expounded that the SDGs could lead to environmental justice and injustices through their combined effect, trade-offs, and inconsistencies. Until now, environmental and social justice are not currently embedded within the SDGs discourse. Scharlemann et al. (2020) unraveled that only ten years remain to achieve all (SDGs) globally; there is a growing need to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of action by aiming for multiple SDGs. According to Scharlemann et al. (2020), more environmentally-focused SDGs support sustainable development; none focuses clearly on the environment-human linkages.

Other scholars (Schanes et al., 2018) believe that some governments across the globe banned a more transformative objective 'beyond GDP', the concept of environmental boundaries, and robust implementation mechanisms. Thus, the environmental essentials in many targets were not included in indicators, or the indicators lacked ambition or were watered down. In their study, Elder & Simon (2019) also concluded some crucial reasons for attaining the unified and robust approach to environment and development at the level of goals and targets. These factors include; (a) the role of new concepts on the importance of the environment and an integrated approach to sustainable development, which was helped by the science and research community; and (b) the institutional structure and working modes of the Open Working Group (which drafted the text of the SDGs) whose unique characteristics simplified the final agreement. The reduction of the indicators resulted from a very different institutional structure and process with different actors and from the development-focused legacy of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that had not resulted in insufficient dimensions for methodically measuring environmental concerns (Scholz, 2017). The fundamental part of environmental criminal law cannot be found in penal codes containing the primary offenses in many legal systems. The central part of environmental criminal law consists of provisions incorporated in an administrative nature's environmental statutes and have compliance with administrative obligations as their primary function. Environmental criminal law is not formulated autonomously but is instead developed as an addition to regulation. An essential part of environmental criminal law will consist of violations of a regulatory nature in legal practice. For instance, the polluter will be prosecuted for discharging certain substances into the environment without a permit or violating permit conditions (Gibbs et al. 2010).

This study adopts SDGs as its theoretical framework to examine how implementing them is impeded by effective environmental law enforcement, especially in the Ghanaian domain. The international community in September 2015 approved “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for sustainable development” with 17 SDGs, to promote the well-being of humanity and protect the earth for future generations (Rasul, 2015). The 2030 Agenda for SDGs is a new development treaty that encourages changes to shift towards sustainable development based on human rights and equality to promote social, economic, and environmental development (Menton et al., 2020). According to Saner (2020), SDGs are enforced with worldwide, unified and inclusive values to ensure that no one will be overlooked. The SDGs must answer two things (For example, procedural and substantial justice) with these principles. Procedural justice is the extent to which all parties, especially those left behind, can be involved in the whole development process. Substantial justice is when emerging strategies and programs address citizens’ problems, especially groups (Holland & Holland, 2017). Janouř (2016) expounds that before the SDGs were adopted, members belonging to the United Nations (UN) met to discuss the need to develop new development goals to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). After extensive discussions and actions, the SDGs were theorized. Ghana, a beacon in Africa promoting peace and environmental development, was nominated to be part of the seventy (70) member country Open Working Group (OWG) established in 2013 with the directive of scheming the SDGs (National Development Planning Commission, 2015). The SDGs, presented in Figure 1 have 169 targets and 230 indicators (Janouř, 2016). The goals are “limited in number, ambitious, and easy to communicate, addressing all three dimensions of sustainable development” (National Development Planning Commission, 2015, p. 3).

According to the UN, the goals are all consistent and, with the full support of all 190 member countries, they are attainable (Allen et al., 2017; Rasul, 2015). They are unified because all the goals are correspondingly significant and transformative. After all, together with the Paris Agreement, they are meant to fight poverty, combat climate change, and build peaceful societies on healthy earth (Janouř, 2016). Researches (Mio et al., 2020) provides evidence of interconnectivity between environmental law enforcement and the SDGs through its best practices model from study to production envisions that environmental protection can contribute to all 17 SDGs. It raises awareness of the opportunities and challenges that the SDGs pose for the environment and its stakeholders and enables multi-stakeholder dialogue on how to address these challenges and achieve them. Environmental law enforcement is responsible for some of the very problems the SDGs are trying to address, including environmental degradation, among others (Mio et al., 2020; Saner, 2020). To ultimately achieve the aims and purposes of the SDGs, Janouř (2016) commend the operationalization of the SDG targets because “Only proper conceptualization and operationalization of the targets will change them from ambiguous and typically theoretical concepts to tools, which are reasonable in terms of empirical comments, measurable by appropriate indicators”. In Ghana, the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) ensures that the country is well-positioned to achieve all 17 goals by 2030. Some of the activities the NDPC has been bespoke to undertake to include public engagements to solicit views and opinions from the citizenry, incorporating SDGs into national development plans, and monitoring and evaluation. Despite the determined and all-inclusive nature of the SDGs, some member countries argue that there are too many goals and unachievable (Oteng-Ababio, 2017). Janouř (2016) has identified some essential feebleness with the SDG framework, including “poor arrangement of targets and goals with existing global agreements and political procedures; lack of effective operation; conflicts between goals and targets, and non-quantified targets.”

Figure 1 - Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Source: (MDG Monitor, 2015)

Environmental law enforcement of the Republic of Ghana regarding Environmental Protection and Management presents the risk of minimum and maximum penalties, development of evidence, punishment for violations of quality standards, integrated criminal law enforcement, and corporate crime regulation. Enforcement of environmental law still sees the principle of *ultimum remedium*, which helps apply law enforcement as a last option after administrative law enforcement is thought unsuccessful. The *ultimum remedium* principle request only applies to certain formal crimes, namely punishment for violations of wastewater quality standards, emissions, and disturbances (Firdaus et al., 2020).

2 METHODOLOGY

An in-depth literature review-based method was employed to help realize this paper’s aim. Hence, a wide-ranging review was conducted to find significant works available (Creswell & Zhang, 2009) to date relating to environmental laws, environmental law enforcement and SDGs. An online academic and scholarly database, search engines and websites of standard global and national firms and publishers were examined to spot the significant works in the area. The researchers scrutinized and studied the documents to understand their contents (Tuffour, 2017). The researchers concise the main concepts of the documents collected (Van Hoecke & Mary, 2016). The main ideas were clustered into themes, and a detailed understanding of the secondary data was studied (Tuffour, 2017). The researchers gathered local governments’ environmental law implementation, enforcement, and SDG information from various news media, websites, and published articles. Lastly, the studied documents’ evidence was rigorously evaluated and presented in a convincing write-up to reflect how realizing SDGs in Ghana is affected by environmental law enforcement. The study was focused on Ghana because Ghana has put environmental laws and has declared its stance on achieving the SDG targets by 2030. Still, some challenges impede Ghana’s aim of achieving its goals (Tuokuu et al., 2019). This paper’s findings were through the interpretative document analysis that guided the careful but rigorous examination of environmental law enforcement and SDGs. This study method confirmed the reliability and genuineness of the information studied and interpreted (Hefferman, 2013). More so, the documents are stable, “nonreactive” data sources, meaning that the researchers had the opportunity to read and review the documents multiple times and remained unchanged by the researchers’ influence (Bowen, 2009, p. 31).

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Maintaining environmental sustainability implies that the environment should be conserved and protected. Thus, it is not adequate to set rules and regulations that will prevent environmental deterioration but requires that law enforcement efforts be made effective. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana directs powers to some agencies and authorities to be responsible for the environment. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Act 490 (part 1, section 14) of Ghana entrusts the Minister’s power to carry out all management authorities

in environmental protection and management and coordinate with other environmental agencies. The Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation also outlines the minister's extensive powers to protect and manage their respective regions' environment. Thus, an establishment that has a capacity based on the Law of Ghana concerning environmental protection and management is not only an association that regulates and directs the implementation of policies. This establishment is expected to have a scope of authority to supervise natural resources management purposes. To ensure these establishments' key responsibilities, funding from the state income and expenditure budget is suitable for the Government and adequate local revenue and expenditure funds for local governments. The objective of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Act 490 (part 1, section 14) can be achieved if citizens play a role in acquiring in-depth knowledge to learn sustainable development and apply them. Thus, Ghana will realize sustainable development within the national development framework, economic, social and environmental through Act 490.

Globally, implementing environmental laws to achieve SDG's target has been obstructed by some criminal activities. In Ghana, firms and establishments carry out many problems of environmental crimes. Usually, these crimes lead to damages and cause environmental damages and pollution to a more considerable extent. There are many issues of environmental degradation which have caused an alarming issue to the environment. Civil and criminal provisions related to environmental management in Ghana have been expounded and protected by the EPA of Ghana. These civil and criminal environmental law enforcement suggest several actions that can assist government and non-governmental investors and stakeholders and individuals in adopting alternate remedies to help ensure agreements with and enforcement of the stipulated environmental requirements. Several ways can be adapted to include non-governmental players with environmental skills that can complement legal action by the state to bring offenders into compliance. In Ghana, through the EPA Act 490, judges have been training and exposed. For instance, in Ghana, conviction rates have enhanced in cases relating to fisheries offenses. Officers from the Attorney General's Departments of Regional Coordinating Directorates, Regional Police Commands, the Fisheries Commission, Circuit Court judges, Naval Commands and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) have been skilled on effective prosecution management. Also, the police are proficient so that they can help in environmental surveys. It is important to note that the most common procedure of enforcement practice is the obligation of unlawful sanctions. The formal situations for criminal environmental law enforcement are expected to be similar to those for civil enforcement in Ghana. Still, they will be better advanced in many cases, stating the long past of criminal prosecution as the primary means of law enforcement. Thus, a good practice is for government sectors lacking in capacity to enter into partnerships, or at least partnerships, with laboratories.

The implementation and enforcement of criminal law in the environmental sector have not attained the anticipated goals. One of the challenges that have caused this failure is the lack of management, organization, and agreement customarily, structurally, and considerably in the criminal justice system—including preventive and repressive action for realized SDGs. In achieving the SDGs in Ghana, the element of preventive and repressive comes to the fore. Preventive means the same as compliance, including negotiation, supervision, information, and advice, while repressive means to investigate to apply both administrative and criminal sanctions (Elder & Simon, 2019). By implication, environmental law enforcement is an optional process, so law enforcers can choose which approach is the best to enforce. Preventive actions in environmental regulatory impacts need to be agreed upon using monitoring and licensing instruments, which the government can carry out, regional government, and the community. Repressive actions are agreed out if environmental pollution and damage have happened, either through administrative, civil, or criminal law instruments.

Enforcement of environmental laws consists some several quite multifaceted elements to sustain and create an environment that every human being can enjoy in a broad sense without troubling the environment. In Ghana, enforcing and implementing environmental laws to achieve SDGs can be likened to the rule of law that applies and functions in society. Thus, multiple legal procedures have been made in laws and various implementing regulations to capture irresponsible parties' attitudes. Environmental law enforcement and implementation aim to enforce regulations such that repressive and prevents environmental destructions do not occur. By implications, it involves all law enforcement officers and increases. Researchers (Allen et al., 2017; Menton et al., 2020) support that environmental law enforcement will undeniably experience several difficulties so that if it is permitted to continue, it will result in more severe environmental damage. In this present era where achieving SDGs have become very vital, the government of Ghana is interested in attaining a sustainable life although it has not fully controlled environmental deterioration. Therefore, there is a need to develop a clear,

firm, and comprehensive legal system for environmental protection and management to assure legal certainty as an origin for defending and managing natural resources and other development actions.

In Ghana, the EPA Act 490, which is based on good governance drawing its strength from the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana expounds that in every procedure, the design and application of preventive instruments environmental deterioration, as well as the prevention and enforcement of the law, necessitates the incorporation of aspects of transparency, participation, accountability, and justice. When there are criminal and civil cases concerning the environment, which impedes realizing SDGs, the appropriate authorities in Ghana ensure justice, like the police, judges, and prosecutors backed by the EPA Act 490. Solodov & Zebek (2020) affirms and concludes in their research that environmental protection through criminal law has a binding effect in Poland and Russia. It is different from the case of the United States, which considers criminal sanctions to achieve environmental goals. Presently, Ghana has not met all the SDGs, especially those that emphasize environmental sustainability. Mensah (2019) affirms this with evidence from their study that Ghana can still attain the SDGs but will need more efforts to limit environmental degradation while efficiently making judicious use of its resources. They will also not causing damage to the environment. SDG points 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15 are directly linked to environmental sustainability. These SDG targets are mostly related to the natural environment but seem impossible to achieve in the due time frame, 2030. Thus, in enforcing and implementing environmental law in the Republic of Ghana, attention and priority should be given to the legal instruments and law enforcement and implementation in a preventive sense should be considered, primarily through socializing Law. By implication, there should be a rigorous monitoring and licensing instrument to serve as a check on environmental protection. In Ghana, the government becomes the principal regulatory, supervisory and licensing agency with the help of other agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency, Minerals Commission, among others. These agencies are required to by law under the 1992 Constitution of Ghana, EPA Act 490, Minerals and Mining Act, 2006 (Act 703) respectively to apply the guiding principles of environmental protection and supervision grounded on good governance. The EPA Act 490 mandates the Minister of Environment, Technology, Science and Innovation in Ghana to carry out all official government duties concerning environmental protection geared towards attaining the goals 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of the SDGs.

Human rights and the environment are dependent on one another. As enshrined in Chapter Six (6), Article 36 (9) of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana calls for a collective effort to protect the environment. As such, the rights and responsibilities and community participation of the citizens are duly protected and respected. Protecting the fundamental human rights of citizens is one of the effective measures to achieve environmental protection. Chapter five (5) of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana upholds fundamental human rights. This implies that people can contribute without fear to protecting the environment, achieving the SDG targets. Rules and regulations concerning the protection of the environment can concurrently uphold human rights, particularly those linked to matters of the right to life, the right to health, freedom from intrusion with property rights and the compromise of protection rights for rural communities. Isiksel (2016) affirms that human rights are classical for the advanced development of international environmental law and a possible self-governing tool for protecting the environment. Thus, understanding and identifying human rights means conserving the domain used to attain sustainable development. World Health Organization (2017) also affirms that SDG goals aim to help people fulfill their dignity, equality, and a healthy environment. The accessibility to natural resources in number or value is not evenly spread, while advanced activities necessitate increasing natural resources. These development activities carry the risk of environmental deterioration. Thus, the Ghanaian environment must be effectively protected and accomplished based on state accountability values and sustainability principles. Environmental protection involves developing a unified scheme in a national policy on environmental protection to augment the already existing environmental policies. Thus, Ghana's determination to implement SDGs, especially goals 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, and 15, is directly related to environmental sustainability and needs a collective effort to achieve these aims fully.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted a need for unvarying understanding and knowledge share on Sustainable Development in Ghana, especially regarding the environment. Stakeholders in Ghana's environmental protection sector should endeavor to understand the UN SDGs framework and start to employ it to develop sustainability proficiencies, skills and competencies concerning environmental protection and management. The debate and

discussions (Yeleliere et al., 2018) about SDGs have been narrowed down to the African continent and its development path, especially when environmental development has been taunted as a model that concurrently leads to economic growth and the protection of the earth (Mio et al., 2020). The universal acceptance of the UN SDGs implies that all countries across the globe are to apply and achieve the SDG target within the specified time frame. However, the environmental conditions associated with the African continent of which Ghana is not an exception demand that much attention be given to the social, political and economic environments in which they are implemented so that the ultimate aims of the SDGs will be achieved. For Ghana and other countries to practically achieve the aims of SDGs should be placed within local, national and regional settings that are beneficial for understanding how these goals meet the real world. Government should involve their key stakeholders and assist them in understanding the demands and consequences of integrating the UN SDGs into environmental issues in Ghana. The Government should establish strong management and accountability in sustainable development by measuring, supervising, revising and evaluating their growth towards meeting SDGs in environmental issues geared towards achieving SDG targets and frequently communicate their development to the public.

Nevertheless, amongst all the contributions made, the study was restricted in the following ways. First, the interpretive document analysis adopted for this study limited the general scope of this study. This was because not all the documents recovered and thoroughly studied and surveyed provided all the essential evidence to achieve the study's aim. Some of the documents provided beneficial information, while others provided nominal information. Although the findings of this study provide vital evidence on implementing environmental laws to achieve SDGs in Ghana, future studies ought to emphasize other environmental law enforcement within Africa to widen the research scope. Future studies can adopt quantitative methods so that findings can be generalized.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

The authors received no direct funding for this research.

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