Sustainable Rural Development as a Strategic Option for Achieving Food Security

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Abstract:
This study explores sustainable rural development as a strategic option for achieving foodsecurity and social justice in developing countries. It highlights the growing gap between rural food production and urban consumption, which exacerbates poverty, rural-urban migration, and environmental degradation. The paper critically evaluates traditional development models and proposes an alternative framework centered on sustainable agriculture, local empowerment, and integrated policy reform. Emphasis is placed on inclusive approaches that engage all stakeholders—particularly smallholder farmers, women, and youth—in co-creating resilient and equitable food systems. The study underlines the need for national and international policies that safeguard land rights, promote environmental sustainability, and enhance rural livelihoods. Innovations in agriculture, coupled with stronger governance structures, are viewed as essential tools to address systemic imbalances in the food system. The paper concludes that sustainable rural development is a vital pathway to long-term food sovereignty, ecological preservation, and socioeconomic equity.

Keywords : Sustainable rural development, food security, social justice, agricultural policy.

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1. Introduction

The rural-urban divide between food production and large-scale consumption of agricultural products poses a risk on food security, social justice as well as the fragmentation of the food system contributing to an imbalance in socio-economic development. For sustainable rural development, the notion of rurality, food security, social justice and sustainability is discussed. The aim is to strategically discuss the concept of sustainable rural development as an alternative framework to traditional rural development. The rural development concepts of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, European Union and Food and Agriculture Organization are discussed followed by some reflections on them in the context of sustainability. It is highlighted that development concepts do not only describe the socio-economic realities of under-development countries, but also represent a particular way the modernisation debate is framed.

Concerns about mounting food security threats in rural areas of the world particularly in developing countries have gained increased prominence recently. The causes for this and possible responses focus primarily on the supply-demand imbalances in the food system. Supply-consumption imbalances have caused large numbers of farmers to migrate out of rural areas and many others to slide into or remain in poverty. Social justice questions of rural food production are largely ignored in current responses to food security threats. A holistic approach is needed to simultaneously address the state of farming vis-a-vis the viability of rural areas and food security in a developing country context. For rural development, food security and social justice, the development of sustainable rural systems with alternative agricultural systems is proposed as both a response to food security fears and a means of creating justice. To try to answer this, we raised this issue: **What policy reforms are needed to align rural development with food security and ecological sustainability?**

Significance of the Topic:. enhancing food security Addressing imbalances between agricultural production and consumption in rural and urban areas. mitigating food insecurity threats in developing countries caused by rural migration and weak production systems. promoting social justice Bridging economic gaps between small-scale farmers and large-scale commercial agriculture. - Safeguarding the rights of rural farmers and improving their livelihoods. advancing environmental and economic sustainability Developing alternative sustainable agricultural systems instead of relying on large-scale monoculture. - Preserving natural resources and preventing soil and water depletion. reducing rural migration and poverty Stimulating rural development to create employment opportunities and reduce urban migration. - Strengthening the resilience of rural communities against economic and climate-related crises.

Objectives of the Topic: analyzing current challenges examining the causes of food system imbalances between rural and urban areas. - Assessing the impact of land grabbing on food sovereignty and security. critiquing traditional rural development models Evaluating development frameworks by organizations such as IFAD, the EU, and FAO. - Highlighting the shortcomings of existing models in achieving justice and sustainability proposing an alternative sustainable development framework Advocating for a rural development model

based on sustainable agriculture and local communities. Promoting small-scale and diversified farming systems over industrial monoculture. encouraging sustainable policies and practices:* - Advocating for policies that support smallholder farmers and rural economies. - Strengthening collaboration between governments and civil society for inclusive development.

2. Understanding Sustainable Rural Development

Sustainable rural development as a strategic option acknowledges that there are different aspects of sustainable development. The concept of sustainable development was first coined in the 1987 Brundtland Report, which was meant "Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". The societal, political and economic advancement aspects of development evolved into the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Hameed & Qaiser, 2017).

Rural development, on the other hand, is intended to mean the integrated rural development, which means economic development, welfare, and empowerment of rural population. The needs of the rural population can therefore be counted as a lot of things such as rural infrastructure, economic growth including agricultural and industrial development, employment opportunities, income generation, health, education, sanitation, empowerment and participatory governance etc. The provisions of these goods and services therefore shall be regarded as part of rural development. There are rural development provisions being made available due to mainly two reasons; the first being having lower number of population in own developed regions for urbanization to occur (Lee Howe, 2008). This is considered as a process and is regarded as general development, with human capital being transferred to urban areas. However this process cannot be infinite because at one point, there shall be a point when urban environments can not absorb and provide for the population; therefore equal opportunity and justice in provision of goods and services shall have to be taken seriously.

3. The Interconnection of Food Security and Social Justice

Food security and social justice are essential facets of a fair, equitable and sustainable world. Both highlight the interconnected issues of underdevelopment, food insecurity, income inequality and the lack of access to necessary resources for the fulfilment of basic human rights (Metzler, 2016). Consequently, sustainable rural development has priority status in global, regional and national processes as a strategic option for achieving food security and social justice. Nevertheless, rural areas, especially in developing regions, often face serious obstacles to their sustainable development. Agriculture must be transformed to facilitate rural development, and vice versa. A systemic and integrated approach that encompasses and actively engages all stakeholders, including peasant and smallholder farmers, women, youth, indigenous peoples and landless workers, is vital to ensure well co-ordinated, coherent and mutually reinforcing actions within and between all relevant sectors and at all levels. Past development efforts in many rural areas have not led to social inclusion, social justice, greater equality or food security; we must learn the lessons of the past and implement the peoples' proposals that are framed by the human rights-based approach and social justice. Social protection and supply-side approach to increases in access to resources—recognising women's rights to access productive resources—are vital to equitable rural development. Land, credit, technology, information and public

infrastructure are among the necessary resources that enable farm diversification and that improve incomes and food security. This demand must be met on a non-discriminatory basis to conditions of gender and class, and for social and ethnic minorities. Access to inputs, cooperatives, powers and value addition for agriculture are social justice concerns. It is also crucial to ensure that the long-standing debts arising from the realisation of peasant and smallholder farmers', women's and indigenous peoples' rights in the implementation of the rights-based development paradigm are re-paid in full. Mechanisms and policies for the equitable redistribution of land, water, forest and fishery resources, financial resources and technology must be clearly articulated and supported through multi-lateral or regional agreements that co-ordinate regulation for the prevention of structural violence against rural communities. (Onyeaka et al.2024)

4. Policy Frameworks for Sustainable Rural Development

Over the last few decades, rural development initiatives have been implemented in developing countries to include rural populations in a higher priority list of them as "forgotten." The first initiatives came up in developed countries before the 1970s in form of community development programs and later rural development programs were sensitive toward the effect of rising tensions between urban and rural locations. After the famous "Green Revolution" in agricultural productivity, world agencies gave a higher priority to rural development together with agricultural extension for increasing food security. On the other hand, as in many developing nations, agricultural land and laborers are on a highly vulnerable stage in the respect that farmland is changing into urban land-use intensively; especially after the global financial crisis, poverty and inequality have been aggravated (Johnson & Resnick, 1970). There are only a few programs which focused on sustainable food security by valuing farmers' domestic products and social justice on continued utilization of farmland through effective land-use management planning although the planner tried with "experiment value in orchestrated planning."

Rural development is a multi-disciplinary social phenomenon, subjective, therefore, needs to be a model structure-based but it is simply treated as agricultural extension-educational and community development program. Following the United Nations report of UNECE/OECD/Eurostat Working Group on statistics for sustainable development, a framework is a practical set of principles and rules that allows one to select a limited set of determinant of sustainable rural development in a coherent and consistent manner (N. Ekong & U. Onye, 2016). This body of research is a framework for measuring the sustainability of rural development in OECD countries. It conceptualizes the notion of sustainability and compares the construction of the OECD framework with that of the United Nations report. The incursions of rural policies are then highlighted in the context of the development of rural statistics, and their sustainability indicators.

4.1. National Policies

Sustainable rural development can only be achieved when efforts to strengthen the sustainability of rural resources are consolidated with an explicit focus on progressing towards food security and social justice. Similarly, national and international developments towards food security and social justice have to be reinforced by attention to the sustainability of rural resources. Especially the recognition of rural resources, land and

labor, as sustainable economic, environmental and social assets is key for that. A national policy framework for sustainable rural development should consist of four essential components: (i) national vision and commitment; (ii) national assessment think-tank; (iii) national priority and action planning process; and (iv) national participatory monitoring and evaluation processes. These components should not merely be good intentions on paper, but should be observably and verifiably operationalized and rolled out. The institutions designated to facilitate those processes need to be adequately staffed and resourced (Johnson & Resnick, 1970). Statutory rights for all-against-land-grabbing should be broadly defined and enforced through civic and state structures at all levels. Users of land should have a primarily say in planning and execution. In order to prevent time-lags in such (long-term) planning processes, effective provisional arrangements for land security and development that are more micro and process oriented have to be devised, providing rural users eventful involvement in the (overdue) creation of a more complete framework for sustainable rural and agricultural development. Effective economic distribution and management agencies in areas of land, credit, input supply, crop and labor marketing, processing, irrigation, water resources development and management, and research and extension should be ensured for exemplar inclusive green growth. State-driven as well as self-initiated processes should be facilitated to better balance workshop, grant and loan receipt, provisioning, completion, management and post-management phases of project and service delivery. Effective agrarian labor protection frameworks for multisecular rural livelihood diversification opportunities should be broadly defined and enforced (including on the basis of a new agrarian labor code), and geared towards progressive improvement of occupational, living and security conditions for rural hired wage laborers and informal-sector workers. Central attention have to be paid to cooperative and community supplier groups and associations to confront unequal bargaining power relations vis-à-vis compact farm enterprises and agribusinesses. Agrarian protection and entitlement frameworks for domestic market development, food democracy and food security, and against inflationary and non-price food supply and accessibility shocks should be broadly defined and enforced.

4.2. International Agreements

Several salient international treaties and declarations formalize the obligations of States to protect the food security of rural populations and secure broad participation in public policies affecting them, echoed in States' obligations to guarantee food security through respect, protection, and fulfillment of human rights. These international agreements represent an important framework of norms. Their articulation and implementation would improve the situation of rural populations and facilitate their contribution to global goals of food security, social justice, and environmental sustainability. These obligations, however, are often largely disregarded and their implementation haphazard, in spite of a proliferation of human rights instruments and amenable monitoring mechanisms in the post-World War II era. Such obligations must comprise concrete measures to ensure development and participation of rural populations in land and food systems and must not merely express global principles or regrets; compliance must be ensured through governmental commitment and political will, independent of other contentious local considerations. (Ugwu, 2021)

In spite of growing demand for additional production, only governance constraining land grabbing by States and private actors can transform rural food systems, protect social justice, and conserve biological diversity. Agriculture is mainly governed in the hands of smallholder farmers with secure land tenure and equitable access to global markets for products at sustainable prices. Such governance demands development policies centered on rural populations' needs and participation, food sovereignty, and functionality of food systems. Such measures require changes in informal and formal governance structures regulating rural food systems to promote broad participation, prevent neo-forums and capture of normal market systems by actors on all levels. Therefore, customary knowledge and informal governance systems should be protected from encroachment and respect for local vulnerability sets a limit on formal governance flexibility in the transformation of rural food systems to protect local populations. (Davis et al., 2022)

Governance is to reduce the inequality and instability of markets and provide security against threats to land tenure and livelihoods. It requires significant change in global governance of agriculture affected by trade and climate politics, through systematic assessment and radical reform to restore the primacy of human rights over economic profit in the negotiation and implementation of trade treaties at all levels (Gonzalez, 2006). Food and environmental laws should directly access customary governance systems and be assessed on their contributions to the protection of public goods instead of merely compliance with technical or financial requirements. Mechanisms for independent assessment of compliance with a broader set of workings and normative standards and the establishment of international liability for transnational corporations in the agricultural sector should be developed.

5. Role of Agriculture in Rural Development

At the community level, agricultural employment, with the sustainability determinants of rural development, have a vital role in local rural policies. In parallel with the harmonization of public policies, there are also useful local initiatives that can serve as examples. It has significant importance in the agri-food market and therefore also the rural areas. The necessity of achieving sustainable goals in these areas is also extremely important. Basically, agriculture is a strategic economic field because agriculture is closely interconnected with the other two key pieces of the economy in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) such as food industry and rural tourism as well as it contributes to the organic national economic developments. Agricultural development is also essential for achieving food safety. Surprisingly, food safety can be conceived as a multi-level issue where global level answers are also significant alongside regional and local policy options as agri-climatic effects are always local. (Ritter et al., 2013). Agricultural activities are responsible for culture value preservation in CEE regions. Local production is essential for preserving local culture, rather forgotten food production tradition, local products with specific tradition, and agroecological cultivation methods. The cultural role of agriculture could upgrade rural understanding, respect, appreciation, or including in this respect the generation gap can be approved. Nevertheless, it could also have a complicated relationship with culture in a wide sense. Agriculture, connected with local resources, needs consideration within the cultural concept. GDP growth alone could not ensure prosperity

hence other conditions of social welfare must also be satisfied. Social justice, equity, and safety could be basic social goals, against these desires the satisfaction of which must be analysed. The attention must be paid on every kind of agricultural work, family farms have to be considered with a different approach as due to their lack of preconditions could also shift its functions from food generation to other irrelevant dimensions.

5.1. Sustainable Agricultural Practices

Smallholder farmer support services must not only be need-driven but also value-adding, providing net gains to farmers, rather than tech-savvy and complex services tied up with extra costs and red tape, leading to ridiculous tech returns at global care-rated levels. Sustainable farming practices remove the prevailing snobbishness, as even successful corporate partners may go bankrupt or yield only scanty tech returns but instead create a hunger for food sovereign self-sufficiency (Chivasa, 2019). Farmers' sectors and governments should adopt a deliberate policy focus on food system security reorientation; make food sovereignty plan number one; treat food system units as security dependent national estates; create the institution of support service pledge vows; create 'G),_' ratings to translate farmer pledges into sound service provision-to-output options track; arrest the institutionalization of anti-farming service agents; ensure pragmatic knowledge translation, understanding, and scaling-up beyond national frontiers to food security institutions. Unless probed into openly, the African food watchdog will cogitate in murkiness on ways on which to make its member states come to terms with this decision-making option (D Dar & L L Gowda, 2013). States have their freedom of action on subtle but mundane turns in the dreamed of rural retrenchment; who will safely guide state press reflexion into momentous panic or sovereignty decisions on food harmless prime expectations? Food sovereignty analyses drawn from that on national holdings thereon will gear policy vision and principle governance attention into making state-on options to mention but a few on democracy and de-bureaucratization. Meanwhile, option deliberation frames must complement politically-entrenched envisaged agri-societal reactions and motivations for reversive group action. Agreement on all alternatives will yield a benchmark farm cash crop democracy ledger on service evaluation curvature to the planning commission for long-term shareholder jeering direction. Democratic and agrarian superiority services will inform the national law enforcement paper of past crimes and justice decisions required of culprits and consortium access for auctioning-off empty-handed state estates. The latter will hand over an ad hoc moral charter to a court on criminal punishment and cap/riding erstgrave recipe's appropriate for custodial sweep and expunging.

5.2. Innovations in Agriculture

Innovations in agriculture based on crop and farming system innovations and postharvest technology innovations have critical roles not only in enhancing food security but also in creating more rural jobs and generating new income sources in rural areas (Shalander et al., 2017). Agriculture innovations in this work are defined in accordance with the users, i.e. people in rural areas including farmers and their households, trading, processing, and industrial firms, local government and other public departments, NGO's, and education and research institutions. These innovations may include a new or modified application or adaptation of ideas or inventions for their new or extended uses, making existing practices more sophisticated and modern, or improving farm management practices and operations.

Innovations in agriculture can broadly be classified as follows: a. Crop or farming system innovations include new or refinements in crop varieties or breeds, cropping systems, animal husbandry practices, nursery schemes, or bioenergy systems. b. Postharvest technology innovations include refinements in processing, grading, packaging, storage, and preservation technologies. c. Institutional innovations include the development of new or improved farming systems organizations, or new ways to organize collective marketing of agricultural products and service delivery, including mechanization (Sujimin et al., 2019). Innovations in agroindustry on value addition to agricultural products and development of the agricultural consumables and associated service delivery systems such as equipment hire services or retail of farm inputs. The example in India is cited where community-based knowledge platforms have been initiated to foster access to agricultural innovations. The guiding principles for sustaining these platforms on the development of production or processing technologies, strengthening farmer-producer organizations, and on moving towards an innovation system approach are elaborated. New collaborative R&D approaches being adopted within ACIAR research projects in Bangladesh and Cambodia are discussed. Innovations in agriculture with respect to access and adoption of technologies across a range of groups of adopters and non-adopters of single or multi-technology set-ups in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors are presented. The empirical constructions will be examined through reflexive argument analysis; while approach improvement through understanding kind of qualitative patterns has been advocated as a way to offset technology diffusion lags, it is vital to investigate how ongoing experimentation by particular actors may induce qualitative changes into attained patterns. An inter-subjective pattern reliability presupposition and associated examination of reflexive positions are proposed as analytical norms; empirical importance will be revealed through consideration of findings from evidence studies across a range of technology groupings in AQEM, Actuarial Health, SRSOR, and K27 projects. The significance for European research and innovation policy will be discussed.

6. Measuring Success in Rural Development

In a world of growing inequity and shrinking space, where the divide between the rich and the poor is widening and opportunism is booming, rural development is essential to gain full citizenship for all individuals. Maintenance of the overture of Asia for 1-2 decades of develop- Operational capacity of the nation-state in many parts developing world viewed as the hindrance of full citizenship and end to legitimacy of ruling regimes. Regarding reconstruction of war torn societies or facilitating emergence of new states failed state example gives space for economistic agenda in promoting sumption-based irreparability of through liberal markets. From non-equivalence agenda to equity, space for activism and rescripting of popular identities endangered participation rights as rational choice reworked preferences prior to anti-global solidarity (N. Ekong & U. Onye, 2016).

In a semi-structured interview, respondents were asked about major interventions of rural development programs in their communities, physical indicators of improvements, and the extent to which identified improvements can be attributed to rural development program interventions. The information collected was aggregated into five qualitative categories, each of which was rated against ordinal scales. There was also an assessment of capacity to

sustain the reported improvements. Metrics to capture new benefits, access, and use of rural development program services as compared to older initiatives were also collected.

The modalities of rural development programs varied considerably among rural development project types. For example, farmer journalists and farmer group platforms were a major feature of the new generation of rural development interventions, whereas capacity building continued to feature strongly in rescaling older interventions. As a consequence, the basket of new rural development investments was already larger than older rural development investments. Nonetheless, it was still expected that future investments would focus equally on both new and older interventions, reflecting the growing importance of older issues to maintain growth in the rural economy and produce growth-diminishing rural spaces. With the transition to the new generation of rural development programs, the extent to which new issues infest rural spaces, especially in backward rural areas, was expected to change considerably. (Kozera et al., 2021)

6.1. Indicators of Food Security

The domain of food security encompasses an array of socio-economic factors and corresponds to the socio-economic pillar of sustainability, standing on a global pandemic stage. International development in trade, investment, technology, and finance all contribute substantively to decisions about how a specific regime of food security is to be achieved. This paper focuses on developing countries' food security and its equity aspect. More specifically, it examines why agrarian structure, rural livelihoods, and rural institutions matter for aiding initiatives aimed at enhancing sustainable rural development as a strategic option for the food security challenge in developing agrarian societies. Upon review of the relevant literature regarding food security measures, rural development, and social justice in developing countries, we highlight the implications of current debates for future research agendas in academic and policy domains. Specifically, it is suggested that in-depth empirical studies should be conducted to examine how food security and equity are measured in various Asian and African rural contexts.

Food security means the ideal situation in which everyone has access at all times to enough food to lead active, healthy lives. The concept goes beyond measuring whether or not individuals or households are undernourished. Safety net interventions globally aim to enhance food security and provide equitable access to food so that poor people can enjoy food security. However, measures to evaluate their environmental sustainability are seriously lacking. This study reviews the evolution of food security measures and evaluates the implications for food security in developing countries within the context of sustainable rural development. The geographical focus is on developing countries in Asia and Africa, the traditional rice and breadbasket regions, and the domains of official and quasiofficial measures of food security. The following issues are addressed: how to assess food security in relation to specific food security regimes? What are the contextual and comparability implications of these measures/indicators? What is meant by food security, equity, and social justice? How are they socially constructed and mediated through rural agrarian structures and livelihoods? How does the rural domain mediate the interplay of food security and social justice? (Penuelas et al., 2023)

6.2. Indicators of Social Justice

To improve the food sovereignty and security of local communities, a specific set of practices must be implemented by states. These practices support the uptake of innovation, implementation of water and soil capital strategies, mobilization of food production, establishment of economic empowerment, gender quality, and women empowerment, improvement of food and nutrition education, establishment of health centers and medical equipment provision, enforcement of ecological conservation legislation and control, improvement of ecosystem sustainability, promotion of transparency and empowerment, improvement of the public procurement system, provision of a multi-field investment mechanism, promotion of the capacity building of stakeholders, improvement of crop production systems, and re-establishment of traditional agroecological knowledge systems. Initial maintenance of greater input availability and affordability, and government sustainability policies and accounts for certain aspects of sustainability that previous projects have overlooked.

Rural territories with less concentrated populations can be difficult to navigate, particularly when it comes to establishing suitable zones for agricultural production and conservation, which take into account environmental ambitions, objectives for agricultural production, public services offered by the surroundings, and the general political orientation. Another significant challenge is ensuring social justice and ensuring that actors benefit fairly from the valorisation of food production through policies, laws, subsidies, and taxes. In countries and regions with less governance experience, food actors may fall victim to the 'tragedy of the commons.' In areas in which empowerment has gone wrong, elite capture is often a real danger. After recent experiences of relational instability in rural development, countries with a relative lack of governance experience are likely to enter a period characterized by widespread political instability and social tensions.

In existing literature, concerns for social justice are often expressed in a limited or implicit way, indicating the need for a framework of indicators that comprises key social justice concerns across levels, but could also be operationalized for each level in a more detailed way for policy purposes. Social justice is viewed as comprising two major properties: 'distribution' and 'important social justice concerns affecting sustainability' and 'acceptance of social justice concerns.' Social justice is defined as fairness in human interactions over a set of goods or arrangements that are of common interest. Adopting this definition does not address concerns for the distribution of capabilities, for example across generations, beyond the concern that a sustainable level of these capabilities be maintained. Mechanisms for the transmission and acceptance of social justice awareness across generations via organizations and political processes are introduced as 'acceptance factors,' which are distinct from 'important social justice concerns.' (Hauptvogel et al.2021)

7. Conclusion

The optimistic vision of an economically viable, socially just, and ecologically sustainable rural development process is no longer a day dream. It has become an expected dynamic that all people, peoples, nations, and communities within nations need to strive for with hardly any compromise. The compelling need to join in this pursuit is founded on the belief that such a process can guarantee food security. This, on the basis of the increasingly shared understanding that food security cannot be attained under conditions of pervasive poverty and that rural poverty is a function, amongst others, of the existence of non-sustainable forms of food production. At this juncture, the onus is on all land-based systems to collectively consolidate their understanding of sustainability in their particular settings and produce a coherent agenda that can propel the development process towards their ideal. Exactly what the specifics of this national agenda might be will hinge on the context; however, food security is likely to sit comfortably at its top.

Over the forty years of post-independent development of Zimbabwe, food security has been elusive. But it is now tacitly acknowledged that the failures of government policy in this regard are premised on non-sustainable food production systems and a grossly inequitable distribution of land for agricultural purposes. It is this conviction that precipitated the land reform program implemented earlier on this year. Specifically, the driving belief is that poverty alleviation can only be achieved through productive engagement in agriculture, mining, and tourism, with agriculture arguably regarded as the most important of these sectors. It has also been accepted that the non-sustainable food production systems impotent to guarantee food security are those that have been dominant over this period. It is this kind of agriculture that unfortunately had a huge majority of the rural people participate in.

The envisioned rural development trajectory involves a transformation to a socially just distribution of land for agricultural purposes that also ensures food production at the household and communal levels, efficiency in food production, and stable food supply throughout the year. Absolute efficiency in food production is likely to be unattainable; however, with a focus on just a few crop and livestock species well-suited to local conditions and the allocation towards this of adequate land, labour, and capital resources, food production capacity can be improved many-fold relative to current levels. Whether this potential can be realised will however depend on a great many site and situation specific factors.

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