ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: ON SPEAKING TERMS

It is encouraging to see that environmental issues are now being integrated into development planning. However, it remains to be ensured that this is not being done at just a cursory level. Rather, such integration should have a definite impact on the designing and implementation of developmental policies. The important thing is not only to arrive at definitions and terminologies of holistic development in their precise and compact forms, but to integrate social, cultural and ecological norms into these policies. In doing so, it should be seen that these norms do not remain a subsidiary part of development planning but occupy an equal position and integrate and support each other as a cohesive whole.

The notion of sustainable development is a subject of much discussion amongst both the theoreticians as well as the development practitioners. Dissatisfaction with past development process and the almost panic-like concern about all-round environmental depletion has made 'sustainable development' the buzzword - right up from the UN corridors down to the grass root level. The development debate that started with the issues of economic growth, to economic development, to basic needs, to redevelopment and human development has now anchored its moorings on to the concept of sustainable development. Just as all those terms had acquired sacrosanct definitions, so also an attempt has been made to define sustainable development by experts and international agencies.

For too long the development field has been dominated by economists or people with an economic vantage point. This is hardly surprising since the entire development debate has mostly run by this set of people. While not underplaying the importance of the economic argument, we feel that we have to look at this issue on a broader canvas. We need to ensure that this debate is not hijacked by the experts but highlighted primarily as a people's debate. The question is one of sustainable livelihood and not sustainable growth. This is the one way that true concerns and issues can be integrated into policies.

Since the essential meaning of sustainable development is to do with sustainable livelihoods and sustainable lifestyles, the focus shifts from growth per se to improvements in the living standards of all people. A high consumption and high waste lifestyle (as witnessed in the North today) is unsustainable because this rate of consumption cannot be achieved for all humanity today, let alone the future generations. This is because the world is operating at a level greater than the carrying capacity of the Earth. A change in livelihoods and lifestyles will not be brought about merely through economic adjustments but raises questions that require deeper insights. Sustainable development is not merely a matter of economics of development, but also its socio-cultural dimensions.

(Continued on Back Page)
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: AN OVERVIEW

Andy Crump's Dictionary of Environment and Development explains sustainable development thus: "irrespective of social, political or economic structures, all human beings require a continuous and undiminished supply of untainted natural biological materials to satisfy their food, shelter, energy and medicinal needs". In reality however sustainable development means different things to different people. Ecologists talk of sustaining natural resources. Economists argue for the well being of a sustained economic order. Demographers and biologists want to conserve the carrying capacity of eco-systems. And then there is the urban environmentalist crying himself hoarse over the need to establish sustainable lifestyles. Clearly it appears to be too complicated a picture to put together, but some where down the line they are all talking of the same thing. The wider implications for the generations to come are obvious. Viewed in this sense each school of thought is contributing towards the concerted move towards the understanding of sustainable development.

What then exactly is sustainable development? This is the question that revolves in the minds of all the people involved with development. However it is too early in the day to define sustainable development within the various parameters involved, and arrive at a steadfast conclusion. Yet some attempts have been made towards giving a minimal definition to the term. The most well known is the one presented by the World Commission on Environment and Development in "Our Common Future" which states, "Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Most people treat this as the basic statement on sustainable development and build upon this definition, mostly to suit their requirements. On one hand we have multilateral institutions like the World Bank which attempts to reduce this down to a continued emphasis on economic growth in a different guise. "Basing development and environment policies on a comparison of benefits and costs and on careful macro economic analysis will strengthen environmental protection and lead to rising and sustainable levels of welfare. When this report uses sustainable".

As sustainable development, it refers to this narrow definition.

The Human Development Report 1992, published by UNDP says that "the call for sustainable development is not simply a call for environmental protection. Instead, sustainable development implies a new concept of economic growth - one that provides fairness and opportunity to all the world's people, not just the privileged few, without further destroying the world's finite natural resources and without compromising the world's carrying capacity". It is clear by such views that the driving force in sustainable development is economic growth as far as babies like the above are concerned. The two major determinates are economic growth and the other is ecological conservation. In fact the pioneer who gave currency to this term was the World Conservation Strategy, published in 1980. It emphasized that humanity has no future unless there was conservation of nature and natural resources. It also focussed on the issue that conservation cannot be achieved without development required to alleviate the poverty and misery of people. It stressed the interdependence of development and conservation. The World Conservation Strategy emphasized three objectives:

- Essential ecological processes and life support systems must be maintained.
- Genetic diversity must be preserved.
- Any use of species or ecosystems must be sustainable.

The Second World Conservation Strategy project has prepared a report on the strategy for sustainable living in which "sustainable development" means, "improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting ecosystems".

Even though this term was being used quite frequently since the mid 1970's, it gained its geopolitical significance with the WCED and has been used extensively by development practitioners, economists, politicians so much so that it has now become a catch phrase.
which is used to justify almost any kind of policy (very much like people’s participation was the catch phrase of the decade of the 80’s and appropriate technology of the 70’s). This has arisen due to a misuse of the concept to justify continued interventions in a different guise. To quote - “Conceptually and politically, redevelopment is now taking the shape of sustainable development for our common future, as prescribed by the Brundtland Commission. Or else it is being promoted as green and democratic redevelopment.... But in its mainstream interpretation, sustainable development has been explicitly conceived as a strategy for sustaining “development”, not for supporting the flourishing and enduring of an indefinitely diverse natural and social life *s. On the other hand there is the continued confusion about sustainable growth and sustainable development, as was the case with economic development in the past.

“Economic growth means that real GNP per capita is increasing over time. This does not mean that such a growth trend is “sustainable”. Sustainable economic growth means that the real GNP per capita is increasing over time and that the increase is not threatened by “feedback” either from biophysical impacts or from social impacts *.

According to Holmberg and Sandbrook “The basic implication of the concept of sustainable development, as embraced by the Brundtland Commission and others, is that we should leave to the next generation a stock of ‘quality of life’ assets no less than we inherited. It is a political goal. But it can be interpreted in three ways:

* that the next generation should inherit a stock of wealth, comprising man made assets and environmental assets.

* or that the next generation should inherit a stock of environmental assets no less than that inherited by the previous generation.

* or that the inherited stock should compromise man made assets, natural assets and ‘human capital’.

The first interpretation stresses all capital assets, man made and ‘natural’, the second emphasizes natural capital only. The third includes cultural and other human inheritances. Throughout recent history, human development has followed the pattern of the first interpretation. But as the world is becoming “full” and the human perturbations of ecological functions are straining them to their breaking point, so our concept of “human capital” - that is, society and its cultural inheritance - is also at risk, and must be built into any desirable definition of development *.

In all this one thing is clear, that it has been the collapse of previous developmental models that made way for this new approach to development. Earlier development models were determined by a clearly defined socio-political planning which included economic, consumerism, and technocratism. The new developmental path calls for human, integral, self-reliant and locale specific approaches towards development. The concept embraces the basic premise of the well being of all human beings for all times to come. Earlier development had raced ahead in total disregard and ignorance of the environmental impact of its activities. The need now is to make applicable alternative solutions towards a more concerted and benign development - one that is more environmentally sound and that sustains quality of life. However reaching for this end requires close collaboration on at least four fronts - economic, human, environmental and technological. These components are closely interlinked and actions in any one area can become intra-supportive to another.

The Human Component:

The most difficult but extremely important approach in the practice of the concept is to deal with people and society. The notion of carrying-capacity, well-being and environmental sustenance are all seemingly concerns of the long-run. People may not view it in the same sense and may not share the same vision. The ultimate degree of implementation, therefore depends on how individuals, households, people, communities, societies and nations look at these choices and options. The more talked of these options are:

* The stabilization of populations.

* The improvement of health-care services.

* Ecologically compatible human settlements.
* Improving access to and quality of education.

* Environmental education and awareness at all levels.

* More prominent role of women in society.

* Stress and concentration on the concept of quality of life.

There is growing need to make the people aware of environmental hazards and damages resulting from over-exploitation, pollutions, unsustainable use of resources, and the importance of conservation, and preservation for the stability of the planet and its people. There is ready consensus today that in order to become sustainable, development must be participatory and community based. And that this should happen at all levels of society. Sustainable lifestyles have to be embraced by all sections of the class-pyramid, especially the top.

The Economic Component:

Economic well-being is the ultimate objective of any development initiative. The basic attributes to this would be security, harmony, stability in the long run. On the sustainable level it would also include income or consumption equality, agricultural productivity and limited industrialization. Options that could play a critical role in stimulating a sustainable economy are:

* Provision of basic needs, in other words alleviation of absolute poverty.

* Reduced usage of non-renewable resources.

* Reduced level of waste production.

* Increased reliance on renewable resources on a stable basis.

* Redistribution of means of production.

* Reduction in regional imbalances and disparity in incomes.

The economic aspect of sustainable development is crucial. This is because we see a clear-cut contradiction in the very term sustainable development. Development entails the intervention and exploitation of resources while sustainability emphasizes preservation and conservation. Clearly, there seems to be a trade-off (i.e. we have to give up a part of one to gain some part of the other) between development and sustainability. It therefore becomes important to check as to how resources are exploited, utilised, distributed (and waste disposed).

Concentration of economic power, be it in industry or agriculture, does not seem compatible with sustainable development. The greater the concentration the greater the inequity. The basic premise of the concept of sustainable development is equity, both for the present generations and also for the generations to come. In the final count sustainability on the economic front would also mean, transferring money from military and state security expenditure to developmental needs. Reallocation of funds from the defense expenditure could markedly accelerate the right kind of development, as it would release resources both financial and human, to enable a less threatening, humane and equitable world.

The Environmental Component:

Ecological factors are very crucial for developmental programmes and need to be addressed urgently. Sustainable development necessitates protecting the natural resources needed for production and fuels. Equally important is not risking significant alterations of the global environment by human actions. Some of the options open to prevent environmental damage and degradation are:

* More efficient use of arable lands and water supplies.

* To avoid overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

* Conserving water by ending wasteful ways.

* Reduce drastically industrial wastes.

* To devise ways for the continuance of co-existence of human and animal species.

* Maintenance of basic ecological processes

* Revegetation of marginal lands.
Halting habitat and eco-system destruction (of wild lands, wet lands and tropical forests).

Since sustainable development recognizes the complementarity between environment and development, we have to analyse the impact of the developmental process on both renewable resources (e.g., water) and non-renewable resources (e.g., coal). Since there is exploitation of both, suitable policies have to be devised to check them. There have to be limits to which non-renewable resources can be utilized (keeping in mind alternate technologies available) and to ensure that renewable resources are not exploited beyond their regenerative capacities. These threshold levels can only be established by people who are crucially dependent on these resources for their livelihood. As long as they do not have control over these resources, it would be difficult to curtail excessive exploitation beyond the carrying capacity of the earth. Environmental sustainability therefore is of prime importance in the developmental process.

The Technological Component:

Sustainable development would thus mean to shift to technologies that are cleaner and more efficient and that minimize consumption of energy and other natural resources. The goal should be towards processes or technological systems that create few wastes and pollutants in the first place, that recycle wastes internally and that work with or support natural systems. In some instances traditional technologies meet these criteria well and should be preserved. We need technologies which:

* **Reduce usage of non-renewable resource.**
* **Reduce level of waste production.**
* **Increase reliance on renewable resources on a stable basis.**
* **Adopt soil-conserving farming systems.**
* **Are energy-efficient and environmentally clean.**

The level of technology available to different countries varies, which means that the utilization of resources is done at varying levels of efficiency. This is not to say that there should be a uniform technology to utilize resources all over the world—but rather that the technology available should be the most efficient in utilizing the resource in the given socio-cultural paradigm. Different societies require different levels of technological support, for instance, the level of technological support in a forest-based tribal community is very different from the requirement of an urban steel plant.

The search for appropriate technologies to facilitate sustainable development will have to extend from viable energy production systems for controlling global warming to measures for providing safe drinking water. As long as efficient technology is seen to be a prerogative of the developed countries and strict norms of control over such technologies exist, we cannot be in a position where any technological innovation can facilitate sustainable development.

Technological co-operation would involve the interaction of the human, environmental and economic dimensions in achieving sustainable development. No one today can seriously address the concept without relating these four components. Only then can we find ways to avoid the dominant trend of manipulating environmental resources for short-term economic gains. For now it is also glaringly true that there are limits to man-made capital to act as perfect substitutes to natural capital. Therefore in a very basic sense what is called for is an effort towards exercising moral restraint and valuing the ethic of our saner judgements. This should enable us to deliver a better future to the coming generations.

It is clear that there is no clear concept of the operationalization of the process of sustainable development. There is confusion among the development practitioners of the multilateral agencies as also those working in the grass-roots. Operationalizing a concept whose desirability is expressed by all is the key to social and economic crisis faced by the world today. It is only societies that are resilient (i.e., have the ability to adjust to shock) which can progress towards sustainable development. Clearly, given the closing in of the world, we are talking of the resilience
of the Earth. Now, it will not be possible to have a sustainable society in one part of the world at the cost of unsustainability of another.

We need to address the issue of centralised power structures and put it on its head. Only when power is decentralised will we be in a position to operationalise this concept. It is only when people suffer the consequences of their decisions that a desire to rectify the error arises. Power has to devolve to the level where people can learn from their mistakes. The faster the people learn, the faster we will progress towards a sustainable and equitable world.

This is the political question that has to be addressed. Is it possible to allow people who take decisions to suffer its consequences in the prevailing political systems? Can proper natural resource utilisation be determined by a person who has never experienced life in village, let alone a forest? Does the representative democratic structure allow the preservation of correct use of natural resources like land, forests and water?

We have seen in our developmental experience that we get a negative response to these questions. Thus it is only possible to have sustainable development when societies learn from their mistakes. This will only be possible when questions about nature, resource control and decision making are addressed. As long as the people who are directly dependent on these natural resources for their survival do not gain control over the use of these resources, chances of establishing a truly sustainable path seem remote. It would be important to ensure that decision making in this group is fair and participative to allow equity which is the basic premise of sustainable development.

References :-

*1. Page 43, OUR COMMON FUTURE, Oxford University Press - 1987


*5. PAGE 16. GUSTAVO ESTEVA In The Development Dictionary (ED) Wolfgang Sachs. A GUIDE TO KNOWLEDGE AS POWER

CARiNG FOR THE EARTH: A STRATEGy FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING.


The aim of "Caring for the Earth" is to help improve the condition of the world's people by defining two requirements. One is to secure a widespread and deeply-held commitment to the ethics for sustainable living, and to translate its principles into practice. The other is to integrate conservation and development: conservation to keep our action within the Earth's capacities and development to enable the well-being of all people for all times to come.

Public participation is essential for the success of the strategy, which is addressed to individuals, citizens groups, as well as to governments. Adopting it will not be easy, but it does provide the agenda for immediate action.

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT: TRADITIONS, CONCERNS AND EFFORTS IN INDIA.

An NGO document for Prep Com IV of UNCED. (By Kartikeya Sarabhai Centre for Environment Education, Thalpe Tekra, Ahmedabad-380 054)

Development until very recently has been in ignorance of the environmental impact of its activities. The forces which were taking India on the conventional development path were proving to be unsustainable. The environmental movement in India blends concerns of development and the environment and reflects a broad spectrum of concerns. This overview of the tradition, concerns and efforts in the arena of environment is an interesting document which has been presented at the PREPCOM and later at UNCED. It presents both the government's and voluntary organisation's efforts and initiatives to develop a framework for integrating environmental considerations with developmental plans. The document suggests that the challenges are staggering in scale and complexity, and what is needed is a blueprint for the development of a less wasteful paradigm with sound values and practices.

OUR COMMON FUTURE - THE WORLD COMMISION ON ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

Publishers: Oxford University Press, YMCA Library Building, Jai Singh Road, New Delhi - 110 001. Published in 1987 Price Rs. 110

Popularly known as the Brundtland Commission report, this is one of the most important documents of the decade on the future of the world. The book is an amalgamation of a world-wide consultation on the issues that should be addressed for a global agenda, for a blending of economy and ecology. It re-examines the critical environment and development problems and formulates realistic proposals to solve them. It wants to ensure that human progress will be sustained through development without bankrupting the resources of future generations.

Earthscan Publications have produced a simplified reader's guide to this report. The Energy Environment Group has produced a Hindi translation of both these documents. For further information, please contact - Energy Environment Group, P.O. Box No. 4, New Delhi - 110 004.

TOWARDS GREEN VILLAGES - A Strategy for Environmentally - Sound Participatory Rural Development.

- Anil Agarwal/Sunita Narain Publishers: Centre for Science and Environment, F-6, Kailash Colony, New Delhi - 110 048. Published in 1989. Price - Not mentioned

The paper has been written to focus on a people controlled rural development paradigm, where the basic premise is to expand gross 'nature' product rather than gross national product. This is because gross 'nature' product is more relevant to the requirements of the people for a sustainable life style. The strategy for equitable and sustainable development is discussed at the conceptual level and at the action level. Case studies have been drawn from villages in Nagaland, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Haryana, which have clearly shown that rural development can take place in an ecologically sound manner.
WORKSHOP ON MARINE FISHING REGULATION

During 14-15 April, 1993, the Society for National Integration through Rural Development (SNIRD) and the Coastal Poor Development Action Network (COPDANET) in collaboration with PRIA organised a workshop on 'Marine Fishing Regulation of Andhra Pradesh', at Vijayawada. Andhra Pradesh is the only state yet to formulate the marine fishing regulation act. Organisations working among the coastal poor in different coastal districts of A.P., representatives of National Fish Worker's Forum (NFWF) from Kerala and Orissa and COPDANET attended this meeting. During the meeting implications of marine fishing regulation and the issue of coastal land alienation due to commercial prawn farming were discussed. As a follow up individuals organisations district level meetings on the implications of marine fishing regulation, followed by a meeting at Guntur on May 22, 1993, where future strategies were prepared.

As a follow up on that part PRIA will collect various state governments' marine fishing regulation Acts and analyse them, and prepare a note giving details of prawn farming, recent trends, and their linkages with national and international economy

PRI ORIENTATION ON THE STUDY OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION - II PHASE.

During May 12-14, 1993, at Tenughat, district Bolara, Bihar, PRIA conducted the second phase of the participatory research orientation on the study of environmental degradation. The focus of this workshop was to take stock of the data and information collected. Later, some specific inputs were also given, e.g., the Environmental Protection Act, Coastal Bearing Areas (Development and Acquisition) Act, Joint Forest Management etc. As a follow up it was decided that participants will collect more information on these issues as decided during phase one. The third phase of the programme will be held in September.

WORKSHOP ON NATURAL RESOURCES IN THE CHHOTANAGPUR REGION

PRIA in collaboration with Parayanam Chethana Kendra (Singhrain) and Jaiprabha Adityayvan Evam Anusandhan Kendra (Muzaffarpur) organised a two day workshop at Jamshedpur during May 15-16. The focus of this workshop was to develop a collective understanding about the problems related to peoples' access to and control over Natural Resources, to understand the perspectives of various movements and to evolve a strategy for a co-ordinated effort towards strengthening the movement. Thirty two activists from various parts of Chhotanagpur region attended this workshop. Activists from Madhya Pradesh, Goa, West Bengal also participated in the discussion.

For more details contact: Shri Ghanashyam, Jaiprabha Adityayvan Evam Anusandhan Kendra, P.O. Muzaffarpur, Dist: Deoghar, Bihar - 815353.

(Continued from Page 1)

The operationalization of sustainable development requires participative decision-making, decentralization and a free flow of information along with an equitable distribution of resources. This essentially is a question of 'governance'. The present form of representative democracy is too far removed from the base, which is why it is then adversely affected by far-flung decisions about use of resources. Unless this system of governance is altered to a system where a local community has its own mechanism of governing the use and regeneration of local resources, sustainable use of natural resources (and hence sustainable development) will not occur. This is the fundamental issue in the politics of sustainable development.

It is in this context that it is interesting to know that many tribal communities in India (and the indigenous communities of the Amazon forests of Brazil for instance) have practiced sustainable development soundly through the centuries. They have the norms, systems of governance, lifestyle and technology which have evolved over centuries of learning by doing. These have been effective in conserving natural resources while permitting a sustainable lifestyle. Thus renewed interest in sustainable development should have the possibilities of learning from such experiences, otherwise the very same experts who have led the (unsustainable) development debate of the last fifty years will now redefine and promote the meaning of sustainable development. Clearly, in its essence, sustainable development is a people's debate.