
An Overview of Follow-up of Agenda 21 at the National Level

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UNCED: Success or Failure?

No single event can be expected in itself to resolve the many complex issues that will be confronting the world community in this decade. However, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, represented a unique opportunity to provide the basis for the major shift out of our inertia required to put us on the pathway to a more secure, equitable, and sustainable future. Some believe that we missed this opportunity to change the course of development, basically because governments failed to agree that at the core of this shift it is necessary to achieve deep changes in the prevailing economic system. And for that, strong action and political will is urgently needed to achieve a more careful and more caring use of the Earth's resources and greater co-operation and equity in sharing the benefits as well as the risks of our technological civilization.

The expectations and hopes engendered by the Earth Summit—the largest gathering ever of more than 120 heads of state and government—were to provide a new basis for relations between North, South, East, and West: a new global partnership based on common interest, mutual need, and shared responsibility, including a concerted attack on poverty as a central priority for the twenty-first century. In the final analysis, the social and economic issues like poverty, consumption patterns, trade, and external debt were weakly treated in *Agenda 21*, and the possibility of laying out an alternative model of economics for sustainability was basically aborted from the beginning of the UNCED process. Efforts concentrated on the environmental issues and the strongest section of *Agenda 21* corresponds to Section II: 'Management of Resources'.

From an institutional and structural point of view, UNCED represented an incredible opportunity to evaluate and assess the current international order composed of the following four macro-structures: the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations System, the transnational corporations, and the International Court of Justice. Today many of these institutions and entities are revising their programmes and strategies, including the processes of participation of organizations outside governments. The changes are urgently needed to respond to the challenges of sustainable development which entails social equity, the protection of

the ecological integrity of the planet, the reorientation of the economic model, and the promotion of participation of all actors of society. Whether or not these institutions will promote a deep restructuring, or whether this will be only a superficial and cosmetic change, will depend on the governments and the public pressure of the civil organizations at the national and global levels.

In this sense Rio was only the beginning.

The Earth Summit was the product of a rich process that involved an unprecedented level of participation of more than 18,000 organizations outside government. The forum for the activities of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) was the '92 Global Forum in the Flamengo Park in Rio de Janeiro. The vast number of NGOs became an integral part of the negotiating process, and after UNCED are participating in a number of governmental delegations.¹

A serious assessment of the Rio process requires a careful analysis of several events. The last decade of the twentieth century offers a unique opportunity for the world community to make the transition to sustainable living for all. The international framework under which the negotiations took place, including the end of the Cold War, the worldwide thrust for democracy, and other recent political events have created an enabling environment which can generate the means and political will that can make possible the fundamental changes needed for the transition to a sustainable society.

In addition, the world is turning into a unipolar or multipolar world where the geopolitical regionalization has been substituted by economic blocs. Never have the rich felt so poor as in these last two years. Everybody would agree that the economic recession in the industrialized world pre-empted the negotiations on financing and prevented agreement on the need for new and additional financial resources. On financing and technology transfer even the minimum targets were not agreed upon, and a sense of frustration came out of the long sessions at Rio Centro.

It is, however, too early to tell if the Earth Summit was a failure or a success.

Maurice Strong, who was the secretary-general of the Conference, stated recently that:

Humanity today is in the midst of a profound civilizational change. There are signs of it everywhere, and for the thousands of dedicated people who were involved in that extraordinary event at Rio a year ago—indeed, for all the people of the globe—they are exhilarating, uplifting signs. While it is too early to provide a precisely calibrated measure of the ultimate success of the Earth Summit, I believe it has ignited a wildfire of interest and support at every level of society in every corner of the planet.²

A Quick View of the Rio Agreements

Five documents were finalized and agreed at Rio: a statement of twenty-seven principles guiding environment-and-development activities, a statement of principles on forestry, two conventions negotiated in parallel with the UNCED process (one on Biological Diversity and the other on Climate Change), and a comprehensive and far-ranging programme of action known as *Agenda 21*.

Of these the main programmatic result was undoubtedly *Agenda 21*, which established the agreed work programme of the international community for the period beyond 1992 and into the twenty-first century.

Agenda 21 represents a two-year effort of the international community to develop the issues of environment and development in an integrated manner. It is perhaps the most complex document ever negotiated in a diplomatic conference. It is the product of an extensive process of preparation at the professional level and negotiation at the political level. It establishes, for the first time, a framework for the systemic, co-operative action required to effect the transition to sustainable development.

Agenda 21 is addressed to governments, to the agencies, organizations, and programmes of the United Nations system, to other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, to constituency groups, and to the public at large, all of whom must be involved, in various ways, in its implementation.³

It contains four sections, forty chapters, 115 programmes, and approximately 2,500 actions to be implemented by governments at the national, regional, and global levels. Each of these programmes represents an important dimension of an overall strategy for a global transition; of the 2,500 actions, around 1,500 should be taken at national level according to a database and a reference system produced by the State Department of the United States.⁴ *Agenda 21* includes cost estimates of each programme of action, which inevitably require new and additional financial resources and concrete strategies to achieve the transfer of technology needed to accelerate the path towards sustainable development. Annex 1 includes the forty chapters of *Agenda 21*.

Governments recognized their leading role in implementation of *Agenda 21*, and its Preamble states:

Agenda 21 addresses the pressing problems of today and also aims at preparing the world for the challenges of the next century. It reflects a global consensus and political commitment at the highest level on development and environment co-operation. Its successful implementation is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments. National strategies, plans, policies and processes are crucial in achieving this. International co-operation should support and supplement such national efforts . . . The broadest public participation and the active involvement of the non-governmental organizations and other groups should also be encouraged.⁵

Agenda 21 should be seen as a process rather than an end document. The first two drafts submitted at the Third and Fourth Session of the Preparatory Committee of UNCED included targets and compromises that reflected, in a more effective manner, what is needed to solve the problems rather than what is politically acceptable. The final version is a document agreed by consensus of 178 nations represented by diplomats or experts mainly from the environmental ministries and agencies. Consensus is not commitment. Moreover, consensus means the giving up of quality and quantity in order to achieve full agreement, and consequently in many portions the document ended up with a 'lowest common denominator'. However, *Agenda 21* includes some targets: some are simply dates for conferences or very broad commitments to start a defined process by a certain date; others are solid promises to achieve environmental or social improvements by a certain year. These targets provide an initial basis and facilitate the task for measuring progress towards implementation of *Agenda 21*.⁶

The objectives and activities of *Agenda 21* need to be revised continuously. The General Assembly decided that the Commission on Sustainable Development in its first substantive session should determine the multi-year programme to review progress on *Agenda 21* up to 1997. In this session, exchanges of information regarding implementation of *Agenda 21* at the national level were a main issue in the discussions. These include guide-lines to the Secretariat for organizing information provided by governments, for example, in the form of periodic communications, national reports, or national *Agenda 21* action plans regarding the activities they undertake to implement *Agenda 21* as well as the problems they face, in particular those related to financial resources and technology transfer. In addition, the exchange of information should include the ways in which the United Nations system and bilateral donors are assisting countries in the preparation of periodic communications, national reports, environmental action plans, or national *Agenda 21* action plans.⁷

National strategies and action plans will be the backbone of *Agenda 21* implementation. In *Agenda 21* each of the forty chapters contains references to national reporting, strategies, or action plans, but the only two chapters that provide a basic framework for national planning are chapters 8, 'Integrating Environment and Development in Decision-Making' and

10, an 'Integrated Approach to Planning and Management of Land Resources'.⁸

The Peoples' Agenda

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead⁹

UNCED was an unedited participatory process that served as a benchmark in the involvement of NGOs in a United Nations Conference. Although the UN has long awarded consultative status to many NGOs, this access has been mainly a privilege of Northern groups. The innovative accreditation process and the financial support mobilized to facilitate NGO participation allowed for the presence of quite a number of NGOs from the South, many of which had never before been in an international conference of this magnitude. This unprecedented level of participation of those outside government in the UNCED process was the key to its political significance.

NGOs decided to participate beyond UNCED itself. Two basic strategies were followed by NGOs during the UNCED preparation process. Some, particularly from the North, acted as professional lobbying organizations and pressed governments and politicians throughout the whole process. Others decided to prepare alternative agendas which culminated at Rio in a parallel forum. Two physically separated events marked the difference between both groups: the official Conference and Summit in Rio Centro and the Global Forum in Flamengo Park near downtown Rio.¹⁰ This made life difficult for those wanting to attend both conferences since there was a large distance between the two.

Many NGOs were of the view that the Rio Agreements were the result of governmental negotiations with little input from civil society, people's organizations, and NGOs, with the exception of big lobbyist NGOs from the North, such as Greenpeace, the Environmental Defense Fund, Friends of the Earth, and the Sierra Club. Moreover, they felt that the Fourth Session of the Preparatory Committee of UNCED in New York had been the last opportunity for NGO input. As a response, the International Forum for NGOs co-ordinated the preparation of forty-six Alternative Treaties which were agreed by more than 4,000 non-governmental organizations at the Global Forum '92. These NGO Treaties address more or less the same items as *Agenda 21*, with the inclusion of other important matters such as ethics of sustainability, militarism, nuclear issues, external debt, racism, transnational corporations, an alternative economic model, and corruption and capital flight.¹¹

In addition, during the UNCED process other agendas

were produced by several important constituencies, such as *Ascend 21*, produced by the scientific community in Vienna in 1991; the *Women's Action Agenda 21*, derived from the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet; *Youth '92* and *Agenda ya Wananchi Citizens' Action Plan for the 1990s*, produced in the Global NGO Conference 'Roots of the Future' held in Paris in 1991. The latter, together with the NGO Alternative Treaties of the Global Forum, were an attempt to introduce a new concept of co-operation within the NGO community and were not intended to be used as inputs to UNCED, but rather as a basis for future action of civil organizations. After UNCED NGO participation has become a permanent factor in international conferences and national processes dealing with environment and development.¹²

In the Rio Agreements the participation of NGOs was considered a key element. In the Conventions and in *Agenda 21* the role of organizations outside governments was treated in chapters 23–29 of Section III. These chapters address the role of major groups and make a strong case for participatory processes in national planning and decision-making. Needless to say that the forty-six NGO Treaties reflect the positions of many organizations in relation to the issues addressed in the governmental documents. These documents point out the deficiencies, and most importantly the missing agenda as stated above.

There is no doubt that NGOs have existed for many decades. In Latin America, for example, many NGOs first emerged as semi-clandestine alternatives, particularly in dictatorship frameworks. Afterwards they evolved into traditional forms of citizen participation such as political parties, student groups, and unions, also under great repression by authoritarian governments. Today many of these organizations are re-democratizing their regions and expanding the peoples' agendas, offering a dynamic, new form of participation to citizens who are sceptical and cynical about electoral politics.¹³

This is of particular importance if we consider that democracy is threatened by the crisis of governance that has emerged from the loss of confidence and lack of credibility that civil society has towards its political élites, its parliaments, and public institutions.

In this context, national governments need to respond to their local constituencies and perform as main actors within the international community. The effectiveness, transparency, and accountability of decisions and actions at the national level will ultimately determine the success or failure of the Earth Summit. The challenge of the people of each nation is to become equal partners in this responsibility.

In order to take stock of the recent efforts at the national level one year after the Earth Summit, it is essential to consider both the governmental and the non-governmental efforts.

A Quick Overview of Actions at the National Level After Stockholm 1972

The evolution of environmental policies up to 1970 was sectoral, corrective, and uneven. The Stockholm Conference recognized the essential relationship between environment and development, but since then too little has been done to give practical effect to the integration of environment and development in economic policy and decision-making. While a great deal of progress was made towards environmental improvement in particular instances, the Brundtland Commission made it clear that, overall, the environment of our planet has deteriorated since 1972 and that there has been serious acceleration of such major environmental risks as ozone depletion and global warming.

The evolution of the environment as an important public issue after Stockholm was accompanied by the establishment of environmental agencies and ministries by virtually all governments. Whilst some, like the Venezuelan Ministry of Natural Resources or the US Environmental Protection Agency, were given formidable powers, these were primarily in the areas of review and regulation. Environmental agencies and ministries had very tiny budgets, and little influence on economic policy or the policies and practices of the major sectoral agencies, the activities of which are the principal sources of environmental impacts. Programmes, laws, and institutions have been largely sectoral. In most countries separate institutions were responsible for the environmental policies to do with agriculture, forestry, fisheries, wildlife conservation, tourism, energy, human settlements, industry, and health. At the beginning, in some industrialized countries the environmental units were located in sectors linked to pollution and public health. Afterwards, in many countries the environmental agency was transferred to the urban-development sectors. In all cases the main function has been mainly regulatory and normative rather than operative.¹⁴

It is now clear that we are experiencing, and in some cases already exceeding, the practical limits of regulation. Regulation is, of course, necessary, but experience has demonstrated that its effects can be limited, and sometimes negative, if it is not accompanied by changes in economic, fiscal, and sectoral policies which provide positive incentives for environmentally sound and sustainable economic development.

In all countries the fiscal system has provided incentives and subsidies designed to meet a wide variety of political and public-policy objectives, usually unrelated to environmental considerations, many of which have become deeply entrenched and difficult to change. Agricultural subsidies are a prime example. We now realize that many of these, in addition to their economic cost and the distortions they create in the market economy, also provide incentives for environmentally unsound economic practices.

The result of the above has been an over-reliance on regulation and a sectoralization of the environment in to marginalized entities. Governments in this decade must therefore undertake an extensive review and reorientation of the system of incentives and penalties which motivate the economic behaviour of corporations and individuals, to ensure that they provide positive incentives for environmentally sound and sustainable behaviour.

An Overview of Some National Initiatives One Year after UNCED

The basic concept of the interrelatedness of the environment and development issues, central to the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, to the Brundtland Commission, and to the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, have now to be reoriented from concept to action. The main task of the follow-up and implementation of the agreements achieved at Rio will be to move the joint environment-and-development issues into the centre of economic policy and decision-making at the national levels.

Environment-and-development policies cross many sectors. Besides land tenure, agriculture, forestry, and fishery management, they include development control, measures to prevent pollution, and measures to regulate industry and transport. In recent years there has been a growing recognition that virtually every activity has some impact on the environment. Sustainable development requires an even more cross-sectoral and integrated vision.

Recognition of the inter-sectoral nature of many environment-and-development concerns is causing an increasing number of governments to develop cross-sectoral policies, laws, and institutions. Another growing trend is the move towards bridging the gaps between central and local governments and between government and the private sector, civil society, and people's organizations. The trend this last year has been to establish inter-agency committees, councils, or commissions, while the policies have been expressed in national environmental strategies, green plans, and national *Agenda 21s* developed in consultation with the sectors involved. Few governments have created high-level, cross-cutting procedures under the direct control of the head of state, and still fewer have required their ministers of finance to adopt new thinking about economic parameters and environmental accounting.¹⁵

The National Resource Defense Council (NRDC) undertook an interesting survey on the implementation of the Rio Agreements. This report was presented during the First Substantive Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. It includes an update of the ratification of the

Climate Change and the Biodiversity Conventions and brief progress reports on eighty-one nations, including the European Economic Community.¹⁶

Regarding the Conventions, a total of 165 states and the European Economic Community have signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change. Fifty ratifications are needed for the Convention to enter into force. Up to 7 October 1993, thirty-six states have ratified or acceded it and thirty-four are expected to ratify it before the end of 1993. In the case of biodiversity, 166 states and the European Economic Community signed the Convention and thirty ratifications are needed before it will enter into force. Up to 15 October 1993, thirty-one states had ratified it and thirty are expected to do so before the end of the year.

In relation to the establishment of institutional mechanisms to review implementation of *Agenda 21* at the national level, the survey reported that, of the eighty-one countries reviewed, sixty-five have designated institutions to oversee implementation of *Agenda 21*. Of these, thirty-five countries have created new institutions or upgraded old ones, and thirty have given this responsibility to existing institutions. Although it is difficult to classify the trends into clear categories, the following is an attempt to show the different institutional options drawn from the NRDC Report.¹⁷

It is interesting to note that the trend of new institutional developments is to establish inter-agency commissions, councils, or committees with an inter-sectoral function. Such is the case in Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Costa Rica, France, Gambia, Hungary, Italy, Korea, the Marshall Islands, Nigeria, Norway, Philippines, Russia, Senegal, Singapore, Spain, the United States, and Venezuela.

Some established new environmental ministries, units, or committees during or after UNCED in order to prepare and follow up the process. This is the case in Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Lebanon, Malaysia, Portugal, and Turkey.

In those cases where no new institutions have been established, the functions to oversee the implementation of UNCED agreements have been given to the existing environmental agencies, secretariats, or ministries. Such is the case in the Bahamas, Belize, Bhutan, Botswana, Brazil, China, Cuba, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Fiji, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Mongolia, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Saint Lucia, Sweden, Thailand, and Uruguay.

New units have been opened within the ministries or the environmental component has been upgraded to ministry rank or upgraded within already established institutions in Antigua and Barbuda, Bulgaria, Colombia, Cyprus, Ghana, Kuwait, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, and Poland.

Many of the existing environmental institutions are desig-

ning and launching new programmes, including the review of national legislation. Some, such as Bangladesh, Canada, Cuba, China, Indonesia, Mexico, Namibia, Netherlands, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Venezuela are preparing their National *Agenda 21* or Green Plans.

In the European countries, Japan, and the United States many special programmes have been established to implement chapter 9 of *Agenda 21* on Protection of the Atmosphere.

The broad conclusion during the UNCED process was that a broad strategy has to be national but worked out through a dialogue involving the components of the state because the mechanism is often more effective when decentralized. Increasingly stressed have been the need to establish effective consultation within countries, often down to local-community levels, and the need to empower community-based organizations. On the other hand, strong national policies and programmes allow countries to be in better positions to negotiate at the global forums.

It is necessary to develop a dialogue between business, industry, commerce, environmental and developmental NGOs, and citizens' groups and to try to build consensus at the local and national levels.

In this context, the most interesting initiatives are those at the local level. They are the closest level of governance to the people and play a vital role in mobilizing the public for sustainable development. Some countries are giving special attention to the strengthening of local authorities and to the organization of a consultative process to achieve consensus and prepare the local *Agenda 21*. The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), which is the environmental arm of the International Union of Local Authorities, has established the 'Local Agenda 21 Initiative' to provide a common vehicle for local governments to strengthen local environmental planning and to support the implementation of *Agenda 21*. ICLEI is planning to publish a regular report on Local *Agenda 21* activities around the world. For this purpose they are producing a manual with the basic principles, elements, and guide-lines to facilitate the preparation of Local *Agenda 21*. Some of these elements include: community consultation processes, sustainable-development auditing, target-setting, development, and use of indicators. Chapter 28 of *Agenda 21* 'Local Authorities Initiatives in support of *Agenda 21*', states two main objectives:

1. By 1996, most local authorities in each country should have undertaken a consultative process with their populations and achieved a consensus on a 'local Agenda 21'.
2. All local authorities in each country should be encouraged to implement and monitor programmes which aim at ensuring that women and youth are represented in decision-making, planning and implementation process.

All national associations of local authorities are starting to work in this direction. The intention is to create formal mechanisms for local government and NGO involvement that could become an essential part of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

National, local, regional, and international actions are closely linked. One basic conclusion that arises from the above is that strategies for national development cannot be *ad hoc* and should be ones that work in the long term. Short-term solutions that are designed with short-sighted views and to respond only to the needs of the current generation are likely to fail. A viable future involves not only technological changes—radical changes are needed in human institutions and systems too.

Building National Consensus and Capabilities to Achieve Sustainable Living

The ability of a country to follow sustainable-development paths is determined to a large extent by its endogenous capacity. This capacity is an integrative capacity to make reasonable, independent and equitable decisions regarding needs, priorities, and approaches, and to implement sustainable-development goals. Specifically, it encompasses the human, technical, organizational, institutional, and resource capabilities needed to address the crucial question of choices and implementation among development options, to understand the environmental potentials and limits, and to respond to the aspirations of the development process, as perceived by the people of the country concerned itself.¹⁸

As an important aspect of overall planning, each country should reach a consensus on policies and programmes needed for the next generation at all levels in society for building the capacity effectively to adapt, adopt, and implement its national *Agenda 21* programme. This should result from a participatory dialogue of interest groups (stakeholders) and should lead to an identification of skill gaps, institutional needs, technological and scientific requirements, and resource needs to enhance environmental administration and to establish the appropriate linkages with the development sectors. The country programming process should be supplemented by explicit inclusion of technical co-operation and development assistance for environmental management and sustainable development.

In case international assistance is required for the dialogue, it should be very clear that the aid flows are democratically controlled by both parties. No one from outside the social and economic fabric of the country concerned can impose a particular direction. Furthermore, no single stakeholder ought to impose his views, as they should all operate on a checks-and-balance basis. A framework could be established, defining

the obligations and responsibilities of each stakeholder, to create a participatory steering mechanism to review periodically the national programmes, the national consensus achieved, and to monitor the contribution of technical co-operation.

The overall objective of an international commitment on capacity building for sustainable development is to encourage each country to derive its own national interpretation of *Agenda 21* in an ongoing and systematic way, with the participation of all relevant stakeholders as stated before. These capacities have to be strengthened in both the developed and the developing countries in order for each to adapt, adopt, and implement its own *Agenda 21*.

The generation and implementation of the national *Agenda 21* of each country concerned requires the promotion and implementation of an ongoing participatory decision-making process where the relevant stakeholders in development—bankers, entrepreneurs, government authorities, politicians, union leaders, scientists, engineers, peasants and farmers, representatives of the organized public, and others—engage in dialogues at various levels and for all sectors of the economy. Such dialogues aim at building a consensus on the needs and priorities for sustainable development and establish a portfolio of priority initiatives or programmes for capacity-building to be implemented through a coalition of resources, domestic and international. This would also improve the national capacity to co-ordinate international and regional technical co-operation. Moreover, technical assistance must evolve into real models of co-operation. A very interesting example of such technical collaboration is the recent agreement on sustainable development to which the Netherlands is subscribing with three developing countries: Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Benin. The intention is to establish a ten-year strategy in these four countries to develop a model of sustainable development and mechanisms to exchange experiences, data, and expertise. This agreement was first discussed in Rio and is now under implementation by the four countries.

Successful efforts in technical co-operation usually benefit from a consultative process where the National Agenda on Environment and Development becomes the centre-piece for mobilizing technical assistance. In the case of Costa Rica, for example, this appears to be an excellent start to the bringing together of other bilateral and multilateral programmes. The existence of a country-defined portfolio of prioritized programmes would enable the countries to take the lead role in co-ordination.

The objective of the dialogue process and democratic participation is to generate a consensus around a portfolio of objectives, programmes, and the specific actions required to implement them, as well as the needs for strengthening the capacity of individual sectors. This participatory process

could be upgraded or set in motion by a cross-sectoral government entity with planning and budgetary responsibilities in order to prepare an environment-development plan as a fundamental instrument for resource-allocation priorities, investment and decision-making. Countries could designate or establish, if required, a central unit to organize and co-ordinate technical co-operation, linking it with the priority-setting and resource-allocation process.

The sectoral programmes could identify the capacity building-blocks through a technical review process with the participation of able local experts—individuals or organizations. This preparatory process based on solid, in-depth technical analyses produced by qualified nationals of the country concerned would help focus resources and international technical co-operation on critical areas. At present the following cross-sectoral elements do not receive adequate international assistance; therefore, capacity is needed to.¹⁹

- assess and monitor the state of the physical environment;
- analyse the social and economic significance of major environmental changes and determine the causes behind them;
- implement environmental audits of ongoing development programmes of environmental significance both from the private and public sectors;
- design and implement effectively environmental legislative and regulatory frameworks and harmonize them with other sectoral legislative frameworks;
- implement global, regional, and other international environmental agreements;
- mobilize private-sector and community-level involvement in action for environmental protection and improvement;
- relate structural adjustment, economic reform and policy instruments, trade objectives, and market mechanisms to environmental management;
- identify and articulate major investment needs for environmental rehabilitation and conservation;
- relate social-development (for example, population, women's status, land tenure) and poverty-alleviation policies and programmes to environmental management;
- organize regular environmental management information.

At present, developing countries are especially disadvantaged in their access to information, technology, and scientific innovation. They lack access to the financial resources and technologies needed to revitalize their economies while making the transition to sustainability. An acute lack of sufficient scientific, technological, and professional capacity

impairs the ability of developing countries to evaluate their own development options, and to formulate and implement the policies required to give effect to them.

Traditional patterns of technical assistance, which often deepen dependence on foreign experts, are simply not adequate. What is needed is a sustained commitment to building indigenous human and institutional capacity. The key to self-reliance is to foster a pool of indigenous talent that can adapt and innovate, in a world where knowledge is the primary basis of competitiveness.

It is of critical importance that this be done on a basis that combines traditional with modern knowledge and methods. Human and institutional development which alienates people from traditional values and sources of knowledge will be counter-productive and often socially destructive. The best and most sustainable development is that in which the processes and techniques of modernization are assimilated sensitively into existing social and value systems without destroying or undermining them.

The United Nations Development Programme's Capacity 21 initiative and the Sustainable Development Networks, particularly in developing countries, offer a promising framework for giving a new impetus to the implementation of the sustainable-development agenda together with the strengthening of endogenous human and institutional capacity. The need to develop this capacity in each country is as critically important from the point of view of environmental protection as it is from that of development. Indeed, it is the indispensable key to sustainable development and the prerequisite to breaking out of the present, deeply entrenched patterns of environmental economic deterioration, dependency, and vulnerability.

It is not only developing countries which need to build or strengthen their capabilities to implement sustainable development and comply with the commitments and promises of Rio. In that sense, Chapter 37 of *Agenda 21* addresses the need to build capacity and capability to implement sustainable development.

Closely linked to the issue of capacity building is that of access to technology. The access to, and application of, environmentally sound technologies can contribute significantly to raising the productivity and sustainability of resources in such areas as agricultural production, energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, and pollution control. In addition to these evident environmental advantages, such measures protect and promote development. Today, technology is an indispensable ingredient of economic growth, and without economic growth, developing countries will have inadequate capital to support environmental protection.

Coupled with the need to increase capacity to develop their own technologies, the transition to sustainable development requires that developing countries have access to the best

technologies available from elsewhere. The cost of these can be a major constraint on their availability, but even more constraining is the lack of adequate institutional and professional capacities to choose and use them. In the past, technology transfer has frequently been supply led, often taking little account of local technologies and knowledge. The emphasis should now be on technology co-operation, in which externally developed technologies are adapted to local conditions and needs and are integrated with traditional technologies and experience.

Most developing countries are unable themselves to provide the resources necessary to establish networks to access information from within their own country as well as from external sources, on the range of technologies available and the experience of others in using them. Provision of resources to strengthen their own institutional and professional capacities would help stem the loss of personnel abroad, as professionals and experts who presently find more attractive opportunities outside their own countries would see new incentives to stay.

Creating Conditions for Global Success

Vandana Shiva reflected upon the term global by saying:

the global as it is emerging in the discussions and debates around UNCED is not about universal humanisms nor about a planetary consciousness . . . The 'global' in the dominant discourse is the political space in which the dominant local seeks global control. The global does not represent the universal human interest, it represents a particular local and parochial interest which has been globalized through its reach and control.²⁰

The international economic environment has clearly contributed to the gross imbalances between North and South that have weakened the economies of developing countries during the past decade. These imbalances continue to present a primary barrier to the revitalization of the economies of these countries and to their prospects for effecting the transition to sustainable development.

Sustainable development cannot be imposed by external pressures; it must be rooted in the culture, the values, the interests, and the priorities of the people concerned. While the transition to sustainability will require a supportive international economic environment, it must not provide a basis for external imposition of new conditions or constraints on development. Developing countries cannot be denied their right to grow, nor to choose their own pathways to growth. Nor should that right be constrained by new conditions on financial flows or trade imposed in the name of environment. In this context, of critical importance is the need to deal more fundamentally with the debt issue.

There is evidence that most aid is not being used to reduce poverty or to protect the global environment, but rather to

influence the political and economic agenda of governments of the South. The concept of military security is still dominating the thinking and the priorities of governments of the North.

As reported by the World Bank, protectionist measures of the industrialized countries reduced national income in the South by about twice the amount of official aid to the region—aid that is itself largely export promotion, most of it basically directed to richer sectors. In the past decade most of the developed countries have increased protectionism. These practices, complemented by the programmes of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have caused the doubling of the gap between North and South. Resource transfers from the poor to the rich have been of more than 400 billion dollars from 1982 to 1990 (the equivalent of six times the Marshall Plan) due to protectionist measures.²¹

In this sense, the very first priority in the global agenda of UNCED was to reverse the outflow of resources that has stifled the economic growth of the developing countries and to ensure that these countries have access on a long-term basis to the resource flows they will need to revitalize their economic life and make the transition to environmentally sustainable development.

Resolution 44/228 of UNCED clearly established the need for new and additional resources in order to initiate the path towards sustainable development. However, this was an area of failure at the Earth Summit and continues to be, one year after.

Despite the controversies during the negotiation process of UNCED on financial matters, many of the heads of state and government present at the Earth Summit made statements supporting the Rio Agreements and the principles of sustainable development. They confirmed the target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product (GNP), but they only pledged to add 2.5 billion dollars to the current levels of official development assistance (ODA). The current level is 55 billion dollars (0.35 per cent of the GNP of the development assistance committee countries), and represents only half of what was calculated, from the donor countries for the implementation of *Agenda 21*.

One year after Rio most industrialized countries are still in recession and the competition for government spending has put intense pressure on aid budgets. Aid from the donor community is declining, and only very few members of the development assistance committee are willing to maintain or increase this target. Out of twenty, only four donors reached the 0.7 per cent GNP aid target in 1993 and only two are expected to improve their performance on aid, Japan and Denmark.

Debt relief is being counted as increase in ODA, and this is reducing in real terms the aid and assistance for poverty alleviation. It seems unbelievable that the World's Agenda for Peace is supported by governments with an annual

'military' spending budget of 900 billion dollars, while the world is unable to find the 60 billion dollars needed to implement *Agenda 21*. Humanitarian emergencies and assistance to growing numbers of refugees is consuming large amounts of external assistance and making short-term security the priority over the sustainable-development approach.

Bilateral aid represents approximately 80 per cent of the total 55 billion dollars, current ODA levels. However, in accordance with the United Nations Development 1993 Human Report, less than 7 per cent of total bilateral aid is spent on human priority areas.

Aid alone will not solve the problem, governments in *Agenda 21* are called upon to act collectively on a series of concrete measures to cope with the economic and social crisis of the planet:

- revitalization of the economies of the developing countries;
- reversing the outflow of resources from developing countries;
- ensuring food security;
- ensuring equitable access to and use of the global commons by all nations under conditions that will provide for their protection;
- changing the system of incentives and penalties which motivate economic behaviour to ensure that they provide strong incentives to sustainability and changes in national accounts to reflect the real values of the environment and resources;
- transition to patterns of production and consumption in the industrialized countries which will drastically reduce their disproportionate contribution to the deterioration of the Earth's environment and related global environmental risks.

Most of all, the life-styles of the rich are the source of the primary risks to our common future. They are simply not sustainable. Those in industrialized countries who enjoy these life-styles are all 'security risks'. These patterns of production and consumption have brought the whole human community to the point where our survival and the well-being which rich and poor alike must share, are threatened. Developed countries must reduce their impacts in these areas, and make room for the growth of developing countries. This requires a transition to life-styles that are less wasteful and indulgent, more modest in their use of resources and the pressures they exert on the environment. The shifts in culture and values which must provide the basis for this transition will impose challenging responsibilities on our educational system, and on the religious leaders, communicators, and

public figures who are the primary agents of change.²²

The primary responsibility for the future of the world rests, of course, within the countries themselves, and the success will depend largely on the possibilities of developing equitable codes of responsibilities, duties, and rights. Developing countries deserve and require an international system that avoids double ethical and economic codes such as the ones existing today, where the developed countries are pressing for free-market economies while they are not willing to abandon protectionism. The Uruguay Round has been a good example of this debate. This includes substantially increased financial assistance, and much better access to markets, better pricing, private investment, and technology to enable them to build stronger and more diversified economies, to effect the transition to sustainable development, and to reduce their vulnerability to changes in the international economy. The world needs an international system that recognizes that the current economic model is failing, at least for the majority of the people of the world. This means a profound breakthrough and change in the existing economic system. Developing countries do not need assistance only; the real need is for an alternative system based on a new economic and social paradigm.

Change is inevitable. The ultimate result of UNCED will depend on the capacity of governments, transnational corporations, international structures, and people to understand the urgent need to change. The inertias are too powerful and there is an addiction to patterns of production and consumption which have produced such major risks to the global environment and can divert us today from taking an equitable sustainable-development pathway.

The change cannot be left in the hands of governments only: 'Leadership must come from the people . . . The Earth Summit gave us an exciting vision of a new and more hopeful future as we move towards the twenty-first century. Only time will tell if this vision will be a deceptive mirage or the dawning of a new era of peace, harmony and progress for all peoples of the earth.'²³

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