

Environment education for people and leaders

by Anu Mahmud

Value of the environment has been underestimated for too long, resulting in damage to human health, reduced productivity, broken social structures, and the undermining of long-term development. Theory of 'optimal development' offers a flexible, disciplined ethical framework for analyzing resource management issues over time, in a manner that takes the welfare work for analyzing resources management issues over time, in a manner that takes the welfare of future generations fully into accounts.

The main message of World Development Report-1992 was that promoting development and protecting the environment are mutually reinforcing with many 'win-win' links between the two. From the World Bank's point of view, however, this does not translate only terms of the protection of the pristine only in terms of the protection of the rare orchid, important as there may be. For us, it is very much about people. It is about recognizing the need to give to people the rights to clean air and water, and fertile soils.

- a) One billion people live on less than a dollar day.
- b) One billion people don't have access to clean water.
- c) 1.7 billion people have no access to sanitation.
- d) These three figures together result in two to three million imminently avoidable infant deaths a year.
- e) 1.3 billion people, mostly in cities in the developing world are breathing air below the

standards considered acceptable by the World Health Organisation.

Seven hundred million people, mostly women and children, suffer from indoor air pollution due to biomass burning stoves that is equivalent to smoking three packs of cigarettes a day.

Hundreds of million of poor farmers have difficulty maintaining the fertility of the soils from which they eke out a meager living.

To this stock of problems we are adding a flow of new challenges due to population growth that averages 90 million persons a year. Collectively this means that, over the coming generation, food production will have to double in ways that are less dependent on pesticides and chemical fertilizers than we experienced in the previous generation.

It means that the cities of the developing countries will have to cope with an increase of at least 160 percent over their current sizes. The management of our natural resources should be done in a much more thoughtful fashion than that practiced to date, which led to the ravages and despoliation with which we are all failure.

But sound environmental stewardship is rooted in sound developmental and environmental strategies, which must be based on properly identifying the right priorities, and these are very much country specific. The key point is that environmental priorities

will vary from country to country. Beyond air pollution, other forms of pollution could be a major priority in some of the cities of the developing world. This is how we hope that the National Environmental Action Plans (BEAPs), which are now being promoted in many countries, will be done.

We have to recognise that rational activities do have global pay offs and that this is an area in which much can be done to promote the global agenda from a national sovereignty decision making framework. There are, of course, global activities recognized as such, and it is for these that special instrument like the Global Environment Facility (GEF) have a special and cultural role to play.

On the global side, the GEF has been designated as interim funding mechanism for the climate change and Biodiversity Conventions. It is also likely to come into its own as a promising instrument of international cooperation, prefiguring the international cooperation between the North and the South and the intensive collaboration of the different agencies of the UN system.

In the developing world, we are talking about new household formation, people will be coming into age groups that will be demanding jobs in the market place, generating economic activity, and creating more stresses on the environment

already affected by the patterns of settlement and activities of a rapidly expanding population. So, the coping with the root causes of high fertility becomes absolutely essential.

It is important to remind ourselves, as the UNDP's 1993 Human Development Report did so eloquently in the now-famous 'champagne glass' graph, that the richest 20 percent of the world receive about 83 percent of the world's income. The poorest 20 percent of the world receive 1.4 percent. There is a huge disparity both in consumption patterns & in pollution.

For the average of the poorest 80 percent versus the average of the richest 20 percent, the average person in the South consumes about 70 percent of the calories, 58 percent of the proteins and about 6 percent of the paper, 9 percent of steel and 8 percent of the energy, that the average person in the North consumes.

On energy consumption levels the difference between Switzerland or Japan for that matter, and the United States is also about one-half. The per capita consumption of energy in Brazil, China, Costa Rica, or India is very small fraction of that. The per capita consumption issues must be looked at as well, & these argue for changes in patterns of the North as such as they argue for sound practices in the South.

Such disparities would encourage us to think in terms of tradable permits. Low income countries with a large population could trade permits based on proportional population rights to use environmental services with some of the richer countries. While this is not currently on the agenda of international negotiations, there is something there for us to reflect on.

The subtle trail of our original wildcast nature has been saved, has grown, and finally blossomed in the free market principle, the cornerstone of all our modern economy. The free market economy is beyond far the most efficient system. The collapse of the communist world is mainly due to the fact that in the competition between East and West, the liberal economy of the West was due much more efficient than the planned economy of the East. Once the East-West competition is over, a close look leads to unanswered questions. The triumphant 'free economy' has resuscitated natural selection, as merciless in the stock exchanges as it is in the jungle, and fierce competition instead of declared mutualism and stimulation.

Market-based economies is primarily concerned with quantifying the flow of goods, service and money and defines value according to what people are willing to pay for something. This is a receiver based system of value as contrasted to one that quantifies value according to what was involved in the production of

goods or services. If a donor based value system were used, we would find such things as forests, species, clean water, and education to be of tremendous value. There are of great value even though people are not willing to pay much for them clearly, our present economic system of ecological value is flawed.

Economy is described as a circuit, work and goods, capital and money circulate from enterprises to homes so that everyone gets richer. This serves as the principles for all evaluations of economic situations. But economy is not a circuit, piles up. The precious goods vanish while value less rubbish grows inexorably.

Environmental education is necessary and should be given to both leaders and citizens. The poorer the people, the more they put their hope in their leaders rather than in themselves. Most of the people from whom votes were being solicited were from sprawling Netrobi slums, where such attitudes are prevalent. Now twenty years later, voters are still being bribed to vote for candidates who are opportunists and are unlikely to promote democratic principles and practices like honesty, accountability, transparency and responsibility. It is leaders with such qualities who are more likely to create an enabling environment that could address the issue of urban poverty and unemployment. But populations change slowly and tend to live for now. In our part of the world they tend to vote for leaders who have encouraged dictatorship under such leadership. It is difficult to promote protection of the environment.

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