

## **Post -15 Development Agenda: A Brief Review**

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The concept of the development agenda depends on the concept of sustainability, explains the relationship between economic development, environmental quality and social equality. This concept has been included since 1972, when the international community first discovered the relationship between the quality of life and environment in the United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm. However, it was not until 1987 that the term ‘sustainable development’ was defined as “development that can meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). This definition established a need to take a decision that is capable of balancing the economic and social needs of the people, which is the reusable ability of the natural environment. Sustainable development is a dynamic process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs. According to the Brundtland Commission sustainable development, in the final analysis must rest on political will of the governments as critical economic, environmental and social decisions are made. Sustainable Development has three dimensions: economic, environmental and social. Sustainability is the term chosen to bridge the gulf between development and environment.<sup>1</sup>

Many new environmental models have emerged to replace the old development model. The forms of social change that are aimed at fulfilling human material and non- material needs, advancing social equity, expanding organizational effectiveness and building human and technical capacity towards sustainability. The objectives of sustainability require the protection of the natural resources based upon which future development depends. The environmental development model is aimed not just at protecting nature, but at creating an ecological society that lives in harmony with nature. This means reconciling economic activity, social progress and environmental protection. Sustainable development is part of new efforts, albeit tentative, to integrate environmental, economic and social considerations into a development paradigm. This challenges industrial societies not only to reduce the resource intensity of production and resort to sustainable production but also to undertake new patterns of consumption that reduce the levels of consumption and change what is consumed and by whom, resorting to sustainable consumption. This creates the conditions necessary for ecologically legitimate development, particularly in the Third World.<sup>2</sup>

The term ‘sustainable development’ has been prominent in discussions about environmental policy since the mid-1980s. Following the central role, it played in the United Nations (UN) appointed Brundtland Commission and its report ‘Our Common Future’ (WCED 1987), it has appeared with increasing frequency in academic studies and in government reports. The Brundtland formulation of sustainable development has come to represent mainstream thinking about the relationship between environment and development. An increasing number of international organizations and agencies subscribe to at least some and often most or all of its objectives. These include the European Union (EU), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Bank. National governments, sub-national regional and local authorities, as well as groups within civil society and economic actors, have all made declaratory and practical commitments to this goal. It also recognizes that promoting sustainable development is a cross-cutting policy task that spans across many areas of public policy, including international development, trade, urban planning, land use planning, environmental protection, energy policy, agriculture and industry. The UN has played a particularly prominent role in stimulating engagement with the model of sustainable development. The UN has organized several World Summits, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which took place in Rio de Janeiro, otherwise known as the Rio Earth Summit and the Johannesburg World Summit on

Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in 2002. The Rio Declaration, which arose from the Rio Earth Summit, provides an authoritative set of normative principles- that is, principles that deal with moral issues, including gender equality, intra –generational equity within a generation, inter –generational equity between generations and justice. It also details the governance principles needed to deal with how to manage and organize the promotion of sustainable development within society, in institutions and at the political level. This activity has advanced the understanding of what sustainable development means. The Summits have also led to several internationally binding environmental agreements, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its related Kyoto Protocol, as well as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The UN engagement has also led to a proliferation of institutions and organizations, including ones within civil society and from the business community, with a mandate to promote Sustainable Development, such as the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD). The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process is used as a shorthand way to indicate the range of activities that have taken place under the auspices of the UN since the publication of the Brundtland Report.<sup>3</sup>

Climate scientists have also now established the human causes of climate change. Understanding the global challenges of sustainable development in the environment, energy, economy, poverty and social justice with the understanding of inter-issues, how it explores and how deep questions of sustainable development asked, how should be done about how continuous development policies and methods are being reconsidered; rising food, fuel and commodity prices that impact hardest and first on the poorest people in societies. Finding ways to address and prevent these crises requires interconnected and interdisciplinary thinking that is also at the core of sustainable development. The sustainable development is currently being pursued is significantly different to that in the 1990s. An increasingly globalised world has brought new challenges and opportunities for the environment and for development. New actors such as transnational corporations and civil society organisations and new technologies particularly in computing, information and communication, now shape outcomes in resource development and management to a much greater extent than previously. However, the closer and deeper integration of people and places around the globe brings new risks as well as opportunities. Farmers, for example, may be able to access new and wider markets for their produce but have less direct control over decisions regarding what to grow and when to sell, and to whom. They become increasingly vulnerable to changes in price and consumer's tastes set at great distance away. The patterns of economic development remain closely associated with increased energy demands and rising fossil fuel use. Moving towards lower carbon patterns and processes of development is a challenge for individuals, business and industry, governments and international organisations globally. Economic growth in the past two decades has delivered vast improvements in human well-being including moving over 400 million people out of poverty. Many of the fastest rates of economic growth currently are now in countries of the Global South. Brazil, Russia, India and China, the 'BRIC economies for example, are now responsible for a significant proportion of world exports and constitute a powerful group within international trade negotiations. However, recent economic success has been very unequal across and within countries; low-income countries and particularly within the African countries remain largely peripheral in terms of world trade and foreign investment, for example, income inequality is also increasing worldwide. Differences in wealth and income are seen to be important factors in explaining a range of spatial patterns of 'unsustainable development'. However, poverty has many dimensions beyond material wealth including the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect one's immediate environment and to feel valued within local communities. 'Making globalisation work better for the poor is understood as integral to many of the challenges of sustainable development, as a human rights issue, as a moral concern, for peace and security and economic development in the future.'<sup>4</sup>

The Conference on the Human Environment 1972 in Stockholm Sweden, attended by 113 states and representatives from 19 international organizations, was the first truly international conference devoted exclusively to environmental issues. There, a group of 27 experts articulated the links between environment and development stating that "although in individual instances there were conflicts between environmental and economic priorities, they were intrinsically two sides of the same coin." Another result of the Stockholm Conference was the creation of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) which has the mission 'to provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and people to improve their quality of life without compromising that of the future generations.'<sup>5</sup>

This conference played a catalytic role in promoting the subsequent adoption of international agreements concerned with ocean dumping, pollution from ships, and the endangered species trade. It also adopted the 'Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment,' which included forward-looking principles, such as principle 13 that declared the need for integration and coordination in development planning to allow for environmental protection. However, 'the Stockholm conference was limited in its effectiveness because environmental protection and the need for development, especially in developing countries, were seen as

competing needs and thus were dealt with in a separate, uncoordinated fashion.” Some critics concluded that “the conference was more concerned with identifying trade-offs between environment and development than with promoting harmonious linkages between the two.” Even the UN documents acknowledged after the Stockholm conference that little was accomplished to concretely integrate environmental concerns into development policies and plans. A more integrated perspective that incorporated both economic development and environmental sensitivities was clearly needed.<sup>6</sup>

The United Nations General Assembly created the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1983, which later became known as Brundtland Commission, named after Chair Gro Harlem Brundtland, then the Prime Minister of Norway and the head of the World Health Organization (WHO). In 1987, the Commission published the Brundtland Report, entitled ‘Our Common Future’. It built upon what had been achieved at Stockholm and provided the most politically significant of all definitions of sustainable development, “sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The definition contains two major concepts: firstly, the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to whom overriding priority should be given; and secondly the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs. In that period the concept of sustainable development acquired political momentum ‘through rising public concern in the developed countries over the new and alarming phenomenon of global environmental change, and in some ways it replaced fears of nuclear war that had prevailed in the early 1980’s.’<sup>7</sup>

Some critics argue that “the Brundtland Commission Report’s discussion of sustainability is both optimistic and vague. The Commission probably felt that, in order to be accepted, the discussion had to be optimistic, but given the facts, it was necessary to be vague and contradictory in order not to appear to be pessimistic”. Others are even more critical. “Brundtland provided a slogan behind which first world politicians with green electorates to appease and third world politicians with economic deprivation to tackle, could unite. The formula was of course vague, but the details could be left for later”. But the fact still remains that the concept of sustainable development was born.<sup>8</sup>

The next step was about UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), which was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the summer of 1992, an unprecedented historical event with the largest gathering of 114 heads of state, including 10,000 representatives from 178 countries and 1400 nongovernmental organizations represented by additional thousand. The conference itself proved to be an international event on an unprecedented scale as heads of government tried to make their mark on what was dubbed the Rio Earth Summit. “The association in the title, ‘Connecting Environment and Development’ was indicative of North–South bargaining at the UN, in which demands for international action on the environment were set against claims for additional development aid and technology transfer”. The key outputs of the Conference were the Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and the Commission on Sustainable Development. All are quite explicitly concerned with sustainable development and it is thus, at the conclusion of the Earth Summit that the concept truly arrives on the international scene.<sup>9</sup>

The commitment of leaders from around the world to sustainable development was clearly articulated in Agenda 21, the key document of the summit - a 500-page collection of agreed healthy practices and advices for achieving sustainable development in almost any area on the surface of the earth. Agenda 21 activities are organized under environmental and development themes: quality of life, efficient use of natural resources, protection of the global commons, management of human settlements, and sustainable economic growth. It recognizes that the persistence of severe poverty in several parts of the world alongside a standard of living based on wasteful consumption of resources in other parts is not a sustainable model, and that environmental management must be practiced in developing and industrial countries alike. During the 1992 conference it was agreed that to implement Agenda 21, countries should prepare a national sustainable development strategy. Sustainable development was the unifying principle for the entire Rio conference, there was disagreement about its meaning and implications. The UNCED process attempted to provide guidance in implementing sustainable development by laying out a set of principles and a plan of action based on the concept. Indeed, Rio was less about debating the definition of sustainable development than it was about developing approaches to ensure its implementation. Some critics argue that “implementing the principles of equity and living within ecological limits can only be accomplished if social, political, and economic systems have the flexibility to be redirected toward sustainability as well as integrated with each other and the environment.”<sup>10</sup>

At the Kyoto conference on climate change in 1997, developed countries agreed on specific targets for cutting their emissions of greenhouse gases, resulting in a general framework, which became known as the Kyoto Protocol, with specifics to be detailed over the next few years. The U.S. proposed to stabilize emissions only and not cut them at all, while the European Union called for a 15per centcut. In the end, there was a trade off, and industrialized countries were committed to an overall reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases to 5.2per centthe below 1990 levels for the period 2008-12. However, the complexity of the negotiations created

considerable confusion over compliance even after the Kyoto Protocol itself was adopted because it only outlined the basic features for compliance but did not explain the all-important rules of how they would operate. Although 84 countries signed the Protocol, indicating their intent to ratify it, many others were reluctant to take even this step. Unfortunately, the USA has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The EU has ratified the Kyoto protocol but this has not been enough. The Union has failed to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The overall picture of the situation in 2030 is pessimistic. In relation to 1990 figures, the US's contribution to CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will increase by 50 per cent, compared to an 18 per cent increase in the EU. The Kyoto Protocol still remains one of the most debated international agreements between the 'greens' and the 'neo-liberals.'<sup>11</sup>

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a product of the UN decision making process. It is what governments do when they get together and pass worthy resolutions. Previous UN Resolutions and Development Decades of various kinds have, however, not had much impact. Yet the declaration of MDGs arose from a global perspective with has been forced on governments. The achievements MDGs of are not a top-down question. It is a process over which governments have some amount of direct control through the provision of resources but it is not a question of budgetary allocations. The achievement of MDGs may require some new thinking. The MDGs have brought the debate back to the basic purpose of development, namely the removal of poverty. They have raised anew questions about equitable development.<sup>12</sup>

The Millennium Summit held in New York in September 2000, world leaders agreed on the Millennium Development Goals, most of which had the year 2015 as a timeframe and use 1990 as a benchmark. These goals are both modest and ambitious. The Millennium Development Goals demonstrate that "the livelihoods and well-being of the world's poor are now conceptualized in terms of access to opportunity and absence of insecurity and vulnerability". They represent a more practical expression of the principle of equilibrium between the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. They include (1) halving the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day and those suffering from hunger (2) achieving universal primary education and promoting gender equality, (3) reducing child mortality and improving maternal health, (4) reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS (5) integrating the principles of sustainable development into country specific policies, (6) reducing by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water. Unfortunately, the world still has to tackle "this dangerous blend of indifference and concealment and ultimately rebuild the trust between people, business and government, desperately needed if we are going to stand any chance in achieving the Millennium Development Goals to combat poverty, disease and deprivation by 2015."<sup>13</sup>

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg in 2002 was a landmark in the business of forging partnerships between the United Nations, governments, businesses and NGOs to gather resources for addressing global environment, health and poverty challenges. The Johannesburg Summit reconfirmed the millennium goals and complemented them by setting a number of additional ones such as halving the proportion of people lacking access to basic sanitation; minimizing harmful effects from chemicals; and halting the loss of biodiversity. Some consider the summit a "progress in moving the concept of sustainable development toward a more productive exploration of the relationship between economic development and environmental quality". The WSSD "fills some gaps in the Agenda 21 and the Millennium Development Goals and addresses some newly emerging issues, including halving the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015; to use and produce chemicals by 2020 in ways that do not lead to significant adverse effects on human health and the environment; to maintain or restore depleted fish stocks to levels that can produce the maximum sustainable yield on an urgent basis and where possible by 2015; and to achieve by 2030 a significant reduction in the current rate of loss of biological diversity."<sup>14</sup>

The Johannesburg Conference confirmed a trend, which appeared since the 1992 Conference, of the increasing importance of the socio-economic pillars of sustainable development. The environmental agenda at the two previous UN conferences had been sustained by peaks in the public 'attention cycle' of major developed countries. WSSD incorporated the concept of sustainable development throughout its deliberations and was initially dubbed 'the implementation summit'. Inevitably "demands for additional financial resources and technology transfer continued but much of the debate had already been pre-empted by the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000."<sup>15</sup> The leaders of the world community in 2000 set forth a shared vision for development based on the fundamental values of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility in the form of the Millennium Declaration adopted by the UN General Assembly. The MDGs that followed have since provided milestones for global and national development efforts, with the overall target date of 2015. The MDG framework helped to galvanize development efforts, set global and national priorities and focus action at all levels. Important progress has been made in most countries, particularly towards the goals of eradicating poverty and improving access to primary education.<sup>16</sup>

The UN Millennium Campaign, started in 2002, supports and inspires people from around the world to take action in support of the MDGs. The Millennium Campaign sought to help create the conditions necessary to achieve the MDGs, through advocacy and engagement efforts aimed at civil society. The Campaign helped bridge the analytic, communication and advocacy efforts of the UN systems with partners globally by



disseminating data and analysis emerging from the substantive efforts of the UN systems and other development partners. In this way, the Campaign supported citizen's effort to hold governments accountable for the promises made in the Millennium Declaration, including the MDGs. The Campaigns worked at both national and international levels to support advocacy efforts of civil society and other local groups to hold their governments accountable for achieving the MDGs. The Campaigns accompanied the MDG process by organizing workshops, launching awareness Campaigns, holding public events, sensitizing politicians, conducting research & disseminating good practices. In programme countries, the Campaign creates and inks coalitions of people who work to encourage governments to take seriously their commitments to poverty reduction through design & implementation of policies to achieve the MDGs.<sup>17</sup>

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