



Workshop 8

The economic pillar of sustainable development: educational approaches

Time: 31 March: 15.00 - 18.00h (first part), 1 April: 11.00 - 13.00h (second part)

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Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meeting their own needs.

The World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future
(The Brundtland Report), 1987

Eradicating poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development, particularly for developing countries.

The Plan of Implementation of the Johannesburg World Summit on
Sustainable Development, 2002

The concept of sustainable development must be understood in terms of human needs, rights and responsibility towards the environment as well as in terms of solidarity – between generations and between communities across nations. We must take a holistic approach to the three pillars of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental development. Poverty reduction cannot be delinked from promoting human rights and dignity, building just and peaceful society, and management of the natural resources and the environment. Our thinking and actions tend to remain compartmentalized too often, focusing on one or another of these goals. Achieving MDG 7 on environmental sustainability is vital to reaching the other MDGs on poverty, health and gender equality.

Globally, the extent of poverty remains massive, as half of the world's people live on less than € per day. Inequalities between and within countries are extremely high and in many cases rising. The ratio between the incomes of the richest 20 percent of the world's population to the poorest 20% was 30 to 1 40 years ago. Today it is 90 to 1. Today, the consumption expenditure in an average African household is 20 percent less than it was 25 years ago.

On an operational level, the concept and practice of sustainable development must be focused on the fight against poverty. We can continue to talk about further conceptual refinement of the three pillars of sustainable development, but it is necessary to use our energy to take the bull by the horns and address

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the root cause of the unstable and unsustainable global development. By integrating environmental considerations into the struggle against global poverty, and vice versa, the chances of achieving meaningful progress will substantially increase. At least five aspects of this integrated approach deserve attention.

a) Marginalisation and disparity and claiming a stake for all in economic and social development.

As mentioned above, the vulnerable poor, the large marginal and disadvantaged populations, have to be given a stake in sustainable development. Key elements in this effort are empowerment of people at the local level in designing and achieving poverty reduction; access to productive assets, capital and technology for the poor, microfinance being a widely used instrument; and social safety net and economic support to the ultra-poor, those who are ineligible even for microfinance, in order to enhance their capabilities to access capital and technology. Development NGOs have played an important role in carrying out economic initiatives for the poor.

Effects of climate change show that poor people are most likely to be the first victims and the greatest sufferers of environmental degradation. The poor are more vulnerable than others to environmental hazards and environment-related conflicts and least able to cope with them when they occur. They, as noted, also tend to be most dependent on the natural environment and direct use of natural resources, and are therefore most severely affected by environmental degradation and lack of access to natural resources.

Issues that the workshop may address: Accepting and recognising that the state and public policy have to provide the lead and set the framework for action to protect the vulnerable groups and assist them to cope with short-term and longer term environmental hazards, do NGOs have a comparative advantage over public agencies in serving marginal and disadvantaged groups? In a framework of public private partnership and corporate social responsibility, what role can the private sector play? What institutional mechanisms and processes can help empowerment of the poor, enable the poor to organize for self-help

and assist them to expand their capabilities? What mechanisms exist to assess the effects of climate change on vulnerable groups and geographical areas?

b) Coping with the feminization of poverty.

Women make up two thirds of the world's poorest people, are more likely than men to be poor, malnourished and illiterate, usually have less access to medical care, property ownership, and employment, and are far less likely than men to be politically active.

Women are the first to encounter the effects of ecological stress, because they must walk farther to get wood for cooking and heating, to search for clean water and to find new sources of food. The responsibility for rearing children and ensuring sufficient resources to meet their needs for nutrition, health care and schooling falls upon the mother. Women's lives have been inextricably linked to use of the natural resources in traditional society. Economic and technological development and expansion of economic opportunities have often tended to alter the symbiotic relationship and added new stress both on women's life and on the natural environment. (See Sylvia Chant, "Re-visiting the 'feminisation of poverty' and the UNDP gender indices: what case for a gendered poverty index?" UNDP, March 2006.)

The questions that must be asked: Why are women particularly vulnerable; what are the social, cultural and economic roots which persist and must be challenged? What are the specific vulnerabilities of women in particular social, economic, cultural and ecological contexts? What institutional mechanisms are there (or not there) to identify and deal with these? How are women's vulnerabilities recognized in the existing policies and programmes to combat poverty and disparity?

c) Promoting sustainable production and consumption in the context of poverty reduction.

Roughly five percent of the people of the world in North America enjoys one-third of the world's economic output. On the other hand, one-third of the world's population in China and India can lay claim



on only six percent of the world's economic output. Arguably, the central point of debate on sustainability is whether the pattern of consumption and production in North America and Europe is sustainable for the majority of the world outside the privileged enclave. Another way of posing this question - Is it responsible for the developing world to aspire to emulate and aim to achieve the pattern of production and consumption of North America and Europe? If not, is there an alternative development path that the developing countries need to find and follow, while protecting and promoting the rights, dignity and well-being of all human beings? And what are the moral, ethical and enlightened self-interest imperatives for the rich countries of the industrial world? (See David Korten, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, 2003)

d) Globalization – winners, losers and threats to sustainable development. Winners and losers from the inexorable forces of globalization are determined by whether people live in the global north or in urban and developed parts of a country, whether they are skilled and educated, whether people have acquired the capacity to adjust to change and new situations easily, whether they possess assets, gender and ethnic status of people, and such factors over which people have little control (Paul Streeten, *Globalization: Threat or Opportunity?*, Copenhagen Business School Press, 2001.) Globalization induced improvements in a nation's standard of living also can promote women's status and raise household income, education, nutrition and life expectancy, while lowering birthrates. The key issues clearly are: How to discern the factors which create the winners and losers, identifying the vulnerable groups affected by these factors; how to determine the conditions and actions that would reduce the vulnerability of people; how to promote and support the creation of these conditions and enable people to engage in these actions.

e) Developing learning and knowledge network and technology for sustainable development within the framework of lifelong learning.

The argument for a central position of the knowledge network and lifelong learning in the national development agenda is that it can contribute in important

ways to meeting the challenges of the modern world both for individuals and societies. These challenges as articulated in development priorities and aspiration of societies have to find a place in the curriculum, learning objectives, educational methodology, and in expanding learning opportunities for all. (M. Ahmed, *Adult Learning and Education: Asia Pacific Synthesis for the Global Report*, UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, Hamburg, 2008)

Establishing the relevance of the educational activities for individuals and society, designing the activities accordingly, implementing these to realize the outcomes, and evaluating if indeed the outcomes and, ultimately the desired impact, have been produced are neither one well-defined task, nor can it be the job of one central agency. There are questions of objectives and priorities in programmes, designing curricula and materials, and assessing outcome and impact of a multitude of activities. Major common development challenges stand out:

- I. Fighting poverty, with the largest concentration in the world of people in extreme poverty in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa
- II. Promoting sustainable development; life and livelihood of large numbers of people in the island nations and coastal areas of several countries being under threat, and other aspects of the fragile environment affecting seriously people in all countries; and
- III. Building participatory democracy and the democratic polity, as people in all countries aspire to build a secure future for themselves and for future generations, with peace, harmony, justice and human dignity.

What do these goals mean in educational terms, and how do these blend with or are balanced with other important concerns in each society? Without being prescriptive and not attempting to decide what each country, and to a degree each community and the learners themselves should decide, how can experi-

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ences be shared among countries and lessons are learned about how the complex dynamics work out?

In addressing the knowledge aspects of the identified economic challenges, the workshop will probe the status, trends and innovative initiatives in this respect and indicate the way forward. The action points to be examined at the workshop will include establishing or strengthening learning and knowledge network and linkages, improving quality of teaching-learning and bringing the ESD perspective into educational content and method; overcoming the digital divide; and promoting the achievement of EFA goals and MDGs – all in relation to poverty reduction.