
Environment Protection in Developing Countries

Editor
Najma Heptulla

PERDANA
FOUNDATION
TAYASAN
KEPIMPINAN
PERDANA

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Preface

Surplus and easy availability of anything concerned with human life is often taken for granted, and a complacent attitude develops which disregards these vitals inputs which sustain life forms on our planet. Although humankind has enjoyed the fruits of its environment surroundings since time immemorial, it has failed to appreciate or conserve the same. In his quest for a progressive and luxurious life-style, man has ravaged his own environment by deforestation, pumping out fossil fuels and digging coal to satisfy his energy requirement—requirements which grow as rapidly as his pace of industrialisation. Several climatic changes, increasing incidence of skin and respiratory diseases and slow but steady rise in the ocean levels were a few physical causes which drew world attention towards global environmental issues.

Awareness of the environment was brought to world focus following the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment and with the publication of the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987. Over a period, environmental concerns have moved rapidly towards the top of the world's political and economic agenda. The culmination of this concern was the convening of the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro in June 1982. Addressing India's concern, as also those of the developing countries to the largest summit of its kind, the Prime Minister of India, Shri P.V. Narasimha Rao stated that "we cannot have conservation of the environment without the promise of development, even as we cannot have sustained development without the preservation of the environment." He further reiterated the Planet Protection Fund proposal for accessing environment-friendly technologies.

The statement by India's Prime Minister reflects India's position on environmental and development issues. These issues have, of late, become a matter of debate between the developed and the developing countries. While responsible for maximum environmental degradation, the developed world is shifting the onus of environmental protection on to developing countries, imposing restrictions which have a potential for severe economic repercussions on these countries. These moves have prompted even countries like Saudi Arabia to react sharply.

According to H.E. Hisham Nazer, Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the developed countries should realise the plight of the developing countries and appreciate their priorities in any global initiative or understanding. He stresses that environment protection and sustainable development in the developing countries can only be achieved after eradication of poverty, "attacking poverty is not only a moral imperative but it is also essential for environmental stewardship". The industrialised countries have direct responsibility in the process to help alleviate poverty and enhance world economic growth. "Abject poverty is indeed the worst environmental pollutant facing mankind. It degrades a human being far more inescapably than carbon dioxide. The immediate struggle for basic survival by the poor of this world overwhelms the legitimate concerns of environmental protection. It is all very well to talk to future generations when the stomach is full. But an empty stomach cannot think beyond the next meal."

H.E. Hisham Nazer rightly points out that there is a growing concern that many environmental and energy policies promoted and implemented in some industrialised countries (here he is hinting at the proposed EC energy/carbon tax), or under environmental constraints imposed on the developing countries through international agreements or aid organisations, could seriously impair the developing countries ability to sustain economic growth. It is estimated, for instance, that the developing countries would need an additional 125 billion dollars annually in foreign assistance alone in order to improve their environment. The sad part is that the developing countries do not have enough resources and the rich countries are not willing to fit the bill.

India's concerns were amply highlighted by our Minister for Environment and Forests, Shri Kamalnath at the Rio Conference held at Brazil in June, 1992. He pointed out that "populations of the South, through their deprivation, have been subsidising, prosperity of the rich." Therefore, it was not proper for developed countries to impose restrictions on the economic betterment of the already deprived countries. Mr. Kamal Nath pointed out to the august gathering that, "progress in technological developments, such as biotechnology, is based on both the rich biodiversity of the South as also the traditional knowledge of the rural and indigenous communities of the South. Genetic resources have been collected from the South with no payment made to the South; on the contrary, these living resources are now sought to be patented and sold back to the countries of their origin, often at exorbitant prices.....such a asymmetry of burdens and obligations is incompatible with the principle of shared responsibility." He emphasised that the solution to our environmental concerns "lies in

a genuine sharing partnership between all the nations.....developed and developing".

We in India also feel that environment is a matter of common concern—as any damage to it affects us all. Our efforts should be to avoid a North-South Confrontation on the issue and, instead, forge a global partnership which simultaneously seeks to protect the environment while addressing the development needs of the developing countries.

The West has itself focussed international attention on global environmental issues such as ozone depletion, acid rain, global warming, and climatic changes, while acknowledging the importance of these issues, we do feel that the principle sources of emission of pollutants into the environment are in the developed countries and, therefore, it is the responsibility of these countries to combat such pollution by modifying excessive consumption patterns and unsustainable life-styles. Any approach towards corrective measures should not, however, divert international attention from confronting the pressing environmental problems facing developing countries (such as land degradation, food security, drinking water, and health and nutrition). Tackling such problems would not only improve the environment in the local or national context but would equally contribute towards resolving a number of environmental issues of global concern.

International instruments and regulatory approaches towards environment protection should also incorporate measures on funding and transfer of technology which would enable developing countries to adjust smoothly to international regimes. Without the provision of adequate funding and provision of environmentally benign technologies on a preferential and concessional basis, it would be almost impossible for developing countries to adopt environmentally sound and desirable technologies, much as they would like to do so. These views have also been voiced before Inter-Parliamentary Union. Transfers of technology and funds for environmental protection should not become yet another instrument of pressure in the hands of the developed countries. Therefore, all such transfer mechanisms should be democratically administered.

The concern for environment protection, specially in the Indian context and my subsequent association with Environment Committee of IPU as its member, motivated me to organise a seminar on "Environmental Protection and Developing Countries" at Delhi in May 1992. Experts on environment from all walks of life participated in this seminar. The large response and participants which included environmentalists, scientists, bureaucrats, academicians, industrialists and non-governmental organisation made the seminar a great success and was

indicative of the growing universal concern on issues relating to environment. The present collection in this book includes papers which were presented during the seminar. However, quite a few of the papers could not be adjusted in the book due to restraints of size and space.

I would like to express my thanks to Shri Kamal Nath whose cooperation and financial help went a long way in making the seminar a great success. I wish to thank all the participants at the seminar for their papers and valuable suggestions which, I am sure, would be duly taken note of. I would also like to acknowledge my sincere gratitude to my husband, Shri Akbar A. Heptulla and my daughter Asma Heptulla who themselves being great environmentalists have encouraged me all these years to inculcate a comprehensive understanding of the cause. I wish to thank Shri Jayant Misra who rendered great help in organising the seminar and finalising the list of participants. After the seminar was over I was assisted by Shri Kapil Kaul in scrutinising the papers to present them in the book form. I thank him and record my appreciation for the assistance rendered by members of my staff Shri S.R. Nijhawan, Shri Bhupesh Khatri, Shri Badruddin Khan, Miss Madhu Sharma, Shri M.I. Farooqi and Shri Raghbir at various stages from organising the seminar till bringing out the selected papers in the book form.

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