

## ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINED DEVELOPMENT IN THE THIRD WORLD: A REVIEW OF THE PAST DECADE

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Exactly a decade ago, during 5-16 June 1972, the United Nations convened an intergovernmental conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm, Sweden. It was the first of the UN mega-conferences that set the pattern for the 1970s, and was followed in rapid succession by several other similar major conferences on critical global issues. These were, in chronological order, on population (Bucharest, 1974), food (Rome, 1974), human settlements (Vancouver, 1976), water (Mar del Plata, 1977), desertification (Nairobi, 1977), science and technology (Vienna, 1979), and renewable energy (Nairobi, 1981). In order to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the General Assembly of the United Nations decreed that a Session of Special Character (SSC) of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) should be held in 1982, in which all nations should participate. The Special Session was held in Nairobi during 10-18 May 1982, and was attended by several Heads of State, ministers and leading international figures. It was held to 'rekindle the spirit of Stockholm, and by so doing strengthen the commitment of governments to the environment'.

Viewed from any direction, the Stockholm Conference was an important bench-mark for the environmental movement. Accordingly, during its tenth anniversary, it is appropriate to analyse how the environmental issues and concerns have been viewed during the last decade in the Third World countries, and also to review the work of UNEP, which was established by the Conference, especially as they relate to developing countries.

### **Genesis of the Stockholm Conference**

For a better understanding of the different environmental views prevalent a decade ago, it is important to review briefly the reasons for the occurrence of the Stockholm Conference.

Undoubtedly, one of the major factors was the development of a substantial and popular environmental movement in the mid-1960s in the Western industrialised countries, especially in North America. Numerous citizens' groups and non-governmental organisations continually focused the attention of the public and politicians on environmental problems. Many groups took to the streets to protest, and environment became one of the major issues on which the youth rebelled against the establishment. These pressure groups started to publicise critical and emerging problems, some real and others not so. At the crest of the environment movement, the Earth Day attracted an estimated 20

million participants in the United States alone.

Because of public interest, the news media started to provide a wider coverage of environmental problems. *Time* started a new section called *Environment*. Articles dealing with environmental issues in the *New York Times* skyrocketed from about 150 in 1960 to around 1700 in 1970, even though the coverage did decline significantly since that time. Similar developments took place in other Western countries such as Canada, Sweden and Japan.

As to be expected, scientists also played an important part in shaping the environmental movement. The decade witnessed the publication of some excellent and objective works like *Study of Critical Environmental Problems: Man's impacts on the global environment* (popularly known as the SCEP Report),<sup>1</sup> which provided an excellent dispassionate analysis of environmental issues. While such reports were well-received by the scientific community as a whole, they tended to be ignored by the media, which tended to be preoccupied with 'trigger' events like the Torrey Canyon and Arrow oil-spill disasters or the mercury content of fish. The media also provided extensive coverage of 'gloom and doom' forecasts for the world by certain scientists, which on a short-term basis, it has to be admitted, did heighten the public interest in environmental affairs. However, on a longer-term perspective, such statements were detrimental to the environmental movement. Their interests were focused on certain specific issues like the population explosion in the Third World, the high level of resources consumption in the West, the evils of economic growth and technology, and individual cases of air, water and soil pollution.

It is worthwhile to look back on some of the statements which made headlines and did have some impacts on the public opinion during the late 1960s and the early 1970s. Paul Ehrlich, who was at the forefront of the environmental movement, asserted in 1968: 'the battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s the world will undergo famines — hundreds of millions of people are going to starve to death'.<sup>2</sup> A year later, in a paper entitled *Eco-Catastrophe*, Ehrlich went even further. He described a 'pretty grim scenario' into which we were already 'a long way' launched. The scenario was:

The end of the ocean came late in the summer of 1979. There had been the final gasp of the whaling industry in 1979 . . . By September, 1979, all important animal life in the sea was extinct . . . Japan and China were faced with almost instant starvation from a total loss of the seafood on which they were so dependent.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly, in 1967, William and Paul Craddock in their book *Famine 1975* advocated the policy of 'triage — letting the least fit die in order to save more robust victims of hunger', an idea that received wide publicity.<sup>4</sup> They classified developing countries into three categories as 'can't be saved', 'walking wounded',

<sup>1</sup> SCEP, *Study of Critical Environmental Problems: Man's impacts on the global environment*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> P Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb*, New York: Ballantine Books, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> P Ehrlich, 'Eco-catastrophe', *Ramparts*, 24-28 September 1969.

<sup>4</sup> William and Paul Paddock, *Famine 1975*, Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1967 (republished in 1976 with a new introduction and postscript).

and 'should receive food'. They wrote off countries like India or Egypt under the 'can't be saved' category.<sup>5</sup> Even in a later edition of the book published in 1976, the Craddock brothers claimed that the 'basic facts have not changed'.

Two reports on population explosion, resource depletion and environmental quality that received wide publicity in 1972, the same year as the Stockholm Conference was held, were *A Blueprint for Survival* by the journal *The Ecologist*<sup>6</sup> and *The Limits to Growth* by Meadows *et al.*<sup>7</sup> The former polemic was written in Britain, and was signed by several respected scientists. *The Limits to Growth* was a highly condensed but very readable report that attempted to analyse for the first time the complex interactions between population, resources and environment by computer modelling. In so doing, and by ringing the doomsday bell as well, it provided a bandwagon for parties who were already more than convinced that mankind was headed straight for disaster, unless growth-oriented policies were foresaken.<sup>8,9</sup>

There were many other well-known scientists in the Western world, who provided such apocalyptic visions on the future of mankind. Lord Ashby of Brandon said of the report *Blueprint for Survival*, 'a travesty of the authoritative and impressive SCEP report . . . It rang the doomsday bell with vigour . . . On practically every page there were assertions repugnant to the rational reader: plunges into naive fallacies; innuendos; patently incorrect assertions; and statements unsupported by published and accepted evidence'.<sup>10</sup> Reviewing some of the environmental developments of this period, the distinguished environmentalist F Kenneth Hare has observed that the remarkable thing about such apocalyptic visions is not that they were so wrong, but that they were written with great passion by distinguished scientists, who have made and continue to make, major contributions to science in other areas. Hare observes: 'the environmentalist movement has captured, and occasionally intoxicated, a number of first-class minds'.<sup>11</sup>

The Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment was first proposed by Sweden in 1968 under these conditions. The Swedes were specifically concerned about three environmental problems which they thought could be resolved only through international cooperation and action. These issues were acid rains, pollution of the Baltic Sea, and the levels of pesticides and heavy metals in fishes and birds. With the interest in environmental issues running high in the Western

<sup>5</sup> Margaret and Asit Biswas, 'Environment and Development', in *Impact of the Development of Science and Technology on Environment*, edited by A K and A Sharma, Calcutta: Indian Science Congress Association 1981, pp. 107-114.

<sup>6</sup> The Ecologist, 'Blueprint for Survival', *The Ecologist* 2(1) 1972, pp. 1-43.

<sup>7</sup> D H Meadows, D L Meadows, J Randers & W W Behrens, *The Limits to Growth*, New York: Basic Books, 1972.

<sup>8</sup> A K Biswas, 'World Models, Resources and Environment', *Environmental Conservation* 6(1) 1979, pp. 3-10.

<sup>9</sup> A K Biswas, 'Global Future Studies: review of the past decade', *Mazingira* 6(1) 1982.

<sup>10</sup> Lord Ashby of Brandon, *Reconciling Man with Environment*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> F K Hare, 'The Planetary Environment: fragile or sturdy?' *The Geographical Journal* 146(3) 1980, pp. 379-95.

industrialised countries, the Swedish proposal fell on receptive ground, and thus it was no surprise that the General Assembly of the United Nations decided by Resolution 2398 (XXIII) of 3 December 1968 to hold a Conference on the Human Environment in 1972. Maurice F Strong of Canada was appointed the Secretary-General of the Conference.

### **Interest In The Third World: prior to Stockholm**

The reactions of developing countries to the suggestion of an intergovernmental conference on the human environment were mixed. Interest on environmental concerns was not as high as in the West, and there was a general feeling that environmental problems were less of a priority compared to the 'real' problem facing them: the alleviation of poverty. It is, however, not an easy task to provide as succinct analysis of the environmental thinking in the Third World countries prior to the Stockholm Conference as can be done for the Western countries, primarily because of the lack of adequate documentation.

One of the few studies from this period that we are aware of was by the United States Agency for International Development (AID), which canvassed its overseas Missions in 1971 in order to identify the most serious problems confronting thirty-five developing countries. The report concluded that there was:

little evidence of awareness of environmental problems among the peoples of developing countries, or among their government administrators . . . Many countries are pre-occupied with the development of their natural resources, and, to the extent that concern does exist for the environment, there appears to be apprehension that social and economic costs of environmental protection may very well out-weigh the benefits'.<sup>12</sup>

While one may disagree with the tone or emphasis of the above assessment, it appears to be reasonably accurate.

The reaction of most developing countries to the Stockholm Conference, when it was first announced, was somewhat lukewarm. There were some serious concerns which were raised by several representatives of developing countries at various international forums. Among these concerns were the following. First, there was a widespread concern that the imposition of environmental regulations and safeguards will represent a new claim on the limited productive resources available to developing countries, and this may prove detrimental to their future rate of development. Second, there was a fear that stringent implementation of environmental regulations in developed countries could have a negative effect on exports potential and trading patterns of developing countries. For example, extensive recycling and more efficient use of raw materials in the West may tend to diminish the volume of primary commodities consumed by the importing countries, which may have adverse economic repercussions on developing

<sup>12</sup> AID Interoffice Memorandum, *Survey of Environmental Attitudes and Needs in Africa*, Washington DC: AID, 23 April 1974, p 1.

countries that have come to rely on such exports. It was felt that some traditional export markets for agricultural products, as well as fish and meat, could even be lost to the Third World, if developed countries banned such products for environmental reasons i.e. high pesticide concentration or heavy metal contamination. Third, environmental issues could turn out to be a formidable competitor for investment funds available in developed countries. If such a concern did not exist, the extra funds may have been channelled towards development assistance for Third World countries. Fourth, some countries were concerned that environmental factors could influence world trade to an ever-increasing degree by changing the pattern of international distribution of industry, as well as the competitive position between countries by altering comparative production costs of goods manufactured. It was felt that countries enforcing less environmentally-stringent standards could have significant production cost advantages. Fifth, developing countries may not be able to take full advantage of new opportunities that would arise from environmental control processes, but they would be expected to pay the full costs for the extra burden which such controls would impose on them.

Faced with such mounting concerns from developing countries, Maurice Strong convened a panel of 27 international experts at Founex, Switzerland, during 4-12 June 1971, to discuss and review the relevance of the environmental concerns to developing countries.

The Founex report reviewed the linkages between environment and development, and proved to be a pivotal meeting. It concluded that while environmental concerns will inevitably 'cast its shadow on all international economic relations', and such implications can be perceived 'only a little dimly at this stage: much more thought and research work is needed before the outlines become any clearer'. So far as growing fears in the Third World on the potential adverse impact of environmental concerns in the areas of trade, aid and technology transfer, the Expert Panel felt that some of 'these fears may be no more than the inherent fears of the weak in any confrontation with the stronger members of the international community'. On the question of possible 'neo-protectionism' of national trade on the basis of rigorous environmental standards in developed countries, the Panel advised:

The major danger that both developing and developed countries have to guard against is that the environment may be turned into an argument for greater protection by vested interests. When the concern spreads from the quality of a product to the environment in which such a product was produced, the alarm bells should ring all over the world, for it would be the beginning of the worst form of protectionism.<sup>13</sup>

Whatever one thinks of the Founex report, it served its purpose admirably. Many of the fears expressed by developing countries were alleviated even though they were not completely eliminated. Developing countries participated

<sup>13</sup> 'Development and Environment: the Founex Report', *In Defence of the Earth*, Executive Series 1, Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 1981, pp. 1-38.

effectively at Stockholm, which undoubtedly made the Conference more successful than otherwise it might have been.

### Interest in the Third World during Stockholm

Even though developing countries participated at the Stockholm Conference, a dispute over the status of East Germany meant that the USSR and the rest of the East European bloc (with the exception of Romania) did not take part. Altogether 113 nations participated.

There was much reference to environment-development interlinkages during the debate at Stockholm. Many speakers from developing countries pointed out the dismal but obvious fact that for nearly two-thirds of the world population, the human environment was dominated by poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and sheer misery. Accordingly, the priority for developing countries has to be more accelerated development. Until such development takes place, and the gap between rich and poor nations was substantially reduced, there could be only limited progress to improve the human environment. In essence, poverty was the worst form of pollution. However, there appeared to be general agreement between the Third World countries that environmental considerations should be integrally linked to national development strategies. Such interlinkages, it was felt, would help the countries to avoid the mistakes made by developed countries during their development process, make the utilisation of both human and natural resources more efficient and ultimately enhance the quality of life of their citizens. There was a general agreement that the concept of 'no growth' was totally unacceptable, but there was a feeling that it was necessary to rethink the traditional concepts of growth. Many countries, both developing and developed, argued that a mindless pursuit of Gross National Product as the only indicator of growth, without other considerations, could only produce conditions that were an affront to the dignity of man. The requirements of clean air, unpolluted water and land, shelter and health were undeniable rights of man.

The Conference agreed on a Declaration and an Action Plan. The Declaration consisted of a Proclamation and 26 principles. The Proclamation was somewhat general and put man firmly as the central focus of the equation. It said categorically that 'of all things in the world, people are the most precious',<sup>14</sup> a thought that was originally expressed at the Conference by Tang Ke, the leader of the Chinese delegation.

The principles adopted were fairly commonsensical, and the majority of them are still valid today. Typical examples are:

- Natural resources of the earth must be safeguarded for the benefit of present and future generations (*Principle 2*)
- Capacity of the earth to produce renewable resources must be maintained, restored or improved (*Principle 3*)
- Wildlife and its habitat must be conserved (*Principle 4*)

<sup>14</sup> *Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, A/CONF.48/14/Rev.1, New York: United Nations 1973, pp. 1-28.*

- Non-renewable resources must be managed to prevent their exhaustion and to ensure that the benefits are shared by all mankind (*Principle 5*)
- Economic and social development is essential for the improvement of quality of life (*Principle 8*)
- Nations have sovereign right to exploit their own resources. No nation has the right to damage another nation's environment (*Principle 21*)
- Nuclear weapons and all other means of mass destruction must be eliminated (*Principle 26*)

The Conference agreed on 109 recommendations, the majority of which (51) were in the area of natural resources. With the exceptions of a few recommendations which were supposed to achieve certain objectives by specific target dates, all other recommendations were open-ended. The three specific targets set were in the areas of commercial whaling (*Recommendation 33*, 'international agreement . . . for a 10-year moratorium'), prevention of deliberate oil-spills (*Recommendation 86(e)*, 'elimination . . . by the middle of the present decade'), and a comprehensive report on available energy sources, new technology and consumption trends (*Recommendation 59*, 'a first report, at the latest in 1975'). None of the targets was met.

### **Interest in the Third World: after Stockholm**

Looking back, a decade later, the Stockholm Conference appears to have been more of a success than many realised at that time. Its timing was right: it was held when the environmental movement in the West was at its peak, and rich countries were willing to provide funds for international environmental protection and management. In contrast, the timing of some other world conferences was incorrect. For example, the one on Renewable Energy in Nairobi in August 1981 was held when world attention on energy problems was beginning to wane, amidst a reduced global energy demand, an oil surplus and falling prices. Had this Conference been held some three years earlier, under different sets of circumstances, the results could have been more positive. Stockholm further established an international machinery (the United Nations Environment Programme) as the environmental conscience of the UN system, to look after the events following the Conference.

The Stockholm Conference also raised the environmental consciousness of the world and sensitised public opinion. In addition to the actual conference, an Environmental Forum was organised for environmental pressure-groups and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Some eight thousand people attended this alternative forum, including NGOs with names like Hog Farm, Pow-Wow, People's Forum, Oi Group, Greenpeace and Alternative City. They published a daily conference newsletter called *ECO*, held numerous meetings, demonstrated on the streets and vigorously lobbied government delegates. A declaration called 'Dai Dong' was issued which emphasised three areas of concern: equitable distribution of resources, monitoring the role of multi-national corporations and limiting increasing militarism. They also formed a

new group: International Assembly of NGOs Concerned With the Human Environment (INASEN). It met annually in Geneva until 1975 but was dissolved in 1977, when it became part of a larger umbrella organisation — Environment Liaison Centre (ELC) — with its headquarters in Nairobi. ELC became a focal point for NGO inputs to UNEP.

If one considers the Conference proper and the simultaneous Environment Forum, together they resulted in one of the largest international gatherings ever held. They also set an important precedent — in terms of the pattern of NGO involvements in all subsequent such world conferences as well as UN environmental affairs.

While Stockholm was an important milestone in the environmental movement, it failed to recognise certain important issues. Probably the two most important failures were to look at environmental problems sectorally and a negative approach to their solution.

A review of the Stockholm Action Plan would clearly indicate its sectoral nature. The recommendations were categorised neatly by sectors, i.e. air, water, soil, energy, mining, fisheries, forestry, livestock, *etc.* Any yet one of the major environmental concerns has to be the interlinkages between the different sectors. Without appropriate safeguards, many times actions taken to alleviate certain problems in one area have given rise to a series of adverse impacts in other areas, the sum total of which could even exceed the total benefits the action was originally intended to provide.<sup>15</sup> Thus, environmental policies and actions have to be viewed on a broader context of interrelationships between people-resources-environment-development. Without such an understanding, it is not possible to have development on a long-term sustainable basis. This is what UNEP's Executive Director, Mostafa Kamal Tolba, has called Development Without Destruction.<sup>16</sup>

The second problem was the negative approach to the environmental problems — stop all form of pollution, stop exhausting non-renewable resources and stop using renewable resources faster than their regeneration. It is not difficult, however, to determine the reason for adopting such an approach. The main emphasis in the West in the early 1970s was control of different forms of pollution, and it was this concern that was manifested in the Stockholm Action Plan. The emphasis over the decade, however, has shifted. It is no longer on stopping environmental pollution, though it remains a primary objective, but rather how to manage the environment better so that pollution problems are substantially reduced. In other words, the main emphasis is now on how to treat the disease and not on individual treatments to reduce its many symptoms.

There are many other issues where the Action Plan does not look as good as it

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of this point and selected examples, see Margaret and Asit Biswas, *Major Requirements for Environmental Education*, Key-Note Lecture, International Conference on Environmental Education, New Delhi, 16-20 December 1981, 14pp. and A K Biswas, *Environment and Sustainable Water Development*, Key-Note Lecture, 4th Congress, International Water Resources Association, Buenos Aires, September 1982, 27pp.

<sup>16</sup> M K Tolba, *Development Without Destruction: evolving environmental perceptions*, Dublin: Tycooly International Publishing Ltd., 1982, 197pp.



did a decade ago. Only three examples will be given here. First, the Plan did not give enough attention to appropriate technology, even though the subject was a major issue in the early 1970s. Recommendation 108 of the Action Plan is on environmental technologies, but the Conference basically chose to ignore appropriate technology, even though the concept was well developed at that time. Second, Conference recommendations on destruction of tropical forests were insipid, primarily because many countries – notably Brazil – defended their sovereign rights to treat their own forests in whatever way they wished. Thus, the recommendations only called for more studies, surveys and data collection. Later on during the decade, similar problems bedevilled the UN system in formulating guidelines on the management of natural resources shared by two or more states. Third, the major concern at Stockholm in the area of water resources was how to ensure development does not contribute to adverse environmental impacts. The issue of the availability of clean water to the people of developing countries was not raised. A decade later, the provision of clean water has become a major environmental goal in itself. Following the recommendation of the UN Water Conference, the period 1981-1990 has been declared the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade.<sup>17</sup>

Over the last decade, there is no doubt the interest of the Third World countries to environmental issues has gradually increased due to many reasons, an important one of which is the Stockholm Conference and the work of UNEP following it. This, however, does not mean that all the doubters have 'seen the light'. The false concept that environmental management has to await until some degree of economic development (invariably undefined) takes place persisted in some people's minds well toward the end of the last decade. An AID review of environmental needs of African countries noted in 1974 that for most of the countries 'development is the "absolute priority" and environmental considerations must not be allowed to interfere with the development process'.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, during the last Plenary Meeting for the UN Water Conference, when the question of environmental considerations for large water projects was raised, the delegates from Brazil and Sudan attacked it so vehemently that the idea had to be dropped.

But overall, as the decade progressed, the relationship between environment and development came into sharper focus and became clearer. It was gradually accepted that environment and development are two sides of the same coin.<sup>19</sup> Much of the credit for clarification of this concept as well as its acceptance by developing countries must go personally to UNEP's Executive Director, Mostafa Tolba, who made it one of his priority areas. As a result of such efforts,

<sup>17</sup> A K Biswas, 'Water for the Third World', *Foreign Affairs* 60(1) 1981, pp. 148-66.

<sup>18</sup> Republic of Costa Rica, *Plan of Action for Renewable Natural Resources*, Publication No. 3, San José: Nation Press, 1978, p 1.

<sup>19</sup> Some have claimed that 'At Founex it became obvious that "development" and "environment" were but two sides of the same coin' (see for example, Foreword, *In Defence of the Earth*, Nairobi: UNEP 1981, p vii). While Founex did discuss some of the interlinkages of environment-development, it did not come to such a conclusion. In fact, the Founex Report virtually ignored the fact that poverty is a form of pollution, and the poor may have no choice about it.

environmental concerns are now being integrated into development strategies of different Third World nations, which undoubtedly is a major improvement of the state of affairs that existed only over half a decade ago. We shall give examples from three countries here.

First, in Costa Rica. President Rodrigo Cárazo Odio pledged in 1978 to establish a 'broad, aggressive and coordinated programme for conservation and rational use of renewable natural resources.' He said:

Costa Rica is approaching the point of no return with regard to the management of its renewable natural resources . . . Travelling through the interior of the country, especially in the dry season, it is possible to contemplate how vast areas have been completely cut over and burned and suffering the effects of the cancer of erosion. The most lamentable part of this picture is the obvious instability and poverty of the rural communities, the reduction in the potential for productivity of the soil, and the loss of options for uses having greater economic and social benefits.<sup>20</sup>

Second, in Nepal, where the basic 1980-85 development plan clearly recognises the interrelationships between environmental and natural resources issues and development. It states: 'Problems like population pressure, limited cultivable land, and destruction of natural resources will adversely tell on the whole development process itself'.

Third, in India, where the Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, said in 1980:

The interest in conservation is not a sentimental one but rediscovery of the truth well-known to our ancient sages. The Indian tradition teaches us that all forms of life — human, animal and plant — are so closely interlinked that disturbance in one gives rise to imbalance in the others.

Similarly, the Framework Document for India's Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) outlines an objective of the Plan to be the following:

Bringing about harmony between the short and long term goals of development by promoting the protection and improvement of ecological and environmental assets.<sup>21</sup>

While it has to be accepted that the above examples of integrating environmental concerns in development strategies have not yet been unanimously implemented in all the Third World nations, there is no doubt that there has been a widespread and dramatic change in the attitudes of governments to environment-development issues.

### UNEP and the Third World

Right from its very inception, UNEP had a special relationship with the Third

<sup>20</sup> Office of Science and Technology, Bureau for Technical Assistance, *Environmental Problems in Selected Developing Countries*, Washington DC: Agency for International Development, July 1971, p 10.

<sup>21</sup> *Report of the Committee for Recommending Legislative Measures and Administrative Machinery for Ensuring Environmental Protection*, New Delhi: Department of Science and Technology, 15 September 1980, p 2.

World nations, because of its very location, which meant it 'belonged' to the Third World. It was the first UN organisation to have its headquarters in a developing country, in Nairobi, Kenya. This was accomplished despite determined opposition from both the Western and the East European countries to the proposal during its initial stages. The idea did, however, eventually receive unanimous approval.

UNEP was set up as the 'environmental conscience of the UN system'. Its role is catalytic, and it is not an executive agency like WHO, UNESCO, or FAO, having a massive budget, a large headquarters and a huge staff. It is a small organisation, having a professional staff of around 180 people, and an annual budget of about \$40 million, part of which is in non-convertible currency, which entails some restrictions as to where such funds can be utilised.

Over the last decade, UNEP has progressively built up its relation with the Third World. It has been responsive to their needs, and to a large extent this has happened because of Dr Tolba's personal interests and beliefs. As a head of a UN organisation, he has some unusual qualities – the most important of which is his own standing in the international scientific community because of his numerous earlier scientific contributions. Right from the very beginning, he has been able to attract the cream of international scientists to give him the best possible advice, a fact that has considerably helped UNEP's performance and standing. This was also reflected during the preparation for the United Nations Conference on Desertification, held at Nairobi in 1977, of which Dr Tolba was the Secretary-General. It is now universally accepted that the quality of documents prepared for the Desertification Conference was scientifically excellent, and significantly better than those prepared for any other similar world conferences.

Undoubtedly UNEP's major success has been to make policymakers, especially in developing countries, more aware of the environmental opportunities and constraints. This sensitisation of leading political figures and decision makers has been largely instrumental in incorporating environmental considerations in national development strategies. This fact has now been widely recognised. For example, in a report to the US President, the Council on Environmental Quality and the Department of State observed 'UNEP has been a key factor in raising environmental consciousness in the Third World.'<sup>22</sup>

UNEP's success can also be judged by the exponential growth of national environmental machineries as well as international environmental legislation. In 1972, during the Stockholm Conference, there were only 11 national machineries dealing with the environment, mostly in developed countries. By 1981, the situation had changed dramatically; some 106 countries had such governmental machineries. Similarly, the amount of international environmental legislation increased from 26 in 1970 to 58 in 1979.

Equally successful has been UNEP's efforts in fostering co-operation between national governments to solve regional problems, especially in the areas of Regional Seas. Currently Regional Sea programmes are envisaged in the

<sup>22</sup> Council on Environmental Quality and Department of State, *Global Future: Time to Act*, Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1981, p 183.

following 10 areas (the dates of agreement on Plans of Action are given within brackets): Red Sea (1976), Kuwait region (1978), West and Central African coastal seas (1981), Caribbean (1981), East Asian seas (1981), South-East Pacific Seas (1981), South-West Pacific Seas (1982), East African Seas (foreseen for 1983) and South-West Atlantic (foreseen for 1983).

In all Regional Sea programmes, UNEP has acted as an initial catalyst, bringing together nations and international organisations concerned. As the programme grows, the states gradually take over. In their oldest programme, on the Mediterranean, currently some 84 laboratories from 16 countries are participating in monitoring and research activities, and governments of the region pledged to contribute more than 97 per cent of the cost of the programme for the next two years.

A direct benefit of such activities has been the role of environment as a unifying effort, an objective not anticipated at Stockholm. UNEP has succeeded in getting mutually hostile nations to sit around a table to discuss, negotiate, and attempt to solve regional problems. Thus, UNEP managed to get mutually hostile countries such as Turkey, Cyprus and Greece; Egypt and Israel (before Camp David); Israel and Syria; Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, to sit together regularly to resolve regional problems. Last April, when Iran and Iraq were at war, their representatives – at ministerial and ambassadorial levels – were discussing the Kuwait Action Plan. When Iran objected to its share of the Trust Fund, Iraq was one of the other seven Arab states that agreed to pick up part of Iran's share. This, undoubtedly, was a major achievement.

Finally, UNEP has successfully managed to look at certain problems, i.e. carbon dioxide or ozone, which developed countries have considered to be important but which Third World countries have not felt to be significant. By assessing the state of knowledge, quality of available data, and risks and uncertainties involved, UNEP has managed to bring an objectivity to the situation which is clearly needed if co-operative action is to be taken.

Like any new organisation, UNEP has had not only its share of successes but also some failures. For example, it has not managed to reach the grass roots at national levels, especially in developing countries, a criticism that is perhaps valid for the entire UN system as well. It has not paid enough attention to provide forums where different interest groups, having different perceptions, could come together to discuss issues, risks involved and actions to be taken. Attempts are being made, however, to rectify the situation. In June 1982 a group of politicians, scientists, industrialists, and journalists was convened in London to discuss major global environmental issues.

Another area where developing countries need some immediate assistance is environmental impact assessments. The current methodologies available were all developed in the West. In their present state, they are too complex, expensive and time-consuming to carry out. Consequently, many developing countries are in a difficult situation since they would like to carry out environmental impact assessments, but they are unable to do so because of lack of techniques that can be easily and quickly adopted.

Finally, the record of UNEP on information dissemination has not been all that good. It has already collected a large amount of information as a result of many successful projects, but these are not being used effectively. While other UN organisations also suffer from this disease, this is an important problem that needs to be rectified in the future.

### Conclusion

According to all studies, the number of people in developing countries suffering from abject poverty is increasing steadily. Because the requirements of food, fibre, shelter, health and other basic necessities of life depend upon the continuing productivity of the relevant resources, the single most important prerequisite to the eradication of poverty could very well be our ability to manage these resources effectively and efficiently on a long-term basis. Thus, the ultimate achievement of mankind could very well be sustainable development. Development can only be sustainable if we specifically incorporate environmental concerns in formulating national development strategies. If we fail, the prospect will continue to be grim: the world's poor will continue to suffer from our failure to address the problems successfully.