

Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

Preamble

The above are very fashionable terms in current international course but their meaning and significance in the 21st century are obscured by the usual western pragmatism and the economic neo-liberalism espoused by the World Bank and the IMF. For instance, the arguments advanced so far for advocating “sustainable development” are based on traditional Western pragmatism and positivist suppositions – a monolith view of the cosmos. The latter passes as an incarnation of universalism owing to western intellectual and scientific hegemony. Yet, this is exactly the problem, as is shown by the unfolding process of the so-called globalisation – a drive towards a unipolar global order in which the rich countries seek to shape the world according to their mundane interests and ideological presuppositions. As will be shown presently, “rationalizations” is the correct way of characterising the terms of reference of the current debate on “Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction”.

Since the beginning of the new millennium two initiatives, regarding sustainable development and the problem of poverty, have predominated. These are the World Bank’s Environment Strategy and the UNDP-EU Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI). Not surprisingly, both initiatives treat poverty as something apart and amenable to certain ameliorative measures. Starting from the neo-classical supposition that the environment is a source of marketable resources or commodities, it recommends that the poor should be taught how to use these in the most efficient manner so as to increase their income generating potential. To this end, it recommends certain measures that could facilitate the process. These amount to nothing more than the usual social services that modern governments are supposed to provide for their citizens, namely, education, health, clean water, sewerage and prevention of toxic waste, safety nets, and defence systems against natural disasters. But, as will be remembered, in its Structural Adjustment Programmes the World Bank had consigned the State to hell in favour of the *market*. This raises very sharply the question of agency under the new dispensation.

In addition to the above, the World Bank stresses the importance of the adoption of correct policies, regulatory mechanisms, and institutional frameworks for sustainable environmental management. However, it has great problems in reconciling this with global requirements for sustainable development. It makes perfunctory remarks about focusing on positive linkages between poverty reduction and the protection of the environment, about giving priority to local environmental benefits that are supposed to dovetail with regional and global environmental benefits. The fact of the matter is that the World Bank is not able or unwilling to deal with the problem of *global commons* and the implications of *sustained development globally*. This is due to its underlying philosophy that all nature is actually or potentially a marketable commodity. In the circumstances one could look forward to the day when some enterprising capitalist would be trying to sell fresh or clean air to all living organisms. How grotesque, some ordinary citizens of the world might surmise.

In contrast, the UNDP-EU Poverty Environment Initiative is bent on modifying the commodity-dominated approach of the World Bank in a favour of a more humanistic view. This takes the form of “sustainable livelihoods” that is derived basically from Amartya Sen’s theoretical framework on poverty. Analytically, this includes access to productive assets, improvement of assets, access to requisite technologies and supporting services from governments. This had already been reflected in the 1997 UNDP report, *Human Development*. There, the UNDP did not talk of “poverty reduction” but of “poverty eradication”. Whether intended or not, this represented a radical departure from previous conceptualisations of the problem in the western-

dominated discourse on poverty, starting from 1976. One had suspected that this would open a Pandora's box (see Mafeje, 1998)¹. If that were the case, then it seems that the European establishment succeeded in putting a lid on this and the European intellectuals lost no time in providing the necessary rationalizations. Thus, as of now, "sustainable development" is construed as so many "sustainable livelihoods" locally or among the poor. It is possible that in his analytical framework Sen gave them the excuse to pervert his philosophy of poverty – an issue to which we will return. But for the time being, it must be noted that the concept of "sustainable livelihoods", as is used in the UNDP-EU Poverty Environment Initiative, eschews the philosophical, theoretical, and economic implications of the concept of "sustained development and poverty eradication" on a global scale. In the meantime, UNDP, which seemed to be blazing a new trail in opposition to the crass materialism of the World Bank, can be accused of having capitulated. Why is the environment and sustainable livelihood the problem of solely the poor? Why are the poor treated as something apart from the rest of humanity as far as global issues and the protection of the environment are concerned. As regards use of natural resources is concerned, is it possible to draw a line between the local and the global? It is obvious that something is amiss.

Social Philosophical Predispositions

From first principles it can be assumed that the world is one and that humanity is one. The rest is a problem of philosophical predispositions and social organisation. Whereas the prevailing view during the rise of western industrialism was that nature was there to be exploited relentlessly through the use of science and technology, now, faced with the degradation of the environment and actual or threatened depletion of natural resources, humanity is called upon to rethink its method of interaction with nature. It is apparent that commodity-dominated approaches such as are advocated by the World Bank will not suffice. It is obvious that the environment cannot in our time be treated simply as a "commodity" or "good" to be used for development. Besides, development itself is a relative term. If greed and avarice were the guiding principles of classical capitalism, in our times the depletion of environmental resources and the degradation of the environment itself can hardly be looked upon as development. Hence, there is a growing demand internationally that a balance should be struck between human needs and preservation of natural resources/protection of the environment. This has profound social philosophical and economic implications and renders the approach of the World Bank and its strongest backer, the USA, obsolete.

It is evident that the idea of accumulation of material goods indefinitely at the expense of nature and ecological equilibrium is unsustainable. Thus, as a matter of historical necessity, an imperceptible transition has been made from the traditional concept of "sustained growth" (meaning indefinite accumulation, independently of actual human needs) to the emerging concept of "sustainable development". The latter sets the limits to unbridled plunder of natural resources and finds concrete expression in Wantrup's concept of "safe minimum standard", which was first used with reference to endangered species 50 years ago. In practice this shifts the emphasis from the quest to dominate nature to the need to protect nature. In other words, if at first the desire was to conquer nature through the use of science and technology, humanity has now reached a point where the same capability can be used to protect nature. Here, it is important to note that "nature" is a much broader concept than "environment". There exists in the seas, the jungles, in the polar regions, and in the stratosphere eco-systems that are part of nature but do not necessarily constitute part of what is called "human environment".

¹ An article entitled "Conceptual and Philosophical Predispositions" that appeared later in a book entitled *Poverty Reduction* edited by F. Wilson, N. Kanji, and E. Braathen, Zed Books, London, 2001

Nonetheless, it is known that these provide life-supporting services to human beings and that their disappearance could threaten the very existence of human beings and other living organisms on Earth e.g. the erosion of the ozone layer beyond a certain point. In the narrow view of the World Bank these might rank low in its list of priorities because they are not “marketable”. However, from a universal and a scientific point of view it is recognised that they are indispensable. Here, we encounter the limits of capitalist vulgarity and philosophical bankruptcy where the ultimate question is: who is going to pay for their protection? In an ostrich-like fashion the USA, the richest country in the world and the only super-power, when the moment of truth came, it hid its head in the sand and callously invoked “national interest” in order not to sign the Kyoto Agreement. In the meantime, the USA with a population of no more than 270 million out of 5000 billion worldwide (i.e. a mere .00054 percent of the world population) consumes about 30 percent of the world resources and accounts for 28 percent of global pollution. This is called success not robbery. In the context of “sustainable development and poverty eradication”, how can such palpable inequities be morally and ethically justified?

Sustainable Development and the Necessity for Equity

Both the above are novel terms and as such are subject to a variety of interpretations. This notwithstanding, both concepts have very profound moral and ethical implications that need not be lost in the welter of definitions. For instance, “sustainable development” can mean only one thing, namely, development that can be maintained within existing natural endowments, human capacities/capabilities, and sustainable livelihoods. This harks back to the concept of “safe minimum standard”. Among other things, this means that there is a limit to intensive exploitation of natural resources and the extent to which human beings can accumulate or consume material goods. The consumerism exhibited by western societies, especially America, is a clear indication that consumption beyond a certain point can only lead to wanton waste of resources. This is an important inference to make because classical economists such as Adam Smith saw capitalist parsimony as an improvement on the profligacy of the feudal aristocracy in Europe. Naturally, they could not have foreseen the consumerism of post-industrial capitalists in America and Europe. Their capacity to waste resources far exceeds anything that Adam Smith could have imagined. However, the only difference is that modern consumerism is “marketable” a-la World Bank. Therefore, historically, we have reached a point where production is not so much for human consumption but mainly for discretionary consumption by a tiny fraction of humanity. This cannot but breed poverty among disadvantaged humanity and less-developed countries. Sustained accumulation among a few implies absorption of a disproportionate amount of available resources globally and the deprivation/exclusion of the majority of humanity.

Insofar as the above is true, poverty is not a natural phenomenon but a function of particular forms of social organisation and modes of production. It is to these that we must direct our attention because they are the root-cause of present social ills in the world. Fundamental questions must be raised regarding the nature of existing institutions nationally and internationally. Among these must be included questions concerning private property, allocation and distribution of what is otherwise collective assets (e.g. environmental resources), and power sharing nationally and internationally. In other words, we need to develop a universal **Theory of Justice** in a combined but unevenly developed world. It is not enough to talk blandly about “globalisation” that offers new opportunities to all, without discussing the status of collective rights in the new order. For instance, it is not clear exactly what are the obligations of the advantaged to the rest of humanity. Can these be construed as charity, rights, or social justice? If, indeed, the world has become one “small village”, as we are often told by those who seek

global hegemony, then it is fair to assume that we have a shared common fate. As such, the people of the world are entitled to answers to the questions raised above.

These questions had been raised in one form or another by John Rawles (an American liberal philosopher) as far back as 1951 in his book, *Theory of Justice*. Since then not much has happened because his suppositions did not suit the American establishment both political and academic. American philosophers, whose major concern was epistemic questions within philosophy itself, thought that he strayed out of the discipline. This is true because he addressed substantive and social issues that are outside the ambit of rarefied modern philosophy. Thus, willy-nilly he became a social philosopher in a manner that is reminiscent of classical philosophers and political economists. One of his major concerns was the idea of property rights that are not contingent on any claim of justice. He surmised that such property rights, which confer sole and exclusive rights to the owner, could be a result of theft, plunder, murder, and abuse of power. He maintained that these are ethical and constitutional issues that are not addressed under modern jurisprudence in the West. He further argued that not only does the concept of “private property” deny access to resources by those citizens who do not have property but that collective belonging to the same territory does not necessarily guarantee equal access to resources to all citizens. As if this was not bad enough, Rawles reminds us that rich countries have property rights outside their territories and can exercise these at their discretion because at present there are no international institutions that guarantee the rights of dispossessed citizens in foreign territories. The case is clear. We live in a global village where some have more rights than others, irrespective of territory. In other words, there is no justice in the prevailing global order.

Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication

It is not surprising that the best theory of poverty has emanated from outside Europe and America. Amartya Sen is the undisputed *guru* on the issue of poverty as a pervasive phenomenon in the modern world. There are good reasons for it. As an Indian and a trained economist, Sen must have encountered the phenomenon of poverty many times in his country. Like all of us in the Third World, it was just a matter of how he reacted to it as a researcher. We all know how did for his work speaks for itself. He succeeded eminently in producing a **Theory of Poverty**, which complements Rawles’ **Theory of Justice**. Both count as *social philosophers* because neither neo-classical economists would accept Sen within the fold nor would philosophers accept Rawles as one of them. The reason is that both of them do not shy away from dealing with moral and ethical issues as well as substantive issues. This is a most welcome development in a world that is dominated by crude positivism that seeks to reduce everything to one common denominator. It represents the best attempt thus far to wean us away from western *utilitarianism* that is so rampant in organisation such as the World Bank. For that matter, the World Bank is the least qualified organisation to deal with the problem of poverty because it sees the issue of poverty as external to development, which is supposed to be determined by market forces and commodity relations. This view might not be unjustified because, conventionally, *poverty* is not an economic concept. Therefore, the neo-classical economists of the World Bank cannot integrate it in their theoretical framework, without abandoning their basic suppositions about “growth” and the supremacy of the “market” or convertibility of all resources into *commodities*. Accordingly, it is not surprising that, far from reducing poverty, in certain regions such as Africa the World Bank programmes have lead to increased poverty among the poor or what is euphemistically referred to as “vulnerable groups”.

At some stage it seemed that the UNDP could provide an alternative approach to that of the World Bank when it talked of “poverty eradication” and development of “human capital” at a

time when the World Bank was urging African governments to cut down on public spending. But the approach adopted in its joint document with the EU casts doubt on this supposition. The policy recommendations it makes are another expression of neo-liberalism and are hardly distinguishable from those of the World Bank. While it advocates increased access to assets by the poor and improved services for the benefit of the poor, it does not say what changes the non-poor would have to undergo to make this possible. In other words, on the question of poverty the UNDP-EU policy-formulators are committed to petty-reformism. While they acknowledge the fact that “it is not by bread alone that men (and women) shall live”, they still treat environmental resources as a commodity that should be used in the most efficient way by the poor to increase their income-generating potential. Here, there is an implicit assumption that the poor are guilty of something that the rich are not guilty of, namely, abuse or inefficient use of environmental resources. Certainly, pushed to the limits such as being edged out to marginal soils or less hospitable environments, the poor are capable of doing a great deal of damage to the environment or of using what is available not in the best possible way. But on record multinational corporations such as logging, oil, and automobile companies have done more damage to the environment than a multitude of the technology-deprived poor of the world could ever manage. Wherefore, why is the burden of using environmental resources in the most efficient manner possible the responsibility of the poor *per se*? If the intention is to teach the poor to adopt the same attitude towards environmental resources as the representatives of corporate capitalism, then we are nowhere near achieving sustainable development, poverty eradication, and protection of the environment.

Implicit in the idea of “sustainable development and poverty eradication” is a number of changes in our outlook towards nature and the environment. Consumerism is an indication that western societies and America in particular still subscribe to the primitive idea that nature is there to be conquered/plundered by human beings and that all environmental resources and the process of converting environmental resources into commodities is limitless. All evidence from scientists in the West points to the fact that this view is unwarranted. For the last 50 years there had been warnings from scientists that over-exploitation of natural resources had negative implications for the required ecological balance, protection of the environment, and the very existence of humankind. Those who benefited from plundering nature on a grand scale paid no heed to these warnings and when the evidence became irresistible, they shamelessly refused to put an end to their greed and to pay for the damaged caused. This is an unmistakable social injustice to all humanity. It stands to reason that if any balance were to be struck between human needs and preservation of natural resources and protection of the environment, western consumerism would have to cease for the benefit of all humanity. Secondly, the obsession with ever-rising growth rates in the developed countries would have to be reviewed.

Rationally-speaking, the developed countries could settle for zero growth, without lowering their present standard of living but cutting down on unnecessary waste of resources. Undoubtedly, this would give an opportunity to the poor and the poor countries to increase their share in the use of global resources and would provide justification for imposing a universal code of conduct with regard to the use of such resources. At the moment it is apparent that it is only the poor who are being told what to do and what not to do. Social philosophically and in the name of justice, this is not acceptable. In essence what is being asked is whether the rich western countries are socially and philosophically prepared to make the necessary adjustments internally in order to guarantee not poverty reduction but *poverty eradication*. It is worth to note here that “poverty reduction” is a palliative, not a cure. The world order has to undergo fundamental structural transformations in order to guarantee poverty eradication. As far as this is concerned, there is no dividing line between the local and the global.

The rich are not likely to spearhead such a movement because they have much to lose. Since 1986 international organisations, including the UN agencies, have been talking about “poverty reduction” but this has not happened. Instead, globally poverty has increased over the last 20 years and in the other direction the rich countries have got richer over the same period. Indeed, it is incongruous that the various “initiatives for poverty reduction” have come from the same countries that have maintained exploitative relations between themselves and the rest of the world. Even if they sincerely wished to deal with the problem of poverty universally, where would they begin, given the fact they have neither a theory of poverty nor of social justice globally? Poverty eradication is an antithesis of grotesque opulence and ostentatious living. As such, it is a political economy issue. It is no accident that in their theoretical explorations both Rawles and Sen reverted to the issues that preoccupied classical economists. Adam Smith’s *Wealth of the Nations* was a recognition of the fact what is good for one nation is good for all, if a rational world economic order were to be established and the happiness of all be guaranteed. Likewise, along with other classical economists, he emphasised the importance of justice within nations with regard to distribution of wealth and rewards to productive labour. A new order was being inaugurated to replace the feudal aristocracy in Europe. A new set of social values or a new social philosophical outlook was being fostered in favour of the rising bourgeoisie. In contrast, in our time the post-industrial bourgeoisie is too decadent to come to terms with the challenges of the 21st century. All it wants is to eat its cake and keep it.

The issue of “sustainable development and poverty eradication” has revolutionary connotations. Consequently, it cannot help being controversial or contentious. In times of controversy it is always best to return to basics. At issue here is the question of sustainability, poverty eradication, and protection of the environment/preservation of nature. So far much has been said about sustainability in relation to consumerism and universal justice. It is time now to turn more specifically to poverty eradication and protection of the environment.

a) Poverty Eradication and Protection of the Environment

There is a number of things that are worth noting with regard to the concept and the phenomenon of poverty. First, poverty cannot be measured. As Sen observes, it cannot only be *characterised*. Accordingly, in his work he has gone a very long way in demonstrating this. His point of departure is the freedoms the poor do not have. In his latest book, *Development as Freedom (1999)*, he argues that there are several distinct types of freedom. He identifies these as: i) economic entitlements; ii) political rights; iii) social opportunities; iv) transparency guarantees; and v) protective security. Apart from these instrumentalities, Sen talks of functionings and capabilities as an essence of well-being. We could quibble about certain terminological renditions and the risk of atomising poverty into a thousand things under the pressure of positivist philosophy and western instrumentalism. It is enough to acknowledge the fact that poverty encompasses not only material deprivation but also violation of one’s state of being. The latter is defined in different ways by different societies and its social reproduction is guaranteed in diverse ways. Therefore, in addition to economic entitlements, the poor, like everybody else, need space for self-expression and fulfilment. For this, there cannot be any prescription and it makes nonsense of any attempt to homogenise the world under the pretext of “globalisation”.

Thus, it is clear that monetary metric indices, as used by the World Bank e.g. “less than one dollar per day”, are devoid of meaning when poverty is considered in its totality in different cultural contexts. One can detect that in the western discourse on poverty bourgeois individualism is taken as a norm. In studying poverty *the individual* is treated as a unit of analysis. Sen also falls into this trap by talking about an abstracted “individual”, without any

reference to collective or community existence. Things might be different in India but in Africa poverty is shared within certain entities and networks such as households, kinship groups, and neighbourhood groups. Therefore, in combating poverty it is important to maintain the integrity of such groups since they comprise both productive units and the necessary safety nets. As has been indicated, social and cultural reproduction is as important as production. It is the former that Sen refers to as the “state of being”.

Sen is absolutely right in regarding poverty *eradication* as “developmental freedom”. The same cannot be said of poverty *reduction*. The concept itself accepts the limitations of the existing socio-economic set-up and has no transformational connotations. The privileged can and do subscribe to the idea, without questioning their own role in generating poverty. It is worth remembering that certain levels of poverty are serviceable to the rich and, therefore, it is convenient to treat them as normal. Not only is the concept of “poverty eradication” developmental but also treats freedom from poverty as a human right. It has been argued by pragmatists that, realistically-speaking, poverty cannot be eradicated. Those who so speak do so precisely because they dissociate poverty from wealth and opulence, and treat it as a natural phenomenon. This is part of bourgeois natural theology that must be rejected most emphatically. Poverty is an actionable social wrong. The Scandinavian countries, which have not always been affluent e.g. Norway and Finland, have demonstrated that once the moral decision has been made to prevent poverty, it is doable. Given the existing levels of accumulation and scientific/technological expertise, there is no doubt that the scourge of poverty can be wiped out globally. The problem is not scarcity but prevailing economic and political structures. Lack of justice nationally and internationally is the issue. Nor has this to do with the physical environment.

Both in the World Bank Environment Strategy and the UNDP-EU Poverty Environment Initiative there is an implicit assumption that there is a necessary link between poverty and the environment. Accordingly, the poor are advised to treat environmental resources as a commodity that should be used in the most efficient way possible to increase their income generating potential. Could it, therefore, be assumed that the non-poor are using environmental resources in the most efficient way? Such an assumption would be a travesty for there is overwhelming evidence that the rich have done far more to degrade the environment than the poor. One has to think of the loggers in the rainforest zone, oil companies, frequent oil spills in the world’s oceans, toxic emissions from exhaust pipes of status symbols such as gas-guzzling automobiles, over-fishing, acid rain, production of mountains of garbage, dumping of nuclear waste in countries that are ill-equipped to deal with its after-effects and so on and so on. Out of ignorance or desperation, the poor often destroy their immediate physical environment but on a relatively small scale since they rely on hand tools and not intensive technologies that are out of their reach. Some of the destruction is forced upon them by circumstances such as being pushed to marginal soils, lack of alternatives to fuel-wood, and other material resources. Nonetheless, they cannot be accused of having managed their commons in a worse manner than the rich have managed global commons. On the contrary, there is reason to believe there is a necessary link between poverty and the way natural resources are appropriated and used by the rich for their selfish interests.

b) Protection of the Environment

The terms “natural resources” and “environmental resources” tend to be used interchangeably. Perhaps, there is a need to distinguish between the environment and nature in the broader sense, including life-supporting systems that cannot be appropriated or converted into commodities e.g. fresh air, convection currents of wind that bring about precipitation or rain, particular eco-

systems such as coral reefs, polar systems and the ozone layer. In this sense we can talk of the “natural environment” that has to be preserved so as to guarantee the continued existence of its life-supporting functions. In contrast, the term “environment” has been used to refer to what could be called “human environment”. In other words, it is an *anthropocentric* concept whose reference is the use of environmental resources (including the flora and the fauna) to satisfy human needs. This approach has been reinforced by the belief that development means ever-increasing conversion of environmental resources into commodities, as is advocated by the World Bank. However, the snag is that environmental resources are exhaustible. Hence, various strategies for the protection of the environment are being touted by the “international community” but so far to no avail because of the double standard used by the same “international community”, meaning leading capitalist countries.

Concerning the anthropocentric view, it is important to comprehend fully its genesis. Under natural economy human beings had a one-to-one relationship with nature, which we now call environmental resources. All the same, they relied on these for their survival e.g. hunting and forage. The only difference is that these were not treated as objects of labour but rather as subjects of labour i.e. environmental resources were used according to need and not for accumulation. Domestication of animals and plants is what brought about a major transformation because for the first time human beings were investing labour in environmental resources so as to get more than was guaranteed in nature. This is the so-called agricultural revolution. For the first time human beings were giving to nature as much as they were taking from nature. It was in the interests of agriculturalists and pastoralists to *nurture* their domestic plants and animals. Not only did they try to keep their stocks constant but also made a concerted effort to augment them by tending their plants and animals, instead of plundering them. Therefore, our proposed slogan of “give to nature as much as you take from nature” is not born of a nostalgia for the primeval universe when human and non-human beings lived in harmony and a time when humans showed a sensitivity towards the environment that bordered on respect, admiration, awe, and worship. It is a call for adapting human needs such that human evolution becomes compatible with the natural environment. It is a supra-systemic view that cannot be trivialised by using past mistakes or failures as a justification for pessimism and by trying to reduce it to single instances, whether true or not. When dealing with matters of principle, rank empiricism is of no avail.

What we need to understand, conceptually and philosophically, is the implications of the anthropocentric viewpoint because it has both positive and negative connotations. The primeval view was “live and let live”. The civilised view, represented by the industrial and scientific revolution, was “take as much as possible from the environment and nature and the rest will take care of itself”. This primitive view still persists, as is shown by the underlying belief of the capitalist world that all environmental resources are convertible into commodities that bring prosperity to the users. Under the circumstances protection of the environment/nature becomes a secondary issue primarily because it costs money i.e. it detracts from the process of indefinite accumulation. This view is at variance with reality because a degraded environment is less amenable to appropriation than an environment that is well-preserved. Reference could be made to “the tragedy of the commons”, locally and globally. Unlike domesticated parts of the environment, the commons have been raped everywhere leading to untold destruction. The main reason is that the commons are *nobody’s property*. Likewise, the effects of the plunder of environmental resources in general and the destruction of natural life-supporting systems are *nobody’s business* because any concern for them can only cost money, which is something that is against the interests of corporate capitalism or “our national interest”, as President Bush so crudely put it. In the meantime, the poor are being cajoled to protect the environment because in their case failure to do so means death. Yet, if the global eco-system were to collapse,

everybody would die unless they had the means to migrate to other planets. But, for the time being, humanity has a common fate.

Something that critics do not appreciate is that the anthropocentric view obliges human beings to do something they have not done before, namely, to think more about the needs of the environment and nature than their supposed needs that have issued into consumerism or wanton waste of environmental resources. With the help of science and technology, human beings have long “conquered nature”. This time they are called upon to use the same capacity not just to protect the environment and life-supporting eco-systems but to *revive them*. With the existing levels of scientific knowledge, it is quite possible to protect the ozone layer, to reduce significantly the levels of pollution of the skies and the rivers, to revive marine life, to revitalise bio-diversity, to deal with animal and plant ecology and the population dynamics of both animals and plants, to push back the Sahara Desert which is growing by 2 inches every year etc., etc. This is quite in keeping because the classical European supposition was that science and technology are liberating. But increasingly in the post-industrial era we are witnessing the use of both for destructive purposes such as the policy of defoliation in Viet Nam, use of nuclear waste material in the Gulf War, and taking pride in the use of “smart bombs” at the risk of releasing toxic materials for which nobody is prepared. This signifies loss of social control by the majority of humanity and abuse of the environment. It goes against the principle of not only protecting the environment but also augmenting of it through use of science and technology.

There are ways in which regeneration among despoiled flora and fauna e.g. depleted forests and threatened animal species can be accelerated instead of waiting for nature to take its course. The time frame within which this is done can be manipulated according to need and existing physical constraints by balancing, say, between tree harvesting and planting as in Sweden and Germany. In southern Namibia, as a team of water engineers, ecologists, and experts on agriculture and rural development, we were able to estimate the rate at which aquifers filled by using past records that showed what it took to pump them dry. Recommendations were made to reduce the rate of pumping underground water by certain proportions and to allow for fallow. Among other things, this meant that the white farmers in the region had to abandon closed European systems of farming and revert to open systems that were used by the indigenous people. If such changes were adopted, the prospects for regeneration were good enough for the ecologists to caution against the use of the notion of “desertification” in the case of southern Namibia. Examples such as these can be multiplied from experience from elsewhere in the world. It is the pessimism of the mind and vested interests that make reversing the damage that has been done to the environment a remote possibility or an impossibility. It might also be an excuse for not doing what is required and pay the political price as well as the financial cost for it. Certainly, scientific knowledge is not the immediate constraint.

It is, therefore, clear that one of the implications of the anthropocentric view is that *homo sapiens* has to use its superior intelligence not to plunder the environment but to restore its equilibrium. As was warned earlier, this process should not be romanticised or treated as static. From a human point of view, the environment consists of beneficial as well injurious elements. This puts human beings in a position to choose between the two. For instance, there is no question that disease-carrying organisms are prime candidates for elimination or severe control. These would include such things as malaria-carrying mosquitoes, bilharzia, liver flukes, tsetse-flies, ticks, mites, flies, plant pests, vermin of all sorts, and a host of microbes. Of course, this would be aimed at guaranteeing good health for human beings, valuable plants and animals. In practice requirements for maintaining an ecological balance among different forms of life has always been subordinate to the former. However, this in turn is subject to the population dynamics of favoured species. If it is true that living organisms are by nature exuberant, then

under changed demographic conditions even this has to be checked. If rampaging elephants, owing to demographic pressure and out of frustration, start destroying their immediate ecological environment, then the anthropocentric view, obliges *homo sapiens* to intervene by either culling the elephants or by transferring part of the herd elsewhere, as they did recently in South Africa

This is a ticklish issue but it has been put firmly on the agenda by both human and animal demographic pressure. One of the critical issues in Africa is how to balance between demographic pressure among humans in general and pressure from pastoralists in particular; or between roaming displaced tigers and wolves and cattle-keepers or sheep farmers in Asia. Local solutions such as shooting prowling tigers and wolves on sight or nomadic pastoralists spearing any sedentary farmer who stands in their way do not obviate problem. There is a great need for finding more rational solutions at the national level, if not at the regional level. But what is patently clear is that human beings have to accept responsibility for rational use and distribution of environmental resources not only among themselves but also among the members of the animal kingdom. Given growing demographic pressure among humans and non-humans, teeming herds of buffaloes in Lake Manyara or wildebeests running amok in their thousands on the Serengeti plains might be more than just a natural splendour or charming spectacle but a serious environmental problem with which humans have to contend under modern conditions. Ungodly as it may seem, *nyama choma* (carnivore) might not be a bad idea, if the lions cannot do the job. Once again, even this could not meet the necessary requirements of social justice unless it is developed into game farming for the benefit of those who coexist with animals or are deprived, instead of catering only for the consumptive elites in the urban areas. Here, we are dealing with a nexus of self-imposing technical, moral, and social issues that flow from the anthropocentric view i.e. the right of human beings to choose between “good” and “evil” in dealing with the exigencies of their environment and their social evolution.

The tendency so far has been to skirt around the big economic, political, and social philosophical issues regarding sustainable development and the future of all humankind. The fundamental reason is that the agenda for dealing with these issues has been set largely by the dominant forces within the world community. This includes the UN agencies, which in reality depend on contributions from the rich countries and not on votes in the General Assembly. Accordingly, their so-called mandates are more than anything else a reflection of the views of the same category of nations. For instance, although the intellectuals in UNDP had followed their explorations to their logical conclusion in 1997, subsequently the managers found it expedient to conform to the dominant view in the West about “poverty reduction” and sustainable development. As a result, their discourse on these two universal issues has degenerated into social work prescriptions such as improvement of social services for the benefit of the poor and better access to environmental resources, conveniently overlooking the fact that in the present world order rights inhere in property and political power and not in justice. Likewise, despite the fact that in the Nairobi Declaration of 1997 UNEP was mandated to be “the principal global environmental authority that sets the global environmental agenda, that promotes the coherent implementations of the environmental dimension of sustainable development and that serves as an authoritative advocate for the global environment”, UNEP is committed to the status quo and can only talk about technical issues. Secondly, whereas it can talk about “empowerment of the poor” or giving them “stewardship” over local environmental resources, it does not discuss the political and economic implications of this globally. Where does UNEP get the social mandate to set the global environmental agenda and what political authority does it have to implement it? If it is limited to technical considerations, who takes care of the bigger issues concerning sustainable development and political and economic justice globally?

Is it not clear that lasting solutions to environmental problems cannot be found until there is a political will to change the global political and economic order. The key to the problem is *universal justice* and *universal democracy*. These are intensely political issues and their resolution cannot be determined unilaterally by the UN bureaucrats or hegemonic powers that are part of the problem. As happened in the Conference on Racism in Durban, when the people of the world through their representatives insisted on determining the agenda, the developed countries led by the United States sought to subvert the whole thing. This warns us against talking about “empowerment of the people” and their “stewardship” over environmental resources in the abstract. There is a fundamental conflict of interests between the rich and the poor. The poor have a moral right to world resources. The rich countries deny this through their actual political and economic behaviour. This disqualifies them from being champions of the rights of the poor, including poor nations. They will have simply to liberate themselves through collective action on a global scale. In practice this means that they should have their own genuine agenda for sustained development and poverty eradication.

Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from our discussion:

1. There is no necessary link between protection of the environment and poverty eradication. If anything, there is a necessary link between consumerism and the need to protect both environmental resources and natural life-supporting eco-systems. The burden of both these does not fall on the poor but on the rich and the powerful. Therefore, let us not mock the poor by giving the impression that their survival methods, however improved, could save the world.
2. Poverty eradication, as a concept, implies universal social justice and an end to the expropriation of the majority of humanity for the benefit of a tiny minority that has vested interests in consumerism, high levels of pollution, and destruction of vital eco-systems. It is a re-affirmation of the principle that all human beings have a right to environmental resources and a right to reproduce themselves socially in a way that is consistent with their being.
3. Poverty is not an economic concept but a moral-ethical concept. Therefore, it cannot be operationalised within the theoretical framework of neo-positivist economics. Accordingly, institutions such as the World Bank that are victims of the fetish of commodities cannot comprehend or grasp its non-material dimensions. Thus, it is left to an economist turned social philosopher such as Amartya Sen to enlighten them. Among other things, this means that the World Bank and kindred institutions (including UN agencies) should defer to those who have existential knowledge of poverty i.e. they cannot arrogate to themselves the right to determine the agenda for poverty eradication. This is a violation of their own confessed principles of democracy and a denial of justice for the underprivileged.
4. “Sustainable development” is as yet an ill-developed concept partly due to the fact that most see it as a physical process and yet it has profound social and political implications. Thus, it is not enough to limit it to safe minimum standards in the exploitation of environmental resources. It has to entail a radical change in the patterns of consumption, especially in the developed countries, and in the distribution of global resources. In addition, it has to treat with reverence the requirements of nature, precisely because they are non-negotiable. They transcend mundane interests of all human beings, whether they be rich or poor. They have implications not just for posterity but for the future of the planet, Earth.
5. Insofar as sustainable development has very strong economic, political, and social connotations, it should be viewed as a struggle for empowerment and justice. Therefore, the deprived should have their own global agenda for sustainable development and avoid depending on the initiatives of the authors of the present inequities and injustices in the present world order. In liberating themselves they will bring about a new world order and more sustainable

environmental regimes, locally and globally. All this cannot be done, without taking advantage not only of the existing wealth of scientific information and technological advances but also by guarding against the abuse of both. Loss of social control over the use of science and technology accounts for a significant part of the despoliation of global resources and the dispossession of the majority of humanity. Science and technology must be put at the service of human beings, instead of being harnessed for their destruction.