

Seven Steps Toward Another World
Reflections on the World Summit on Sustainable Development held September
2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa
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The Johannesburg Summit's host, Thabo Mbeki called on world leaders to address the root causes of global Apartheid under which 20% of the world's population monopolises and consumes over 80% of the world's resources. Instead, the leaders chose to focus on the symptoms of this unsustainable world order. Once the focus was defined, the compromises were made and nothing was done about the real problem.

Kenny Bruno of CorpWatch declared that the Earth Summit a death blow to Sustainable Development. "Sustainable Development is dead", he said, killed off by signatories who chose to see it as "whatever compromise governments happen to reach on trade, subsidies, investment and aid, and whatever projects corporations see fit to finance" (Corpwatch 4.9.02).

The world context

Vandana Shiva, Director of the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy in India, defined the global situation faced by Summit delegates as a series of systems in crisis.

"The WSSD is being organised at a time when the world is in chaos, violence rules, governance structures are breaking down or being used to break down societies and ecosystems. Non-sustainability is the defining feature of our times -- at the ecological, social, economic and political levels. The challenge for the WSSD and the world community is to 1. Restore ecological sustainability in the way the earth's vital resources -- land, water, biodiversity and atmosphere are used. 2. Restore peace and social sustainability to societies being ruptured and torn apart by terrorism, fundamentalism, communalism and war. 3. Restore economic sustainability to people's lives and livelihoods which are being destroyed by the economic forces of globalisation and the rules of free trade'.

The summit was held in a context of crisis brought on by leadership failures and betrayals, war against invisible enemies, global apartheid, floods in Europe, droughts in Africa, economic collapse in Argentina, drumming for more wars in the ME, famine, AIDS, and burgeoning crime and corruption.

From Rio to Doha

Some delegates came to Johannesburg expecting to build on the agreements at Rio in 1992 and at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. However they were outgunned by delegates aligned with corporate interests who succeeded in replacing the Rio principles with the Doha TWO process of free trade according to which the whole world is one big borderless market. In this way, the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) could be subordinated to the WTO and its playing partners, the IMF and the World Bank. The Summit's outcomes supported economic growth without serious consideration for the environment or with meeting the basic needs of the majority of people around the globe.

Even though world peace is a prerequisite for sustainable development, no actions were taken on the deadly wars raging in central Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. On the contrary, President Bush was busy preparing to ignite a new war against Iraq, as if that is what the Middle East needs. In southern Africa where the summit took place 14 million people are said to be at risk of dying of hunger. Unlike, Rio, there were no new visions or global objectives and thus no conventions or protocols. The US even reminded the gathering that the agreements were not legally binding anyway.

When the wolves look after the Sheep

The symbols of corporate triumph literally towered over the Summit with perhaps the biggest paradox being that some of the most environmentally dangerous wolves showed up as the loudest speakers for sustainable development. The huge electronic billboard that met me at the entrance of Sandton regularly gave me the corporate message; the blue globe that I thought was erected by the UN or a group of NGOs, only to find out that it belonged to the BMW Group. It was a parade of expos for the translational. The same could be said about the Ubuntu Village, where a huge screen showed ads for companies along with political speeches. The expo centre was dominated by shiny exhibitions by corporations and governments.

What the summit ignored

The world's present condition, as described above by Vandana Shiva, is the direct outcome of the sustained dominance of the western development model in global affairs. This development model is rooted in a monocultural worldview according to which all countries and people have to catch up with the rich countries. It promotes only one model of development. This model consists of 'transferring power from nature to man, leaving nature degraded' (Wolfgang Sachs 2002). The model has divided humanity into haves and have nots while depleting and polluting the environment.

Paradoxically, most third world countries were in complete agreement with the Corporate and government proponents of the dominant worldview. So pervasive and persuasive is it that many poor countries cannot imagine an alternative path of development and they are willing to pay the price for its poisoned progress: developing economies rather than people, meeting the insatiable profit needs of transnational companies rather than meeting the needs of the people. The only block of countries that fought in vain for taking on the environmental consequences of the northern development model were the low-lying small Pacific Island nations whose very existence is threatened by global warming and the resulting rise in sea levels.

Who's the problem?

The poor and poverty have been presented as the problem, but the real problem is the rich and their excessive riches. It is these few who not only make their fellow humans, other creatures and the environment suffers, but also in the process make themselves suffer from a new disease called "**affluenza**". The symptoms of this disease are rootlessness, obesity, heart disease, restlessness, social breakdown, and boredom, chronic lack of time, depression and insecurity.

The underlying structure

Because the Johannesburg summitters failed to see the world as one organically interrelated and interdependent whole, they could not arrive at a systematic way of handling vital common issues like sharing the environmental space and its resources along with the scientific, technological and cultural fruits of civilisation. Instead the summitters' world remained split into north and south, east

and west, developed, developing and underdeveloped nations. And it is this splitting which makes any attempt to deal with world problems impossible. The western development model is so deeply rooted that it is running societies instead of societies running it. We serve the machine and the machine is destroying us.

As **Jordi Pigem**, lecturer in philosophy at Schumacher College in Devon, England. Put it,

Year after year, economic globalization helps to enrich the rich (mainly corporations and people from the North) while impoverishing the poor (mostly countries and people from the South): the richest 20 per cent of humanity is already 80 times richer than the poorest 20 per cent. Mind the gap. Meanwhile the structural greed of the system results, per day, in 24,000 deaths from malnutrition and the extinction of 140 species (New Internationalist Jan/Feb 2002).

What happened to the CSOs, CBOs, NGOs?

Rio 92 was first world summit where civil society organisations and indigenous people's groups made their presence felt. Since then every gathering of world leaders has been accompanied by a parallel people's forum. That's what happened in Copenhagen in 1995 and in Durban in 2001. The whole global forum phenomenon was set in motion following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. Supporters of this trend, believed state power would gradually wither away and be squeezed out by corporate power and people's power. However, this gradual loss of terrain by the state was halted by what happened after September 11. Suddenly, presidents who either seized power through dubious or violent means were rehabilitated and began to pose as moral leaders and saviours of the human race from the scorching rays of terrorisms and fanaticism.

Where Rio was held in the context of the end of history, the end of Cold War, and the liberation of Kuwait. In Joburg the context was war preparation and the division of the world into those with us versus those against us. It is, in short, a world dis/order.

Unsustainable debts

If the summiteers were serious, they would have focus on addressing the crippling debts of poor countries. At present, these debts crush the endeavour of developing countries; they punish ordinary people and deprive them of basic services. This is particularly distressing when one considers that most of the debts were incurred by dictator regimes whose real goals were to fill their personal accounts and serve their foreign mentors rather than their own people.

It's time for corporate and bank governance

The transnational corporations, backed by their governments, have succeeded in transforming the world into one big global market where they get access to resources, labour, consumers and a dumping ground for dangerous industrial wastes. They get tax incentives and protection from the governments. In this sense they have become like the earlier colonial companies – such as the British East India Company - that operated on behalf of their respective governments. They are above international laws and UN rules and local codes of good behaviour. They are not accountable to any particular country any more. There is clearly a need for global governance to be strengthened, to set boundaries and ensure transnational corporations respect human rights and work for the environment, not against it.

Neither free nor fair trade

Rich governments preach free trade while they pay 1 billion dollars a day to their farmers. The farming population makes up 2% of US inhabitants while in the EU they make up just 4%. During the summit the daily Danish broadsheet daily, "Politiken" made a comparison between a Danish farmer and white farmer in South Africa. The former has about 400 hectares, employs nobody, yet he gets 280,000 kroner in his pocket from the EU. The South African farmer has some 500 hectares and 9 employees to whom he pays about 200 kroner a month. He gets no subsidy or export support. Both farmers have a turnover of 4 million kroner per annum. This state of affairs puts the Danish farmer at an advantage as he can export his products to South Africa and out competes the local producers. Such unfair trade, sustained by the current world dis/order, maintains economic apartheid in South Africa. It prevents the SA government from implementing land reforms and redistribution because that will make it even more difficult for South African agricultural products to compete in the world market. Of course, the question is what South Africa's priorities are. Are they about exports or about feeding the people? But here again, the western development model leads all countries in a dance that is about developing macro economies, not meeting the basic needs of the people.

There is always money for destructive purpose

It has been estimated by UNDP that to meet the development needs and protect the environment; the world needs to invest 60 billion dollars a year. When it is about development, environment and health this amount seems astronomical. However, if the issue is about mustering resources for war, it is nothing. Following the 9/11 attack on the US, New York City alone got 700 billion dollars for reconstruction. The Lockheed Company secured a 200 billion dollar contract to manufacture more war machines. I just wonder how much has been spent on the CIA, FBI, and the military and on the war against Osama Bin Laden. How much money has other governments around the globe spent on security since September 11? Remember this money was not budgeted for but it seems that when war calls, there is always money and men to fight.

Possible ways out

In spite of the present rule of greed and violence by the few rich, another world is possible. The first step in the way out of the unsustainable development march is to do away with the very system that has created the problem. Then it will be possible to re-educate and restore those of us who have gone astray back to nature. Our education systems and media need to be reoriented to the original Comovision according to which the world is seen and treated as a living being. There is only one earth, so is only one human race. Such an outlook will acknowledge, validate and respect every life. We can learn to live with nature and to see ourselves as part of the whole and that what is good for the whole is also good for the constituent parts. Both modern and ancient knowledge and wisdoms will be validate and allowed to complement each other. This will democratise globalisation to open many doors for humanity to discover and benefit from the various cultures and civilisations of the world.

Ancient and time tested wisdom will guide humanity to live with, not against nature. The notion of sacred groves in Africa, the sacred status of certain trees and animals in India and other Asian countries will help protect the environment; recycling nutrients in organic agriculture will enhance sustainability; and the reciprocal relationship with sacred nature in Bolivia and Peru is a good basis for land management. (Food for Thought page 25). "Trees have always been linked with penance, education and religious activities. According to Hindu tradition, Prithvi, Mother Earth, is the divine

mother who sustains plant and animal life. She is perceived to be powerful Goddess for the world as a whole. The cosmos itself is seen as a great being, a cosmic organism. Different parts of the world are identified as parts of her body. The earth is called her loins, the oceans her bowels, the mountains her bones, the rivers her veins, the trees her body hairs, the Sun and the Moon her eyes and the lower worlds her hips, legs and feet. The sun, the great ball of fire is the energiser, the life giver. (Food For Thought Page 34: 1999)

The second is the democratisation and decentralisation of development. There should be as many development models and choices as the different cultures of the world see fit. The concept of biodiversity should apply to development diversity. Economic growth and technological progress should follow cultural relativity. Linguistic and cultural diversity should be as necessary for sustainable development as the genetic biodiversity of the world species. Material greed should be condemned and made into taboo. We must educate ourselves into responsible global citizens.

The third is to establish and enforce democratic global governance to ensure that global companies serve the global needs. This means dismantling the terrible three of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF and replacing them with more representative and more democratic global economic institutions, if it is necessary at all to have such monstrous giants that may run out of control. Green, Tobin, air flight and other transport taxes should be introduced and enforced. Vital global issues like the environment, nuclear weapons and unnecessary militarism should be monitored and controlled by a representative global body.

The fourth, the concepts of environment crime, terrorism and genocide should be introduced and enforced by a truly democratic Environmental Security Council.

The fifth, the concept of international economic and trade terrorism should be introduced and enforced by the new International Criminal Court. Deadly weapon and land mine overproduction and export should be incorporated into the notion of war crime.

The sixth, basic livelihood such as water, sanitation, land, energy, health care, housing, local environment, knowledge and culture should not be up for privatisation and for making money. These basic livelihoods should be controlled and managed locally.

Finally, production and consumption should be relinked. Like the Kyoto Protocols that limit the amount of CO₂ pollution for each country in proportion to its population, there should be a limit to the amount of material production by each country, especially as the overproduction does not reduce hunger around the world. For example it is both weird and wasteful that a small country like Denmark with 5 million inhabitants produces so much food that it can feed 25 million people. There should be a progressive taxation on the overproduction above what each country needs. The income from these taxes can be saved and invested into a global fund for global environment and human security, emergencies, war prevention, peace keeping and restoration.