ENVIRONMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

GEO 4 environment for development

GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK

The fourth *Global Environment Outlook – environment for development (GEO-4)* assessment report is published in 2007, exactly two decades since the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) published its seminal report – *Our Common Future* – which placed sustainable development on the agenda of governments and other stakeholders. *GEO-4* is the most comprehensive UN report on the environment prepared by about 390 experts and reviewed by more than 1 000 others across the world.

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The world has changed radically since 1987 – socially, economically and environmentally.

Global population has grown to more than 6.7 billion, from about 5 billion people. The global economy has expanded and is now characterized by increasing globalization. Worldwide, GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) has increased from US$ 5 927 in 1987 to US$ 8 162 in 2004. However, growth has been distributed unequally among regions. Technology has also changed and communication patterns have been revolutionized with the growth of telecommunications and the Internet. Human population and economic growth have increased demand on natural resources.

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) recognized 20 years ago that environmental, economic and social issues are interlinked.

It recommended that the three be integrated into developmental decision making. In defining sustainable development, the Commission acknowledged the need for both intra and inter generational equity – development that meets not only today's human needs but also those of future generations.

Changing drivers, such as population growth, economic activities and consumption patterns, have placed increasing pressure on the environment. Serious and persistent barriers to sustainable development remain.

In the past 20 years, there has been limited integration of environment into development decision making.

Environmental degradation undermines development and threatens future development.

Development is a process that enables people to improve their well-being. Long-term development can only be achieved through sustainable management of various assets: financial, material, human, social and natural. Natural assets, including water, soils, plants and animals, underpin people's livelihoods.

Environmental degradation threatens all aspects of human well-being.

Environmental degradation has been demonstrably linked to human health problems, including some types of cancers, vector-borne diseases, emerging animal to human disease transfer, nutritional deficits and respiratory illnesses. The environment provides essential material assets and an economic base for human endeavour. Fisheries, forests or agriculture provide 50 per cent of employment worldwide. Non-sustainable use of natural resources, including land, water, forests and fisheries, can threaten individual livelihoods as well as local, national and international economies. The environment can play a significant role in contributing to development and human well-being.

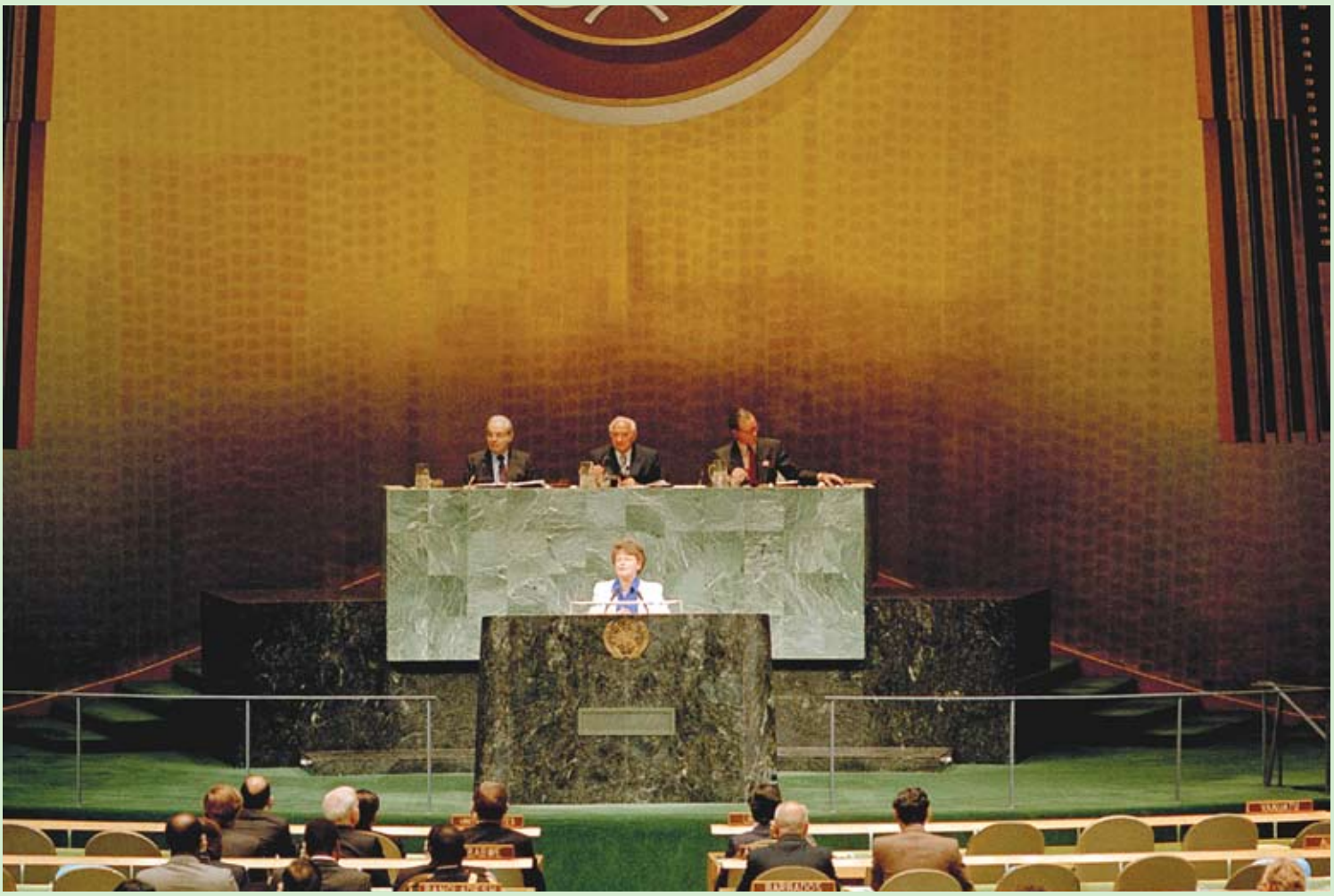
Environmental sustainability, Millennium Development Goal 7, is critical to the attainment of the other MDG goals.

Natural resources are the basis of subsistence in many poor communities. Natural capital accounts for 26 per cent of the wealth of low-income countries. Up to 20 per cent of the total burden of disease in developing countries is associated with environmental risks.

Some progress towards sustainable development has been made since 1987 when the WCED report, *Our Common Future*, was launched.

The number of intergovernmental processes related to the environment and development has increased (for example, the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development), and there has been a rapid growth in multilateral environmental agreements (for example, the Kyoto Protocol and the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants) to address environmental challenges.

Sustainable development strategies have been implemented at local, national, regional and international levels. An increasing number of scientific assessments (for example, the



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Since the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development was introduced by Gro Harlem Brundtland (above), some progress towards sustainable development has been made, but much more still needs to be done.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports) have contributed to a greater understanding of environmental challenges.

Despite changes in environmental governance, and greater understanding of the links between environment and development, real progress towards sustainable development has been slow.

Development strategies often ignore the need to maintain critical ecosystem services on which long-term development goals depend. Action has been limited to certain issues, for example, climate change, persistent organic pollutants, fisheries management, invasive alien species and species extinction.

Effective policy responses are needed at all levels of governance.

While proven solutions continue to be used, world leaders should also address both the drivers of change and environmental problems themselves. A variety of tools that have emerged over the past 20 years may be of strategic use. Economic instruments, such as property rights, market creation, bonds and deposits, can help correct market failures and internalize the costs of protecting the environment. Valuation techniques can be used to better understand the economic value of ecosystem services.

*Sources and credits for the information presented here are available and fully referenced in the **Fourth Global Environment Outlook - environment for development** report.*

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