

brinkmanship needed

In a globalized economy people can acquire commodities produced at comparably low cost in a developing country. They can go on holidays abroad much more cheaply than was possible just a few years ago, due to the relative decrease in travel costs. Both of these examples show how consumers benefit from globalization. But there is also a flipside to the coin — the environmental consequences of a globalized economy. Environmental standards are unequally distributed and the ability of governments to regulate and ensure compliance with them differs similarly. So environmental costs are not internalized in the market. The environmental and social ramifications are severe. We must establish a better understanding of the drivers behind a globalized economy — and its environmental consequences — as a basis for effective decision-making.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment underlined that human actions are depleting Earth's natural capital — putting such strain on the environment that the ability of the planet's ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted. Governments will have to couple much more the horizontal distribution of environmental costs with vertical distribution between generations. If not, they will become famous — not for what they did while in power, but for the decisions they did not take when they had the opportunity. We, the present environment ministers of the world, must combine visionary thinking with political brinkmanship and effective policies to consider fully the environmental consequences of globalization.

We should aim for the decoupling of environmental degradation from economic growth. This is an enormous challenge, but I believe it is not just necessary but possible in the long run. It has proved viable in Denmark, for example, where we have experienced a 60 per cent growth in gross national product over the last 25 years, while carbon dioxide emissions have declined. This has been made possible by my predecessors' visionary

policy formulation and by providing stable policy frameworks entailing clear long term goals and targets.

The challenge is to make sense of unfolding global trends as a basis for effective decision making. The evidence clearly demonstrates the fast changing conditions in which we live, consume, produce, and interact. Transplanting industries to developing countries, job migration, increased transport of commodities and export of hazardous wastes, growth in tourism, rising world population, climate change, hyper-efficient long distance fishing technologies, and increased sourcing of natural resources in general — all help undermine the resilience of ecosystems everywhere, and carry with them the potential for more volatile global security.

Yet globalization also entails a number of benefits particularly relevant to the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, not least the potential of the successful and effective sharing, take-up and deployment of more environmentally sound technologies and practices. Many of the technologies required are already fully proven, but not fully utilized. The Bali Plan of Technology Support and Capacity Building provides an excellent tool, but much more needs to be done. The responsibility

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of securing the full deployment of these technologies and practices needs to move increasingly from government to business, industry and civil society. We must establish a framework where the demand for 'green' technologies, practices and policies is communicated from the bottom up, and where the governments cooperate collectively on the basis of *common but differentiated responsibilities*. Such an approach needs also to take into consideration that curbing the environmental consequences of globalization is an issue of the responsibility of governments to their constituencies, and that it is not just related to the international assistance agenda.

There is a striking lack of a coherent framework in world politics for considering these fundamental drivers. Genuine efforts are under way, such as around the Marakesh Process, the Bali Plan of Action, the Doha Round, national poverty eradication strategies, Multilateral Environmental Agreements, policies of the international financial institutes, and the current work related to the Secretary-General's Reform Panel.

These processes are valuable, indeed crucial in enabling governments better to adapt to the environmental challenges posed by globalization.

But are they adequate and will they suffice — in time? Do we even have a genuinely good understanding of the fundamental drivers and how they interlink? Are we finally reaching the point where environmental standards are to be measured *on par* with economic standards? Is the architecture of international environmental governance enabled to meet the challenges of the environmental consequences from globalization? I doubt if we yet have affirmative answers to these fundamental questions. This is why, for the first time, I proposed at the 2006 UNEP Governing Council Special Session in Dubai that the world's environment ministers should be given the opportunity to consider the relationship between globalization and the environment at the 2007 UNEP Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF 2007). I am very grateful that this has been provided.

I trust that the GMEF 2007 will be remembered as the session where environment ministers fulfilled their mandate further to advance global sustainable development in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals. A substantial response to this obligation depends on finding the proper solution to the globalization / environment equation — and doing so fast: The cost of inaction — or delayed action — will be extremely expensive not just in terms of financial losses and market deficiencies, but in terms of the irreversible loss in biodiversity and ecosystems and of undermining the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

I hope that GMEF 2007 will result in an agreement among ministers that extraordinary action is required, and that the international community will show the courage and the boldness needed seriously to promote a more coherent and horizontal approach to the management of the environmental consequences — both positive and negative — stemming from globalization. 



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