

The clash between the differing paradigms of sustainable development and unfettered globalization is now sharper than ever. It should be resolved as soon as possible. The future of humanity — and the Earth depends on this.

On the one hand, there is a resurgence in recognition of the heightening environmental crisis, manifested in fever-renewed concern over such issues as climate change, energy depletion, deforestation, biodiversity loss. But, on the other, there is persistent promotion of the drivers of the crisis — unregulated growth, unfettered market forces and increased 'competitiveness' — which accelerate both resource use and pollution.

The 1992 Rio Earth Summit provided the impetus for the sustainable development paradigm with its three components of environmental, economic and social sustainability. It recognizes not just the environment crisis in its many facets, but how it is embedded in economic and social systems. And it understands that a realistic and long-term solution must deal with both the environment and the development crises simultaneously and in an integrated fashion.

Two principles underpin 'sustainable development'. The precautionary principle asks us to act urgently when grave environmental harm is likely, even if all the facts are not completely available. And the principle of 'common but differentiated responsibility' acknowledges that the North is, and historically has been, most responsible for the crisis — and has more resources, as well as a greater responsibility for resolving it. The South must also play its role — but must be helped with financial resources and technology transfer, and should not be made to bear an unfair share of the burden of global adjustment.

Development goals, poverty eradication and providing for human needs should be top priorities: environmental concerns should be integrated with (and not detract from) them. Sustainable development would involve ecological practices that enable meeting the needs of future generations, and equitably change production and consumption patterns, so that resources now being wasted are saved and rechannelled to meeting the needs of everyone now alive, and of future generations.

By contrast, the paradigm of unfettered market forces — which characterizes the present brand of globalization — pushes for vastly expanded rights and 'freedoms' for the large corporations that dominate the market: the state should intervene only minimally. Though it recognizes that there are environmental and social side effects, these should be dealt with through market instruments rather than regulation, and by charity and 'social safety nets' rather than a re-design of the core economic paradigm.

With the ascendancy of this paradigm, especially following the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995, development values and principles have been downgraded in international relations. In its place is a Social Darwinian philosophy of "each individual for himself/herself, each firm for itself, each country for itself."

In this law of the social jungle, it is the right of individuals and companies to demand freedom to seek advantage and profit and to have access to the markets and resources of other countries anywhere in the globe, to implement their right to profit. The advocates of this approach want a free-

# paradigm clash

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market system where the strong and 'efficient' are rewarded, and the weak or inefficient unfortunately have to lose out. Aid can be advocated and even increased to offset the glaring inequities, but the principles and practices of the market cannot be touched.

These two paradigms have clashed dramatically in international affairs. The paradigm of partnership and cooperation is represented by the United Nations' series of world conferences, in which global problems relating to the environment, women, social development, habitat, and food were sought to be discussed and resolved in a consensus-seeking framework. It was recognized that, left to itself the market would be more of the problem than the answer, and that governments — both individually and jointly — must temper it with social and environmental priorities and programmes.

In contrast, the free-market paradigm is represented by the Bretton Woods institutions — which have persisted in promoting reforms in developing countries based on a narrow concept of macro-economic stability, privatization and liberalization — and by the WTO. The latter was initially criticized for being too 'free market' in orientation: in fact it is a combination of liberalization and protectionism.

The developed countries, which by and large still dominate the WTO, make use of it both to push open the markets of the developing world, and to protect their own turf. Thus, the North presses for liberalization of goods, investments and financial flows, but resists Southern requests for liberalizing the flow of labour and technology. The WTO's agreement on trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS) is anti-competitive, designed to increase the monopoly of large corporations, and hinders technology flows.

There is a double standard even within the core area of trade in goods. Developed countries pile on the pressure to have free trade in manufactures (where they have an advantage, except in labour-intensive sectors like textiles) but insist on protecting their uncompetitive agriculture. In the stalled Doha negotiations the major subsidisers of agriculture want to maintain their domestic support (though they will shift from one type of subsidy to another in order to claim to be not so 'trade distorting'), but some



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of them are pressurising developing countries to open up to farm imports, and opposing their attempt to defend their own food security and their small farmers' livelihoods.

There is also a clash of paradigms and principles between the TRIPS agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) over their treatment of intellectual property, biological resources and indigenous knowledge. The CBD's objectives include conserving biodiversity and protecting traditional knowledge and the rights of local communities: access and benefit sharing are key aspects. TRIPS is a commercial treaty that facilitates implementing a particular model of intellectual property which promotes private monopoly rights that are expected largely to benefit transnational companies.

While the CBD is based on the principle of national sovereignty over genetic resources, TRIPS confers the right to have 'national treatment' for foreigners and facilitates foreign ownership of patents in developing countries. There is a conflict between the stress of TRIPS on the private and exclusive rights of individual patent holders and recognizing the contribution and nature of community knowledge and the rights of those that have traditionally held it.

There are also differences between the two agreements in their treatment of innovators using modern technology and traditional knowledge. Even more significant, there is a clear contradiction between CBD's system of the right of states and local communities to prior informed consent and benefit-sharing, versus the right given to private companies and researchers under TRIPS to obtain patents unilaterally without undertaking prior informed consent and benefit-sharing arrangements.

This tension between TRIPS and CBD has been the subject of intense debate and negotiations within the two fora. It is imperative that the conflict is resolved, and on the basis of sustainable development principles.

The 'free market forces' paradigm has predominated for years, and still does. But there are some positive signs that indicate a strengthening of the sustainable development one. After reaching a peak at the 1992 Rio Summit, the environment lost priority among political leaders because of the pressures

to be competitive in a liberalizing world. But awareness of its importance is now growing again, largely due to growing evidence of climate change and its devastating effects, and to the increasing net depletion of oil resources and the need to develop alternative, cleaner energy sources. It should soon return to near the top of the political agenda, rivaling globalization.

Though many developing countries still face persistent poverty and inequality, there has been a breakthrough — largely due to grassroots campaigning — in cancelling and relieving debt: twenty countries are initially involved and another twenty may become eligible. Interest in aid has revived in several developed countries, largely in the context of the Millennium Development Goals.

There is growing realization in many developing countries, that unfettered market forces and rapid liberalization are not working — and a search for alternative policies that favour sustainable development. Developing countries as a whole — through the Group of 77 and China — are demanding that their right to 'policy space' is respected by developed ones. And there is also a growing public awareness that the developed countries' agricultural subsidies harm the developing world. Pressure for reform is building up. Developed countries are still resisting, but the public clamour may eventually bring some results.

Citizen groupings representing alternative approaches and promoting social and environmental causes have been becoming more effective. Particularly positive has been increased networking and collaboration among Northern and Southern groups, cross-fertilizing interests in such issues as the environment, development, human rights, women's rights, and cultural and social problems. The emergence of civil society — advocating alternative viewpoints at international fora and to international institutions — can monitor and help shape the globalization process, bringing hope for the promotion of sustainable development. Most encouraging of all are the thousands of grass-roots movements and groups taking their own initiative to fight for their survival, livelihoods or the larger public cause. These are the real advocates of sustainable development, and they give rise to the best hope that the clash of paradigms will have a good outcome. 