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What is sustainable development?

Summary

- **There are many different definitions of sustainable development coming from various disciplines and with different assumptions about the basic relationship between society and nature.**
- **Ideas of sustainable development have a long history in the literatures of both development and environmentalism.**
- **There have been a number of important international conferences within which actions towards sustainable development have been debated (and contested) at the highest levels of government.**
- **Sustainable development is widely accepted as a desirable policy objective amongst many institutions concerned with the future development of the resources of the globe.**
- **Ideas concerning the best way of achieving development have changed over time, but are rarely replaced entirely. Mainstream environmentalism encapsulates the dominant ideas surrounding society–environment relationships, but are not subscribed to by all interests, equally.**
- **Sustainable development is currently being pursued in the context of an increasingly globalised world, but one which is also characterised by poverty. The global challenge of sustainable development lies in complex interdependencies of environment, social and economic development.**

Introduction

In 1984, the United Nations established an independent group of 22 people drawn from member states of both the developing and developed worlds, and charged them with identifying the long-term environmental strategies for the international community. In 1987, the World Conference on Environment and Development published their report entitled, ‘Our Common Future’ (WCED, 1987), often known as the ‘Brundtland Report’, after its chair, the then Prime Minister of Norway, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report used the term ‘sustainable development’ widely and defined it as ‘Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (p. 43). The report is

said to have put sustainable development firmly into the political arena of international development thinking. Certainly, it has been translated into more than 24 languages (Finger, 1994) and its definition of the term continues to be that which is most widely used.

In 1992, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the 'Earth Summit', took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. At the time, it was the largest ever international conference held, with over 170 governments represented (Adams, 2001) and a further 2,500 NGOs and 8,000 accredited journalists attending (O'Riordan, 2000). The central aim was to identify the principles of an agenda for action towards sustainable development in the future. The challenge was seen to require consensus at the highest level, so that, for the first time, heads of state gathered to consider the environment. By this time, the term 'sustainable development' had also 'gained a currency well beyond the confines of global environmental organisations' (Adams, 1990: 2). Certainly in the developed world, the substantial media attention given to the serious environmental disturbances surrounding forest fires in Indonesia, flooding in the Americas, China and Bangladesh, and typhoons in South-East Asia, for example, brought questions of conservation and ideas of sustainability into the public vocabulary. In the fields of development and the environment, an evident consensus was emerging that sustainable development was an important rallying point for research and action and a desirable policy objective which should be striven for.

However, it was evident through the decade of the 1990s, that there was substantial debate and contestation concerning the meaning and practice of sustainable development. For example, whilst the primary output of the Rio Conference, the huge 'Agenda 21' document, carried much political authority and moral force (Mather and Chapman, 1995) important tensions were evident through the proceedings at Rio such as between the environmental concerns of rich and poor countries, between those who wished to exploit resources and those who wished to conserve them, and between the development needs of current generations and those of the future. For some, the term 'sustainable development' has subsequently been redefined so many times and used to cover so many aspects of society–environment relationships that there are now 'doubts on whether anything good can ever be agreed' (Mawhinney, 2001: 1). For others, sustainable development is an idea that 'makes a difference' precisely because it is contested, requires debate and compromise and because it challenges both researchers and policy-makers (McNeill, 2000).

In 2002, 104 heads of state once again met in Johannesburg, South Africa, for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). The global challenge of sustainability is now understood to lie in the complex interdependencies of environmental, social and economic development (Potter *et al.*, 2004). New understanding has emerged of the linkages between environmental resources and conflict and the threats to environment of globalisation (as well as opportunities) as discussed in more detail here and in Chapter 2. In addition, a much more diverse range of interest groups was engaged in activities at Johannesburg than at Rio. In particular, there were many more non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from the developing world representing issues of human rights, social justice and business accountability, for example. These activities suggested new ways of addressing sustainable development at a global level and a 'more decentralized understanding of where change comes from' (Bigg, 2004: 5).

This chapter identifies in some detail the origins of the concept of sustainable development and its current 'meaning' in terms of finding alternative patterns of progress to meet the needs of the global community. Through an analysis of the key debates in the previously separate literatures of development thinking and environmentalism, it is possible to understand the sources of continued conflict regarding sustainable development in theory and practice and the broad political economic context in which sustainable development is being sought into the twenty-first century.

The concept of sustainable development

Literally, sustainable development refers to maintaining development over time. By the early 1990s, it was suggested that there were more than 70 definitions of sustainable development in circulation (Holmberg and Sandbrook, 1992). Figure 1.1 lists just a small number of such definitions and the varied interpretations of the concept which have flowed from these different ideas. Definitions are important, as they are the basis on which the means for achieving sustainable development in the future are built.

Evidently, different disciplines have influenced and contributed to the sustainability debate, 'each making different assumptions about the relation between environment and the human subject' (Lee *et al.*, 2000: 9). Differences are even more important when thinking about policy development: how the human and environmental 'condition' is

Figure 1.1 *Defining and interpreting the contested concept of sustainable development*

Definitions of sustainable development

‘In principle, such an optimal (sustainable growth) policy would seek to maintain an “acceptable” rate of growth in per-capita real incomes without depleting the national capital asset stock or the natural environmental asset stock.’

(Turner, 1988: 12)

‘The net productivity of biomass (positive mass balance per unit area per unit time) maintained over decades to centuries.’

(Conway, 1987: 96)

‘Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’

(World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43)

Interpretations of sustainable development

‘A creatively ambiguous phrase . . . an intuitively attractive but slippery concept.’

(Mitchell, 1997: 28)

‘Like motherhood, and God, it is difficult not to approve of it. At the same time, the idea of sustainable development is fraught with contradictions.’

(Redclift, 1997: 438)

‘It is indistinguishable from the total development of society.’

(Barbier, 1987: 103)

‘Its very ambiguity enables it to transcend the tensions inherent in its meaning.’

(O’Riordan, 1995: 21)

‘Sustainable development appears to be an over-used, misunderstood phrase.’

(Mawhinney, 2001: 5)

thought about, viewed or understood underpins subsequent planning and interventions in the form of development and conservation projects, yet different disciplines and philosophies may assign quite divergent ‘orders of priority’ to these policies and programmes. During the course of this text, it will be apparent that, although there are many signs of progress, there is also much debate and uncertainty as to the most appropriate strategies to foster sustainable change. Indeed, as suggested in the quotations in Figure 1.1, the attractiveness (and the ‘dangers’) of the concept of sustainable development may lie precisely in the varied ways in which it can be interpreted and used to support a whole range of interests or causes.

The challenges of understanding what this idea of sustainable development may mean, and how people can work towards it, are

evident in a brief analysis of the definition of sustainable development provided by the WCED. Their apparently simple definition of sustainable development is immediately seen to contain a distinction and a potential conflict between the interests of the present and those of future generations. Further, very challenging notions can be identified such as those of needs and limits.

Questions emerge such as: what is it that one generation is passing to another? Is it solely natural capital or does it include assets associated with human ingenuity, language or other aspects of culture? What and how are the limits set – by technology, society or ecology, for example? What of the fact that, currently, needs in one place or amongst particular groups are often fulfilled at the expense of others?

Fundamentally, ‘needs’ mean different things to different people and are linked to our ability to satisfy them, i.e. are closely aligned to ‘development’ itself. So, society is able to define and create new ‘needs’ within certain groups (that could be interpreted as ‘wants’), without satisfying even the basic needs of others. These questions highlight the many sources of conflict in the debates over the meaning of sustainable development: conflict between the interests of present generations and those of the future; between human well-being and the protection of nature; between poor and rich; and between local and global.

Furthermore, the substantial challenges of operationalising the concept of sustainable development were clear in the report of the WCED, back in 1987. Figure 1.2 displays the critical objectives identified by the Commission and the necessary conditions for sustainable development in the future, evidently encompassing a huge breadth and scale of activity. A more prosperous, more just and more secure global future was seen to depend on new norms of behaviour at all levels and in the interests of all. The conditions for such a future encompass all areas of human activity, in production, trade, technology and politics, for example, and encompass cooperative and mutually supportive actions on behalf of individuals and nations at all levels of economic development.

Most definitions of sustainable development encompass the idea that there are three interdependent pillars of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social. In 1987 Barbier presented these as three interlocking circles as seen in Figure 1.3. The objective of sustainable development is to maximise the goals across all three systems and is illustrated by the intersection of these circles. Critically, the model encompasses the understanding that each of the system goals (examples of which are identified in the figure) is socially

Plate 1.1 *Promoting the messages of sustainable development*



a. Sign on entry to
Kang, Botswana

Source: David Nash,
University of Brighton.



b. VOYCE (Views of Young Concerned Environmentalists) Four Seasons
Mural, Brighton, England

Source: Kim Jackson, Brighton and Hove City Council.

Figure 1.2 Critical objectives and necessary conditions for sustainable development as identified by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)

Critical objectives

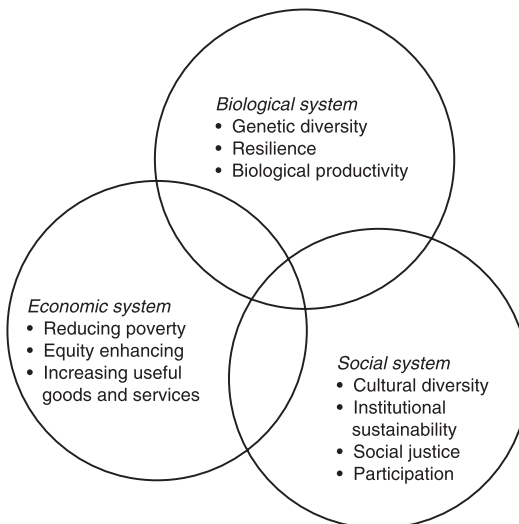
- Reviving growth
- Changing the quality of growth
- Meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation
- Ensuring a sustainable level of population
- Conserving and enhancing the resource base
- Reorientating technology and managing risk
- Merging environment and economics in decision-making

Pursuit of sustainable development requires:

- A political system that secures effective citizen participation in decision-making
- An economic system that provides for solutions for the tensions arising from disharmonious development
- A production system that respects the obligation to preserve the ecological base for development
- A technological system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance
- An international system that fosters sustainable patterns of trade and finance
- An administrative system that is flexible and has the capacity for self-correction

Source: WCED (1987).

Figure 1.3 The objectives of sustainable development



Source: compiled from Barbier (1987).

constructed and that achieving sustainable development requires trade-offs; choices have to be made at particular points in time and at particular scales as to what is being pursued and how, and sustainable development requires recognition of the costs involved for particular interests and for groups of people.

Whilst many of the early contributions to defining sustainable development came from the disciplines of economics and ecology, it is the third sphere that has accommodated much recent work. For Starkey and Walford (2001), for example, sustainable development is a moral concept that seeks to define a 'fair and just' development. They suggest that since the environment is the basis of all economic activity, and of life itself, 'it is surely only right that the quality and integrity of the environment be maintained for future generations' (p. xix).

Notions of 'environmental justice' are now a prominent part of contemporary discussions of the meaning and practice of sustainable development and take the moral concerns further: in addition to environmental protection, the concern is for how environmental bads (such as pollution) and goods (such as access to green space) are distributed across society. Environmental justice also encompasses a concern for the equity of environmental management interventions and the nature of public involvement in decision-making.

Understanding is mounting of the political nature of sustainable development in practice; how the solutions proposed (and the choices and trade-offs made) can carry different costs for different groups of people.

Clearly, whilst common sense would seem to tell us that our development should not be at the expense of that of future generations, the challenges in practice are substantial. In order to identify the challenges of implementing sustainable development actions and to realise the opportunities for sustainable development, it is necessary to understand the changes in thinking and practice from which the concept has developed. As Adams (2001) suggests, sustainable development cannot be understood in 'an historical vacuum' (p. 22). Of particular importance are the changes in thinking about what constitutes 'development' and how best to achieve it, and changing ideas about the 'environment'. Indeed, the current conflicts surrounding sustainable development today could be considered a legacy of the substantially separate nature of these two debates in the past (Lee *et al.*, 2000). Furthermore, it is considered that the debates on sustainable development have been important in reshaping understanding in both these arenas (McNeill, 2000).

Changing perceptions of development

Poverty, hunger, disease and debt have been familiar words within the lexicon of development ever since formal development planning began, following the Second World War. In the past decade they have been joined by another, sustainability.

(Adams, 2001: 1)

Development is often discussed in relation to ‘developing countries’, but is a concept which relates to all parts of the world at every level, from the individual to global transformations (Potter *et al.*, 2004). Development is something to which we all aspire and, certainly in the more developed world, ‘self-development’ has become something that is actively encouraged and an endeavour on which large amounts of money are spent, for example. Ideas about the best means by which to achieve our aspirations and needs are potentially as old as human civilisation. The study of development, however, has a relatively short history, really dating back only as far as the 1950s. Since then, the interdisciplinary field of development studies has seen many changes in thinking regarding the meaning and purpose of development (ideologies) and in development practice in the field (strategies of development). Although these shifts are considered chronologically here, in reality existing theories are rarely totally replaced; rather, new ones find relative favour and contestation over the prescriptions for development flowing from them continue.

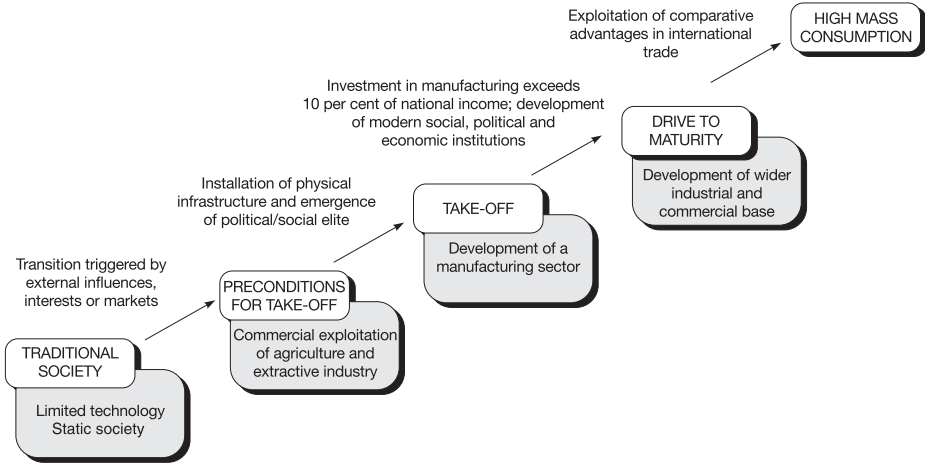
Optimistic early decades

During the 1960s, development thinking (encompassing these aspects of ideology and strategy) prioritised economic growth and the application of modern scientific and technical knowledge as the route to prosperity in the underdeveloped world at that time. In short, the ‘global development problem’ was conceived as one in which less developed nations needed to ‘catch up’ with the West and enter the modern age of capitalism and liberal democracy. Underdevelopment was seen as an initial stage through which western nations had progressed and the gaps in development that existed could be gradually overcome through an ‘imitative process’ (Hettne, 2002: 7), significantly, through a sharing of the experience of West in terms of capital and know-how. In short, development was seen in terms of modernisation and, in turn, modernisation was equated with westernisation (and an associated faith in the rationality of science and technology) during this period. This ‘modernisation thesis’

dominated mainstream theories of economic development from the late 1950s through to the early 1970s. It was an optimistic time: it was thought that underdevelopment could be overcome through the spatial diffusion of modernity from the West to less developed countries and from urban centres to rural areas, for example. It was assumed that many development problems of the underdeveloped world would be solved quickly through the transfer of finance, technology and experience from the developed countries.

Insights from neo-classical economics as modelled by authors such as Rostow (1960) were very influential in development thinking at this time. Rostow's model of the linear stages of economic development is shown in Figure 1.4. On the basis largely of the experience and history of the more developed societies (i.e. a Eurocentric stance), it was suggested that, through assistance in reaching a critical 'take-off' stage in levels of savings and investment, the benefits of development and characteristics of 'modernisation' (including of society, politics and culture) would inevitably and spontaneously flow from the core to less-developed regions. Industrialisation through capitalist growth was seen as the central requirement in order for development to take place and through this strengthening of the material base of society, all countries had an equal chance to develop. Whilst there were differences in emphasis regarding the nature of the strategies to deliver industrial growth, there was an absolute faith within development thinking at this time that there was a linear, unconstrained path to economic development and an 'unswerving faith in the efficacy of urban-based industrial growth' (Potter *et al.*, 2004: 94). There was an active role envisaged for the state in creating the conditions needed to achieve 'take-off' (such as setting policy to stimulate local demand and savings) and in setting appropriate rates of taxes. Aspects of these ideas, such as the importance of the free market and the priority given to the European experience, found renewed emphasis in the 1990s within structural adjustment programmes as detailed below.

The optimism of the theorists of the 1960s, however, was generally not borne out by experience of development on the ground in that decade. By the 1970s, inequality between and within countries had in fact worsened. The empirical evidence concerning economic growth as measured by gross national product (GNP) suggested that, whilst change had been achieved, this 'development' was not shared equally amongst the populations of these nations. For example, in Brazil in 1970, the poorest 40 per cent of the population received only 6.5 per cent of the total national income, in contrast to the 66.7 per cent of

Figure 1.4 The stages of economic development as modelled by Rostow

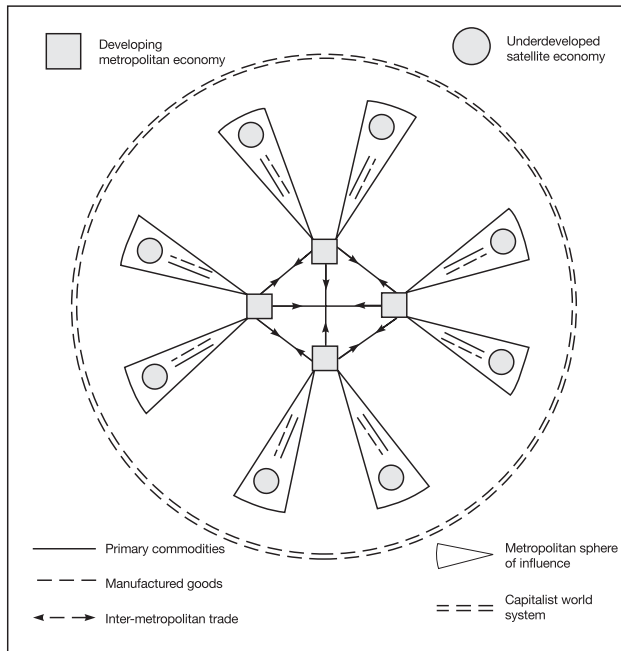
Source: Rostow (1960).

the total national income received by the richest 20 per cent of the population (Todaro, 1997). Into the 1980s, rising levels of debt, the oil crisis and the problems for oil-importing countries led to growing dissatisfaction with ideas of modernisation as development. The optimism of a speedy end to underdevelopment faded on the basis of such emerging 'real-world observations' (Potter *et al.*, 2004: 97).

During the 1970s, development thinking was influenced strongly by the writings of scholars within the developing world itself, particularly from Latin American and the Caribbean (notably those regions most strongly linked to the United States). They considered the socioeconomic structures and economic conditions of their countries in terms of the exploitative/dependent relations with other parts of the world, particularly through colonialism in the past and with the capitalist economy generally. The politics of development came to the fore within such writings. In Europe too at this time, there was a reinvigorated interest in the work of Marx and an emerging 'New Left' movement that linked with the struggles of the Third World anti-colonial movements (Potter *et al.*, 2004). Through the 1970s, what became known as the radical or 'dependency' school of thought became dominant in development. This school is perhaps most closely associated with the work of Andre Gunder Frank (1967), a European economist trained in America, but who carried out much research in Central and Latin America.

Fundamentally, the assertion in dependency theory was that underdevelopment was not the result of any inadequacies in economic, social or environmental conditions within those countries themselves, but the direct outcome of development elsewhere and the manner in which those countries were incorporated into the operations of the international capitalist system, i.e. the structural disadvantages of these countries and regions. Rather than seeing the US and Europe as the source of a cure for the ills of the developing world, dependency theorists saw the role of these regions as the source of those ills, i.e. in actively creating the problems of underdevelopment. To use Frank's terminology, development and underdevelopment were two sides of the same coin. As illustrated in Figure 1.5, peripheral or satellite regions and countries are integrated into the world system through processes of unequal exchange and dependent relations with the metropolitan core. In consequence, the further entrenched they become in such processes, the more they are held back in development, rather than enabled to progress. This 'development of underdevelopment' was modelled as applying to processes of unequal exchange operating both internationally and internally within countries, and was used to explain patterns of regional and national underdevelopment in countries like Brazil.

The barriers to development as modelled by dependency theorists, therefore, lay in the international division of labour and the terms of trade, rather than a lack of capital or entrepreneurial skills, as within modernisation thinking. One of the principal policy responses to flow from the dependency ideas was import substitution industrialisation (ISI). ISI is a strategy to enable peripheral countries to industrialise through looking inward (setting up domestic industry and supplying markets previously served by imports). It depends on a strong role for the state in protecting new industries via import tariffs and quotas and controlled access to foreign exchange. Many Latin American countries such as Brazil and Argentina had established substantial industrial bases by the 1960s using this strategy towards providing consumer goods such as clothing, cars, food and drinks to sizeable home markets. However, ISI has proven less successful in relation to the production of intermediate and capital goods which are more capital than labour intensive (Hewitt, 2000) and where problems of the lack of domestic capital to invest in such production and a lack of purchasing power on behalf of local, relatively poor, citizens have emerged. Other means towards 'withdrawal' from the international capitalist economy such as through the formation of regional trading areas (as a means for expanding domestic markets) have generally not

Figure 1.5 The Frank model of underdevelopment

Source: Corbridge (1987).

been sustained over time. In short, dependency theory did much to expose the structural disadvantages of peripheral countries in relation to the capitalist core, and therefore how unlikely it was that they would follow the stages of economic growth mapped out on the basis of early experiences in Europe and North America (as modelled by modernisation theorists). However, the internal problems of local economies were generally underestimated within dependency theory.

The lost decade of the 1980s?

By the 1980s, dependency theory had to a large extent moved out of fashion within development thinking, criticised in particular for its rather deterministic emphasis on the role of external economic structures in shaping society and development. Many commentators by this time were starting to consider the basic development conditions and needs of people within countries of the developing world, to focus on issues of self-reliance in development and on the internal forces of change. The expression, 'another development' is

Plate 1.2 *The inevitable consequences of development? Industrial air pollution*



Source: Gordon Walker, Lancaster University.

often used as an umbrella term to include a broad sweep of changes in thinking regarding development and how best to achieve it from the late 1970s. As a whole, proponents of ‘another’ or ‘alternative’ development make less recourse to theorising social change and are more concerned with *how* development should occur (Thomas, 2000). Phrases such as ‘growth with equity’ or ‘redistribution with growth’ emerged in the 1970s and encapsulated the recognition that economic growth remains a fundamental ingredient within development thinking and action, but that it was critical to ensure that the benefits do not fall solely to a minority of the population. Similarly, the International Labor Organisation World Employment Conference in 1976 is considered to have been particularly important in raising issues of employment generation and a redistribution of wealth over and above economic growth. By the 1980s, ‘development’ was seen as a multidimensional concept encapsulating widespread improvements in the social as well as the material well-being of all in society.

In addition, it was recognised that there was no single model for achieving development; certainly it required investment in all sectors, including agriculture as well as industry. Rural-based strategies of development were particularly important amongst those promoting ‘development from below’ such as Stohr and Taylor (1981). Rather than a single, ‘top-down’ (and linear) model, it was asserted that development needs to be closely related to the specific local, historical,

Plate 1.3 *The pollution of poverty*



a. Hazardous housing on a Calcutta roadside

Source: author.



b. Washing in the Jakarta floods

Source: author.

sociocultural and institutional conditions, focused on mobilising internal natural and human resources, appropriate technologies and give priority to basic needs. In stark contrast to the theories of development up to that time, development was to be more inclusive, with individual and cooperative actions and enterprises becoming the central means for (or ‘agents’ of) development. Strong and

enduring notions (as will be seen through subsequent chapters) of ‘participatory development’ emerged at this time in recognition of the shortcomings of top-down, externally imposed and expert-oriented research and development practice (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Above all through the 1980s, it started to be understood that development needed to be sustainable; it must encompass not only economic and social activities, but also those related to population, the use of natural resources and the resulting impacts on the environment.

Table 1.1 *Income ratios between rich and poor nations*

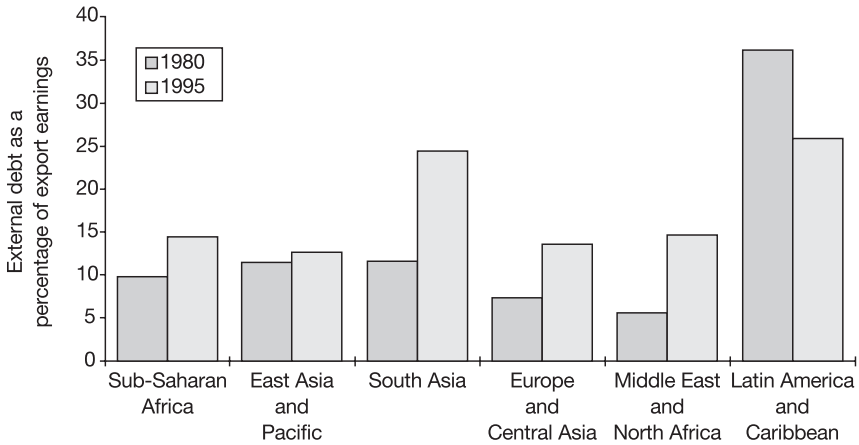
| Year | <i>Income of richest 20% divided by income of poorest 20%</i> | |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| | | |
| 1960 | 20:1 | |
| 1980 | 46:1 | |
| 1989 | 60:1 | |
| 1999 | 74:1 | |

Sources: Schurmann (2002); UNDP (1999).

The 1980s, however, have been referred to as the ‘lost decade’ in development. The suggestion is that, with the exception of the ‘Asian Tigers’, the widespread experience in the developing world was of ‘development reversals’, i.e. previous gains were lost and in many cases went into reverse. ‘Per capita national incomes in Latin America and Africa, for example, declined, investment declined (resulting in the deterioration of infrastructure and transport, communications, education and health care) and unemployment and underemployment grew’ (Hewitt, 2000:

301). Furthermore, global inequality increased in the 1980s: the income ratio of rich to poor nations worsened in this decade and continues to do so as seen in Table 1.1.

For many developing countries through the 1980s, development had to be pursued in the context of global economic recession and a mounting ‘debt crisis’. Starting in Latin America, with Brazil and Mexico announcing that they could no longer service their official debts, concern spread through the commercial banks and northern governments (that had previously lent huge monies in a context of low interest rates and global expansion) about widespread defaulting and the possible collapse of the international monetary system. Figure 1.6 illustrates the persistent and generally mounting challenge throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s of servicing debt in relation to export performance of regions of the developing world. Economic recession impacted on developing countries through a combination of declining international demand, increasing protectionism in the industrialised countries, deteriorating terms of trade, negative capital flows, continuing high interest rates, and unfavourable lending conditions. These factors had serious implications for the environment, as considered in Chapter 3, and were primary aspects of

Figure 1.6 *Debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services by world region*

Source: World Bank (1997).

the context in which sustainable development was pursued in the 1980s (and remain so). Not only did huge interest repayments mean money going out without any direct impacts on productive development internally, but savings had to be made, typically in the finance for environment departments and through cuts in social services.

The growing inequality globally and the increasingly diverse experiences of development and underdevelopment in the South through the 1980s were important factors in shaping what has been termed the ‘impasse in development studies’ (Schurmann, 2002) that was also considered to have characterised this period. The suggestion was that ‘old certainties’ concerning understanding development were ‘fading away’ and that existing theories ‘could ever less adequately explain experiences of development and underdevelopment’ (p. 12): i.e. there was a concern about how development was being theorised as well as the concerns over the development impacts on the ground. A number of factors continued to underpin such concerns through the 1990s. For example, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of communism undermined the strength of Marxist analyses (that had underpinned dependency theories, for example). A ‘post-modern’ critique within the social sciences generally at this time was also fundamentally about moving away from an era dominated by notions of modernisation and modernity. Both these factors had profound implications for development theory and practice. Furthermore, the rise of globalisation (as considered below and in Chapter 2) was

changing the position of the nation state and national governments across economic, social and political spheres. Yet the nation state was central within existing theories of development as seen above. Evidently, all these factors raised many questions for those involved in both development thinking and practice through the 1990s.

The neo-liberal 1990s

In the North, disillusionment with the record of state involvement in the economy (and social life more broadly) also mounted from the late 1980s. This was illustrated in the ascendancy of conservative governments and the politics of Reagan and Thatcher in the US and UK, for example. A belief in what Simon (2002: 87) terms the ‘magic of the market’ developed and neo-liberal ideas of development took hold. Neo-liberalism is essentially an approach to development that considers the free market to be the best way to initiate and sustain economic development. Typical policy implications of such an approach therefore centre on removing the influence of the state in markets; in removing tariffs on imports and subsidies on exports, for example, and denationalising public industries and service provision. The roots of neo-liberalism are in the neo-classical economics of Adam Smith and ‘this ideology rapidly became the economic orthodoxy in the North and was exported to the global South via aid policies and the measures formulated to address the debt crisis’ (Simon, 2002: 87).

For many nations in the developing world, their entry into the world economy through the 1990s was increasingly defined by the neo-liberal policies of the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As already suggested, many developing countries began to experience severe balance of payments difficulties in the 1980s that were considered to threaten the international financial system as a whole. Debt became the concern of the two ‘mainstays of the global economic order’, the WB and the IMF. The assessment in the early 1980s was that the economic crisis in developing countries was more than a temporary liquidity issue (as it had been conceived in the 1970s). Rather, comprehensive, longer-term solutions were required, based on packages of broad policy reforms in indebted nations. The term structural adjustment programme (SAP) is used to refer to the generic activities of the IMF and WB in this arena. The central objective of SAPs as defined by the World Bank was to ‘modify the structure of an economy so that it can maintain both its

growth rate and the viability of its balance of payments in the medium term' (Reed, 1996: 41), i.e. to address issues of debt.

The first SAP was implemented in Turkey in 1980 and by the end of the decade 187 SAPs had been negotiated for 64 developing countries (Dickenson *et al.*, 1996: 265). Most countries today have some kind of SAP since they are the basis for receipt of WB lending that now reaches most countries of the world as shown in Figure 1.7. Although each package of policy reform is tailored for the particular country, SAPs generally have included many or all of the elements listed in Figure 1.8. It has been argued that the impacts of SAPs quickly went far beyond the original national contexts for which they were designed, to become an instrument for global economic restructuring (Reed, 1996) and through the conditions attached, they enabled the IMF and WB to 'virtually control the economies' of many developing nations (Hildyard, 1994: 26). Certainly, these international institutions currently influence development policy and planning in the developing world to an unprecedented extent and are important actors in determining the prospects for sustainable development in the future, as seen in Chapter 3.

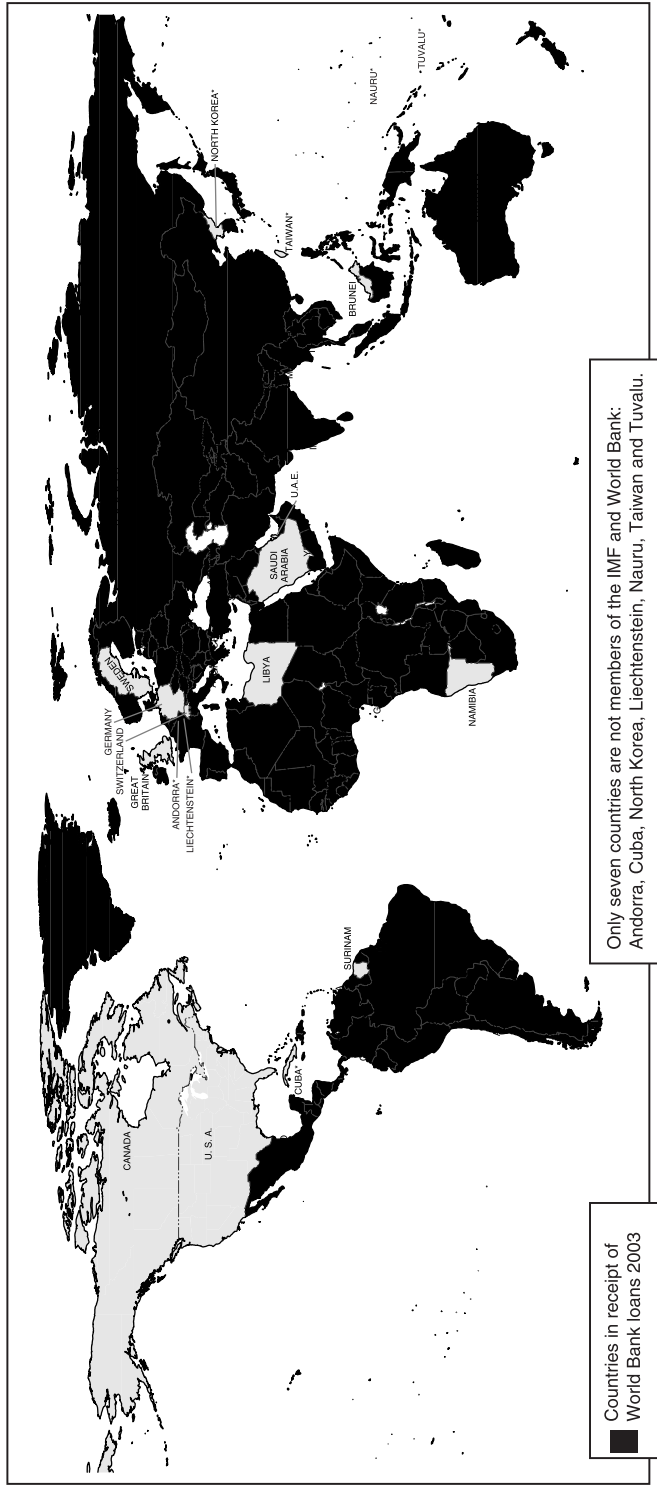
Through the 1990s, recognition also grew of the unprecedented changes of a global character occurring in all arenas of economic, social, political (and environmental) activity. The term 'globalisation' became:

widely used to explain the causes and effects of most aspects of life at the turn of the century . . . While open to different interpretations, globalisation captures a description of the widening and deepening of economic, political, social and cultural interdependence and interconnectedness.

(Willett, 2001: 1)

In short, globalisation encompasses the various processes of change through which interactions between different regions are increasing and the world becomes ever more global in character. Whilst global links and interconnections between places and peoples around the world have existed previously (through colonial ties, for example), the nature, extent and depth of contemporary processes of globalisation are relatively new. As Allen and Hamnett (1995) suggest, it is not the global scope of movements of people or resources currently, but the immediacy and intensity with which we can now experience other parts of the globe, which is unprecedented and is part of what distinguishes globalisation from earlier periods of 'internationalism'. Furthermore, processes of global integration now extend to much

Figure 1.7 The global reach of the World Bank



Note: Countries not members of WB/IMF and therefore ineligible.
Source: *New Internationalist*, no. 365, March 2004.

Figure 1.8 The principal instruments of structural adjustment

Cuts in:

- government expenditure
- public sector employment
- real wages

Pricing policies designed to:

- eliminate food subsidies
- raise agricultural prices
- cost recovery in public services

Trade liberalisation involving:

- currency devaluation
- credit reform
- privatisation of state-owned institutions
- higher interest rates

more than the flow of goods and services, for example, as illustrated further in Chapters 2 and 3.

However, whilst the world is becoming more global, it does not necessarily mean it is becoming more uniform, as discussed in Box A.

Into the twenty-first century, one of the most radical reactions within development thinking to the dilemmas of development on the ground and to the limitations of both conventional and alternative schools of thought came from what's known as the 'post-development' school (most closely associated with Escobar, 1995).

Within this thinking, the concept of

development as a desirable process itself is contested for the ways in which it 'involves a dependent and subordinate process, creates and widens spatial inequalities, harms local cultures and values, perpetuates poverty and poor working and living conditions, produces unsustainable environments, and infringes human rights and democracy' (Hodder, 2000: 17). Not only is development considered to have failed, but the development project itself is condemned for creating and producing the opposite of what it promised (Corbridge, 1999). In short, a post-development era depends on breaking the 'holds of westernisation' be it as organised by the aid industry or activities of western private capital. 'Defending the local' (such as through ecological, women's and people's organisations) and resisting the forces of globalisation are core prescriptions for change. Post-developmentalists emphasise grassroots participation and the capacities of organisations at the local level as agents of change (the suggestion being that the state has failed for the way that it has facilitated the westernisation of the development project). Whilst the post-development school can be criticised for focusing on the 'worst' experiences of the last decades (Rigg, 1997) and for ignoring the improvements shown in longer-term data sets, post-development thinking has helped reaffirm the importance of the local in development processes (Potter *et al.*, 2004), which will be seen to be a feature of more sustainable development processes in later chapters.

Box A

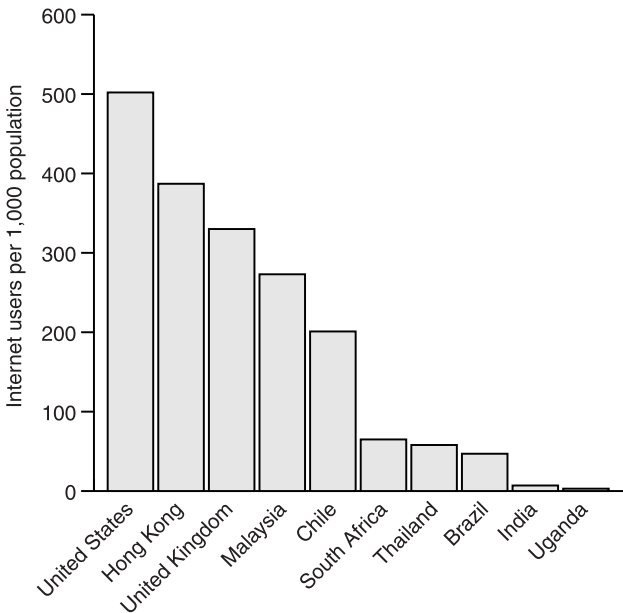
The unevenness of globalisation

Despite the global character of many major processes of economic, political, environmental and social change in the world currently, it should not be taken that globalisation affects all people or all areas of the globe equally. It is evident that some parts of the world are 'left out' in the sense that they are not part of a network of communications or do not receive multi-national investment, for example. A simple illustration is that half of the world's population has never made a telephone call.

(Potter *et al.*, 2004)

Figure 1.9 highlights the geographical differences in the use of the Internet. Over half of the population of the United States is now online, whereas in countries like Thailand, only a minority of the urban population is able to access this network. Approximately 70 per cent of all traffic on the Internet originates from or is addressed to North America (Knox and Marston, 2004). Furthermore, 80 per cent of all global websites are in English, yet only 10 per cent of the world's population speaks English (UNDP, 2001).

Figure 1.9 Internet users per 1,000 population, 2001



Source: UNDP (2003).

The uneven reach of globalisation is also illustrated in terms of foreign direct investment – investment made by private companies that is a major driving force of economic globalisation. The developed world accounts for two-thirds of the world's FDI stock (UNCTAD, 2003). In particular, it is firms from the EU, the US and Japan which are the major owners and sources of outward FDI. In large measure, these major investors

overseas are also investing in each other. Table 1.2 confirms that the great proportion of inward FDI flows are to the high-income countries of the world. In contrast, the African continent, for example, could be suggested to be only loosely connected to this globalising economy.

Table 1.2 Inward foreign direct investment, by major world region, 2000

| | <i>Total flows, millions of dollars</i> | <i>% of world total</i> |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| World | 1,167,337 | |
| Low income countries | 6,812 | 0.6 |
| Middle income countries | 150,572 | 12.9 |
| High income countries | 1,009,929 | 86.5 |
| East Asia and Pacific | 42,847 | 4 |
| Europe and Central Asia | 28,495 | 2.4 |
| Latin America and Caribbean | 75,088 | 6.4 |
| Middle East and North Africa | 1,209 | 0.1 |
| South Asia | 3,093 | 0.3 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 6,676 | 0.6 |

Source: Compiled from World Bank (2003a).

Changing perceptions of the environment

The history of environmental concern is quite similar to that of development studies: although people have held and articulated varying attitudes towards nature stretching back many years, it is only since the 1960s that a coherent philosophy and language surrounding the environment ('environmentalism' as defined by Pepper in 1984) can be identified. In continuity with 'development thinking', it is possible to identify significant differences and changes over time concerning ideas about the environment; regarding society's relationship with nature and in terms of the prescribed conservation requirements within modern environmentalism. Although the focus here is largely on 'mainstream' environmentalism, i.e. the broad consensus that can be identified as forwarded for example within successive conferences and publications of international institutions, the continued diversity within modern environmentalism should not be denied or underestimated. For example, there is a persistent and fundamental divergence between 'reformist/technocentric' and 'radical/ecocentric' environmentalism which is the source of much contemporary debate within sustainable development. Box B

Box B

Modes of thought concerning humanity and nature

It is argued that society's desire to manipulate nature, concomitant with an acceptance that the Earth nurtures our own existence, is inherent in the human condition. 'Technocentric' and 'ecocentric' refer to the two extreme positions. In reality, the distinction between these different perspectives is often blurred. As O'Riordan (1981) suggests, rarely is the world so neatly divided into two camps; rather we all tend to favour certain elements of both modes, depending on such factors as our changing economic status and the institutional setting or issue at hand. The categories should not, therefore, be thought of as rigidly fixed or mutually exclusive.

Environmental philosophies:

Technocentric

Human-centred: humanity has a desire to manipulate nature and make the world a more certain place in which to live.

Ecocentric

Earth-centred: the Earth nurtures humanity's existence and should be treated with respect and humility.

Green labels:

'Dry Green'

Reformist in that the present economic system is accepted, but considered to require some gradual revision.

Belief in political status quo, but more responsible and accountable institutions. Self-regulation through 'enlightened conscience'.

'Deep Green'

Radical in that quite rapid and fundamental changes in economy and society are desired.

Supports devolved, political structures with emphasis on self-reliant communities and pursuit of justice and redistribution across generations.

Environmental management strategies:

Reliance on scientific credibility, modelling and prediction.

Promotes the appropriate manipulation of markets to create cost-effective solutions to environmental improvements.

Sustainable development through rational use of resources, better planning and clean technologies, for example.

Management strategies geared to retaining global stability based on ecological principles of diversity and homeostasis.

New and fundamentally different conservation solutions required which are flexible and adaptable.

Alternative and appropriate technologies.

Sources: compiled from Pepper (1996), O'Riordan (1981) and O'Riordan (1995).

highlights the principal differences between these two philosophical standpoints on nature and society and the varied implications of each for conservation action.

Development as environmentally destructive

In the 1960s, environmentalism was largely a movement reflecting European and American white, middle-class concerns. The undesirable effects of industrial and economic development were beginning to be seen via a number of 'conspicuous pollution incidents' (Bartelmus, 1994: 5) and people were worried about the effects on their own lifestyles and health: 'after two centuries of industrialism and urbanisation, people now began to rediscover the idea that they were part of nature' (McCormick, 1995: 56). Environmentalists campaigned on issues such as air pollution and whaling and often received substantial support from the media. In contrast to earlier nature protection or conservation movements within these regions, environmentalism was overtly activist and political. The combination of actual changes in the environment and people's perceptions generally at this time brought widespread public support for the environmental movement, particularly amongst the younger groups. As Biswas and Biswas (1985) suggest, 'the environment and Vietnam became two of the major issues over which youth rebelled against the establishment' (p. 25).

For the new environmentalists, it was not solely their local outdoor environments which were perceived to be under threat, but human survival itself. A number of very influential 'global future studies' were published in the early 1970s which served to reinforce and spread the fears and influence of western environmentalists. For example, texts such as *The Population Bomb* (Ehrlich, 1968), *Blueprint for Survival* (Goldsmith *et al.*, 1972) and *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.*, 1972) modelled an ever-expanding population and mounting demands of society on a fundamentally finite resource base. In order to 'avoid the disastrous consequences of transgressing the physical limits of the Earth's resources' (Bartelmus, 1994: 5), urgent conservation actions (particularly population control in the developing world) and 'zero-growth' in the world economy were required.

Not surprisingly, this environmental movement found little support in the developing nations. Many developing nations (outside Latin America) had only just gained independence and were sceptical

regarding the motives behind proposals which seemed to limit their development objectives and remove sovereign control over resources. These underdeveloped nations saw their development problems as being linked to too little industry rather than too much and contrasted this with the position of the developed countries which used the bulk of resources and contributed most to the resulting industrial pollution. Similarly, it was hard for representatives of the developing world to consider how their relatively impoverished citizens could compete with affluent consumers of the West in terms of responsibility for the depletion of resources.

Development and conservation at this time were portrayed as incompatible: resources were thought to be finite, and pollution and environmental deterioration were considered the inevitable consequences of industrial development. In conceiving the 'environment' as the stocks of substances found in nature, by definition these resources were ultimately considered to be limited in quantity. In turn, therefore, the global future predictions gave little attention to the social, technological or institutional factors which affect the relationship between people and resources (Biswas and Biswas, 1985). Further to such environmental determinism, these reports were ahistorical in the sense that they gave no attention to how or why the world is divided into rich and poor, for example. They were also apolitical in considering the future of the Earth (rather than people) as the overriding and paramount concern, with no consideration of how the solutions advocated would favour some nations or groups over others.

By the time of the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, the environmental movement had 'come of age' and environmental issues were clearly on the international political agenda, as evidenced by the participation in Stockholm of 113 countries. However, as Adams (2001) suggests, whilst the Stockholm meeting is often identified as the key event in the emergence of sustainable development, 'it was only partly, and belatedly, concerned with the environmental and developmental problems of the emerging Third World' (p. 54). The primary impetus for the conference had been the developed world's concerns about the effects of industrialisation (Sweden, for example, being particularly concerned about acid rain). In the event, the dialogue between government representatives, and within parallel meetings of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at the conference, soon moved to wider issues including the relationship between environment and development issues. The term 'pollution of poverty' was used for the first time at

Stockholm to refer to the environmental concerns of the poor, such as lack of clean water or sanitation, which threatened life itself for many in the developing world. It also encompassed the emerging recognition that a lack of development could also cause environmental degradation, a notion which is now shaping much thinking and action towards sustainability, as detailed in subsequent chapters. However, discussions of the links between poverty and environmental degradation were limited at Stockholm (Adams, 2001), as were the causes of poverty (Middleton and O’Keefe, 2003), and whilst it was made clear that environment and development *should* be integrated, it was left unclear as to *how* this should happen.

Following the Stockholm conference, there continued to be mistrust on behalf of the developing nations regarding the extent to which ideas of development and environment were indeed understood as interdependent and truly ‘shared’ problems of global resource management. Furthermore, environmental concern continues to be very uneven within regions of both developing and developed worlds, as considered in subsequent sections. Perhaps the most significant outcome of the Stockholm conference was the creation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in the following year. The intention established at the conference, was that a new intergovernmental body should be established within the UN to focus environmental action and to serve as an ‘international environmental watchdog’ to be responsible for the monitoring of global environmental change. Although its monitoring role is considered to have been limited (Werksman, 1996), UNEP remains the UN’s primary environmental policy co-coordinating body and its role has been strengthened in subsequent international fora. UNEP has also been instrumental in overseeing a rising number of multilateral environmental agreements in the last few decades, as seen in Chapter 3. However, its activities continue to be hampered by problems of international coordination and scarce funding.

Finding policies for action

In summary, by the late 1970s, important changes in thinking regarding both the environment and development were causing the two previously separate issues to be seen as more interconnected concerns and an improved understanding of the interdependence of the developed and developing worlds was also recognised. The challenge for the 1980s was to translate the substantial rhetoric into

policies and actions in practice. In 1977, UNEP commissioned the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) to consider and report on the conservation problems of the world and to identify effective solutions to them. Historically, the IUCN had been concerned with wildlife conservation and nature protection. Their report, the World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, 1980), has been referred to as the ‘launchpad’ for the concept of sustainable development (Mather and Chapman, 1995: 248) and the ‘nearest approach yet . . . to a comprehensive action-oriented programme for political change’ (Adams, 2001: 65). Within the WCS, for the first time, development was suggested as a major means of achieving conservation rather than as an obstruction to it: ‘human benefits would follow from appropriate forms of environmental management’ (Mather and Chapman, 1995: 247). The WCS identified three objectives for conservation, as shown in Figure 1.10. It is evident in the figure that conservation itself was defined as being more than nature preservation through the ways in which human survival, future needs in science, medicine and industry are linked to ecological processes and genetic diversity, for example.

Figure 1.10 *The World Conservation Strategy objectives of conservation*

- 1 The maintenance of essential ecological processes and life-support systems** such as soil, forests, agricultural systems, and coastal and freshwater systems. This meant managing cropland, protecting watersheds and coastal fisheries, and controlling the discharge of pollutants.
- 2 The preservation of genetic diversity** for breeding projects in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. This meant preventing the extinction of species, preserving as many varieties as possible of crop and forage plants, timber trees, animals for aqua-culture, microbes and other domesticated organisms and their wild relatives, protecting the wild relatives of economically valuable and other useful species and their habitats, fitting the needs of ecosystems to the size, distribution and management of protected areas, and co-coordinating national and international protected area programmes.
- 3 Ensuring the sustainable use of species and ecosystems.** This meant ensuring use did not exceed the productive capacity of exploited species, reducing excessive yields to sustainable levels, reducing incidental take, maintaining the habitats of exploited species, carefully allocating timber concessions and limiting firewood consumption, and regulating the stocking of grazing lands.

However, the WCS has been criticised for continuing to portray a very neo-malthusian future in which escalating numbers of people are identified as the source of short-sighted approaches to natural resources management and the root of degradation. In continuity with earlier publications, there was little attention to the political, social, cultural or economic dimensions of resource use or, indeed, obstacles to development (Reid, 1995). Adams (2001: 60) summarises the WCS as ‘a conservation document that addressed the issues and problems raised by economic development, rather than a document about development and environment as such’. Whilst stressing global responsibility and strategy, the failure of a global agenda for environmental action to recognise the political nature of the development process was particularly problematic. As Reid (1995: 43) states,

To suggest solutions based on such ‘self-evident’ principles as ‘population increase must be halted’ and ‘carrying capacity must be respected’ without considering the political realities affecting the chances of their being implemented is to ignore the rights of local people, neglect the impact of social and economic forces on their access to and use of resources, and deny the reality of the effort needed to surmount the many political difficulties associated with negotiating ‘improvements’ that have recognisable similarity with ‘obvious’ global solutions.

Recognising the politics of sustainable development

In 1987, the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development extended the ideas of sustainable development significantly beyond those of the WCS and did much to disseminate the popular and political use of the term as identified at the outset of this chapter. Principally, the WCED started with people (rather than the environment) and gave greater attention to human development concerns and the kinds of environmental policies needed to achieve these: to the challenge of overcoming poverty and meeting basic needs and to integrating the environment into economic decision-making. It recognised that the ‘environment’ did not exist as a sphere separate from human actions and ambitions and explicitly considered the political and social requirements of sustainable development in practice. It was underpinned by a strong ideology that nature and the Earth could be managed (i.e. there was no spectre of economic disaster as portrayed by the WCS within the WCED report) and for this, reviving economic growth was considered essential. No longer was it a question of whether development was desirable: economic

growth was central to the Commission's proposals for environmental protection and 'degraded and deteriorating environments were seen to be inimical to continued development' (Mather and Chapman, 1995: 248). It was also clear that it was futile to continue to tackle environmental problems without considering the broader issues of factors underlying world poverty and international inequality. But new forms of economic growth would be the key to sustainable development; growth must be less energy intensive and more equitably shared, for example.

The mix of 'environment' and development concerns of the WCED are evident in the critical objectives identified in Figure 1.2. Whilst ensuring a sustainable level of population is one of those objectives, the WCED gives a very different message from that of WCS. For example, the WCED recognises the differentiated impact on resources of current international patterns of consumption: 'an additional person in an industrial country consumes far more than an additional person in the Third World. Consumption patterns and processes are as important as numbers of consumers in the conservation of resources' (WCED, 1987: 95). Similarly, in relation to the objective of a changed quality in economic growth in the future, the Commission acknowledged varied responsibilities:

if industrial development is to be sustainable over the long term, it will have to change radically in terms of the quality of that development, *particularly in industrialised countries* . . . industries and industrial operations should be encouraged that are more efficient in terms of resource use, that generate less pollution and waste, that are based on the use of renewable rather than non-renewable resources, and that minimise irreversible adverse impacts on human health and the environment.

(WCED, 1987: 213, emphasis added)

For some commentators, however, the continued prominence given in the Brundtland Report to economic growth has suggested a 'comfortable reformism' in respect of the suggestion that it can be reconciled with environmental conservation without any significant adjustments to the capitalist market system. Although the substantial political and economic changes required in future to achieve sustainable development were identified by the WCED (see Figure 1.2), it has also been suggested that it did not go far enough in terms of identifying the barriers or obstacles to change in these sectors (Starke, 1990).

The WCED was commissioned by the United Nations and reported directly to its General Assembly. In 1989, it was announced that a

conference would be held five years hence to report progress on environment and development since the report. This was the 'Earth Summit' held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. It is important to evaluate the conference as a process rather than a single event (Adams, 2001). In Chapter 3 the specific agreements reached at Rio and the *continued* impacts on the actions of varied institutions of development are discussed. Commentators on the Rio conference have presented strong and often opposing reactions (O'Riordan, 2000). For Middleton and O'Keefe (2003: 7), it put the environment at the 'centre stage of politics' and in placing the concept of sustainable development at the centre of the debate, it prompted new ways of thinking regarding the links between poverty and the environment. For Adams (2001), however, the agenda remains dominated by northern priorities focused on issues of the global commons that are more amenable to political and technical solutions than poverty or global inequality. There was certainly substantial optimism at the conference that new global commitments between North and South could be achieved around the common interests of these regions: the end of the Cold War and of the economic recession of the 1980s, for example. However, many of the problems of environment and development identified at Rio got worse through the 1990s and the finances identified as necessary to implement Agenda 21 (A21) generally did not materialise. It was estimated by the UNCED secretariat that US\$600 billion annually was required between 1993 and 2000 (O'Riordan, 2000) to implement A21. But by that end date, official development assistance had in fact fallen to its lowest level ever (Banuri *et al.*, 2002), as discussed in Chapter 3.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development

In 2002, the World Summit on Sustainable Development was held in South Africa. The aim was to reinvigorate at the highest political level, the global commitment to a North–South partnership to achieve sustainable development. It has been referred to as 'by far the most inclusive summit to date' (Seyfang, 2003: 227) for the way in which more stakeholder groups were brought into formal meetings (including a bigger presence for business, for example), but also for the extensive informal participation of many individuals and groups in parallel civil society events. An estimated 40,000 people attended the Civil Society Global People's Forum. However, it has also been suggested that it may be the last of the 'mega-summits' whereby success is measured by the number of participating heads of state and

the summit is preceded by years of negotiation to develop a text that reflects a consensus of common purpose for the international community (Bigg, 2004). The suggestion is that the gap between the expectations of these summits and the results produced is now too wide.

The official outcomes of WSSD were the Declaration on Sustainable Development and the Plan of Implementation. It is evidenced in the Declaration reproduced in Figure 1.11 that social and economic development (poverty and inequality, for example) are now firmly within international thinking on the environment: ‘the eradication of poverty is now seen as an underlying theme in all work on sustainable development’ (Bigg, 2004: 7). Similarly, Seyfang (2003) suggests, one success of the summit was the way in which it facilitated such ‘joined-up’ thinking on environment and development. It was also the first time that the implications of globalisation (that were not discussed at the Rio Conference) were identified as principal challenges for the future. However, early reflections on the WSSD Plan of Implementation are that it is substantially a recommitment to

Figure 1.11 *The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development: the challenges we face*

-
- We recognise that poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns, and protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development are overarching objectives of, and essential requirements for, sustainable development.
 - The deep fault line that divides human society between the rich and the poor and the ever-increasing gap between the developed and developing worlds pose a major threat to global prosperity, security and stability.
 - The global environment continues to suffer. Loss of biodiversity continues, fish stocks continue to be depleted, desertification claims more and more fertile land, the adverse effects of climate change are already evident, natural disasters are more frequent and more devastating and developing countries more vulnerable, and air, water and marine pollution continue to rob millions of a decent life.
 - Globalisation has added a new dimension to these challenges. The rapid integration of markets, mobility of capital and significant increases in investment flows around the world have opened new challenges and opportunities for the pursuit of sustainable development. But the benefits and costs of globalisation are unevenly distributed, with developing countries facing special difficulties in meeting this challenge.
 - We risk the entrenchment of these global disparities and unless we act in a manner that fundamentally changes their lives, the poor of the world may lose confidence in their representatives and the democratic systems to which we remain committed, seeing their representatives as nothing more than sounding brass or tinkling cymbals.
-

the implementation of existing commitments, those of Agenda 21 and of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The MDGs are listed in Figure 1.12. Their origin is in the Millennium Declaration adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000. In September of that year, 189 member states had met ‘at the dawn of a new millennium, to reaffirm our faith in the Organisation and its Charter as indispensable foundations of a more peaceful, prosperous and just world’ (UN, 2000: 1.1). A host of commitments were encompassed within the Declaration and a number of specific, monitorable targets for achievement by 2015 were identified that have become known as the MDGs. One of those goals refers specifically to sustainable development and the actions of governments in preparing national strategies. Many others are clearly central to sustainable development in that they demand better outcomes in many areas that affect poorer groups. Although international goals and targets have been set before, the MDGs are considered to be

unprecedented in the range of goals and targets chosen, in the recognition that most are interconnected, and in the public commitment from international agencies that they will be judged by whether these goals and targets are achieved.

(Satterthwaite, 2003: 8)

A new millennium target, to halve the number of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015, was added at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development. However, many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are generally disappointed by the lack of specific monitorable and binding commitments to emerge from the conference. Furthermore, as Middleton and O’Keefe (2003: 30) warn, ‘a third of the period in which these goals are to be achieved has elapsed already and . . . so far, there is little sign of change’. However, in addition to the commitment and agreements negotiated by governments in Johannesburg, a new type of partnership was also formalised at the summit, officially termed ‘Type II outcomes’. These are alliances comprising interested governments, international organisations, corporations and major groups in society aimed at translating the multinationally agreed outcomes into concrete actions. Hundreds of such partnerships were announced and are suggested as a major innovation of WSSD (Guttman, 2003). There is, however, a concern regarding what impact these regional and sectoral agreements will have on the future of international intergovernmental decision-making (this is considered further in Chapter 3). Governments of southern countries have also expressed concern as to how this kind of development could reduce pressure on

Figure 1.12 The Millennium Development Goals and Targets

| Goal | Target |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger | 1 To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than US\$1 a day 2 To halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger |
| 2 To achieve universal primary education | 3 To ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling |
| 3 To promote gender equality and empower women | 4 To eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015 |
| 4 To reduce child mortality | 5 To reduce by two-thirds, between 1990 and 2015, the under-five mortality rate |
| 5 To improve maternal health | 6 To reduce by three-quarters, between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio |
| 6 To combat HIV/ Aids, malaria and other diseases | 7 To have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the spread of HIV/Aids 8 To have halted by 2015 and begun to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases |
| 7 To ensure environmental sustainability | 9 To integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources 10 To halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation 11 To have achieved, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers |
| 8 To develop a global partnership for development | 12 Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system 13 To address the special needs of the least developed countries 14 To address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states 15 To deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long run 16 In cooperation with developing countries, to develop and implement strategies for decent and productive work for youth 17 In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, to provide access to affordable, essential drugs in developing countries 18 In cooperation with the private sector, to make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication |

more developed countries to provide additional direct financial support for sustainable development.

Indeed, the optimism that was at Rio concerning the common interests of different parts of the globe does not appear to have been justified across the period between the two conferences. For example, there were significant problems within the PrepComs in arriving at the statements that are intended to provide the framework for subsequent debates at the summit: 'it was astonishing that agreement on either document was possible' (Middleton and O'Keefe, 2003: 23). It has to be acknowledged that the opportunities for constructive dialogue and engagement at the summit were compromised by the fact that it was being held at a time when the US and the UK were engaging in war on Iraq and displaying a 'patent contempt for the UN' (Middleton and O'Keefe, 2003: 24). Many 'gaps' rather than 'commonalities' were also evident within the proceedings of the summit (Bigg, 2004); efforts to establish new targets for proportional increases in renewable energy use were thwarted and for mandatory standards on corporate accountability downgraded. Regularly it was the US who were often 'out of step with developments' (p. 7).

Conclusion

Evidently, the idea of sustainable development is not new but has a substantial history. However, what was new in the 1980s was the way in which the two literatures of development and environmentalism came closer together, recognising the significant and interdependent nature of these goals. Into the 1990s, it has been seen that the concept of sustainable development encapsulated notions of development based in the reality of local environments and the needs of the poorest sectors in society that were far removed from the unilinear, econometric development models of the 1960s. Insight also came through both literatures concerning the multidimensional nature of this challenge through expanded notions of the environment and the functions it plays in human societal development. Critically, sustainable development was recognised as a *global* challenge: ultimately, the achievement of environment and development ends in any single location or for any group of people is connected in some way to what is happening elsewhere, for others. By the end of the 1990s, the widespread suggestion was that the world itself was characterised by unprecedented rates and degrees of economic, political and social change and the understanding of sustainable

development currently encompasses the challenges and opportunities presented by a globalising world.

It has been confirmed, through this analysis of mainstream sustainable development, that it remains central to international agendas as encompassed in the outputs of major UN conferences, for example. In subsequent chapters, it will be seen that sustainable development is also being claimed as a major policy goal by other institutions such as the World Bank and even the World Trade Organisation. However, there remains substantial contestation as to how best to secure sustainable development. Once again, such debate is evidently not new, as established through this chapter. Whilst neo-liberal development ideas and faith in market globalisation remain strong, they are not entirely uncontested, as illustrated in the work of the post-development school. Whilst issues of the global environment itself remain at the centre of environmental debates and can be considered a northern agenda focused on intergenerational issues (Adger *et al.*, 2001; Adams, 2001), there are also signs that poverty today in the developing world is moving higher up that agenda. Further details of how these debates (as well as the rapidly changing context for sustainable development) are shaping the challenges of sustainable development and the nature of actions taken by the now varied agencies in development are considered in the following two chapters. The outcomes of these for local experiences in rural and urban areas are the focus of Chapters 4 and 5.

Discussion questions

- * Summarise the role of the state as modelled within modernisation theory, dependency approaches and by post-developmentalists.
- * Have the principal development and environmental concerns of the developing world been recognised in the outcomes of major international conferences of recent decades?
- * Consider how debt may affect the prospects for sustainable development as defined by the WCED.

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