

Cutting the Gordian Knot: Sustainable Development in an Unequal World

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The environmental challenge that threatens our very existence on earth can be dealt with only by facing head-on the equally daunting challenge of unequal, hierarchical and exploitative human social relations. The sustainability of development is confronted by large scale environmental transformations that characterize our era. At the most fundamental level it affects our very ability to appreciate the crisis and the nature of the problem. Even when we do perceive the problem, it influences the kinds of solutions that emerge and hinder the development of long term sustainable visions.

Human Development Report of 2011 suggests a disturbing recent trend reversal. Past Reports have shown that living standards in most countries have been rising - and converging - for several decades now. Yet the 2011 Report projects a disturbing reversal of those trends if environmental deterioration and social inequalities continue to intensify, with the least developed countries diverging downwards from global patterns of progress by 2050. The Report shows further how the world's most disadvantaged people suffer the most from environmental degradation, including in their immediate personal environment, and disproportionately lack political power to do anything about it.

Three major responses to the ecological crisis dominate today: the denial of the crisis itself and refusing to notice that we are at the brink; assuming or attempting to isolate the problem so that it does not affect everyone; forcing some sections to bear the cost of

cleaning up the mess or enforcing conservation at 'distant' places through domination or market mechanisms. I hope to convince you today that all these options are chimeras that do not address the fundamental problem. Issues of social justice are inextricably entwined with the development/environmental crisis and consequently with the survival of humanity today. Recognizing this means dealing with a fundamental transformation of power relations in society, which has never been easy in human history. Accepting this reality itself changes the rules of current society in fundamental ways, and struggles all over the world around social justice are also collaterally contributing to an ecologically and socially sustainable future for humanity.

Differential Appreciation of the Sustainability Crisis

Let me begin by describing the nature of the ecological challenge in an unequal world. We are certain that the transformations in the global ecosystem directly attributable to human interventions are beyond anything we have seen until now in the short history of humanity. These changes, we know beyond reasonable doubt, are likely to change the Earth in ways that would make it uninhabitable for the human species. However will this change affect everyone everywhere in the same way? The answer to this simple questions is anything but simple, depending on several scales of time and space, cause and effect, structural processes and human agency. But attempting to address this will help us find reasons for our current failure to fully appreciate the nature of the crisis we face.

From a long term perspective, it can be concluded that the destruction of earth would affect all human beings, in the last instance. The web of nature does not differentiate on the basis of social stratification or the logic of social hierarchies and we can be sure that the finality of change affects us all. In addition, the web of nature tells us that the impacts of climate changes for instance are not spatially containable. Thus no region of the world can isolate itself from changes occurring in other parts of the earth. Given our limited knowledge of these complex environmental processes, our ability to contain or counteract them is so far limited, and it is clear that at least some of the changes are irreversible. In this perspective, all of us, irrespective of differences and inequalities will

be affected by the environmental crisis. We will all sink or swim together with this Titanic and there are no limited lifeboats which may help a privileged few survive separately.

However, there is an alternate scenario that emerges in the interim - or at least in the short and medium term – that environmental transformations will affect different sections of people of the world differently. With the current impact of environmental changes, this has been more evident in experience. The world's most disadvantaged people are saddled with the burden of environmental crisis disproportionately: they have contributed the least to the damages so far since they have not been recipients of the benefits of development, they have suffered most from the damages caused whether it is climate change or loss of forests or toxic pollution, and they share the costs of the clean-up or preservation agendas while having the least opportunity to influence policies on these issues.

For instance, climate change is expected to hit developing regions the hardest. Its effects such as higher temperatures, changes in precipitation patterns, rising sea levels and frequent weather related disasters will pose a risk to food and water supplies. Evidence shows that not only are the poorest people often more exposed to specific climate change impacts, they are also more vulnerable to those impacts, and find it harder to recover when they occur. Climate change will widen existing inequalities, globally and locally. The worst health impacts due to living in the most polluted cities of the world are faced by some of the poorest populations of the world:

PARTICULATE MATTER AIR POLLUTION 2004¹

(Micrograms per cubic meter)

RANK	CITY	COUNTRY	Particulate Matter
1	Cairo	Egypt	169
2	Delhi	India	150
3	Kolkata	India	128
4	Tianjin	China	125
5	Chongqing	China	123
7	Kampur	India	109
8	Lucknow	India	109
9	Jakarta	Indonesia	104
10	Shenyang	China	101
11	Zhengzhou	China	97
12	Jinan	China	94
13	Lanzhou	China	91
14	Taiyuan	China	88
16	Beijing	China	89
17	Chengdu	China	86
18	Ahmadabad	India	83
19	Anshan	China	82
20	Wuhan	China	79

Countries with more control over resources may be able to better adapt to a process such as climate change. It is clear that some nations will have lesser means to deal with the devastation that may accompany climate change. These inequalities are not restricted to the national or regional levels. A study of differential impacts within a developed country such as the UK² shows that climate change will disproportionately affect the poorest in

¹ Data Source: The World Bank

² Wolstenholme, Ruth 2009. Differential Social Impacts of Climate Change in the UK. Research Report accessed at <http://www.knowledgescotland.org/briefings.php?id=95>; last accessed on 27/02/12.

society. The people who are likely to be most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change are those living in places at risk, people who are already deprived by the health, level of income, the quality of their homes and mobility; as well as people who lack awareness of the risks of climate change, the capacity to adapt, and who are less well supported by family, friends and state and non-state agencies. Whether it is the impact of the tsunami in Sri Lanka or Hurricane Katrina in the USA, the section of people who are most devastated and take the longest to recover belong to the same sections who are otherwise discriminated against even in the absence of 'natural' disasters.

No one, however resourceful or powerful will remain unaffected by the planet-level transformations that are happening. But the gradual and often invisibilized nature of climate change or environmental transformations allows differential appreciation of the crisis. So it is still possible for some societies or sections of people to believe that they will be the last to be affected, and with an unrealistic belief in the invincibility of technological change, may continue to believe that there will be technical fix to the problem by the time it finally reaches them. So the urgency of the problem is differentially experienced.

Unfortunately for them, scientists are now showing that the cause-effect chain of nature is a very long and complicated one that these processes are not spatially or temporally isolatable. That is, what is likely to happen to our ecosystem tomorrow was already set in motion by the actions of our ancestors and there are sufficient indications that few of the effects can be contained locally. So while skepticism about the extent of our own knowledge may be healthy and there should and will continue to be debates on the exact nature of the crisis that is staring down at us, only the extremely foolhardy can be complacent about the absence of or our ability to handle the environmental crisis. However, in an unequal world, there will always be differential appreciation of the looming crisis since the interim impacts are differentially distributed.

There is also a second reason why there is differential appreciation of the crisis. Expectations for the future are closely connected to the experiences and expectation of

the present. Consider the concept of sustainable development, drawing from the most quoted definition from the Brundtland Commission, - sustainable development is development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable development emphasizes intergenerational equity which is a very important ideal. But this needs to be moderated with the understanding that not every section of humanity would be happy with a simple reproduction of the society we have today. 'Meeting the needs of today' is a complex social statement where distribution of resources is not according to needs, but according to ability to control resources. In a world divided by class, race, caste, gender and other inequalities, clearly this is not the kind of society that one would wish to preserve for future generations. So socially, the argument that we need to ensure that future generations are at least as well off as we are today does not work for the 99%. There are sufficient struggles around the world today that demand that future generations are not saddled with the kind of unequal world we have today. Widespread acceptance of the intergenerational equity ethic then presupposes first dealing with intra-generational equity.

Thirdly, there is a fundamental difference in the way the nature of the problem is perceived, again arising from differential experience of environmental change. In regions and sections of the world with higher levels of development and consumption, the problem is recognized as an environmental crisis, as a threat to the earth or ecology. There is a conscious environmental movement therefore that seeks to protect the environment. In contrast to this, in less developed and poorer regions of the world, where clearly the fallout of ecological change is more current and immediate, the problem is perceived as a human crisis. The problem is then of loss of human lives and livelihoods, and what the movement seeks to protect is human life and livelihood rather than an abstract environment. The former then sets out to protect the environment while the latter sets out to protect human life, both often obstinately refusing to recognize the interconnectedness of the issue. Social movements of the latter variety, which are often struggles over control of natural and livelihood resources, have sometimes been referred

to in the literature as environmentalism of the poor³. While the literature so far has rightly focused on the strengths of recognizing the contribution of environmentalism of the poor for a more sustainable future, it is also significant that the definition of the problem and consequently the solutions proposed by these movements is not always easily adjusted with the post-industrial environmental ethics and movements.

False Dichotomies and Alienation from Nature

Environmentalism is as much about control over resources as development. The contradiction often set up between the two, even in the concept that we have of sustainable development, is a false dichotomy that creates alienation. The control over natural resources, including the right to protect and preserve, conserve and care for nature, is not differently distributed in society from the control over financial and other productive resources that contribute to development. Look closely at the conservation agenda and institutional structures. Decision making on conservation is as much driven by the needs and decisions of those in power as are decisions about development. The challenge is that when we talk of concepts such as carrying capacity of the Earth, we assume that each member of the human species has an equal burden. These concepts only indicate to us numbers. What they fundamentally leave out is that the burden of costs is not evenly spread. They actually do not tell us that if we were to reduce population or consumption, which sections of society should be making these sacrifices. The spread of the costs of achieving sustainability is just as uneven as the spread of the costs of development, which has resulted in alienation from the idea of conservation itself among many sections of society. The dichotomy that is presented between development and environmental protection plays an important role in depoliticizing this fundamentally unequal resource distribution.

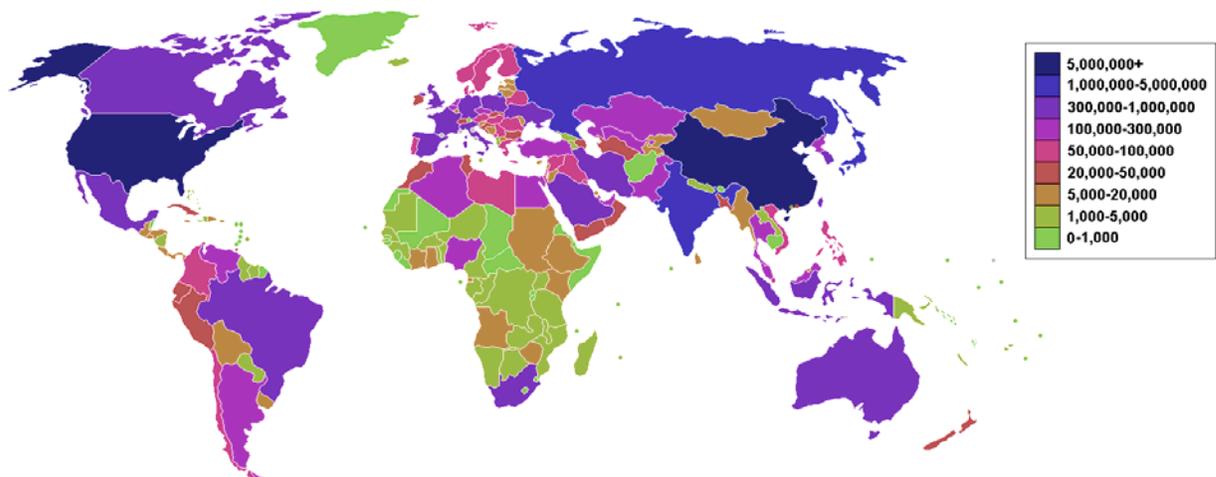
According to the report by UNEP's International Resource Panel, by 2050, human beings could devour an estimated 140 billion tons of minerals, ores, fossil fuels and biomass per

³ Martinez-Alier, J., 2005. *The Environmentalism of the Poor : A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press. Guha, R., 2000. *Environmentalism: A Global History*. New York: Longman

year – three times the current consumption rate, unless economic growth is “decoupled” from natural resource use. At present, developed countries citizens consume an average of 16 tons of those four key resources per capita, ranging up to 40 or more tons per person in some countries. By comparison, the average person in India today consumes four tons per year.

Another indicator of the environmental impacts of development is carbon dioxide emissions. Emissions depend on levels and type of industrialization, types of transport and fossil fuel usage. Emissions result from very basic survival practices such as burning locally available wood to keep warm in winter to technologically advanced high-consumption lifestyle choices. In examining data like this, these practices are equated, even though in an ethical framework, survival practices should be weighted differently from luxury activities. In spite of this, per person the most polluting territories emit 1000 times more carbon dioxide than the least polluting. In 1980 the most carbon dioxide emissions came from the United States, China and Germany. However emissions per person from the United States were 14 times greater than those from China.⁴

World Map showing total carbon dioxide emissions



⁴ Map and data: Copyright World Sites Atlas (sitesatlas.com). Last accessed on 26/02/12.

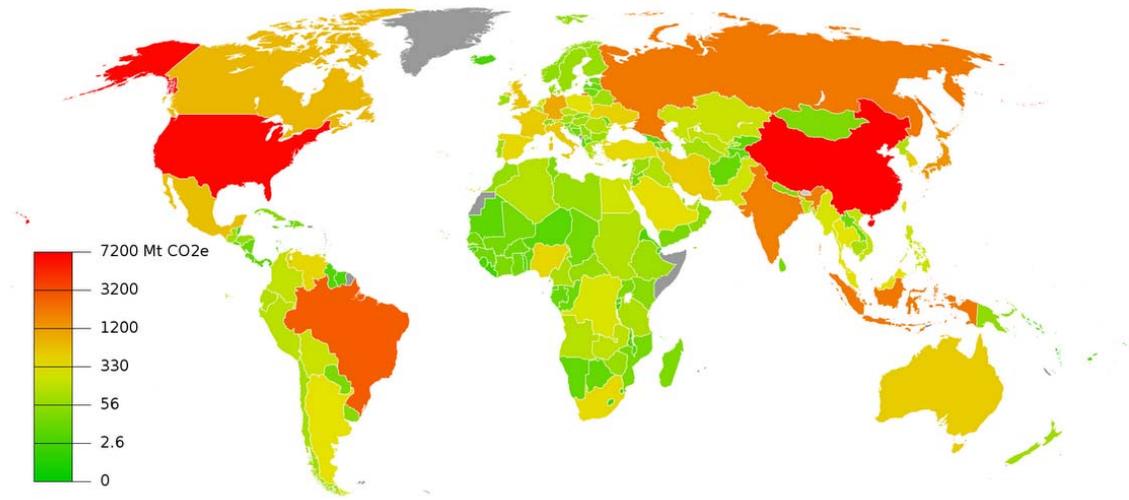
MOST AND LEAST CARBON EMISSIONS IN 1980⁵

*tonnes of carbon emitted in 1980 per person living in that territory**

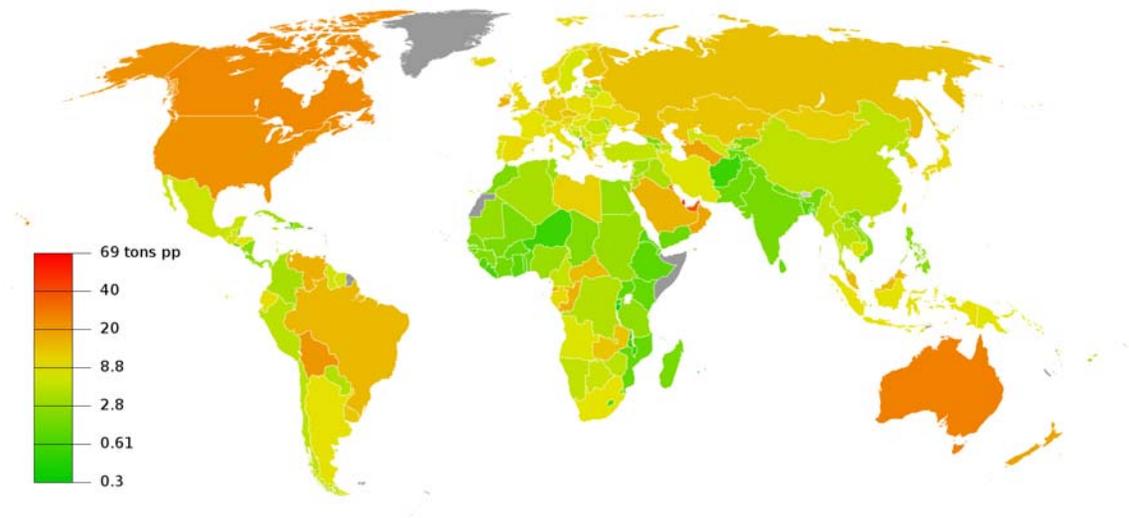
Rank	Territory	Value*
1	Luxembourg	28.9
2	Bahamas	27.3
3	Brunei Darussalam	25.5
4	Qatar	23.0
5	United States	16.3
6	Canada	13.4
7	Germany	13.1
8	Belgium	12.8
9	Trinidad & Tobago	12.4
10	Denmark	11.7
191	Uganda	0.050
192	Comoros	0.050
193	Niger	0.049
194	Burundi	0.031
195	Central African Republic	0.031
196	Bhutan	0.031
197	Nepal	0.030
198	Cambodia	0.029
199	Chad	0.028
200	Ethiopia	0.027

⁵ Data from SASI Group (University of Sheffield) and Mark Newman (University of Michigan), 2006.

Green House Gas Emissions including land use change by country.



Green House Gas Emissions including land use change per capita



It is important to note that in recent decades, carbon dioxide emissions for China and India have increased at a fast pace, but the cumulative per capital emissions of the developed world still remain substantially higher than the poorer half of the world.

A similar pattern is reflected in using other indicators such as the ecological footprint which is a measure of the area needed to support a population's lifestyle. This includes the consumption of food, fuel, wood, and fibres as well as pollution such as carbon dioxide emissions. Considering nations, the United States, China and India have the

largest ecological footprints. However, look at the actual numbers of people who are producing this footprint. In both China and India, resource use is below the world average. The per person footprint in the United States is almost five times the world average, and almost ten times what would be sustainable. This distinction between treating physical nation boundaries as units of consumption or pollution versus looking at per capita consumption or emissions has proved a sticking point in many inter-national climate negotiations.

However, even this kind of analysis hides huge inequalities within nations and regions. A city like Delhi in India draws on tremendous amounts of resources from all the adjoining regions to maintain its standard of living. Massive hydroelectric plants have been already built on every Himalayan river. Thousands of people are displaced, and by the end of this decade there may be no free-flowing river in the entire Gangetic river system. This massive power production is necessary mainly to sustain the urban lifestyle in Delhi, since most of the power produced in these projects is dedicated to Delhi's consumption. Even within the city, the distribution and consumption of resources such as water is extremely skewed in favor of richer localities.

TABLE: Iniquitous Water Distribution in Delhi⁶

S. No.	Area	Average Water Available (lpcd)
1.	Mehrauli	29
2.	Narela	31
3.	Karala-Kanjhawala	32
4.	Najafgarh/Dwarka	74
5.	Vasant Kunj	74
6.	Shahdara	130
7.	New and South Delhi	148
8.	West Delhi	202
9.	Civil Lines and Rohini	214
10.	Old City	277
11.	Karol Bagh	337
12.	NDMC Area	462
13.	Delhi Cantonment	509

⁶ *Source:* Delhi Fact Sheet (2000). NCR Planning Board

Similar patterns can be found in the distribution of the costs of cleaning up toxic and other wastes produced in a consumption driven lifestyle. Given the working of markets in a grossly unequal world, those responsible for the production of toxic wastes rarely have to deal with the full consequences of it. The health mortality and other risks are invariably borne by people who have not benefited from the production of these dangers. We will consider this further when we look at the market based solutions that we have as the solution to this crisis.

Environmentalism, or an ethic and movement to care for the environment at one level seems the exact opposite of the processes of development discussed above. However, if we examine the social structures and processes that accompany environmentalism, the pattern of decision making, costs and benefits are distributed in a manner that mirrors the costs, benefits and power structures of development.

The distinction between post-industrial environmentalism and environmentalism of the poor is an interesting one. Apart from differences in ideological assumptions about the nature of the crisis already discussed, the 'nature' that they seek to protect also affects the distribution of costs and benefits. Often in movements labeled environmentalism of the poor, the poorest sections of society are seeking to protect nature that is in their own backyard rather than the distant 'nature'. Thus the villagers in Himalayan forests who were part of the Chipko movement were seeking to protect the trees in their backyard. As environmentalism gets more elitist, the urge is to protect nature that is more distant and further away. The NIMBY or Not In My Backyard ideology brought to light by the environmental justice movement, works at two levels. At one level it seeks to ensure that the worst fallouts of unsustainable development such as toxic wastes and pollution are 'not in my backyard'. At the other extreme, it becomes a characteristic of certain forms of environmentalism that seek to preserve nature that is not in one's own backyard, essentially preventing others from using their own resources. This may take imperialist forms where parks are created by national or international fiat, or it may be enforced through market mechanisms such as carbon credits. In this sense, environmental

conservation is eminently about access to and control over resources, including control over nature that is legitimately in others' domain. These structures are ubiquitous. An indigenous person from the forests of central India does not get to decide that there should be no more cars allowed in a city like Delhi for the benefit of all humanity. Nor does an Amazonian peasant have the opportunity to advise the reintroduction of wildlife in New York City; nor do Mexicans make policy on the regulation of fuel consumption in the USA. These suggestions would seem absurd to many. But it is worth pointing out that these actions do not happen –not because the central Indian *adivasi* (indigenous group), the Amazonian peasant or Mexican slum dweller don't care for the environment or the future or lack ideas on how to deal with it. In fact the decision making structures that exist to deal with the sustainability crisis are so skewed that even statements like these seem like absurd fantasies. The reverse (where the decision and financing to save the tiger in rural India is made in New York or New Delhi, or water privatization policies for a city with an argument that it is conservationist in ethic is made half-way across the globe, is the norm. It is not only easily accepted as appropriate but also valorized as caring for environment. To engage with any kind of conservation that considers equity, the principle of 'think globally, act locally' needs to be instituted most of all in conservation agendas. NIMBY conservation creates two kinds of alienation – one among conservationists where the link between burning aviation fuel to attend annual climate conferences and the actual damage to the earth is made invisible, and second, in places where this conservation agenda is implemented, it creates an alienation from the idea of environmentalism itself since it is linked inevitable to loss of local control over resources.

Moving on to another aspect of the complex relationship between development and environmental conservation. Contrary to what was earlier believed, both poverty and uneven development are dangerous to environmental health, but in different ways. For instance in some of the villages in the Himalayan region where I have been working, two decades ago there was considerable poverty, degradation of forests and carbon pollution. Wood from the nearby forest was the main source of fuel, and women in particular spent hours of arduous labor to collect fuel wood for cooking and heating and collecting water. Fifteen years later, the situation is different. People work in the tourism industry, have

higher levels of literacy and education, and the forests are doing better, earning international carbon credits. The picture looks promising, but part of the work I am doing has been to look carefully at the long-term impacts of what we are currently celebrating. One of the surveys I am currently conducting is looking at fuel consumption, and fuel consumption has actually gone up with development in this region. Local forests are being saved precisely because fuel elsewhere is now available for consumption. One of the active effects of development is an increase in the use of resources, but the resource is accessed indirectly from elsewhere. Sustainable development actually seems to mean the consumption of more distant resources while conserving ones own - an action made eminently possible only through globalization of environmentalism in an unequal world. It is a study in systemic contradiction that as a people/region/ nation develops resources for both development and conservation come from spaces, people and times that are far removed. One can see the horizon but not the dirt at one's feet.

This has long term consequences beyond the immediate resource use as it is fundamentally transforming human subjectivity in relating to nature. The relationship of humans to nature is produced and reproduced through the structures and processes of environmentalism. As one example, my current work focuses on the experience of wildlife by different sections of people – such as middle-class tourists, working class visitors, wildlife guards, jeep drivers and wildlife guides - in national parks and sanctuaries. The kind of conservation agendas we have that are imposed and adopted by those in power results in transforming the very means by which humans relate to nature. In India, for many poor people who share their habitat with a diversity of other species, it is becoming increasingly difficult to relate to nature as a habitat and to wildlife as co-habitants. The sighting of a tiger in a protected national park interestingly does not evoke fear or surprise or awe, or simple a human defense mechanism to secure oneself and retreat. Instead, it brings forth an urge to shoot, albeit with a camera. The tiger is significant only so far as one can take back proof of having been in contact with it. So if you come across a tiger and you do not have a camera on you, it is irrelevant, because the value of the tiger only lies in the market for conservation or exotic wildlife viewing

experience. Sighting the tiger is a trophy in social relations rather than an individual experience of nature that may evoke multiple emotions. This alienation that accompanies the commodification of nature is a serious threat that will continue to have long term impacts on our ability to come together as a human race to find solutions to this crisis.

Equitable Market Solutions: An Oxymoron?

Among the many solutions that are being discussed to deal with the environmental dimensions of development in crisis is the idea that appropriate markets can resolve the issue of both equity and sustainability while maintaining current structures of production and consumption. One of recently popular concepts is the idea of the green economy, defined as an economy that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.⁷ Its most distinguishing feature is direct valuation of natural capital and ecological services as having economics value. It relies exclusively on the ability of the market in an unequal world to solve the environmental crisis.

Let us examine some of the market solutions that we currently have to solve the problem of environmental degradation caused by high levels of consumption. One of the mechanisms we have is the idea of a market for carbon credits. If we examine the concept carefully, we are saying that one section of society can continue a high level of consumption and attendant pollution as long as they can find another section of humanity whom they can pay to not to increase their current consumption levels. It is of course possible to assume that some sections of people do not aspire to consume more and perhaps herein lies hope for the future. But it is somewhat naïve given existing hierarchies and cultural hegemony, to assume that large sections of people in our globalized world do not wish to increase their current levels of consumption. It is particularly incredulous to assume that this low consumption drive is found in large part among peoples who have very little access to consumption or choices in terms of designing their life. However, the market works not on the principle of the ethics of

⁷ UNEP website (<http://www.unep.org/greeneconomy/>) Last accessed 26/02/12

lowering consumption or pollution. Two definitions of the term carbon credit point to two dimensions of this market mechanism.

The Environment Protection Authority of Victoria defines a carbon credit as a “generic term to assign a *value* to a reduction or offset of greenhouse gas emissions.. usually equivalent to one tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂-e).”⁸ The Investopedia Inc investment dictionary defines a carbon credit as a “*permit* that allows the holder to emit one ton of carbon dioxide”..which “can be traded in the international market at their current market price”.⁹ In the former it is a mechanism to attribute value to social actions that did not earlier carry a market exchange value. But the second definition points out that this serves as a permit to continue polluting! It allows me for instance to feel as an international traveler that by being able to pay a little extra money for taking that plane from India to fly here, I am somehow less guilty of contributing to the environmental crisis that someone who may never actually take an international flight – because I not only chose to but could afford to buy carbon credits, while that choice is simply not available to the majority of humanity who earn less than the cost of these carbon credits in return for their labor.

The model essentially not only assumes but also requires the continuation of an unequal world. It is premised on the idea that there will always be sections of society who will be in a situation where they will be willing to accept this exchange. Assuming that the prices fixed are fair, the cost of polluting for those who are more affluent will go up, and the logic is that as the price of polluting goes up, they will pollute less. What is the cost of carbon credit? Is it merely one that is affordable for rich consumers or is it so prohibitive that they are forced to change their lifestyles? In an unequal world with ‘fair’ markets, the former is more likely. Even the carbon credit market would solve the over-consumption problem only in a situation of relative equality. These models assume a perpetually unequal world since these markets exist only if there are always people at a

⁸ *Carbon credit*. Environment Protection Authority Victoria. 2008-09-02.

<http://www.epa.vic.gov.au/climate-change/glossary.asp#CAM>. Accessed on 23/02/12

⁹ Investopedia Inc. http://www.investopedia.com/terms/c/carbon_credit.asp. Accessed on 23/02/12.

lower level of affluence who are willing to enter into this exchange. Even without utopian ideas of a perfectly equitable society, it is logical to assume that people who are at the lower end of this hierarchy who today accept these terms will struggle and not passively accept the status quo.

In an equitable world, we will simply have to find ways to pollute less since there will be no 'poor' section of humanity who will be willing to accept that pollution given the fact that survival is a basic human need. Off the coast of Gujarat in India, ships filled with toxic material including asbestos come every year to be dismantled for scrap by workers with their bare hands. It is a profitable business for those who produce those toxic wastes as a byproduct of their lifestyles as well as those involved in the junk recycling business. But can you imagine discussing the idea of the environmental security of future generations with the workers who are dealing with the toxics with their bare hands to make a minimum wage living today? They understand future security accurately which is why their struggles focus on the security of their lives today. The point is, in an unequal world, market solutions work in the short term – that is there are always people poor enough to buy the pollution caused by excessive production and consumption. But if the compensation was fair as it is often claimed when talking about such pollution markets, presumably the poor would be pulled out of their poverty. Then what happens? No one would be willing to accept this pollution. But since inequality is systemic we can expect that there will always be sections of humanity that will accept the waste generated and contain their carbon in exchange for a minimal livelihood. But this has several 'invisible' consequences that are disastrous in the long term. It reinforces the correlation between high income, power and high consumption. Thus everybody rationally aspires to consume more, since we know excessive consumption is a mark of being in power. But simultaneously, it is also clear that there has to be someone who remains poor enough even if it is relative poverty, to accept the pollution that is generated. Structurally, it can even be argued that at some point war or economic crisis is essential without which there are not enough poor to accept the pollution. It is simply cheaper to pollute in an unequal world.

Changing the Rules.....

Making the environment count in sustainable development requires a redistribution of resources, most particularly a redistribution of freedoms and opportunities. What we are looking at in terms of changing the rules is a fundamentally different understanding of development as expanding the substantive freedoms of people. Freedoms, as Amartya Sen argues, is not only the primary ends of development, they are also among its primary means. He defines freedom as an interdependent bundle of political freedom and civil rights, economic freedom, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and, protective security.

However, even this perspective of redefining development provides only the first step towards re-imagining development that can address the environmental crisis.

Development as freedom goes so far as to argue that individuals should have the requisite capabilities to engage with existing institutional structures available in an equally accessible public sphere. However, even this becomes insufficient to deal with the entanglement between development and environment. The environmental challenge brings out the limitations of the approach of individualism, since the problem in the last instance will always remain collective. This demands an even deeper social transformation than the most profound liberal engagements with democracy so far. Institutions of liberal democracy are premised on individuals having rights and opportunities to make decisions based on personal considerations. This is evidently true for the institutions of free market as well as for political space of liberal democracy in which rights bearing individual citizens are the basic building blocks. Environmental crisis is a crisis for entire humanity. Current institutional structures all make it a crisis for entire humanity only in the last instance, whereas the objective nature of the crisis is that this last instant may not be too far ahead. We need institutions based on not just equity of right bearing citizens at the global level but institutions based on collective principles. Many international environmental negotiations that frequently break down today may actually become irrelevant for the future simply because they seek to retain the hierarchies that exist today for tomorrow. It is not a zero sum game nor is it one of

simply cooperation to maintain the status-quo. Those who have the decision making powers are the ones who benefit most from the status quo. This fact is the Gordian knot that cannot be entangled but needs to be cut.