

# SAWTEE

WSSD Special Issue

A NEWSLETTER OF SOUTH ASIA WATCH ON TRADE, ECONOMICS & ENVIRONMENT

## WSSD: Implementation is the key

Rio failed not because of lack of agreement but due to absence of political will. This should not be repeated at Johannesburg.

Ten years ago, world leaders gathered at Rio de Janeiro for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) to combat the worst ever problem humanity was facing at that time. A few seemingly major achievements were made during the Conference. However, most of the commitments made during that event remain on paper. Leaders of the world did not have enough political will to really translate them into action.

Now after 10 years, same world leaders and/or their successors have gathered in Johannesburg to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rio Summit with the pledge to ensure sustainable development at the global level. More than 65,000 people representing government, business, civil society, academia and media have descended to city with the hope that they would be able to make a difference this time.

Unfortunately, some of the global environmental problems have become even worse over the past ten years. Fast depletion of natural resources, extinction of species, increase in carbon dioxide emissions, reduced air and water quality are a few non-exhaustive lists of examples. One of the major achievements post-Rio is the setting up of clear-cut timeframe and target for the reduction of greenhouse gases. The Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change was considered as the major success of the international community to address this serious problem – which could have pushed the world to the brink of disaster. However, the USA where only 6 percent of the world population lives and which emits 36 percent of greenhouse gases has adamantly refused to sign the Protocol at the insistence of the corporate lobby.

Sustainable development is a holistic concept – a fact which many environmentalists have a tendency to ignore. The reality is that the issues of poverty, hunger, deprivation and marginalisation of half of the humanity and constant deterioration of environmental quality are intimately intertwined.

Taking a cue even from the economists one could understand that income level and environmental quality are positively

correlated – as income level rises environmental quality improves and vice versa. Therefore, in order to improve the environmental quality the pervasive inequity and inequality – the worst scandal of our time – should be cured first. Unfortunately, globalisation and trade liberalisation have only served to hasten this process. Globalisation *per se* is not to be blamed for this but its chief architect are.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) from around the world, which are represented at the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), are voicing their concerns, among others, on the way North is helping South to remain poor and permanently dependent on them for their development. Developing countries' governments too are fully supportive of this idea. The Summit, therefore, is likely to witness an acrimonious battle between the North and the South on the issue of market access, trade, finance, debt relief, technology transfer and increased official development assistance.

Corporate leaders, with their sheer power and financial strengths, have not only been the chief architect of globalisation, but also are posturing themselves as the saviours of the environment. They are the ones who undermine domestic and international regulations that could have impact on their profits. The irony is that they are the ones who are setting the agenda for negotiations at the WSSD. CSOs are making every possible effort to ensure that the issue of corporate responsibility – going beyond voluntary code of conduct – is squarely put on the Summit agenda. However, the possibility of achieving success on this front is slim. This is because the governments of the developed world are frightened of the political clout of the multinational corporations.

Finally, nothing concrete can be achieved if the Summit comes out with rhetorical wordings without the desire on the part of the leaders of the North (as usually happens) to fulfill them. Therefore, the Conference needs to come out with clear-cut articulation of implementation strategies with achievable targets and well-defined and timeframes – such as the one agreed at Kyoto – for achieving the goal of sustainable development at the global level.



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## SAWTEE

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## What can Johannesburg do?

Jo'burg must reorient global discussions back towards sustainable development, argues Dr Abid Qaiyum Suleri.

After a 10 year cycle since the historic United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro 1992, the UN is holding another conference in an attempt to address sustainable development. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), unofficially known as Rio+10, will be a UN summit gathering at the highest level.

The official agenda of the Summit is to review the achievements that have been made since the Rio Summit. Governments will debate what participating countries have done so far to implement the Rio action plan "Agenda 21", if they have ratified the conventions e.g., to prevent biodiversity loss and what obstacles have been encountered; and if they have adopted national sustainable development strategies, as was agreed they would, by 2002. Governments will also investigate new factors that have emerged since UNCED and what mid-course corrections need to be made.

A lot has been worded since Rio, but not much has changed. The challenges are still there, while the situation has worsened. The UN system has once again proved disappointing for many of us. Dashed hopes, false promises, and missed opportunities outweigh the achievements by far. Civil society continues to be distanced from the locus of global

decision-making, in spite of the fact that it has grown in size and achieved many successes at the local level. The hopes that sustainable development would build new bridges between North and South or between governments and civil society remain

largely unrealised.

Ten years ago, the South was sceptical about the idea of sustainable development. Today the level of awareness has increased manifolds in southern nations and their citizens are not only criticising the irresponsible attitude of northern nations, but are also pointing out the double standards adapted by their own governments.

The decision the US President Bush to remain absent from WSSD would be a symbolic triumph of international civil society organisations and friends of the South who should try to re-orient sustainable development back to its original course. There must be ample pressure and force behind the demand of sustainable development so that WSSD is forced to recuperate the original version: an orientation towards participatory action; the protection of environmental life-support systems; the maintenance of the diversity of life; a priority for the poor; a commitment to social justice and human security; and a respect for human dignity.

The WSSD needs to challenge governments to fulfil their commitments voiced since UNCED in 1992, in particular those crucial agreements like the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC), which are still awaiting ratification. There are no new conventions on the table for Johannesburg. Nonetheless, it is much more important that the ratification processes for some of the existing conventions and protocols be finalised and that a regulatory framework for the resulting outcomes, as well as for resolution of conflict be found. In addition, the institutional and financial obstacles that presently hamper the implementation process must be removed.

While disappointed from governments, many think that the Summit will provide opportunities for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to reintegrate environment and development and to reinvigorate government's commitment to develop a sustainable conceptual framework for this century. However, the NGOs need to be clear headed and well determined in their demands, otherwise there are chances that international financial institutions (IFIs) would co-opt them and their voice would be silenced in the guise of IFI jargons such as "national poverty reduction strategy" etc.

Sustainable development is not just an environmental demand; it is a development necessity and Jo'burg must reorient global discussions back towards sustainable development. There is no need for global environment governance. There is an urgency to strengthen existing arrangements - for example, giving United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) the resources and authority it needs, making Global Environment Facility (GEF) more democratic, and uncluttering multilateral environmental agreements proliferation.

WSSD would never be able to bring any change until and unless we don't change our approach and attitude towards international assistance. It is not charity and it should be based on clear understanding that the global ecological services provided by the poor need to be compensated. All institutions - from multilateral development financiers to national and local recipients-must be made transparent and held accountable. Governments, northern and southern, must be pushed to fulfil the promises they made at Rio.

Finally, it goes without saying that all of this would be in vain without facilitating the local communities through a process of empowerment in their quest for sustainable livelihoods; and the best way to empower them is to develop strong and accountable local institutions in order to ensure that local needs and priorities are not ignored in the transition to sustainable development.

(Dr. Suleri is a Research Fellow at SDPI, Islamabad)

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# Jubilee 2010/2020 Campaign

Jubilee 2010/2020 Campaign is being launched at the WSSD, Johannesburg on 28 August 2002. The movement, inspired by the Jubilee 2000 Campaign that led to debt relief for poor countries, is aimed at dismantling trade protectionism in labour intensive goods and agricultural products.

## Introduction

Trade is an engine of growth. Expanded international and domestic trade can add to a country's total output, contribute to economic growth, help redistribute incomes and reduce poverty.

The Preamble of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) adopted lofty objectives by placing sustainable development squarely on the WTO Agenda. However, looking at the implementation experience of the past seven years since the WTO came into being, it needs to be questioned whether the rich countries have followed the core values.

## Adverse impact of protectionism

Even after the establishment of the WTO, there still exists a huge imbalance in the share of world trade between the rich and the poor. The share of least developed countries (LDCs) in international trade is still in decimals. It was just 0.49% in 2000, compared to a share of 35% for the European Union (EU) alone.

Indeed if all the WTO's objectives were followed properly, the situation would have been much better for the poor. One major problem in the achievement of these objectives is the rich countries' protectionism i.e. they maintain high tariffs in products of developing countries' interests, such as textiles and clothing; leather and leather goods; and agricultural commodities. They maintain not only high tariffs but also tariff peaks, tariff escalation, tariff rate quotas and variable tariffs. At the same time the rich countries keep world market prices for those same goods artificially low by subsidising their own producers.

## What's at stake for poor countries?

To add insult to injury, the rich castigate the poor for their high tariff rates (*read protectionism*). At the same time, there are several misconceptions behind the reluctance of poor countries to lower their own protectionism. These are: Rich country protection is higher than poor country protection. Exports from poor countries fail to grow because of protectionism. Trade barriers against poor countries reflect hypocrisy on the part of rich countries. Poor countries do not want to lift their trade barriers when there are still trade barriers in rich countries.

Truly, these misconceptions need to be addressed, as the lack of action is not only hurting the rich countries.

Rich country protectionism against the labour intensive products of the poor countries is an equally important issue. It is undeniably hurting poor countries. Whatever promises made by the rich countries, they often fail to honour their words and have mostly shied away from putting their money where their mouth is.

Barring a few exceptions, everytime efforts have been made to assist the poor countries, resolves have disappeared into thin air.

## Dismantling protectionism

The Doha Development Agenda has put forward an agenda with a keyword 'development'. This calls for more liberal trade. It must be understood that the opening up of global trade is not a substitute for economic development. It is merely a tool.

It is essential to deal with hurdles that confront the system. The common misconceptions that are blocking the removal of protectionism by poor countries must be addressed. At the same time, rich countries must dismantle the protectionism against labour-intensive goods of the poor countries and agricultural produce. To make progress on trade liberalisation world wide, the rich must stop massive direct and indirect subsidies and protection to their producers.

Nevertheless, even when all protectionism on both sides has gone, the poor countries also need to address the important issue of their own capacity to exploit opportunities.

Thus, inspired by the success of the Jubilee 2000 movement, which brought debt relief to poor countries, the Jubilee 2010/2020 campaign aims to tear down all trade barriers.

The Jubilee 2010/2020 Campaign will ask the rich to demolish all trade barriers on poor country exports in two phases. The first phase, which is to end in 2010, will ask for total elimination of trade barriers on industrial products. Realising that agriculture is a more sensitive issue in the rich countries, they must eliminate all barriers by 2020.

Lastly and importantly, these reforms should not and must not be replaced by new barriers such as anti-dumping and safeguard measures. This is necessary to liberalise genuinely and take forward the development agenda. This development agenda aims at the eradication of poverty through economic growth and proper distribution of income.

## Potential benefits

It is not only the poor countries that would gain out of better terms of trade, but the rich are expected to gain as well. Not only people, but also the environment would gain hugely, when people have resources to protect them. It's a win-win-win situation for all!

[Detailed information can be found at <http://www.cuts-india.org/Jubilee2010-2020.htm> or by contacting CUTS at [cuts@cuts.org](mailto:cuts@cuts.org)]



**The Jubilee 2010/2020 Campaign will ask the rich to demolish all trade barriers on poor country exports in two phases**

## What should the world expect from Johannesburg?



According to a World Bank's new World Development Report, the next 50 years could see the global population swell by 50 percent to nine billion people, and the world's gross domestic product (GDP) increase fourfold to US\$ 140 trillion. Given current trends in production and consumption, social and environmental strains threaten to derail development efforts and erode living standards unless we design better policies and institutions.

If we stay on the road we are on, the signs do not appear very encouraging. Development policies therefore need to be even more focused on protecting our forests, fisheries and farms – and making them more productive – if the poor are to narrow the equality gap that has emerged in the last 50 years. By 2050, the world's annual output of carbon dioxide will have more than tripled while nine billion people – three billion more than we have today and mostly living in developing countries – will be tapping into the earth's water supply. Meanwhile, food needs will more than double, a grim prospect for Africa where food production is currently falling behind the pace of population growth. All this in a world where extinction already threatens 12 percent of all bird species, and a quarter of its species of mammals.

Globally, 1.3 billion people already live on fragile lands – arid zones, wetlands, and forests – that cannot sustain them. By 2050, and for the first time in history, more people will be living in cities than in rural areas. Without better planning, the stresses from immigration and population shifts across the

globe could create new social upheaval and desperate competition for already scarce resources.

At this backdrop, the Johannesburg Summit is expected to address such issues with high priority and the world leaders and policy makers meeting there have a key role to play. While developing countries need to promote democracy, inclusiveness and transparency as they build the institutions needed to manage their resources, rich countries should increase aid, support debt reduction, open their markets to developing country exporters, and help transfer technologies needed to prevent diseases, and especially to increase energy efficiency and bolster agricultural productivity.

Equally important role will be of the civil society groups gathering there. They can act as a voice for dispersed interests, and provide independent oversight of public, private and non-governmental performances.

All in all, international community must work together on global issues. If we wisely safeguard our vital resources, key among them the environment, and social stability, then we will attain the growth rates essential to reducing poverty in ways that will last. It would be reckless to successfully reach the Millennium Development Goals in 2015 only to be confronted by chaotic cities, dwindling water supplies, increased emissions, and even less cropland to sustain us than we have.

*(Adapted from the article of James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, published in The Himalayan Times, 23.08.02)*

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### SAWTEE NETWORK

#### BANGLADESH

1. Associates for Development Initiatives (ADI), Dhaka
2. Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA), Dhaka

#### INDIA

1. Citizen Consumer & Civil Action Group (CAG), Chennai
2. Consumer Unity & Trust Society (CUTS), Jaipur
3. Development Research & Action Group (DRAG), New Delhi
4. Federation of Consumer Organisation of Tamilnadu & Pondichery (FEDCOT), Thanjavur

#### NEPAL

1. Society for Legal & Environmental Analysis & Development Research (LEADERS), Kathmandu
2. Forum for Protection of Public Interest (Pro Public), Kathmandu

#### PAKISTAN

1. Journalists for Democracy & Human Rights (JDHR), Islamabad
2. Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad

#### SRI LANKA

1. Law & Society Trust (LST), Colombo

## SAWTEE

Launched in December 1994 at Nagarkot, Nepal by a consortium of South Asian non-governmental organisations (NGOs), South Asia on Trade, Economics and Environment (SAWTEE) is a recognised, registered, non-profit and non-governmental organisation. After having operated as a loose network until 1999, It was formally registered with District Administration Office, Kathmandu in the same year. It currently operates through its headquarters in Kathmandu and 11 network institutions from five South Asian countries, namely, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It's mission is to build capacity of the concerned stakeholders in South Asia by equipping them with knowledge, information and skills to voice their concerns particularly in the context

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