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## **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE QUESTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES**

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### **Abstract**

Many nations, local authorities and development sectors are now beginning to incorporate the idea of 'sustainable development' into policies. Despite many definitions, opinions and interpretations, other than adopting these as catchy words, little has been done with commitment. Conceptual and operational concepts are wide apart. This paper deals with three critical concerns in the procedural path towards sustainability. The first is the comprehensive policy directions that cope with the environmental resource management, welfare needs and economic development. The second is the commitment needed for securing survival needs while ensuring favourable conditions that are maintained in order to continue future activities. The third is the internalization of development which should include aspects dealing with socio-economics including self reliance in society, production and the ability to cope with in the face of crisis situations.

The arguments put forward in the discussion reveal that the objectives set by the decision makers are to assure 'quick results', and the economic goals have often been considered superior to sustainability. In Sri Lanka serious development and environmental problems have emerged over the years as a result of setting development goals to increase profits, rather than to stabilize and maintain the resources on which the majority of the resource poor depend. In the development process, socio-economic needs have to be built into the process of setting development policies towards a stable situation, rather than isolating poverty and unemployment related aspects as impeding factors. Socio-economic problems are the challenges for the development policy makers, and development is meant to solve problems in a sustainable manner. Socio-economics cannot be considered simply as the 'impeding factors', to explain why development has failed, cannot be achieved and sustained. The fundamentals for formulating an integrated approach by

taking into account the local context both environmental and socio economic in order to accomplish long term goals of development have been discussed. This suggests that new policy directions and operational opportunities are needed to solve the current problems and decide future directions.

### **Conceptual and Operational Context**

In the paradigm of development, the concept of 'sustainable development', has gained tremendous attention in policy at political and research platforms. Hediger (1996) shows how the terms; 'sustainable development'; and 'sustainability' have been used with extremely different meanings and interpretations. The flexibility is connected with the nature of the concept which could be adopted in a range of contexts related to human development, environmental management and economic growth. The absence of static models, and the same level of understanding have made the situation worse because no single operational strategy has been evolved to cope with long term environmental and socio-economic requirements which differ spatially.

The operational context of sustainable development directly points to the intergenerational perspectives in the use of resources. This has been embedded in the concepts of conservation since early 1980s. For instance, in focusing on nature conservation IUCN (1980) has given the definition as "the management of human uses of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations". The subsequent debates on sustainable development have not deviated from this. The international debate has been evolved more around the report of Bruntland Commission (WCED, 1987). It spelled out that 'sustainable development' is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations'. The important issue here is whether a transitional process has begun or if not what impedes it. Hediger (1996) shows that WCED's definition is much broader and "it provided a definition for sustainable development that involves a

subtle but extremely important transformation of the ecologically-based concept of physical sustainability and nature conservation to the context of social and economic development". Clearly this definition has been grounded on the inseparable connection between the environment and the economy, and their interdependent nature. More frequently, the word 'sustainable' has been used in connection with the sectors and areas. For instance, IUCN, UNDP and WWF (1991) in "Caring for the Earth" have used the word sustainable as a prefix including many scenarios like 'sustainable development', 'sustainable economy', 'sustainable society' and 'sustainable use'. In the local context, the word sustainable has often noted in regard to the resource and environmental areas. Local attempts are closest to the description given by FAO (1991). Accordingly sustainable development is the management and conservation of the natural resource base, and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner as to ensure attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations. Such sustainable development (in agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors) conserves land, water, plant and animal genetic resources, is environmentally non-degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable. What we really want to achieve, what strategies could help us to overcome the current and possible future problems and whether there are solid obstacles that could be bundled to "socio-economics" impeding sustainable development need thorough interpretations.

### **The Country Context**

If sustainable development is accepted as an operational process of change that is intended to achieve harmony between social, economic and environmental objectives and needs both in the short and long run, then the question as to what extent a holistic approach has been adopted, arises. Problems associated with sustainable development in Sri Lanka are more connected with the disintegration of integral parts, the social, the economic and the environmental aspects rather than socio-economics. The development guided by welfare needs has made a dramatic change, particularly in terms of individual achievements. While service sectors have made their investments on building up services like education and health, those who deal with economic and

environmental matters in compartments have failed to internalize the process to build a local capacity to take challenges.

Sri Lanka is currently ranked 97th out of 174 countries according to the 'human development index', a measure of income, health and education (UNDP, 1995). Further it is ranked 58th out of 130 countries on Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and 79th out of 116 on Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). In terms of human development, over several decades we have achieved a status to be a member of the medium ranked countries on conventional criteria. When gender related indicators are added our status has been drawn back to the low ranking countries. The emerging issues in adopting sustainable development as a concept and a process and finding operational means are more complex. The questions are what do we want to achieve? and how could the crisis situation be solved in the process?

On many interrelated aspects, our problems; the deepening poverty, unemployment, population, resource degradation, decreasing food production, land abandonment, unequal opportunities and resource distribution are crucial. We are unable to take the challenge. Many of these are the symptoms of mal-development. Mal-development is the violation of the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems that set in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustice and violence. It is blind to the fact that a recognition of nature's harmony and action to maintain it are preconditions for distributive justice (Shiva, 1989). From a global context the International Institute for Environment and Development (1994) has estimated that the planet is left with a net gain of 13.5 million tons of food production, which is well below the 25.3 million tons or 2 per cent growth needed to match the annual world population growth. In setting our priorities for the present and future it is necessary to assure that thing could sustain or can be continued and maintained over a longer period. What would be our operational strategy, the strategy to cross all those obstacles while solving them.

The development indeed does not urge a common blanket condition for economic and social change and it is to be decided according to the needs, objectives and potentials. In this process Conway et al, (1990) has

noted four significant features in sustainable systems by referring to sustainable agricultural systems. These include: productivity, stability, sustainability and equability. He explains that productivity is the net yield or income per unit of resource; stability is the extent to which productivity is maintained constant; sustainability is the ability to maintain productivity; and equability refers to the distributive aspects of the agro ecosystems. Elaborating on the same features, Al-Attar *et al.*, (1996) has examined the adoption of the features to describe social systems. She points out that, Societies must be productive and have diverse income sources to increase its productivity. They can be stable by being able to face internal and external crisis with minimum loss. They can also be sustainable by considering the current needs and needs of future generations. Finally, societies must adopt equability where individuals can share equal opportunities without discrimination and have the chance to improve their living conditions through their own efforts. More community centred components have been added in discussing sustainable human development (UNDP, 1995). The essential components are quite similar to those proposed by Conway, et al. (1990), although they are placed within the context of human development. What factors could impede the sustainable development in Sri Lanka where the economy has been agrarian, people's survival is closely linked with local resources, and problems of poverty, unemployment, subsistence and the environment are crucial, cannot be simplified in a disintegrated manner. This paper is focused primarily on the issues pertaining to productivity, stability, equity, participation and cooperation and empowerment.

### **The Crucial Problems**

Impediments to sustainable development are multiple, interconnected and complex so it is extremely difficult to separate them from one another. Many have emerged out of the development and technological adoptions made in the past. The era of welfare development has been marked with improvements in human development such as literacy, life expectancy, etc. Sri Lanka demonstrates how numerous pressures have been created due to the inability of the sectors to absorb the contribution of human resource that has been developed. I would like to begin my discussion focusing on the problems that we can now discuss as impedi-

ments, their causes and future threats. The statement of Federico Mayor quoted by Mike Wild (1996) in a presentation shows that 'the reason that we are not prepared to rise to all the challenges of the future - poverty, population, the environment, ethnic tolerance - is that we are still working with the tools of the past'. Sri Lanka demonstrates an example of this. Part of the country's problems are related to the priorities placed on modernization and technology. Nearly a decade has gone since many nations including Sri Lanka have adopted the word "sustainable development" to every possible sector in compartments but without commitments. The practical problems in reality are that people have not been able to increase productivity per unit of resource, stabilize their survival and participate fully in development and have equal opportunities to remunerative employment. There has been no balance between long term options and the short term market production. A majority, except a handful of the affluent and wealthy, have no access to and control over assets, neither do they have equal opportunities. Moreover, the lack of equal opportunities for the present generation itself is a symbol of the exclusion of hopes for the future ones. Rather than decide themselves the development pathways, people have increasingly become dependents of external delivery systems, as such the spirit of the people is lost. Neither their potential contributions nor the primary concern have been taken into account. The majority of the people have had no opportunities to decide the development process, so it has been set aside by political goals. The concept of empowerment which follows two requisites: development 'by the people' and 'for the people' is thrown out of the development paradigm. These in turn are the interrelated aspects impeding future sustainability.

### **Decreasing Productivity**

Many serious problems in development are connected with the decreasing productivity, the scarcity of remunerative employment and also the degradation of the resource-base, primarily the land and the forest out of which productivity is to be increased. In spite of all the development efforts made so far in the non-agricultural sectors, over 45 percent of the people still depend on agriculture for their living. Nearly 80 percent of the people live in rural areas, and expect a 'fare share' of services in rural areas. With its increasing population, land: man ratio

has declined from about 2.7 ha/head to 0.38 ha/head within the last hundred years (Ministry of Environment and Parliamentary affairs (1991). While land per head ratio was decreasing the employment opportunities in agriculture has also declined due to land degradation. The inappropriate land management has resulted in many ecological consequences such as soil erosion, landslides and erosion of biodiversity. These in turn reduce the productivity and the remuneration derived from agriculture.

The connection between depletion of productivity of agricultural lands and the socio-economic problems is interconnected. Sri Lanka's National Report to UNCED, prepared in 1991/1992 has pointed out that, 'In Sri Lanka, as in many other countries of the Third World, the problems of environmental degradation, and hence the threat to sustainable development, arises out of a state of under development. It would be futile to attempt to solve the problems of the environment while people are poor, malnourished, unemployed and living under conditions of squalor. The first priority is to address the problems of under development. Simultaneously environmental issues should receive attention; for, otherwise, whatever development that is achieved will not be durable and lasting'. The danger in this process is that it is not desirable to go by the symbols of under-development instead of sorting out the causes. Poverty, under and unemployment, malnourishment, inequality in access to benefits and control over assets have been accumulated over the years. One could argue that these are the impeding factors, but I would like to say that these have emerged as a result of the inappropriate paths followed to increase productivity. The decreasing productivity due to the poor management of resources has threatened the lives of farmers who are more malnourished than the rest of the society.

Drawing attention to the debates in the Citizens' Report on Sri Lankas' environment and development (Sri Lanka Environment Journalists Forum, 1994) many examples could be cited. It states that "...The yield per hectare has been doubled over the past three decades, mainly due to the use of high yielding varieties of rice, and the practice of high input agriculture. However, self-sufficiency in rice has been an elusive goal. It was claimed as an objective of the Mahaweli river

diversion programme. In 1985, when paddy production peaked at 2.6 million metric tons, self sufficiency appeared to be just round the corner. But not quite. Today, with declining production, lower yields and less area under paddy, there is not much talk of self sufficiency. Production was down to 2.3 million metric tons in 1992, as farmers, discouraged by the withdrawal of subsidies and fluctuating prices, shifted to other cash crops, the land under paddy has shrunk from 2.2 million acres in 1986 to 1.9 million acres in 1992". The multiple problems bundled here reveal that the nation is aware of the crisis, impediments, and the fact that inter-generational survival security is threatened by the current deepening problems. The cost of crop production is beyond the farmers' capacity, farming not remunerative enough for them to meet their basic needs; intervention driven with subsidies has had a short term interest, those farmers who undertook the challenge to feed the nation now want food subsidies to maintain their day to day living. More seriously the freely gathered goods such as water, fuelwood, and wild food varieties are not within the local systems; so getting certain basic needs has become more energy consuming and cumbersome than ever (Wickramasinghe, 1993).

The loss of soil in some of the croplands has continued at an unprecedented rate. In tobacco grown steep slopes the loss has been as high as 388-913 ha/year (TAMS, 1980). The sediment yield of Mahaweli Ganga has been estimated by NEDECO (1984). Accordingly nearly 15 million tons of sediment, calculated for the period 1952-1982, has moved away in the Mahaweli watershed through Peradeniya gauging station, trapping 70 percent at Polgolla barrage. The on-site effect of this serious soil loss, is a symbol of the decreasing land productivity, its future problems. Yet such destruction has been ignored owing to the interest of making short term projects. This problem has serious socio-economic consequences such as labour redundancies, food scarcities and urban migration, problems of water and woodfuel scarcities withdrawal of farming where the cost of artificial input for a harvest is much greater than the returns to farmer's input, their land and labour.

The farmers, the people who depend on, and regularly dealt with, the resources that are associated with land are often blamed for the soil degradation. The connection between agricultural modernization and

changes in farming practices under which more and more land has been exposed to serious threats has been ignored. Increasing input has been taken as the sole means to assure productivity. To retain that inorganic input to the soil, farmers apply more and more organic fertilizer. A research study conducted in Boragas area in Welimada, with potato growers reveals that the application of both organic and inorganic fertilizer has been increased tremendously between 1960 and 1990. Farmers have explained that not only does the cost of inputs increases season after season but they also struggle for organic manure of which the price keeps on increasing (Wickramasinghe, 1991).

A rather contrary idea has been brought to notice by an elderly farmer in Kelegama. She said - "I have sold two truck loads of cow-dung today. I used some for a few small vegetable beds in the home garden, but the rest cannot be used because cow-dung is said to be unsuitable for the high yielding crops grown in Hena" (the dry land plot). Information synthesized in the Natural Resources, Energy and Science Authority of Sri Lanka (NARESA, 1991) brings out a number of trends in many sectors in agriculture that go against the sustainability of agriculture. For instance, fertilizer use in tea has increased from about 120 to 210 kg/ha between 1972 and 1987, while the production has been rather static, producing about 210 million kg/year during the same period with marginal fluctuations. Not only is the increasing cost of fertilizer a threat, but the increasing amount of fertilizer required per unit area is also a question.

For the sake of increasing productivity for investment both bio-physical and human, the conditions must be balanced. Farmers are aware of the problems. They see that polluted soil has completely destroyed the process of colonization of herbs and many types of greens of multiple uses regenerating wildly. They have seen how water spouts are disappearing after decades of seasonal farming in the highlands. They see that irrigation systems are getting polluted by mineral concentration with the disturbances caused by disrupting the natural systems. They experience severe scarcities of food due to the erosion of biodiversity. The poor farmers who are attracted and driven to adopt modern inventions, because of the short term economic promises and short term subsidies are the ones who suffer more from decreasing productivity.

The affluent, the wealthy and the formally employed could sustain in the market economy than the farmers themselves. There has been no justice for unlimited repercussions forced onto the lives of people (Wickramasinghe, 1988; 1993). Many of the conservational measures have been introduced after the fertility of soil has gone. So, several decades, if not centuries will be required to restore productivity. After two to three decades of tobacco cultivation land has been abandoned for recovery. The same has compelled the farmers to abandoned their generation long livelihood, the farming, and dipend on food subsidies.

One argument that could be advanced is related to technology; the modern agriculture in which farmers are trapped and have become dependent on technologies which threaten their livelihood, crop production, and the resource base. Panos Medice Briefing (1995) discusses that "..... today the demand to increase food production has led to dependence on a dangerously small number of crops. The world's population obtains about 90 percent of its calories form 20 crop species. Four of them - rice, maize, wheat and potato - account for 50 percent of total calories intake". While state policies have been in favour of the green revolution since the 1960's to feed the increasing population, the words "sustainable development" has been added to the academic and political jargon merely from the perspective of making promises. Attempts have been made to transfer the agrarian economy heavily associated with small scale production systems to modern farming, with high yielding crop varieties and heavy use of chemical pesticides, weedicides and fertilizer. Not only has the cost of production been unbearable, but farmers have also suffered from indebtedness, decreasing crop production, crop damage and household food scarcities. The FAO, one of the promoters of the Green Revolution in the 1960s, now points out that intensified food production can be achieved by the sustainable use of a broader range of genetic material.

The vast majority of farmers lead lives of poverty and deprivation. The prerequisites to resolve this situation are the rehabilitation of the productive resource base, increasing productivity of the land and human labour. The wise use of land and forests which encapsulates all these resources is the primary means of increasing productivity; a system where people have to depend on imported food commodities is not so.

The factors impeding the adoption of sustainable, locally acceptable and feasible farming are not the socio-economics ones. Farmers are reluctant to destroy the productive potentials of the land they cultivate, but it has happened when farmers are motivated and in some cases forced to adopt farming practices prescribed as requisites to assure a better harvest. The adoption of crop monoculture has eroded not only the farmlands' diversity but also the multiplicity of products, income sources and the farmers' ability to survive in case of damage to the few crop varieties.

### **Equity, Rights and Opportunities**

Among many socially - reproduced patterns, the disparities among social strata are getting wider and more intensified. The status consciousness together with inequalities in socio-economics, resource distribution, employment opportunities and rights to basic needs and resources have created boundaries among many strata, communities and social sectors. Equity and equal opportunities have not made practical adjustments in the areas where problems exist, but more opportunities have been created for the affluent sectors. Still the rights of the most deserving, the poor are not seen on grounds of equity. Many are not prepared to live in harmony and care for others, and provide conditions to share the resources and income sources.

The disparities in ownership and control of resources have become more prominent, and widened over the decades of development interventions. The state ownership of lands, amounting to about 80 percent of the country's land means a clear controlling power over land kept under state authority. Our expectations with regard to the common interest of people to manage all those state owned lands suffer from lack of motivation and the exclusion of local initiatives. Forest management, resource conservation and modern irrigation schemes provide evidence for the contrary between ownership and rights. The pressure of new forms of wealth on property rights is a serious issue. What legal ownership could do in favour of sustainable management of resources is a question to be taken seriously. Legislation contributes marginally, while people are excluded as non-technical users, beneficiaries and destroyers of resources. It is the local people who deserve productive

resources to produce food, fodder, medicinal herbs, fuelwood, etc. The knowledge with regard to the management of forest for survival, primarily for the Non-Timber Forest Products has been borrowed from indigenous communities (Wickramasinghe 1996b). Yet, with the demarcation of boundaries and claiming of natural forest as state owned areas, justice for indigenous communities has been overlooked (Wickramasinghe, 1996a; 1996b). What is available is excessively used by the resource rich, while the struggle of the poor is to search scarce resources such as fuelwood, water, medicinal and food products. It is not poverty that makes people vulnerable, but the fact that there are no options for their survival.

The manner in which the state has marginalized the customary rights of the local people to the resources and the fact that people have ignored state legislation meant to displace people's rights are conflicting. The conflicts are covert but serious if one has to find justice. The State legislation fosters neither benefits for local communities nor sustainable management. Instead of building on by integrating locally appropriate systems to the development process, we try to extract things alienating the local context. For instance, people place a sentimental value on the local forest. In some areas, the feeling of inheritance is strong, particularly among the communities descending from hunting and gathering groups (Wickramasinge, 1996a). Irrigation management systems of indigenous communities centred round the social system, around the leadership of "Wel-vidane" (village functions on paddy cultivation matters) and also the management of paddy tracts as a system known as "Yaya" are some of the examples pointing to the principles of equity, mutual respect, care and sharing of common resources in a sustainable manner.

Strategies on conservation have been state centric or taken as a matter to be dealt with by the scientific community. We are far away from the convention on Biological Diversity, because the issues of common concern have not been taken into account due to the interest of keeping state rights uninterrupted. For the purpose of managing the resources, including ecosystems and local habitats, the prerequisite is to eliminate the misconceptualization of aspects related to common concern.

The overall conditions reflect that impediments are related to:

- \* Unequal distribution and people's rights to resources on which people depend;
- \* Lack of employment and service opportunities for the people to be benefited from national investments, resources and remunerative employment;
- \* The new forms of wealth that are more status oriented rather than the practical contribution oriented;
- \* Discriminatory attitudes.

The discussion at Baddegama-gedara in Walugedara (located in southern fringe of Sinharaja forest) shows that the communities deserving services and have the rights to be benefited from the state delivered services have been ignored over decades. A woman mentioned that "since I came to Walugedara about 42 years ago three women delivered their babies in the jungle path while walking down to the hospital located about 4-5 kilometres away. All three lost their babies. We don't have access to roads neither do we have easy access to medical and educational services. We head-load the village products, sacks containing 20-30 kg of tea leaves are carried almost everyday to the collection centres located about 2-3 kilometres away. Children have educational facilities only up to the secondary level, and thereafter, they have to walk about 4 kilometres to the school located outside this area if they want to go for secondary education. Development means nothing for us and this is why youths are restless and aggressive when they talk about development". This demonstrates that development has not gone to many of our communities. Walugedara and Kolontotuwa represent the prevailing situation in many remote areas. Lack of rights to common services and unequal opportunities have resulted in a lack of faith in development.

Increasing productivity is impeded by poor investment capacities and opportunities to make use of capacities. Politics and the lack of social influence have become constraints to obtain appropriate employment, as such many are deprived of opportunities. What is available for the non affluent is the heavily regimented employment which does not facilitate advancement, either in terms of human input and better

conditions of work. A recent survey conducted on garment workers who have obtained employment with the decentralization of the sector shows that lack of options, poverty and unemployment are the reasons that have driven them to take factory work. Not only that there is low motivation but the capacities are also deteriorating due to problems inside and outside factories.

Issues pertaining to the rights to food, clean water, energy, lands, forests, employment, education, health care, communication services etc. are interconnected with social and economic inequity. Services are often enjoyed more by those who are better off and have access to them, than by the ones who deserve and suffer from the double burden of poor access and crucial needs. Thousands of communities living in remote areas cannot be taken as threats, but are the ones whose rights to equal access have been left out. A field investigation conducted in Kolontotuwa in September 1996 shows how the ill feeling with regard to social injustice in service delivery systems is serious. The neglect of the service rights of those who contribute to the national agrarian economy stands against the principles of equity. As mentioned by a tea producer "... you can see that we are the ones who take the challenge of tea production, work in rough terrain from dawn to dusk, head-load the harvest down to the collecting points. We sustain the middle men who collect the leaves. But, tell us what will happen to tea production if we just wait until access to better roads is made available. Don't forget that we must have a right to such services as maintainers of this tea economy". The idea of using peoples' capabilities, resources and essential goods and services for a transition has not become a reality. The essential social conditions such as living in harmony with others, the care and concern for others are lacking. Under the same conditions food, energy and water are also enjoyed more by a minority, allowing a few options for the majority. If equity within the present generation is not practised but exists only in slogans, the chances for the eradication of inequity between the present and future generations, for sustainable development can be bleak.

It is important to refer to situations explained in the Human Development Report (1995), with a view to identifying the conditions that could withstand development. It states that: "... considerable

human deprivation remains in both the developing and the industrial world. In developing countries one person in three lives in poverty. Even basic social services, basic education, safe drinking water and adequate nutrition - are not available to more than one billion people". Among many dimensions gender bias in development has resulted in unequal allocation of resources employment and also in wage discrimination. Jacobson (1992) shows that as a condition that afflicts every social institution from individual families to international development organizations, gender bias is an enormous stumbling block on the road to a sustainable economy. The inequalities in resource options and opportunities has a considerable impact on the majority, particularly on the resource poor and the non affluent. Slow growth of employment is in conflicts with the fast growing employment requirements. Nearly 150,000 join the labour force annually. Many are forced to accept employment which does not require advanced learning. Rights to food and other needs are decided more by the income than by human need. The resources are owned by wealthy leaving an extremely low proportion for the majority. These gaps tend to obstruct the development process. So, unless and until these gaps are narrowed, sustainable development will be confined to political and academic jargon. The Sri Lanka Environmental Journalists Forum (1994) has rightly shown that "inequalities make a mockery of economic growth because the benefits of development are enjoyed largely by a minority". Although it seems hard to eradicate inequalities established over decades, inequalities in the distribution of income, wealth and employment opportunities have resulted in frustration and anomalies. Boundaries among social classes, ethnic groups and gender are socially enforced ones that have no justification, and remain as obstacles to equal opportunities and rights.

### **Discriminatory Attitudes**

Many forms of discrimination exist ranging from unequal access to and control over resources to the level of employment and social activities. It is often the position in social hierarchy that matters in getting to prestigious positions. All sectors of society and the economy are not comparable in terms of power relations. One of the reasons for the lack of common interest and unequal responsibility is the unfairness towards the deprived sectors like women, the poor and also the ones who

are involved in subsistence farming and other non-prestigious jobs. Discrimination among social sectors, between genders and among the categories of employment is linked to social inequality. Discrimination is connected with the social stratification and status consciousness. The bases for discrimination are numerous, some have emerged out of new forms of material wealth and employment while others are related to gender, ethnicity etc. Whatever they are all forms of discrimination are destructive to the spirit of the people. Their dignity and opportunities for capable contribution to development have been undermined. It cannot be isolated from matters related to inequalities where responsibilities and partnership have been disintegrated and kept under the control of a few.

In Sri Lanka, there has already been a transition in social value systems; it has changed from spirit and self-reliance to material wealth and dependence. The negative consequence of this transition is greater in rural areas. The rural sector is deprived of the recognition and respect for its contribution to the economy. There are two cases demonstrating the situation. One is the rubber small holding sector, which increasingly suffers from labour scarcities. A field investigation at Horana and Malagala conducted in 1995 focusing on problems of rubber small holdings revealed that labour scarcity is the main problem to sustain the system. The other is the abandoning of paddy fields where labour is not adequately available. In real terms these areas are not short of labour but short of the desire to work as farm labourers. What is expected by many is 'recognized employment' through which social disabilities could be eliminated. Many employment opportunities available in the core of the economy are not recognized as respectful in the current context. Most of the employed suffer from lack of job security, equal wages and labour rights. The study on women workers in the garment industry shows why labour migration takes place even without additional financial returns. The withdrawal of youths from agriculture is an important phenomenon in the agriculture sector. One young girl explained that - .. "even if I work in the fields throughout the year I am not considered as an employed and is often looked down upon by people. But since I started the present job they recognized me as a fully employed person". Farming is the mainstay of the economy and a way to sustainable survival. Development will heavily depend on the coun-

try's ability to feed the nation. Yet, it is neither seen as a respectable occupation nor as a contributor to development. The dignity of productive labour irrespective of nature, cleanliness and organization is the basis to motivate people to become active. When it is lacking it stands as an impediment to development.

A situation attributed to discrimination is the attitude and displacement of indigenous technology. The ways of managing local resources have been ignored as non-technical and non-scientific. The displacement of organic farming that has been practised over generations is an example. The priority placed on modern technology, particularly in the 1970s and the 1980s has encouraged people to deviate from the techniques that they were confident of. Where replacements have failed, attempts are made to reinvent the same as innovations. Increasing realization of the feasibility of indigenous medicine, forest management systems, irrigation management, agroforestry, economics of non-timber forest products suggests that the systems discarded as non-technical during last 2-3 decades are the ones that are intended to be reintroduced to reduce destruction and restore peoples' self reliance and commitments to sustainable development.

## **Participation and Empowerment**

No development paradigm is composed of one single element, sector or one group of activists. The more we go by holistic principles, the better we dissolve boundaries amongst sectors of the state economy, society, and also between people and development sectors. The holisticity is the condition that connects socio-economics with the biophysical. This suggests that, at many levels, lack of partnership among concerns could directly impede sustainability. This demands partnerships among all in a harmonious and mutually respected manner. One situation standing against the principles of integrity is the compartmentalization of sectors for the sake of administration, division of tasks and resources. The environmental responsibilities are dealt with separately from agricultural sectors, forestry and wildlife. While forestry excludes the provision of food, fodder, fuelwood, fibre, etc from its resources the sectors on wildlife is focusing on core areas of the natural forests leaving out peripheries for forestry or agriculture. This has resulted in a state

of irresponsibility when matters are to be handled for the purpose of development. Similarly the incentives provided by one state sector has become a disincentive for another. For instance, the tea small holding sector is involved heavily in promoting tea among small holdings, so as long as farmers could provide certification of their cultivation rights to parcels of land subsidies are given. In contrast, the forestry sector experiences tremendous pressure under the regularization of newly encroached lands in forest peripheries on their claims to cultivations. It is so with regard to environmental legislation too: Who possess the responsibilities to act against activities which are not agreeable to legislation, or in harmony with nature? Lack of partnership among the sectoral agencies is only one side of the problem. The other, the more crucial one is the lack of partnership between state agencies and the people.

There is no common understanding regarding partnership based on principles of sharing and equity. In the 1980's much effort has been made to use the word 'participation', as a prefix, at all levels from research to action. Participation has been evaluated in terms of headcounts; attendance as listeners, and attendance at work on paid basis or on subsidies in tree nurseries, rehabilitation of roads and tanks, tree planting etc. Such examples show a clear deviation from the real meaning of participation. The impediment here is the externalization of the process. There have been no motives for the people to come forward by themselves and neither have they been motivated with local initiatives. Enforced participation, in many circumstances has been a way of being polite to the officers, village leaders and interventionists. Chances for local people to take part in development mean to uplift and sustain their livelihoods without being controlled by external forces. The local resource-base and the environment have been marginalized. Although problems are internalized and put into a local context, solutions are not internalized. As a result the decades in which attempts have been made to entertain people's participation are marked with more failures. "Community Forestry" is a good example.

In Sri Lanka's context, people's participation has been invited to facilitate outside interventions. The opportunities for people to make changes have not been seen as essential to sustain development.

Interest and co-operation among institutions, between people and the interventionists have often been missing. The social process through which development could be internalized has not unfolded, because it is contrary to the well-established principle of centralization. A broader and clearer version of the whole concept, 'the partnership' has been added particularly to the forestry sector in Nepal and India during the last decades. The needs were for 'a fare share' and cooperative action of the state and local communities to become responsible for effective, efficient and sustainable management. It has been a way to institutionalize community forestry in Nepal, Gilmore (1989) and India (Indian Environmental Society, 1990).

In Sri Lanka opportunities for the people to make management decisions regarding resources have been marginal and crop up as obstacles to development. The whole system has transferred the spirit of the people to a feeling of "dependence". As long as people's aspirations are ignored the sustainability of resources and survival systems and the intergenerational equities will not be achieved. Many attempts have been made by the state and NGOs to justify that their interventions are community or people oriented, yet, in the full practical sense, control over the matters is reserved by agencies and interventionists. Little has been done to understand community-based organizations, management systems and locally developed technologies and to recognize them as the local initiative to build up from them.

### **Lack of Power and Control**

This does not coincide with conventional practices, and the fostering of people's commitments is also beyond the interest of many state agencies. There are a number of reasons for the continuation of conventional thinking in relation to development and participation. One reason is that sectors which have the power or control over resources, do not trust local communities and their capacities and technological know how. Some sectors are not willing to share power, and build-up strategies focusing on the felt needs, people's aspirations and initiatives. The second reason is that transformation has not taken place over the past decades. Instead, people have been taken as 'silent participants', 'beneficiaries', 'clients', 'recipients' or 'beneficiaries'. The

rights of people to make decisions, express their needs and direct interventional assets have been controlled, assuming that local people are not knowledgeable. The third is that, in most cases, the commitments of responsible sectors are defined more in favour of the external agencies than for the local communities to uplift their living and improve the conditions of the local resource-base. Not only are the people deprived of their rights but also that their needs and problems are defined and solutions are recommended by outsiders. The fourth is highly political, and it is related to the interest of solving the immediate problem primarily food, ignoring the needs for setting direction towards long term social and environmental stability and equality through which the welfare requirements were to be provided. This implies that lack of attitudinal changes regarding development, sharing of power, resources and opportunities and also on the local people impedes the internalization of the development process towards sustainability.

## **Conclusions**

What the country needs for future sustainability is efficient and effective management of resources through which productivity could be promoted. As has been debated by Agarwal, (1994) in her book on 'A field of One's Own' all impediments to the peoples' active contributions must be given priority in all national development programmes. The socio-economic factors that can be contextualized as impediments are the products of mal-development. The overall objectives of poverty alleviation could be better solved by directing economic resources to the ones who are equipped with knowledge, experience and interest. Among economic resources land is the primary productive asset to which we could turn back at present and the future. It provides a prominent economic security for the majority, mostly the ones deprived of opportunities and assets.

State agencies should empower people to act against all exploitative forus means destroying the environment and human resources. The scenarios constructed in this discussion paper are the crucial ones. There has been no holistic approach to development and no pre-identified directions to be followed for the betterment of people and resources. Inequalities in development sectors, both in terms of power

and capacities have made them define sustainable development, and ignore the intersectoral effects and long-term consequences.

The future of the country, of the next generation, has turned dark due to decreasing productivity, the inequalities, discrimination, externalization of development, lack of commitment and partnership, power centralization and also due to the absence of transitions in attitudes and power relations. 'Development' needs to be considered in integrity, treatment for one destruction or problems should not be the cause for many. Socioeconomic impediments that are interlocked with the environmental problems, so the long-term solutions depend on how the country handles them with a holistic view in an integrated manner. What is needed for future sustainability is the building up of impeding issues into development process.

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