

INTERNATIONAL COMMENT

The Environment: An Area of North/South Cooperation Rather Than Confrontation?

A number of major framework agreements and arrangements on the environment are now in place. For example, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conventions on Biological Diversity and Desertification, the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Agenda 21 and the Statement of Principles on Forests. Negotiations are by no means at an end. Intense international activity is continuing in relation to forests, coral reefs, responsible fishing in the high seas and on other initiatives resulting from Agenda 21. The Global Environmental Facility (GEF) has been established (restructured in 1994) as the interim financial mechanism for the Montreal Protocol, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biological Diversity and for issues relating to the high seas. Activities under the Desertification Convention and those relating to deforestation will also be covered as they relate to the four focal areas. Further negotiations relating to the areas covered by the main framework conventions are continuing with the objective of giving greater substance to and ensuring the implementation of the commitments entered into under them.

A major outcome of the above negotiations is the clear acknowledgement among both developed and developing countries that development does not need to follow the traditional model which sought development for its own sake nor does development assistance need to be provided to support traditional development models. The approach to development which emerged from the exhausting negotiations and was encapsulated in the Rio Declaration, recognised that development could proceed consistent with the objective of protecting the environment and this achievement, to a considerable extent, was due to the efforts of developing countries themselves.

The impetus for conserving the environment came initially from developed countries who were encouraged by the massive pressure exerted by domestic environmental lobby groups. Although environmental concerns existed in developing countries, the priority was development. The challenge was to produce a negotiated outcome at Rio which broadly met the concerns of both developed and developing countries.

In the negotiations on the various environmental initiatives, developing countries successfully managed to combine their development objectives with the environment concerns of the major developed countries. In the process they succeeded in obtaining commitments from developed countries for new and additional funding and technology transfers for those aspects of their development which had implications for the environment and which also concerned developed countries.

These commitments were in addition to assistance developed countries already provided by way of development assistance. New sources of funding to meet environmental needs were explored and agreed upon while the traditional commitments intended for purely developmental purposes were maintained.

Developing country efforts were assisted considerably by the realisation that whatever developed countries did under pressure from their domestic environmental groups to preserve the environment, would be rendered ineffective unless developing countries were also made to

participate in the process. The enormous bargaining power that developing countries exerted in this respect was clearly evident.

The first major compromise on funding and technology transfers was achieved in the context of the review of the Montreal Protocol (on ozone depletion) in 1990. Similar approaches were adopted in the negotiations on the Framework Convention on Climate Change and in the Convention on Biological Diversity. Under these conventions, developed countries committed themselves to provide the agreed full incremental costs of implementing the conventions.

Agenda 21, in Chapter 33, further acknowledged the commitment of developed countries to provide new and additional financial resources and technology to developing countries to meet the challenge of the environment.

The key of the GEF is beginning to be more clearly defined. Although designated as an interim financial mechanism, it is gradually acquiring a more permanent role for itself.

In the process of concluding the negotiations on the major environmental agreements, the international community may have developed a new cooperative approach between developed and developing countries which would not only facilitate development but also development consistent with the objective of environmental protection. Many of the details of these commitments remain to be negotiated and developing and developed countries will continue to haggle in various environmental and other fora over the next few years on aspects of the commitments made but the outlines of a new cooperative approach to development in an environmental friendly way is now firmly in place.

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(This is a summary of the comments made by the author at the NELA Annual Conference in Melbourne)