

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Twenty-ninth session
SECOND COMMITTEE
Agenda item 46

Distr.
GENERAL
A/C.2/292
1 November 1974
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL:
ENGLISH/SPANISH

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

The Cocoyoc Declaration adopted by the participants in the UNEP/UNCTAD
Symposium on "Patterns of Resource Use, Environment and Development Strategies"
held at Cocoyoc, Mexico, from 8 to 12 October 1974 ¹

Thirty years have passed since the signing of the United Nations Charter launched the effort to establish a new international order. Today, that order has reached a critical turning point. Its hopes of creating a better life for the whole human family have been largely frustrated. It has proved impossible to meet the "inner limit" of satisfying fundamental human needs. On the contrary, more people are hungry, sick, shelterless and illiterate today than when the United Nations was first set up.

At the same time, new and unforeseen concerns have begun to darken the international prospects. Environmental degradation and the rising pressure on resources raise the question whether the "outer limits" of the planet's physical integrity may not be at risk.

And to these preoccupations must be added the realization that the next 30 years will bring a doubling or world population. Another world on top of this, equal in numbers, demands and hopes.

But these critical pressures give no reason to despair of the human enterprise, provided we undertake the necessary changes. The first point to be underlined is that the failure of world society, to provide "a safe and happy life for all is not caused by any present lack of physical resources. The problem today is not primarily one of absolute physical shortage but of economic and social maldistribution and misuse; mankind's predicament is rooted primarily in economic and social structures and behaviour within and between countries.

Much of the world has not yet emerged from the historical consequences of almost five centuries of colonial control which concentrated economic power so overwhelmingly in the hands of a small group of nations. To this day, at least three quarters of the world's income, investment, service and most of all of the world's research are in the hands of one quarter of its people.

The solution of these problems cannot be left to the automatic operation of market mechanisms. The traditional market makes resources available to those who can buy them rather than those who need them, it stimulates artificial demands and builds waste into the production process, and even under-utilizes resources. In the international system the powerful nations have secured the poor countries' raw materials at low prices - for example, the price of petroleum fell decisively between 1950 and 1970 - have engrossed all the value-added from processing the materials and sold the manufactures back, often at monopoly prices.

At the same time, the very cheapness of the materials was one element in encouraging the

¹ Circulated in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee at the 1622nd meeting on 1 November 1974.

industrialized nations to indulge in careless and extravagant use of the imported materials. Once again, energy is the best example. Oil at just over a dollar a barrel stimulated a growth in energy use of between 6 and 11 per cent a year. In Europe, the annual increase in car registrations reached 20 per cent.

Indeed, pre-emption by the rich of a disproportionate share of key resources conflicts directly with the longer-term interests of the poor by impairing their ultimate access to resources necessary to their development and by increasing their cost. All the more reason for creating a new system of evaluating resources which takes into account the benefits and the burdens for the developing countries.

The over-all effect of such biased economic relationships can best be seen in the contrast in consumption. A North American or a European child, on average, consumes outrageously more than his Indian or African counterpart - a fact which makes it specious to attribute pressure on world resources entirely to the growth of third world population.

Population growth is, of course, one element in the growing pressures on world supplies. The planet is finite and an indefinite multiplication of both numbers and claims cannot be endlessly sustained. Moreover, shortage can occur locally long before there is any prospect of a general exhaustion of particular resources. A policy for sane resource conservation and for some forms of management of ultimately scarce resources within the framework of new economic order must soon replace today's careless rapacity. But the point in the existing world situation is that the huge contrasts in per capita consumption between the rich minority and the poor majority have far more effect than their relative numbers on resource use and depletion. We can go further.

Since a lack of resources for full human development is, as the Bucharest Conference on Population clearly recognized, one of the continuing causes of explosive population growth, to deprive nations of the means of development directly exacerbates their demographic problems.

These unequal economic relationships contribute directly to environmental pressures. The cheapness of materials has been one factor in increasing pollution and encouraging waste and throwaway economy among the rich. And continued poverty in many developing lands has often compelled the people to cultivate marginal lands at great risk of soil erosion or to migrate to the physically degraded and overcrowded cities.

Nor are the evils which flow from excessive reliance on the market system confined to international relationships. The experience of the last 30 years is that the exclusive pursuit of economic growth, guided by the market and undertaken by and for the powerful elites, has the same destructive effects inside developing countries. The richest 5 per cent engross all the gain while the poorest 20 per cent can actually grow poorer still. And at the local as at the international level the evils of material poverty are compounded by the people's lack of participation and human dignity, by their lack of any power to determine their own fate.

Nothing more clearly illustrates both the need to reform the present economic order and the possibility of doing so than the crisis that has arisen in world markets during the last two years. The trebling of the price of food, fertilizers and manufactures in the wake of world inflation has most severely hit the world's poorest people. Indeed, this winter the risk of a complete shortfall in supplies threatens the lives of millions in the third world. But it cannot be called absolute shortage. The grain exists, but it is being eaten elsewhere by very well-fed people. Grain consumption in North America has grown per capita by 350 pounds largely in meat products, since 1965 - to reach 1,900 pounds today. Yet this extra 350 pounds is almost equal to an Indian's total annual consumption. North Americans were hardly starving in 1965. The increase since then has contributed to super-consumption which even threatens health. Thus, in physical terms, there need be no shortage this winter. It requires only a small release from the "surplus" of the rich to meet the entire Asian shortfall. There could hardly be a more vivid example of what one might call the overconsumption of the wealthy nations contributing directly to the underconsumption of the world's poor.

The quadrupling of oil prices through the combined action of the oil producers sharply alters the balance of power in world markets and redistributes resources massively to some third world countries. Its effect has been to reverse decisively the balance of advantage in the oil trade and to place close to 100 billions a year at the disposal of some third world nations. Moreover, in an area critical to the economies of industrialized States, a profound reversal of power exposes them to the condition long familiar in the third world - a lack of control over vital economic decisions.

Nothing could illustrate more clearly the degree to which the 'world market system which has continuously operated to increase the power and wealth of the rich and maintain the relative deprivation of the poor is rooted not in unchangeable physical circumstance but in political relationships which can, of their very nature undergo profound reversal and transformations. In a sense, a new economic order is already struggling to be born. The crisis of the old system can also be the opportunity of the new.

It is true that, at present, the outlook seems to hold little but confrontation, misunderstanding, threats and angry dispute. But again, we repeat, there is no reason to despair. The crisis can also be a moment of truth from which nations learn to acknowledge the bankruptcy of the old system and to seek the framework of a new economic order.

The task of a statesmanship is thus to attempt to guide the nations, with all their differences in interest, power and fortune, towards a new system more capable of meeting the "inner limits" of basic human needs for all the world's people and of doing so without violating the "outer limits" of the planet's resources and environment. It is because we believe this enterprise to be both vital and possible that we set down a number of changes, in the conduct of economic policy, in the direction of development and in planetary conservation, which appear to us to be essential components of the new system.

1. The purpose of development

Our first concern is to redefine the whole purpose of development. This should not be to develop things but to develop man. Human beings have basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, health, education. Any process of growth that does not lead to their fulfilment - or, even worse, disrupts them - is a travesty of the idea of development. We are still in a stage where the most important concern of development is the level of satisfaction of basic needs for the poorest sections in each society which can be as high as 40 per cent of the population. The primary purpose of economic growth should be to ensure the improvement of conditions for these groups. A growth process that, benefits only the wealthiest minority and maintains or even increases the disparities between and within countries is not development. It is exploitation. And the time for starting the type of true economic growth that leads to better distribution and to the satisfaction of the basic needs for all is today. We believe that 30 years of experience with the hope that rapid economic growth benefiting the few will "trickle down" to the mass of the people has proved to be illusory. We therefore reject the idea of "growth first, justice in the distribution of benefits later".

Development should not be limited to the satisfaction of basic needs. There are other needs, other goals, and other values. Development includes freedom of expression and impression, the right to give and to receive ideas and stimulus, There is a deep social need to participate in shaping the basis of one's own existence, and to make some contribution to the fashioning of the world's future. Above all, development includes the right to work, by which we mean not simply having a job but finding self-realization in work, the right not to be alienated through production processes that use human beings simply as tools.

2. The diversity of development

Many of these more than material needs, goals and values, depend on satisfaction of the basic

needs which are our primary concern. There is no consensus today what strategies to pursue in order to arrive at the satisfaction of basic needs. But, there are some good examples even among poor countries. They make clear that the point of departure for the, development process varies considerably from one country to another, for historical, cultural and other reasons. Consequently, we emphasize the need for pursuing many different, roads of development. We reject the unilinear view which sees development essentially and inevitably as the effort to initiate the historical model of the countries that for various reasons happen to be rich today. For this reason, we reject the concept of "gaps" in development. The goal is not to "catch up", but to ensure the quality of life for all with a productive base compatible with the needs of future generations.

We have spoken of the minimum satisfaction of basic needs. But there is also a maximum level, there are ceilings as well as floors. Man must eat to live. But he can also over-eat. It does not help us touch to produce and consume more and more if the result is an ever-increasing need for tranquilizers and mental hospitals. And Just as man has a limited capacity to absorb material goods, we know that the biosphere has a finite carrying capacity. Some countries tax it in a way that is far out of proportion with their share in world population. Thus they create environment problems for others as well as for themselves.

Consequently, the world is today not only faced with the anomaly of under-development. We may also talk about overconsumptive types of development that violate the inner limits of man and the outer limits of nature. Seen in this perspective, we are all in need of a redefinition of our goals, of new development strategies, of new life styles, including more modest patterns of consumption among, the rich. Even though the first priority goes to securing the minima we shall be looking for those development strategies that also may help the affluent countries, in their enlightened self-interest, in finding more human patterns of life, less exploitative of nature, of others, of oneself.

3. Self-reliance

We believe that one basic strategy of development will have to be increased national self-reliance. It does not mean autarky. It implies mutual benefits from trade and co-operation and a fairer redistribution of resources satisfying the basic needs. It does mean self-confidence, reliance primarily on one's own resources, human and natural, and the capacity for autonomous goal-setting and decision-making. It excludes dependence on outside influenced and powers that can be converted into political pressure. It excludes exploitative trade patterns depriving countries of their natural resources for their own development. There is obviously a scope for a transfer of technology, but the thrust should be on adaptation and generation of local technology. It implies decentralization of the world economy, and sometimes of national economy to enhance the sense of personal participation. But it also implies international co-operation for collective self-reliance. Above all, it means trust in people and nations, reliance on the capacity of people themselves to invent and generate new resources and techniques to increase their capacity to absorb them to put them to socially beneficial use, to take a measure of command over the economy, and to generate their own way of life.

In this process education for full social awareness and participation will play a fundamental role and the extent to which this is compatible with present patterns of schooling will have to be explored.

To arrive at this condition of self reliance, fundamental, economic, social and political changes of the structure of society will often be necessary. Equally necessary is the development of an international system compatible with and capable of supporting moves towards self-reliance.

Self-reliance at national levels may also imply a temporary detachment from the present economic system; it is impossible to develop self-reliance through full participation in a system that perpetuates economic dependence. Large parts of the world of today consist of a centre

exploiting a vast periphery and also our common heritage, the biosphere. The ideal we need is a harmonized co-operative world in which each part is a centre, living at the expense of nobody else, in partnership with nature and in solidarity with future generations.

There is an international power structure that, will resist moves in this direction. Its methods are well known: the purposive maintenance of the built-in bias of the existing international market mechanisms, other forms of economic manipulation, withdrawing or withholding credits, embargoes, economic sanctions, subversive use of Intelligence agencies, repression including torture, counter-insurgency operations, even full-scale intervention. To those contemplating the use of such methods we say: "Hands-off. Leave countries to find their own road to a fuller life for their citizens". To those who are the - sometimes unwilling -tools of such designs - scholars, businessmen, police, soldiers and many others -we would say: 'refuse to be used for purposes of denying another nation the right to develop itself'. To the natural and social scientists, who help design the instruments of oppression we would say, 'the world needs your talents for constructive purposes, to develop new technologies that benefit man and do not harm the environment'.

4. Suggestions for action

We call on political leaders, governments, international organizations and the scientific community to use their imagination and resources to elaborate and start implementing, as soon as possible, programmes aimed at satisfying the basic needs of the poorest peoples all over the world, including, wherever appropriate, the distribution of goods in kind. These programmes should be designed in such a way as to ensure adequate conservation of resources and protection of the environment.

We consider that the above task could be made easier by instituting a new more co-operative and equitable international economic order.

We are aware that, the world system and the national policies cannot be changed overnight. The major changes which are required to answer the critical challenges facing mankind at this turning point of history need some time to mature. But they have to be started immediately, and acquire a growing impetus. The Special Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations on a New Economic Order has given the process a right start and we fully endorse it. This, however, in a very, preliminary step which should develop into a great tide of international activities.

The Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, proposed by the President of Mexico, Lic. Luis Echeverría, and now under discussion at the United Nations, would be a further important step in the right direction. We urge that it be adopted as early as possible.

In a framework of national sovereignty over natural resources, governments and international institutions should further the management of resources and environment on a global scale. The first aim would be to benefit those who need these resources most and to do so in accordance with the principle of solidarity with future generations.

We support the setting up of strong international régimes for the exploitation of common property resources that do not fall under any national jurisdiction. We especially emphasize the importance of the ocean floor and its subsoil, possibly also the water column above it. An oceans régime has to be established with all countries of the world represented, favouring none and discriminating against none, with jurisdiction over a maximum area of the oceans. Such a régime would gradually develop the type of resource-conserving and environmentally sound technology required to explore, develop, process and distribute ocean resources for the benefit of those who need them most.

The uses of international commons should be taxed for the benefit of the poorest strata of the poor countries. This would be a first step towards the establishment of an international taxation system aimed at providing automatic transfers of resources; to development assistance.

Together with the release of funds through disarmament, international taxation should eventually replace traditional assistance programmes. Pending the establishment of these new mechanisms, we strongly recommend that the flow of international resources to third world countries should be greatly increased and rigorously dedicated to basic needs of the poorest strata of society.

Science and technology must be responsive to the goals we are pursuing. Present research and development patterns do not effectively contribute to them. We call on universities, other institutions of higher learning, research organizations, scientific associations all over the world to reconsider their priorities. Mindful of the benefits deriving from free and basic research, we underline the fact that there is a reservoir of under-utilized creative energy in the whole scientific community of the world, and that it should be more focused on research for the satisfaction of fundamental needs. This research should be done as far as possible in the poor countries and thus help to reverse the brain-drain.

A rejuvenated United Nations system should be used to strengthen the local capabilities for research and technology assessment in the developing countries, to promote co-operation between them in these areas and support research in a better and more imaginative utilization of potentially abundant resources for the satisfaction of the fundamental needs of mankind.

At the same time, new approaches to development styles ought to be introduced at the national level. They call for imaginative research into alternative consumption patterns, technological styles, land-use strategies as well as the institutional framework and the educational requirements to sustain them. Resource-absorbing and waste creating over-consumption should be restrained while production of essentials for the poorest sections of the population is stepped up. Low waste and clean technologies should replace the environmentally disruptive one. More harmonious networks of human settlements could be evolved to avoid further congestion of metropolitan areas and marginalization of the countryside.

In many developing countries the new development styles would imply a much more rational use of the available labour-force to implement programmes aimed at the conservation of natural resources, enhancement of environment, creation of the necessary infrastructure and services to grow more food as well as the strengthening of domestic industrial capacity to turn out commodities satisfying basic needs.

On the assumption of a more equitable international economic order, some of the problems of resource maldistribution and space use could be taken care of by changing the industrial, geography of the world. Energy, resource and environmental considerations add new strength to the legitimate aspirations of the poor countries to see their share in world industrial production considerably increased.

Concrete experiments in the field are also necessary. We consider that the present efforts of the United Nations Environment Programme to design strategies and assist projects for ecologically sound socio-economic development (eco-development) at the local and regional level constitute an important contribution to this task. Conditions should be created for people to learn by themselves through practice how to make the best possible use of the specific resources of the ecosystem in which they live, how to design appropriate technologies, how to organize and educate themselves to this end.

We call on leaders of public opinion, on educators, on all interested bodies to contribute to an increased public awareness of both the origins and the severity of the critical situation facing mankind today. All people have the right to understand fully the nature of the system of which he is a part, as a producer, as a consumer, as one among the billions populating the earth. He has a right to know who benefits from the fruits of his work, who benefits from what he buys and sells, and the degree to which he enhances or degrades his planetary inheritance.

We call on governments to prepare themselves for action at the 1975 Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly so that the dimension and concepts of development are expanded, that the goals of development be given their rightful place in the United Nations

system and the necessary structural changes initiated. We affirm our belief that since the issues of development, environment and resource use are essentially global and concern the well-being of all mankind, governments should fully use the mechanisms of the United Nations for their resolution and that the United Nations system should be renewed and strengthened to be capable of its new responsibilities.

5. Epilogue

We recognize the threats to both the 'inner limits' of basic human needs and the 'outer limits' of the planet's physical resources. But we also believe that a new sense of respect for fundamental human rights and for the preservation of our planet is growing up behind the angry divisions and confrontations of our day.

We have faith in the future of mankind on this planet. We believe that ways of life and social systems can be evolved that are more Just, less arrogant in their material demands, more respectful on the whole planetary environment. The road forward does not lie through the despair of doom-watching nor through the easy optimism of successive technological fixes. It lies through a careful and dispassionate assessment of the 'outer limits', through co-operative search for ways to achieve the 'inner limits' of fundamental human rights, through the building of social structures to express those rights, and through all the patient work of devising techniques and styles of development which enhance and preserve our planetary inheritance.