

ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT ISSUES AND CONCERNS

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Readers
Service

Published March, 2014

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ISBN : 978-93-8262-48-9

**Published by
Tandrita Chanda for
Readers Service
59/5A, Garfa Main Road
Kolkata-700075**

**Cover Design by
Souvik Chatterjee**

**Composed & Setting at
Microprint Graphics
Kolkata-700009**

**Printed at
S.P Communication Pvt. Ltd.
Kolkata-700 009**

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Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development

Anuradha Banerjee

We all have a common dream - a world without poverty - a world that is equitable - a world that respects human rights - a world with increased and improved ethical behavior regarding poverty and natural resources - a world that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, and where economic growth is accomplished within the constraints of realising social objectives of poverty eradication and social equity and within the constraints of life support nature's carrying capacity, and a world where the challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and social inequity have been successfully addressed. This is an achievable dream, but the system is broken and our current pathway will not realise it.

Unfortunately, humanity's behavior remains utterly inappropriate for dealing with the potentially lethal fallout from a combination of increasingly rapid technological evolution matched with very slow ethical-social evolution. The human ability to do has vastly outstripped the ability to understand. As a result civilization is faced with a perfect storm of problems driven by overpopulation, overconsumption by the rich, the use of environmentally malign technologies, and gross inequalities. They include loss of the biodiversity that runs human life-support systems, climate disruption, global toxification, alteration of critical biogeochemical cycles, increasing probability of vast epidemics, and the specter of a civilization-destroying nuclear war. These biophysical problems are interacting tightly with human governance systems, institutions, and civil societies that are now inadequate to deal with them.

During the eighties and particularly after the Rio conference