

Interrelation between Poverty and Environment

by Fahmida Akter

REDUCTION of pollution is a compelling reason for economic development. Industrial growth and other economic activities in the developing countries, even if they do not take pollution control measures, can reduce poverty and, as such, reduce what is termed as poverty-related pollution.

While millions of people in the developed countries are enjoying a luxurious life, some one billion people are still suffering from abject poverty and struggling to survive. It has been estimated that most of the people to be born to the next generation will be in the poor families. Concern over increased poverty has been followed by an emphasis on economic growth. However, in the light of recent experience, when economic growth has always been associated with a number of negative effects, environmental degradation being the one, question may arise: What sort of growth should we look for. The obvious answer from the environmentalists is growth which takes into account the issue of sustainability.

What do we mean by sustainable development. It has been defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (also known as Brundtland Commission) as a "development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". Putting it differently, sustainable development means that per capita utility or well-being is increasing over time. This kind of development talks about environmental sustainability.

If we look into the poverty-environment linkage, we would find a two way relationship, since economic growth is accompanied by environmental degradation. Urbanization, industrialization and modernization of life style inextricably linked up with

do all these negative impacts bear, it hardly occurs to us that the first priority is to live in health. Such a feeling indicates that poor people are not responsible for polluting the environment. Some argue that they lack resources to degrade. Washing machines, television sets, refrigerators, automobiles are beyond their means, not only that, they also try to preserve their resources — both natural and material. Studies in some African countries show that the poor families do not sell trees even in their financial strains. But the fact is that there is no

other than in crowded squatter settlements and suffer from all kinds of pollution. Thus, poverty is both cause and effect of environmental degradation which calls for economic development. Many people argue that since the question of survival is important to the poor then why do we bother for the environment. Investment in the interest of protecting the environment might appear to be a worthy cause to the richer countries but a wastage to the developing countries. But the fact is that there is no

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environmental pollution. Urbanization means sky — scrapers, vehicles and all modern amenities — in other words, more consumption. Pollution of all kinds air, water and noise, risk of accidents, congestion, spread of slums are the outcome of this modern urban life. Industrialization also creates pollution and risks health. Increasing agricultural productivity by using various chemicals sometimes do not consider the environmental impact. Now whatever implications

On the other hand, this fact cannot be overruled that the poor depends more on natural resources and, therefore, to some extent are responsible for exhausting natural resources. Overuse of land degrades soil fertility, cutting forests for money of fuel creates environmental imbalance and emits carbon which helps in global warming in the long run, killing animals can create biodiversity problem. Poor families tend to have more children and cannot afford to live in a decent place

conflict between poverty alleviation and environmental improvement. Reduction of pollution is a compelling reason for economic development. Industrial growth and other economic activities in the developing countries, even if they do not take pollution control measures, can reduce poverty and, as such, reduce what is termed as poverty-related pollution. Economic activities taking into consideration environmental issues help the poor in several ways. Construction of

Cultural Tourism Threatens World Heritage Sites

by Sue Williams

SEA, sex and sun holidays are on the way out. Crowded, polluted beaches, AIDS and the threat of skin cancer are pushing tourists to seek exotic, adventurous vacations elsewhere.

The answer, according to many, is cultural tourism. To just as many others though, the idea is an anathema; a trend that will lay waste to the world's cultural and natural heritage.

The Convention takes the view that, since the listed property constitutes a world heritage, responsibility for its protection falls not only to the countries to which it "belongs," but also to the international community whose duty it is to help these countries in case of need. The

think it's time that the World Heritage Convention be brought up-to-date. The World Heritage Convention celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. "It provides the occasion for an assessment," says Michael Batisse, former Assistant Director-General of UNESCO

Is it possible to prohibit mining or drilling for oil in a national park in a poor country, or to protect a landscape if it has fertile soil underneath?

Hundreds of tourist buses arrive daily, choking access routes and aggravating pollution problems on the site.

Convention exerts its authority on both cultural and natural property. The Convention has already notched up numerous successes. In Australia, for example, the Federal Government blocked attempts by the Tasmanian State Government in the early 80s to build a major hydroelectric dam in the magnificent Franklin River wilderness area, using its obligations under the Convention as the basis of its legal argument.

for Science and today an advisor on environment. He was directly involved in the preparation and implementation of the Convention.

The air conditioning in these buses requires that they be left idling while waiting for their load of tourists, and their thick exhaust fumes had begun to seriously damage the carefully restored stones of the pyramid. The vehicles are now kept at a distance by a buffer zone around the site. The Borobudur pyramid is part of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention which states that cultural or natural heritage of outstanding interest need to be preserved for humanity as a whole. The World Heritage List includes 260 cultural, 84 natural and 14 cultural/natural sites in 81 countries. Some examples: the Taj Mahal and the Galapagos Island, the centre of Rome and Mount Kilimanjaro.

On another occasion, the Convention was used to persuade Egyptian authorities not to build a holiday village next to the pyramids. But the Convention also has its limits. "Monuments are blown up in civil conflicts, there are no funds for conservation work and no policy guidelines for governments or professional bodies," says Italy's ambassador to UNESCO, Michaelangelo Jacobucci. "We

What is its real significance? Is it a catalogue of sites that tourists feel they ought to visit or is it a list of sites in need of active protection? How far can the Convention force governments to protect sites on the list? Is it possible to prohibit mining or drilling for oil in a national park in a poor country, or to protect a landscape if it has fertile soil underneath? Mr Batisse concedes the Convention is working. Some 123 countries are party to the Convention and are continuing to propose the inclusion of new sites. "Though they are often tempted to look to the advantages of being listed rather than to the obligations, all of them are striving to follow the recommendations and meet the demands made on them by

Wildlife Trade Goes Underground

by Ramon Isberto

IN the old days, tourists could wander into the downtown 'wet' market of this southern Philippine city and buy a fascinating array of colourful wild birds — hanging parakeets, cockatoos and talking mynahs.

km ride to the central Philippine islands of Cebu or Panay, from where they are brought to Manila and eventually sent overseas.

Palawan is a major source since it is one of the few islands left with substantial forest cover. The riches of this island-province can also be found offshore, like the coral reefs that make up about 40 per cent of the country's total and contains about 400 of the 500 species known in the world.

These days, the stalls are bare. But the conservationists are not exactly overjoyed. The illegal trade in rare and endangered birds has simply gone underground, largely because of the increasing public outcry against the practice.

Tourists can still buy at the Puerto Princesa public market if they ask discreetly. This reporter asked, and was told to go to a dry goods store in the middle of the market being tended by a smiling, dark middle-aged man.

This natural treasure trove is being rapidly depleted. Over the past four years, for instance, many local fishermen have taken to using sodium cyanide to catch colourful tropical fish. They spray the deadly poison into coral reefs, stunning the fish, making it easy to catch them.

The wildlife trade here used to be quite brazen, says Joselito Alisua, who heads the provincial chapter of Haribon, a nationwide environmental group.

He said he could produce several of the jet-black talking mynahs from some unlicensed storage point in a jiffy. The price: about US\$ 30 for an untrained young bird and about US\$ 120 for a trained bird that can already talk.

They used to take the birds



to Manila by airplane," he adds. "And you could tell the Philippine Air Lines (PAL) flight had already arrived because the birds made a huge racket as they were brought to the airport in cages."

Manila," he said. Talking mynahs are a favourite because they make for great conversation pieces. They can be trained to talk through simple repetition of words. Technology has also helped. Explained the shopkeeper: "To save time, we just record the phrases we want the bird to learn and play the tape again and again."

But this practice slowly kills the corals and eventually kills the fish catch too. Such practices have turned the Philippines into one of the world's largest exporters of tropical fish. But a backlash is developing and major US buyers have stopped buying Philippine fish.

Buffer Zones, advance reservations, a change in school curricula so that busloads of students do not arrive on busy days, inner reserves which are off limits to tourists and height regulations for hotels are some of the ideas being tried with varying success at heritage sites around the world.

The Philippines is one of 11 countries worldwide that has signed the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), which proscribes trade in species considered rare or in danger of becoming extinct.

With financial help from Haribon, some of the fishermen have stopped cyanide fishing. Instead, they use conventional nets. Says Jose Medina, who heads a local fishermen's association: "It's harder. We catch much less. But at least we can keep going back to the area to catch more later on."

Things changed in 1989, when after months of lobbying, Haribon convinced PAL management to stop carrying wildlife cargo on their daily flights from Puerto Princesa, the capital city of Palawan province, some 600 kms south-west of Manila.

One such bird displayed in a cage (not for sale) at the market, amused passers-by by mouthing "you're ugly," or the first few words of the lyrics of the pop song "We Are the World."

Medina said more fishermen would probably give up cyanide fishing if they were given help so that they can switch to more environmentally friendly means of fishing. And if enforcement of laws against such practices were stricter.

Instead of travelling by aircraft, the birds — and the anteaters, the butterflies, the beetles, the orchids and other assorted items from Palawan's ecological treasury — now go by pump boat.

Illegal wildlife trading is rife in the Philippines partly because the country is so rich in exotic animals. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) lists 950 species and subspecies of birds, 230 species and subspecies of mammals, more than 240 species of reptiles

They are taken for a 300-

'Eco-Democracy' Campaign Links Street-Children and Arctic Seals

by Carlos Castillo

THE fate of street-children in poor countries is identical with the fate of arctic seals and with falling trees in the Amazon jungle, says Brazilian campaigner Herbert Jose de Souza, "because they are all victims of the same process."



HERBERT JOSE DE SOUZA: 'Eco-democracy' and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

The 56-year-old former underground leader is fighting that process through "eco-democracy", a concept that links environmental protection with community participation in decision-making processes.

not only to human relations but to dealing with Nature. For example, he says, much environmental destruction is due to undemocratic use of natural resources by governments and corporations.

His crusade took shape when he saw a film in which activists from the environmental pressure group Greenpeace embraced seals in a desperate attempt to protect them from hunters.

"I was frightened by the realisation that those boys and girls would only have any protection if they were considered as animals and be thus saved from killing by death squads."

It also stems from the view that the environment is a raw material to be exploited — an idea, he stresses, which must be buried.

He believes they must work together if they are to survive, and his efforts to achieve unity through eco-democracy have won him a place on the UN Environment Programme's "Global 500" roll of honour.

"I wondered what could happen if these brave eco-warriors could take the same stand towards the poor and abandoned street-children of Rio de Janeiro," he recalls.

"I was frightened by the realisation that those boys and girls would only have any protection if they were considered as animals and be thus saved from killing by death squads."

He has been married twice, and has two non-hemophilic sons. A sociologist, he is president of the Brazilian Interdisciplinary Association for AIDS Studies, and Ombudsman for the city of Rio.

His two brothers were also infected through the same route and died two years ago after much pain.

"I suddenly came to my mind that rescuing rational animals is as ecological as struggling for the life of irrational ones."

His ideas initially caused confusion between the Brazilian Left and the country's green movement, whose differences have been polarised by their respective approaches to next year's United Nations Conference on Environment

and Development in Rio de Janeiro. But now eco-democracy is catching on, and might even become the basis of a common platform of Brazilian non-government organisations (NGOs) at the huge unofficial meeting which will run parallel with the UN conference.

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The global debate about development, he says, is now tied

to the environment issue. The problem is that socialists and social-democrats argue that capitalist growth leads to concentration of wealth in a few hands and to social imbalance, but they lack solutions for the problems posed by environmental degradation.

"I have been living side by side with death since I was a child," he says. "The idea that today could be my last day does not hurt me anymore."

The Village that Lives in Harmony with its Birds

by A J Singh

UNBELIEVABLE but true. And the phenomenon has been there as long as the villagers can remember.

The attitude of the villagers is summed up by Kullegowda, a village elder: "They're like our children. And like children, they make a lot of noise. But that's okay. We're comfortable with it."

Until the 1980s, no one had heard about this bird-natural phenomenon. When a natural-

ist reported it in a newspaper hundreds of birdwatchers and photographers began to make for the village from December to May. The villagers are watchful. Anyone trying to scare the birds, or a photographer using a flash, is warned off.

Wild spotted pelicans, gray pelicans, painted storks and others in thousands — all large birds — trust the villagers of Kokkare Bellur, in southern Karnataka, as nowhere else in the world.

Each December thousands of pelicans and storks descend on the village of Kokkare Bellur in southern India. They build nests in the trees in the midst of the village, lay eggs and rear their young. The villagers feel the birds are part of the community and treat them well. Gemini News Service reports on a unique phenomenon of cooperation that goes back generations.

Strangely, the birds do not catch fish from the village canals, nor do they harm the crops. Instead, they fly out and catch fish from a nearby river. When this river dries up in May they fly to Ranganattitu bird sanctuary, 40 km away, for fish.

And although they make the tedious trip to feed themselves and their offspring, the storks and pelicans do not nest in the sanctuary," says naturalist Joginder Chawla. No one except the birds themselves can supply the reason.

They do not nest on trees outside the village," says naturalist Ran Singh. One elderly resident adds: "We don't know where they come from in December and fly away to in June, but we live together and like it that way."

The 2,500 villagers of Kokkare Bellur, 80 km from the state capital, Bangalore, live happily with the constant clacking of beaks, fluttering of wings and screeching of birds.

The village derives its name from one of the birds which comes to nest. Kokkare in local Kannada language means storks.

The farmers benefit. The bird's droppings yield rich fertiliser, better than what is available in the market.

A resident says: "These birds must have some system of passing on information about our village being a safe haven for them from generation to generation. Otherwise how come they return only to our village year after year?"

The villagers never disturb the birds. "During the nesting season, no one climbs the trees the birds live on, or uses their wood," says a village youth.

Many of these birds — for instance, the spotted pelican — are on the endangered species list. The pelican now exists only in India and Sri Lanka.

The Karnataka government declared Kokkare Bellur a "bird centre" in the 1980s.

"Instead of giving up hope, I decided, a long time ago, to consider all my remaining living days as a sort of grace period, an extra time to do whatever I can".

The birds are considered a property of the community. A man appointed by the forestry department to keep watch on the birds says he has never seen anyone troubling them.

Each year the arrival of the birds is eagerly awaited. When they land it is considered a good omen. When they did not come in the 1960s the village suffered from drought.

This year the people were jubilant as more than 2,000 storks, 500 pelicans and other big birds came home to roost.

Once more people and the birds began living together in harmony, bringing fortune and joy to each other. Sounds too good to be true. But true it is.

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