

Sustainable development: Widening gap between North and South

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THE ever-widening gap and disparity between the developed North and developing Southern countries was quite evident at the second session of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held at New York from January 28 to February 8, 2002. The Northern countries dominated the global negotiations held at UN Headquarters. The voice of the developing Southern countries were at times divided and at times unarticulated. In the absence of strong and articulated leadership, Southern countries failed to match their government and non-government counterparts. What was interesting, in the multi-stakeholder dialogue also, representatives of nine different groups were also dominated by the developed countries. Representation of the affluent countries was strong and large. Because of lack of resources, support and smartness, participation of the developing countries was quite weak and small.

At the two-week PrepCom II some of the structural weaknesses of the global negotiation were exposed. The achievements of the forthcoming PrepCom III in late March in New York will depend on how best the secretariat can ensure the adequate participation and quality of the representatives of Southern countries. Can countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, China, South Africa, Brazil, India, Pakistan and Egypt within Group-77 come up with a more concrete set of proposals and means of implementation to help achieve sustainable development by improving the quality of life in the Southern countries, some of which are the pockets of endemic poverty, hunger, illiteracy and backwardness?

The goal of the forthcoming WSSD in Johannesburg is to conduct a review of Agenda 21 and its implementation, with one of the key outputs being a 'concise and focused document that emphasizes the need for a global partnership and integrated and strategically focused approach to the implementation of Agenda 21, addresses the main challenges and opportunities faced by the international community, and reinvigorates at the highest level, global commitment to a North-South partnership, a higher level of international solidarity, accelerated implementation of Agenda 21 and promotion of sustainable development.'

The primary objective of PrepCom II was also to prepare a document that could provide the basis for negotiation and lead to realization of such an output by the time of the Summit. Did PrepCom II rise to the occasion? Representatives of developed countries, be government or stakeholder groups, were more or less happy about the outcome of the process so far. But, representatives of the Southern countries, especially the handful of chosen NGOs were clearly unhappy.

The applause PrepCom Chair Dr. Emil Salim of Indonesia received upon presentation of the Chairman's Paper, the affirmative comments from regional groups that

this Paper will provide a 'good basis' for negotiation during PrepCom III, and the Commission's approval for its transmission to the subsequent PrepCom for negotiation suggest that PrepCom II did indeed achieve some its objectives. One enthused delegate even suggested that the document was 'more than we deserve.' A surprised Bureau Member, Ositadinma Anaedu, commending the Chair, quipped, 'I did not believe Mr. Chairman, you could produce such a document in such a time....' But some of the Southern delegates were not that happy.

All agreed that while the Chairman's Paper was well-received, its development was challenging at best. With the exception of poverty, there was very little consensus among delegations, the regional preparatory meetings and the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues about the priority issues to be addressed in Johannesburg. Narrowing down these many diver-

gent governance for the G-77/China; oceans and a separate section on the SIDS for AOSIS; poverty, partnerships and voluntary outcomes for the EU; domestic governance, markets and voluntary outcomes for JUSCANZ; and, for Saudi Arabia, the subjugation of energy into a broader theme. However, the ability to maintain a balance between adhering to the often-heard mantra that 'we're not renegotiating Agenda 21' and temptation to generate many new issues, as well as the ability to convert what Hungary observed was still a 'wish-list' into concrete, time-bound action-oriented proposals, are likely to be key challenges at PrepCom III.

The expectation of Summit participation and commitment at the highest level begs this key question: Are Heads of State and Government actually willing to put their political clout behind the Johannesburg goals and ensure the Summit's success? It appears that

meeting can count among its achievements a meaningful dialogue among Major Groups and government delegations though dominated by the North. There was also progress made on rallying support for partnerships and outputs that could result in voluntary initiatives. However, the most remarkable success of the PrepCom is having fulfilled its simple but challenging mandate of producing the Chairman's Paper, and in doing so, providing the structure of what is expected to be one of the most important outcomes of Johannesburg.

However, participants in the WSSD process must not rest on their laurels: there is still much to be accomplished prior to and after PrepCom III. Better coordination is needed in group positions, in particular the G-77/China, to ensure a clear voice in future deliberations. Participants need to vigilantly track the evolution and development of the binding and voluntary Summit outcomes. Delegations are likely to jockey on these outcomes to ensure their negotiating objectives are inserted into the outcomes that best reflect their national interests. Some participants expressed concern that both past commitments and new proposals - such as those on provision of financial resources, creation of enabling domestic environments and corporate responsibility - may be moved into voluntary outcomes, when many feel it is imperative that these be negotiated as binding agreements. Real participation of the Southern countries and groups should be ensured at any cost to make the WSSD most successful one.

While it makes sense that the final decisions of political leaders to attend the WSSD will wait until there is a clearer sign of the nature of the documents to be adopted and the process shows signs of success, there is a psychological dimension. Once Heads of State commit, delegations will be more likely to buckle down and engage in serious negotiations in order to reach consensus.

gent priorities to just a few agreed ones was viewed by some as an overwhelming task. By the end of the first week of the session, it was still unclear, even to the Bureau, how to go about preparing this draft.

During the second week there was enough criticism to go around. The G-77/China was criticized for its lack of cohesion, which led to holding one informal Interactive Discussion instead of the two parallel ones as initially planned, which further complicated the process of text development. Several delegates also lamented that the Secretariat had too much control in the actual writing of the Chairman's Paper. Despite their presence, there was neither direct involvement of the Regional Commissions that had facilitated regional preparatory processes nor of other UN family members with the requisite issue expertise. Some complained that some of the ideas that emerged during the Multi-Stakeholder Dialogues, such as youth and women, were not reflected in the Chairman's Paper. Media was not represented as a stakeholder group. After growing demand of the delegates, the secretariat organised a panel discussion on the role of media to achieve sustainable development. But that very few chosen media representatives were also mostly from the developed countries. Southern media were not represented.

However, some participants agreed in the end that the process of making 'order out of chaos' was efficient. Chair Salim and his Bureau and the Secretariat succeeded in producing a paper that enjoys broad support. The Paper's initial success lies in its reflection of the key issues of interest to the various regions: poverty, means of implementation, consumption patterns and sustainable develop-

ment. The G-77/China and some others voiced strong objections, noting that domestic governance is a matter of national jurisdiction and that only the global and regional aspects of governance should be discussed. Caustic remarks were made in the closing Plenary, that if the North wants to monitor national practices, they should turn the monitoring lens on themselves and apply similar standards.

Yes, there are several subtexts in the governance issue. Unlike the IEG, with UNEP and multilateral environmental agreements at its core, there is no comparable governance structure for sustainable development, except the CSD itself, which is regarded as ineffective. Many issues have to be considered in this context including, ongoing institutional reform at the UN, inter-agency relations, the missing link to financial institutions, the emerging role and possible input mechanism for Major Groups and other stakeholders, the role of ECOSOC, the mandate and authority of the CSD, and the various turf wars about the future shape and responsibilities of CSD and UNEP. Numerous concrete proposals for strengthening SDG were made at PrepCom II, but it remains to be seen how governments choose to act upon them. An inter-sessional informal consultation on SDG is expected to be held at the end of February to help Co-Chairs Göran-Engfeldt and Anaedu prepare a discussion paper for consideration at PrepCom III. Given the amount of time it has taken UNEP to advance IEG, it is questionable how comprehensive the Committee can address SDG in the remaining six months.

Some optimists say, participants can return to their capitals and missions with reports of veritable successes from PrepCom II. The

most countries are biding their time until at least PrepCom IV in Jakarta to decide whether their Heads of State or Government will attend. While it makes sense that the final decisions of political leaders to attend the WSSD will wait until there is a clearer sign of the nature of the documents to be adopted and the process shows signs of success, there is a psychological dimension. Once Heads of State commit, delegations will be more likely to buckle down and engage in serious negotiations in order to reach consensus.

True, there is a growing feeling of summit fatigue. At least three large conferences this year, including the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey in March, which is drawing media attention and government commitment, as well as the World Food Summit in June (and even an Ecotourism Summit in May), countries are already feeling this 'summit fatigue.' Also, the Summit's timing - in the midst of an economic downturn with regressive environmental policies almost everywhere, and with world attention focused on security, international instability and brewing and new conflicts - does not bode well for political support and high-level attendance. On the top of it, lack of public and media attention is not helping to raise the Summit's profile. As the media panel compellingly articulated, the role of the media in stimulating public support for the Summit and pressure for leaders to attend cannot be overemphasized.

Against this backdrop, Jan Pronk, the Secretary-General's Special Envoy to the WSSD, is working hard to commandeer support and this summer, Sweden and Brazil, hosts of the 1972 and 1992 Summits, with South Africa, will make a collective appeal to

meeting can count among its achievements a meaningful dialogue among Major Groups and government delegations though dominated by the North. There was also progress made on rallying support for partnerships and outputs that could result in voluntary initiatives. However, the most remarkable success of the PrepCom is having fulfilled its simple but challenging mandate of producing the Chairman's Paper, and in doing so, providing the structure of what is expected to be one of the most important outcomes of Johannesburg.

All said and done, it is incumbent upon all delegations - governments, UN agencies and Major Groups alike - to make certain that they live up to the challenge of providing an outcome that is relevant, substantive, forward-looking and with action-oriented and time-bound targets. In the words of Chair Dr. Emil Salim, 'Facing a turbulent world, we must be successful in drawing the map for a journey of hope to reach the goal of a world without poverty.' Dr. Salim was a member of the Indonesian dream team. Can he realise his dream of sustainable development across the developing Southern countries? Can WSSD Secretary General Nitin Desai ensure the participation of the Southern countries at the highest level? Can he ensure adequate participation of Southern multi-stakeholder groups to help chart a sustainable future at Johannesburg summit? Can we ensure the participation of Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and other leaders of the developing countries. How the Southern countries will raise their negotiation skills, capacities and qualities of participation? The United Nations should look back in that direction.

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Musharraf banks on Japanese assistance

Japan is likely to back America's new strategic ally-- Pakistan

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PAKISTANI President Parvez Musharraf is scheduled to arrive Tokyo this afternoon on a four-day official visit. During his stay in Japan, President Musharraf will make a state call on the Emperor and Empress of Japan, and will also hold a meeting with Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. It should be mentioned that President Musharraf earlier expressed his desire to make an official visit to Japan during an interview he gave to Japan's public broadcasting corporation, NHK, towards the end of January and subsequently the Japanese government decided to invite the leader of the important US ally in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan.

The new Afghan crisis emerging after the September 11 incidents in the United States has turned the military leader of Pakistan from a near pariah military dictator into a political figure everyone willing to have dialogue with. For Pakistani leadership this reversal of fortune came as a blessing as the country was on the verge of severe economic crisis unless assurances of new financial assistance from international financial institutions and other bilateral sources were forthcoming. President Musharraf,

since then, has carefully and methodically exploited all new possible options arising from Pakistan's changed political standing and was successful in getting commitments of vital assistance for his country from different funding sources. His current Japan visit is also a part of that careful calculation that Pakistan is willing to exploit to its full advantage. The visit is being realized at a time when the administration is facing increasing pressure at home to prove the rationale of country's political turn around by improving the economy and standard of living of the people. President Musharraf's Japan visit, as a result, is seen by observers as an attempt to ensure Japanese financial assistance for Pakistan's troubled economy.

During the meeting between two leaders, issues like situation in Afghanistan and international effort to help rebuilding the country, as well as global fight against terrorism are to be covered in detail. The president of Pakistan will also be discussing ways and means to strengthen and consolidate bilateral tie with Japan, which this year marks its fiftieth anniversary.

Japan had imposed economic sanctions on India and Pakistan after both countries carried out nuclear tests in May 1998. The sanctions were lifted after Pakistan

joined US-led international coalition against terrorism following the September 11 attacks. Since then Japan has offered \$300 million in grant aid to Pakistan for over a period of two years and new assistance are also being considered. But Tokyo has not resumed what for years have been annual yen loan packages. President Musharraf would definitely like to see a resumption of such packages as well as assistance in other areas too.

Resumption of Japanese yen loan to Pakistan now seems to be only a matter of time and Prime Minister Koizumi would be happy to offer such assistance to America's new strategic ally. What other big commitments Japan will be offering remains doubtful as long as Japanese economy shows no signs of improvement. But at the same time, whatever Japan is to offer is presumed to come with certain mild form of preconditions attached to such packages. Tokyo would definitely like to get some kind of a commitment from Islamabad concerning country's possible signing of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), as well as a timely return to civilian rule. It will be interesting to note Pakistani response to such Japanese desires.