Need for integration between local and global environment facilities

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The recently concluded first General Assembly of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) was, as usual, a jumbo meeting. The reason is that environment today encompasses almost everything under the sun; name an aspect of human endeavour, it is included under environment, because there are environmental impacts associated with all development. A series of workshops and other events were held. I participated in the meeting organized by the Ministry of Environment and Forests on the efforts made by India towards sustaining development. The Secretary, Vishwanath Anand, made a detailed presentation followed by discussion. I also attended a very erudite and thought-provoking Coromendal Lecture by Sir Chrispen Tickell: the person credited with 'greening' of Ms Margaret Thatcher when she was the Prime Minister of UK.

The general impression gathered was that GEF Assembly ignored the ground realities, and the relationship between global and local issues took a back seat. The root cause of most global issues can be traced to unsustainable development at the local level. Furthermore, it is a continuum from local, provincial, regional and national to global issues. In the ultimate analysis it is a two-way traffic all the time: from local to global and vice versa. For instance, ozone depletion can be traced to one of its root causes: the use of CFCs in the refrigeration that is found in every household in cities and towns. This issue was considered only in the global context. But the importance and the role of the Local Environmental Facility (LEF) cannot be ignored.

Environment is inherently a holistic subject. Name any area of human activity, it has some impact on environment. Today we legitimize environmental action by prefixing eco- before a particular action. The result is that there may be well over two hundred new compound words coined during the last few years, all prefixed by eco- (short form of ecology or ecological). However, one was dismayed to find that, GEF did not consider the role and importance of the time-tested local technical knowledge, perhaps because it has become fashionable to talk of global issues rather than local ones, although the reality is that as pointed out above there is a continuum between the two. By and large, most of our issues emanate from local human actions.

The basic problem is that the priorities in all such jumbo meetings are set by the West, and developing countries have literally no role. The former follow their agenda very aggressively, and developing countries become followers and not leaders. Anything that does not fit in the scheme of things does not really exist for industrial countries. This has also been true throughout the human history. For instance, there is a major difference between the environmental perceptions of Amer-Indians (the real Americans) and the Euro-Americans who drove the former to near extinction and colonized the Americas. The civilizations of Amer-Indians in North, Central and South Americas were decimated. Even so, the environmental perception of Amer-Indians is still relevant as is clear from the sayings of Chief Seattle. There is an element of universality about what he has said.

Similarly, a country like India has a rich heritage of tribals, *adivasis*, ecosystems people and host of other rural communities living in over 576,000 villages. There are many indigenous technologies available at the level of villages. No doubt over the years some chaff has collected round such technologies. Bereft of this, these technologies are time tested and need refinement and replication on wider scale. These need to be given respectability that they deserve. Regrettably, the developing world has not been able to do this because it is weak-kneed and divided. The result is that it is taken for granted. The recent cases of patenting turmeric and *basmati* are leads to the shape of things to come.

Most of the modern technologies are polluting and wasteful to varying degrees, while the indigenous technologies are not so. Some important cases are listed in a thought-provoking book *Dying Wisdom* published by the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi. The specific examples pertain to sustainable and unsustainable water use. Following local technical knowledge, water availability can be ensured in desertic conditions in Rajasthan during the hot and arid months, while water scarcity is the order of the day in the warmer period in Chirrapunji which at one time was regarded as the wettest place on the surface of earth. Is it not enigmatic?

While one should not be averse to global thought *per se*, it should not be at the expense of our own time-tested knowledge and technologies in the villages. We have 10,000 years of experience behind us, while history of America in its present form is only a few hundred years. Following their developmental regime, they have spoilt not only their land and other environmental assets, but also those of a number of developing countries on account of their resource-guzzling developmental patterns. Now they are poised to do the same to moon and Mars from where they could also target at any country which is opposed to such a course of action. If only we could establish a method of estimating environmental damage on the basis of per capita, per unit of space, and per unit of historical time, Indians will be at the top (with most minimal values) while industrial countries at the rock bottom with maximum values. The reason is that there is an underlying serious and fundamental attitudinal and ethical difference. The Indians revere nature, regard it as partner and intrinsically aim to live in harmony with it; but western attitude is one of arrogance, thinking themselves to be co-creators and the result is conflict with nature. Humankind according to western thought is the sovereign monarch and supreme power. But Indians regard human being a constitutionally integral partner with nature. The western thought is for subjugation of nature for the benefit of human being, while Indian thought is partnership with and respect for nature, because if tampered beyond a limit, it takes its toll and there follows total annihilation of nature. The Indians have faulted on account of western influence. All these aspects have to be understood in their proper perspective.

Reverting to local technologies, which

are time-tested, normally should lead to environmental harmony, economic efficiency, resource conservation, local self-reliance, and equity with social justice. They also have a cultural relevance. There are several places in India where outstanding work has been done in this direction. There are a number of success stories based on the foregoing basic premises. We Indians believe in connectivity between local, regional, national and global dimensions in both directions. Therefore, we would like to be concerned about global issues because all these have their roots in the local issues. Corrective measures at the local level can affect favourably what today have become global issues. This connectivity has to be appreciated, strengthened and established firmly. Therefore GEF and LEF have to be interrelated, interconnected and interdependent.

The GEF has to be an extension of LEF, and a good part of GEF funds must go to the refinement and replication of LEF. If done in a proper manner, development emanating from such a basic premise would meet the acid test of Gandhian development, which is inherently sustainable. Gandhiji said: 'Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it?' This has very wide implications. The test is accepted by all right-thinking people. If we follow this lead, our Planet would indeed become worth living.

Furthermore, India is not Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai or Calcutta, and it is also not in the air-conditioned rooms of these cities, but it is in the dust, din and dirt of villages; 'If villages perish, India perishes', so said the Father of the Nation. If we accept this premise, only then there would follow what J. C. Kumarappa (Gandhiji's dutiful follower) called as *Economy of Permanence*. In turn it would lead to a transition from eco-unfriendly and consumptive, to ecofriendly and conservation technologies. At the world scene, in future there is going to be more money in evolving, selling and using conservation rather than consumptive technologies. The former would also lead to ecolabelling of products. In turn there would follow a transition from ecologically-insensitive to ecologically-sensitive economy. It will also mean proper evaluation of natural resources. At present, clean air and water, fertile land, dense forests and abundant biodiversity have no price tag and are free-for-all which is not good for sustainability. We must also strengthen microenterprises and establish proper benefit-sharing processes. Lastly, unless we work towards the benefit of the weakest (*antodaya*), we cannot expect benefit for all (*sarvodaya*). A *Sarvodaya Society* would be the most ideal sustainable society with its roots in our history, culture, religion and philosophy. It is such a thinking that holds hope for the teaming millions in India and the developing world.

Let us all remember that primarily it is the industrial world and the rich in the developing world who have ruined the world on account of their unlimited greed and appetite for resources. This has made the world most unsafe for all life. Theirs is the prime responsibility to change. This is the only vision of hope for the future.

Conclusions

There are major local problems confronting India and the developing world on the one side, and GEF as sponsored by the industrial countries on the other. There is also a schism in the perception between the two worlds. The former feel, and rightly so, that agenda should be local while the latter feel it should be global. The latter conveniently forget the connectivity between the two. Even the present Prime Minister of India felt that ensuring supply of clean drinking water and energy for sustainable development for each Indian village was a priority. Therefore, a major challenge before us is to bridge this schism between the local and global agendas. India must be clear about priorities and then prepare a proper strategy. For instance, renewable energy has been in the news for over three decades, but does Planning Commission give this area due importance even when a full-fledged ministry is looking after this area? We are told that the 9th Plan Document on Power Sector does not mention renewables even by default! If true, it is indeed sad. There is an urgent need for clarity of our thought and vision, and then translate these into action. It is deep thinking and hard work all through with no short cuts in between.

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