

# Consideration of the Environment Essential for Sustainable Development



Sweden has undertaken to work for sustainable development and the Swedish Parliament has laid down that Swedish international development cooperation shall contribute to the sustainable use of natural resources and protection of the environment. This has made a deep impression on Sida's work.

Effects on the environment have a great influence on economic and social development. It is not possible to dismiss the environmental issue as a "luxury problem". Real development and poverty reduction can only be achieved if measures are also taken to safeguard natural resources and the environment.

However, the "environment" is not a special area that can be kept separate and left in the hands of experts. The environment is intimately linked to other aspects of development. Sida tries to meet the challenge of sustainable development with the aid of a holistic perspective.

## The environment and poverty

In developing countries, poverty is often exacerbated by the environmental pollution. Sometimes poverty leads to the destruction of the environment since poor people are forced to use natural resources in an unsustainable manner in order to survive.

The poor have – by definition – few resources and are therefore particularly dependent on the natural resources in their immediate surroundings. If, for example, clean water is available, it is possible to fish, and there is firewood and grazing land, even those born without possessions have a better chance of making a livelihood. But, if these resources are impoverished, the poor suffer severely.

As far as can be judged, poor people are also severely affected by global environmental problems, particularly the global climate changes that are the consequence of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. It is highly

probable, even if it has not been proved conclusively, that the increasing frequency of extreme weather conditions, such as hurricanes and torrential rain, is due to climate changes.

When the climate grows warmer, the sea level will probably rise and the poor will be those affected most severely since they do not have the resources to meet the changes. For example, it has been estimated that, if the sea level rose by one metre, 70 million people in Bangladesh would be forced to leave their homes.

Poverty is more than a lack of income. According to a survey made by the World Bank, the views on poverty held by poor people emphasise lack of respect, lack of the possibility to develop and a vulnerable living situation as some of their heaviest burdens. Eighty per cent of the respondents stated that access to water was the most important matter to them after income, while 40 per cent of the respondents spontaneously pointed out drought, floods, lack of firewood, pollution and soil erosion as severe problems.

In agrarian communities, typical links between poverty and the environment are overgrazing and the over-exploitation of vulnerable and limited natural resources. In order to survive at all, poor people are forced to exploit the resources available to them and, as the resources shrink, new resources must be exploited. A vicious circle is created.

## The environment and human rights

Today, it is quite clear that balance in the environment is essential for the fulfilment of human rights. The right to life and personal security, and the right to enough food to ensure health and well-being, were taken up in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. These rights can scarcely be fulfilled without protecting the environment.

If the destruction of a mangrove swamp has the result that the local community is unable to

### Greater poverty after Mitch

The hurricane Mitch, which swept over Central America in the autumn of 1998, claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people and left a million people homeless. The combination of poverty, social injustice and destruction of the environment contributed to its devastating effects.

fish and consequently suffer from malnutrition, these people's human rights can be considered violated.

But strong human rights are also essential to enable the environment to be protected and natural resources to be conserved.

The relationship between the environment and human rights is forcefully reflected in Agenda 21, one of the final documents from the UN Conference on the Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The broad approach in Agenda 21 implies that the right to life and personal security, protection before the law, democratic governance and freedom of opinion and expression are regarded as being just as intimately associated with the environment as the right to food, health, a reasonable standard of living, favourable working conditions and education.

It is easier to prevent planned violations of the environment in communities where the people have considerable freedom to exercise their political and civil rights. Poor people in particular, who are greatly dependent on the sustainable use of natural resources, would be helped if they could exercise their rights with greater vigour than they do today.

### **Destruction of the environment, living conditions and conflicts**

It is said that poverty can constitute a breeding ground for conflicts within, and between, nations. However, an in-depth analysis indicates that it is not poverty as such, but rather a rapid deterioration in their living conditions that makes people receptive to ideas of solving problems with the aid of violence, and persuade young men to join armies or gangs in order to kill or rob.

When many people lose their livelihoods, or are not given a chance to earn a living, the stability of society is threatened and there is a greater risk of violent conflicts.

More than half the world's population support themselves by farming, which thus has a key role where people's livelihoods are concerned.

However, farming as a means of making a living can fail for different reasons. When the population grows, there is perhaps not enough land to cultivate. Farming land can also be impoverished by environmental factors and access to land can be unevenly distributed.

In Rwanda, towards the end of the 1980s, farming collapsed through a combination of all these three reasons. People suffered from famine and large numbers of people lost their livelihoods. In combination with the inability of the government to solve the crisis, this was the origin of the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990s.

Many conflicts are described in terms of ethnic conflicts (Kosovo) or conflicts over natural resources (Sierra Leone). But if the armies of young men and boys who have been deprived of their hopes of a "normal" life did not exist, people with different ethnic backgrounds would be able to continue to live side by side, and power-hungry élites would have to find other methods than violence to realise their ambitions.

In order to curb conflicts in the future, it is of decisive importance that livelihoods can be created and maintained. This makes it essential that environmental and natural resources are maintained at a level that can secure the livelihoods of people in a long-term perspective.

### **The environment and health**

Poor people are those who are most severely affected by the destruction of the environment through air pollution, water pollution and the risk of vermin and diseases, since it is not possi-

Almost sixty per cent of Sida's development cooperation funds are allocated to activities that have the environment as a principal objective or significant objective. Below some examples are given that can illustrate Sida's policy for sustainable development:

- Independent environmental organisations in the South receive financial support from Sida, for example via the Swedish Society for the Conservation of Nature and the WWF. This extends contacts between active members of environmental organisations in the North and South.

- In Vietnam, Sida has supported the production of a national environmental policy and is supporting the development of the new environmental authority which is needed in view of the growing pressure on the environment from tourism, industry and fishing.

- Sida has contributed to financing wastewater treatment plants in Lithuania and has also supported the modernisation of local water companies with the aim of long-term sustain-

ble for them to protect themselves or find a more secure environment to live in.

If people's homes and their immediate surroundings are included as part of the environment, poor sanitary conditions and air pollution from fireplaces constitute considerable environment-related health hazards. Overcrowded living conditions, lack of clean water and sub-standard toilet systems result in infections being spread from human faeces to drinking water and food.

Shortcomings in methods for the disposal of solid waste also imply a threat to health since rats, cockroaches and flies flourish and can spread infections.

The incidence of malaria and other diseases spread by hosts are affected by prevailing environmental conditions such as water pollution and climate changes. It has been estimated that the global temperature will rise between three and five degrees (by 2100). This will have the effect that malaria will spread to areas that are not affected today and it is assumed that 60 per cent of the world's population will be exposed to malaria, as opposed to 45 per cent today.

Starvation or malnutrition resulting from the impoverishment of farming land is one of many poverty-related health problems which, in part, have an environmental background.

When the mangrove forests are cut down in order to make way for shrimp farms for export purposes, it is no longer possible for the local people to fish, and this has serious consequences for their nutritional intake. In Asia alone, over one billion people are dependent on fish and other marine animals in the coastal zone as their primary source of protein.

Drought, torrential rain and other environmental disasters which force people to leave their homes lead to severe hardship in the form of malnutrition, infectious epidemics and mental illness.

## Economic growth and the environment

Economic growth is desirable since it enables poor people to increase their incomes. But can the environment accept more growth?

What is of decisive importance is the type of economic growth and the type of stress on the environment and depletion of natural resources. This determines the relationship between growth and the environment, and is far from simple and clear-cut.

Traditional economic analyses have failed to put a value on growth and its dependence on the natural environment and the ecological services that nature provides. Examples of services of this kind are the cleaning by nature of air and water, biological production of everything from forests to fish, and the conservation of biological diversity.

An increase in GDP is often equated with economic growth, but an in-depth analysis shows that GDP can increase even when the national income is decreasing, i.e. growth is negative. This can occur when production takes place at the cost of consumption of capital – either traditional capital in the form of property and plant, or natural capital, for example in the form of forests and farming land.

Thirty years ago, warnings were given that finite natural assets such as metals and oil would soon be depleted. But this prophecy came to nothing since the market adjusts to expected shortages in various ways.

Ironically, it is the so-called “renewable” resources that are increasingly under threat. One of the reasons for this is that an increase in demand, for example for natural water treatment or absorption of carbon dioxide, is not met by rising prices – or not by any price at all, since the resources are not owned by anyone.

able management of the water resources.

- Well-informed reports on environmental issues in the media can contribute to creating understanding that popular participation is essential in order to protect the environment. Makerere University in Uganda is one of many educational establishments that receive support from Sida with the aim of strengthening good and knowledgeable journalism on the environment.
- In Tanzania, Sida is supporting an extensive rural development programme.

By supporting the rights of farmers to own land, and by improving methods to till the soil, crop production has increased while deforestation and the impoverishment of land from grazing has decreased.

- Each year, many persons are given training in the environment and sustainability through Sida's international training programmes. Certain courses focus specifically on the environmental while, in courses with another focus, aspects of the environment are integrated in the training programme.

Many of the renewable resources are sensitive to exploitation and, if economic growth increases the pressure on them, economic controls can be introduced to reduce demand for the most vulnerable resources.

### **This is what Sida does for sustainable development**

Sida's point of departure is that each country is responsible for its own environment and natural resources and that development cooperation should be based on the needs of Sida's partners in cooperation. Therefore, Sida attaches great importance to strengthening and developing the capacity of partner countries to analyse and take action to solve their environmental problems.

At Sida we have the ambition to ensure that consideration of the environment shall be included as a self-evident component in all strategies, all discussions with partners in cooperation, and all decisions. We endeavour to spread understanding that, if the environment is taken into consideration, development will be sustainable and thereby successful. All members of staff at Sida shall understand the importance of this and ensure that aspects of the environment are taken into consideration from the outset and throughout all activities.

Sida's environmental management system is a tool that is intended to enable environmental

thinking to permeate the entire organisation. It provides guidance for the integration of aspects of the environment in policies for all sectors – for example education, health and energy – and it contains a plan of action that concerns all parts of Sida and which is updated at regular intervals.

Sida uses a number of methods to integrate consideration of the environment in all activities in order to analyse relationships and to follow-up results on the completion of projects. Some of these methods are:

- strategic environmental analyses at country level\* (overall assessments of pre-requisites for the country in question to achieve sustainable development)
- environmental analyses at sector level\*
- environmental impact assessments prior to each project as a part of the decision-making process\*
- special indicators for the analysis and follow-up the outcome of contributions,
- environmental economics analyses that clarify the economic benefits and costs of positive and negative environmental effects.

Sida's staff undergo continuous training with the intention that consideration of the environment permeates the entire organisation.

\* made with the aid of written guidelines and with access to expertise.

#### **Read more in the following reports**

(all of which contain extensive lists of references)

Abiri, E., The Environment and Human Rights – Links and Conflicts, Sida, 2001.

Environment, Development & Conflict (newsletter), [www.padrigu.gu.se/EDCNews](http://www.padrigu.gu.se/EDCNews)

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Ohlsson, L., Livelihood Conflicts: Linking poverty and environment as causes of conflict, Sida, 2002.

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Sustainable Development Update (newsletter), [www.albaeco.com/sdu/newsletter.htm](http://www.albaeco.com/sdu/newsletter.htm)

Reports published by Sida are available at [www.sida.se](http://www.sida.se)



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