7

The scope for North–South co-operation

Colin Sage

7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the evolution and development of North–South relations in the context of the emergence and increasing importance attached to international environmental policy making. Its underlying argument is that the root causes of environmental change and resource degradation are to be found in the process of *globalisation*, which is especially influencing patterns of development in countries of the South. By 'South' I mean the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America while the 'North' encompasses the industrialised nations of Europe, Japan, North America and Australasia (Northern in terms of development though Southern in location). There are, of course, many differences within the South, a point I shall return to later in the chapter (for a discussion of the definition of North and South see, for example, Sage, 1996).

Anthony Giddens defines globalisation as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (Giddens, 1990, p.64). The most obvious expression of this is the policies of the international agencies which have world-wide consequences that can penetrate down to local level. Examples include the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank; the measures agreed under the Uruguay round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and now regulated by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (see Chapter 5); and, of course, environmental treaties. While governments may enter into voluntary agreements to protect the environment, such treaties nevertheless bind signatory countries to national policy changes that can have significant social, economic and political repercussions at local level.

Yet underlying the globalisation of policy making is the 'internationalisation of economic, social and cultural forces and models' (Khor, 1995). Transnational corporations, including those working with televisual media, have been responsible

for a rapid and dramatic transformation of local societies in the South, especially altering lifestyle aspirations and patterns of consumption. The promotion of infant formula feeds to replace breastfeeding is one of the clearest examples of such change, which occurs to the detriment of the child (lack of sterilisation and use of untreated water) and the family (cost of feed). The notion of globalisation can help to explain such change by revealing the multiple linkages and interconnections that exist between different places and at different levels (local, regional, national) across the world and which operate across all realms of life: political, economic, industrial, military, cultural and environmental.

In the environmental sphere one important consequence of globalisation is that the site of environmental degradation may be far removed from its principal agent. This means that the relationship between cause and effect may not be obvious and, consequently, attributing responsibility is not straightforward. There is also an abundance of evidence demonstrating that globalisation touches on almost every aspect of our daily lives. The

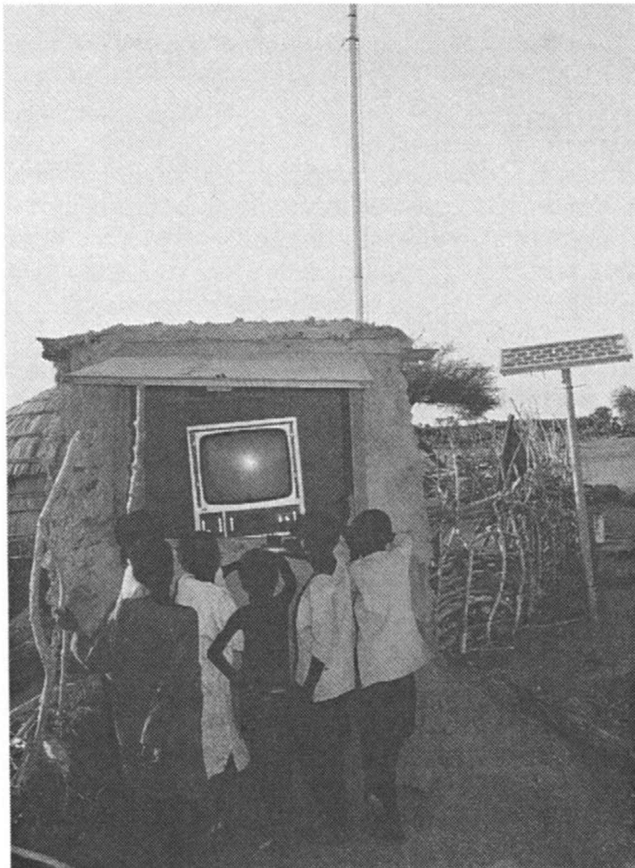

Plate 7.1 A television set powered by solar energy, Niger. Globalisation is transforming local societies in the southern hemisphere. Photo: Mark Edwards/Lineair

concept of globalisation can thus be a useful tool to deepen our understanding of the causes of environmental degradation and constraints on developing effective programmes and policies for sustainable development.

Giddens identifies four dimensions of globalisation: the nation state system; the capitalist world economy; the world military order; and the international division of labour. I shall briefly describe what Giddens means by each of these in turn.

The nation state system has emerged from its European origins to provide a world-wide framework encompassing some 200 or so political units with recognised sovereignty over territory and people. Yet the relative autonomy of each nation state is conditioned by processes of uneven economic development and other factors, not least the legitimacy of the state in the eyes of its citizens or subjects. Clearly those nation states which have been established only during the past 30–40 years following the end of colonial rule have had to work hardest to establish their sovereignty internally, although their autonomy has usually been recognised by other states (see Chapter 1).

The capitalist world economy. Since the demise of the Soviet Union and its East European allies and the market reforms of China, it is effectively the case that a single capitalist economy operates across the entire world. There are major centres of economic power (members of the Group of Seven of industrialised countries) but the main agents are international businesses, principally transnational corporations (TNCs). The largest TNCs today have budgets greater than all but a handful of countries and their influence through trading relations with states brings a global expansion of commodity markets, including labour power.

The world military order. The globalisation of military power is not confined to weaponry and alliances between the armed forces of different states – it also concerns war itself. The involvement of the United States in Indochina and in the Gulf War is a testament to this. Yet many economically weak developing countries are militarily powerful and have long used external development assistance to strengthen their military security. This, of course, has consequences for the *environmental* security of individual countries and of the world community as a whole.

The international division of labour. This fourth dimension of globalisation concerns the expansion of industrial activity and its consequences for the international division of labour. The world-wide distribution of production has created patterns of regional specialisation in terms of type of activity, level of skills, remuneration, profitability and so on. The emergence of the *newly industrialising countries* (NICs) in the South (South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Mexico, Thailand, Malaysia, amongst others) has had implications for the old industrialised countries, such as the UK or the United States, which have experienced a decline in their traditional manufacturing base. It has also had a major impact on those industrialising countries themselves, transforming pre-existing forms of social organisation and the relations of local societies with their natural environment. Such transformations take many forms, e.g. the incorporation of young rural women into the factory labour force producing textiles or electronic goods for expor,t or the adoption of modern farming methods including the acquisition of new machinery, which has a major effect on productivity but also on the local resource base.

By employing the notion of globalisation, we can see that contemporary environmental problems are the result of interdependent patterns of development arising from

the transfer of industrial technology and market values through the expansion of the international division of labour, reflecting regional specialisation and comparative advantage. The world-wide spread of capitalism and industrialism has penetrated far-flung areas of the world to a degree where even the local state has not brought them wholly under its political control. These forces lie behind the very nature of North–South relations and ultimately determine the prospects for sustainable development.

Yet, in using the notion of globalisation, it is vital to guard against a simplified universalism, in which it is assumed all countries, North and South, share a common threat posed by changes in the global environment and a common destiny of equal restraint. The world is marked by a strongly asymmetrical division in patterns of resource use, both historical and actual and in the relative responsibility for such global problems as ozone depletion and climate change. Consequently, in the many international fora convened to discuss the global environment, from Stockholm in 1972 to Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the countries of the South have continued to emphasise the centrality of economic development and the need to eliminate poverty before they can consider the consequences for natural resources. The North, on the other hand, seeks to urge upon the South a rather different set of priorities. The extract in Box 1 offers an interpretation for this apparent 'dialogue of the deaf'.

Globalisation, then, affords an explanation for the pattern of uneven development that is reflected in the nature of the environmental problems in the South. They are essentially problems of environment and development manifested in such features as land degradation, poor urban environments, bad sanitation, inadequate water quality,

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North–South conflict

The essence of the problem (the conflict between North and South) is that the two parts of the world are at different stages of development, so that the South only produces the ingredients for the industry of the North and it sells them at uncertain and fluctuating rates to buy the more expensive finished products. There is an interdependence that locks the two parties into their unequal roles and when the South seeks to share in the industrial role of the North it enters an arena where both the conditions of technology and the rules of competition put it at a disadvantage. Thus, *there is neither equality of present status nor equality of opportunity for the future and the inequality of condition is mirrored and magnified by the inequality of capability to change it.* Not only have the norms and practices of postcolonial international relations trained the new nations to expect something different from their status of economic inferiority, after having emerged from a status of political subjugation, but the problems of economic inferiority within the international economic order keep coming back to the doorstep of the rich, who must keep their debtors alive enough to continue to service their debt, stable enough to continue to export their raw materials and even prosperous enough to continue to buy the exports of the rich. But kept alive to that degree, the South calls for more, demanding the equality that humanitarian norms promise to human beings and that the norms of the United Nations – as part of the current international political order – promise to states. Hence, it is a conflict not only of relations but also of perspectives, for it is primarily seen by both sides in zero-sum terms (Zartman, 1987, p.3).

polluted air and land, gross exploitation of natural resources and the dumping of wastes including toxic and hazardous wastes. This chapter focuses on the component elements of globalisation in North–South relations. It demonstrates the imbalance in these relations of trade, aid, industrialisation and economic growth which result in the North tending to exploit the South. A historical approach is adopted to show how these relations have developed and to indicate the origins of conflicts and the prospects for co-operation between North and South.

In Section 7.2 a historical survey demonstrates how uneven development in the South has been a consequence of the process of economic growth shaped by relations with the North. Section 7.3 discusses the impact of development on the environment and the alternative approaches that have been advanced to try to reconcile the conflicts between development and environmental protection. Section 7.4 examines the lead-up to the Earth Summit and beyond and the conflicts between North and South over the various global agreements that resulted. The conclusion (Section 7.5) considers the opportunities that have emerged for greater co-operation between North and South.

7.2 Tracing the Third World

The development race

According to Wolfgang Sachs, the Third World came into existence on 20 January 1949. This was the day on which President Harry Truman, in his inauguration speech before the United States Congress, identified the poorer countries as 'underdeveloped areas'. Overnight the immeasurable diversity of the South was crammed into a single category – underdeveloped. But, as Sachs argues, such a term was not a matter of accident but the clear expression of a worldview in which 'all the peoples of the world were moving along the same track, some faster, some slower, but all in the same direction' (1993, p.4). Moreover, progress along this track could be measured by gross national product (GNP), and GNP per capita still provides the system of ranking countries in the World Bank's annual World Development Report.

The development process was thus presented as a race in which the task of the stragglers (the poorest countries) was to catch up with the front runners (the rich industrialised countries, led by the United States). The world economic system provided the arena for this competitive process; development aid was the incentive and encouragement to those lagging behind. Truman's vision embodied both the optimism and the arrogance of a country which emerged from the Second World War financially, technologically and politically strengthened and able to take over the mantle of world leader from the European powers exhausted by conflict and without the moral or political capacity to maintain their imperial ambitions. Thus the growing numbers of newly independent countries could look to the United States for their economic and political inspirations and demonstrate allegiance to the West during the height of the Cold War.

The years since Truman's speech have indeed been marked by increasing economic competition, rising levels of agricultural and industrial production and unprecedented levels of material consumption. But this period has also seen a widening of the gap between North and South. In 1960 the richest 20% of the world's countries had

incomes 30 times greater than those of the poorest 20% of countries. By 1990 the gap was 60 times greater. There is also the growing belief that the pursuit of economic growth has begun to reach, if not exceed, some biophysical limit.

Despite the emergence of new constellations of economic power, for example comprising the East and South East Asian newly industrialising countries and the capital-rich oil exporting countries of the Middle East, economic dominance still resides in the North, now including Japan. Yet for the majority of people in the South poverty has not been eliminated despite the slogans and rhetoric of successive United Nations' Development Decades and all their efforts at catching up. For example, according to the World Bank, in 1990 an estimated 1.1 billion people were living below the poverty line, of which 50% were in South Asia. Consequently, despite the globalisation of economic life based upon Western values and consumption patterns, the gap between front-runners and stragglers in the economic race is wider than ever (see Figure 7.1). Indeed, for Sachs, not only has the gap 'widened to the extent that it has become inconceivable that it could ever be closed [...] it has become evident that the race track leads in the wrong direction' (p.5–6).

The imperative of industrialism

That the world is heading in the wrong direction is, of course, not an uncontroversial conclusion. For many in the South there is a powerful and understandable preoccupation with economic growth and development in the absence of any other obvious remedy for poverty and inequality. The centrality of this concern has been most evident in the context of policy debates around the global environment when the Non-Aligned Movement has invariably expressed in forthright terms the imperative of economic growth and development alongside assertion of the rights of self-determination and national sovereignty. Aspirations for economic growth are inevitably tied to strategies of industrialisation, which offer the only guarantee of breaking out of dependence upon primary commodities. The experience of Latin America is relevant here.

The countries of Latin America gained their independence from Spain and Portugal during the first half of the 19th century. Yet, despite over 100 years of independence by 1945 and the beginning of the end for colonialism in Asia and Africa, there remained in Latin America the persistence of symptoms associated with neocolonialism and underdevelopment. These included high levels of dependence upon external markets for the sale of agricultural products and other raw materials and an internal social structure in which an oligarchical elite exercised control over land and other economic assets. While there were naturally important differences between countries in the social organisation and culture of the majority populations, there were strong similarities in the position of the political elites and in economic structures. These circumstances gradually gave rise in the late 1940s to analysis by the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) on the causes of economic stagnation and ways of overcoming it.

The analysis of ECLA demonstrated a deterioration in the terms of trade for Latin America's raw material exports as against the import of manufactured goods from the North. Their evidence thus flew in the face of theories of comparative advantage which emphasise the benefits of each country performing roles to which it is best suited. In Latin America's case it was always argued by neoclassical economists that development

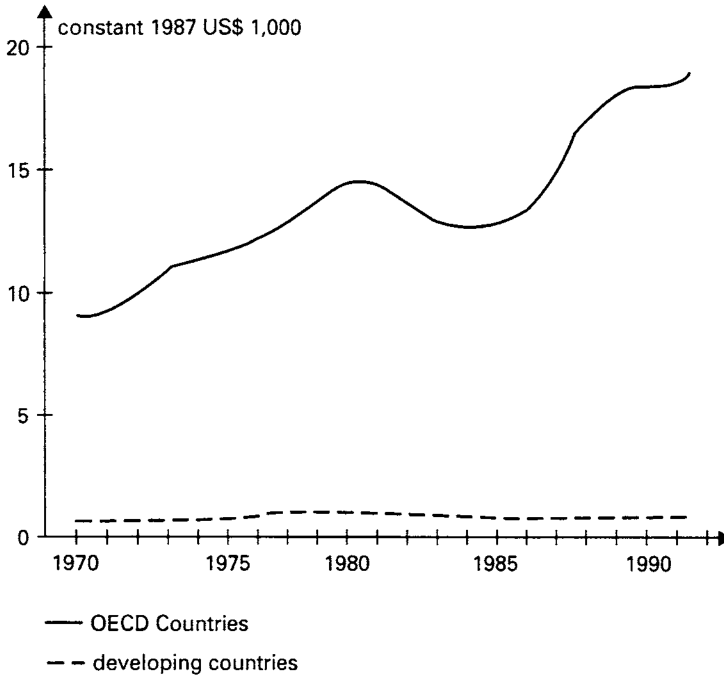

Fig. 7.1 Trends in GNP per capita, 1970–1992. Source: World Resources Institute, World Resources 1994–1995, p.5.

would follow on the exports of coffee, tin, copper, beef, etc. What such theories had not foreseen was the collapse of world trade in the 1930s following the 'crash' of 1929, when Brazilian coffee beans stockpiled on the dockside were eventually burnt for lack of a market. Or that the war of 1939–1945 would mean that the suppliers of manufactured goods stopped exports as industry was retooled to meet the need for armaments and other means of military conflict.

ECLA's analysis of external bottlenecks on trade led inevitably to consideration of strategies that would overcome such dependence on foreign markets. *Import substituting industrialisation* (ISI) became the slogan as the larger Latin American economies – Brazil, Argentina, Mexico – followed later by Chile, Colombia and Peru, as well as by India, Taiwan, South Korea and Hong Kong, began their own manufacturing activities to meet domestic demand. The main characteristic of ISI involves a relatively high degree of state intervention in the economy, principally through strategic direct investment in infrastructural and other projects and encouraging the inflow of private sector funds and concessional development assistance. The state sought to protect this incipient process of endogenous industrialisation by establishing high tariff barriers which imposed heavy taxes on cheaper foreign

imports. As the process of industrialisation proceeded from the initial stage, where the manufacture of consumer goods (textiles, household items, foodstuffs) prevails, to the stage marked by the production of capital goods (e.g. iron and steel making, motor vehicle assembly, chemical plant) the role of foreign capital is increased. In seeking to develop an independent, modern, diversified industrial economy via a strategy of ISI, the countries of Latin America in particular increasingly came to depend upon the technology, scientific and managerial expertise and capital of transnational corporations (TNCs).

The consequences of industrialisation

During the 1950s and 1960s economic growth in the South, according to Brett, was 'uneven but not unimpressive'. The middle-income countries grew at a slightly faster rate (5.7%) than the developed countries (4.7%) which in turn outperformed the low-income countries (3.6%), although this was sufficient to produce improvements in per capita income. Between 1956 and 1970 total foreign private investment from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries approached $58 billion, of which 50% originated in the USA, more than half was invested in raw material production, over a quarter in manufacturing and the rest in public utilities and services. Inflows of official development assistance over the same period was half the size again of private investment at just over $86 billion. Yet by the late 1960s these generally favourable developments could not disguise the serious structural dislocations and uneven process of development that was occurring. Brett identifies several key problems that became apparent during this period.

First was the continuing failure to narrow the gap between North and South even during a period of growth within the world economy. Indeed, the persistence of relative deprivation was associated with increasing internal inequality and of absolute impoverishment of the poorest in many countries.

Secondly, the 1950s and 1960s also saw increasing differentiation within the South as the newly industrialising countries (the NICs) and the oil exporters outperformed the rest. Moreover, the role of TNCs strongly reinforced this tendency towards uneven development, concentrating resources in a few developing countries. Brett cites a UN document which reports that 43% of the stock of direct foreign investment was concentrated in seven countries and a further 30% in another 13.

Thirdly, by the late 1960s serious structural problems had begun to appear in national strategies of ISI. The high levels of protection and subsidisation of capital-intensive industrialization drained the surpluses from the traditional export sectors and created major problems for national balance of payments. Meanwhile employment growth was constrained by the adoption of new, labour-saving technologies and further increased inequalities, which also worsened as chronic inflation took hold. The popular disillusionment with ruling bureaucratic elites and the political process which inevitably followed finally led to the wide-spread intervention of the military in politics. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s there were few countries in Latin America which escaped the seizure of power by the generals.

However, one group of countries escaped this particular set of outcomes associated with ISI. In Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore the initial period of

growth with non-durable consumer goods for the domestic market was followed by an expansion of manufacturing output for the export market. Taking advantage of their low-cost labour, these countries set out on a strategy of *export-oriented industrialisation* (EOI), in which manufactured output increased dramatically, as did levels of industrial employment. Once full employment had been achieved wages also began to grow, improving the distribution of national income and increasing domestic demand. Moreover, because TNCs were not the leading actors in export promotion during the early period, national investment adopted more appropriate labour-intensive technologies and sought greater domestic sourcing of inputs, leading to more balanced growth. Consequently, the experience of the four 'Asian Tigers' offered the most successful development model to other NICs, most especially those in the region such as Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia.

Yet it is important to recognise how development has become equated with industrialisation. Far from freeing society from the constraints of Nature as Marxists once argued, industrialism has arguably enslaved us to an obsessive pursuit of growth, continuous technological innovation and a belief in the right to spiralling levels of material consumption. The chief characteristic of industrialism for Giddens is 'the use of inanimate sources of material power in the production of goods, coupled to the central role of machinery in the production process' (1990, p.55–56). Industrialism consequently presupposes regularised social organisation in which old ways of

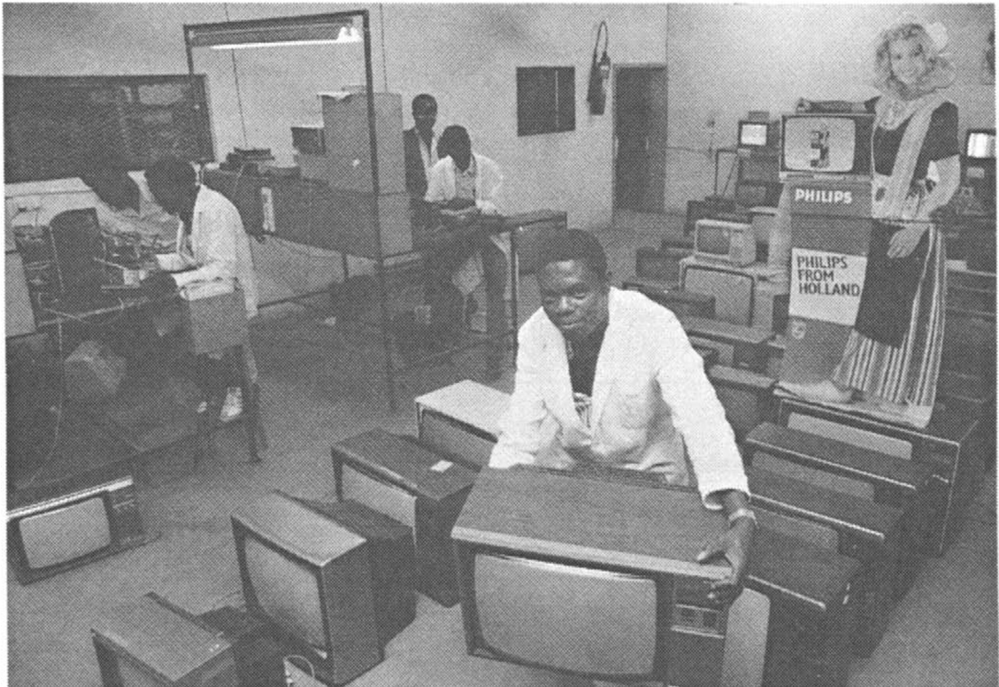

Plate 7.2 The Dutch-based multinational Philips uses cheap labour in Zambia to produce televisions.Photo: Ron Giling/Lineair

production and systems of work are shattered and the balance of economic power irreversibly shifts in favour of a new social class. It also, echoing Giddens, involves a transformation of the capacity to harness energy which powers production.

The degree to which the success of industrialism is entirely contingent upon unlimited supplies of cheap energy is, of course, borne out by the Gulf War, when the industrial countries went to war to protect a source of non-renewable fossil fuel resources. Moreover, our unreflexive dependence upon the tools of industrialism, such as the use of even simple electrical appliances, means that little thought is given to its social and environmental consequences. The implications of industrialism for everyday life are illustrated by the example in Box 2. Finally, the hazards of large-scale energy production are illustrated by the case of Chernobyl, where explosions in the nuclear reactor resulted in radioactive fallout across much of Europe.

2

The impact of technology

To demonstrate how Western technology in the South is a Trojan horse of Western economic values, Wolfgang Sachs uses the seemingly innocuous example of the electric mixer:

> Whirring and slightly vibrating, it makes juice from solid fruit in next to no time. A wonderful tool! So it seems. But a quick look at cord and wall socket shows that what we have before us is rather the domestic terminal of a national, indeed worldwide system.
>
> The electricity arrives via a network of cables and overhead utility lines, which are fed by power stations that depend on water pressures, pipelines or tanker consignments, which in turn require dams, off-shore platforms or derricks in distant deserts. The whole chain only guarantees an adequate and prompt delivery if every one of its parts is staffed by armies of engineers, planners and financial experts, who themselves can fall back on administrations, universities, indeed entire industries (and sometimes even the military) [...] Whoever flicks a switch on is not using a tool. He or she is plugging into a combine of functioning systems. Between the use of simple techniques and that of modern equipment lies the reorganisation of a whole society (Sachs, 1990, cited and extracted from McCully, 1991, p.249).

Downturn, divergence and debt

The relatively positive performance of the developing countries during the 1950s and 1960s was, of course, closely associated with the sustained period of growth in the world economy from 1945. However, by the mid-1970s a new phase of structural dislocation occurred which caused further differentiation and uneven development amongst the countries of the South. This was triggered, first, by US repudiation of the gold standard and the collapse of the fixed exchange rate system and second, by the fourfold increase in oil prices. This latter development was to push the balance of payments of oil importers into deficit and while the industrialised countries were able to restore economic equilibrium within a short period – albeit with significantly higher

energy costs – the South sought to make increased use of borrowing. Members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC, of which more below) found themselves with more revenue than they were generally able to use and naturally deposited surplus capital with the international banks. These petrodollar deposits were then recirculated by the banks as loans, primarily to non-oil, middle-income countries whose industrialisation programmes had been interrupted by higher import prices. Between 1973 and 1981, the private banks increased their lending to the South sixfold to $220 billion. By 1981 70% of developing country debt was to the commercial banking sector (as opposed to the official development agencies such as the World Bank).

It is at this point worth emphasising once again that the collective nouns such as the 'Third World', the 'South', the 'developing countries' mask increasingly divergent economic performances, structures and interests. As Ravenhill observes:

> [...] the newly industrialising countries are worlds apart from sub-Saharan Africa: their interest in inexpensive raw materials inputs for their burgeoning industries sets them at odds with the latter's enthusiasm for higher prices; similarly, the dependence on imported oil of the north-east Asian NICs and Brazil gives rise to a sustained conflict of interests with OPEC and other LDC oil-exporters (1990, p.732; 'LDC' stands for 'least developed countries').

This divergence was to increase throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In the least developed countries production barely kept ahead of population growth, while in sub-Saharan Africa per capita food production actually began to decline. The non-oil, middle-income industrialising countries, meanwhile, borrowed heavily on the international financial markets and by the late 1970s were achieving high rates of growth of GDP and manufactured exports. In 1979, however, OPEC played its hand again, raising oil prices and this time the consequences were even more far-reaching, coinciding with the beginnings of the monetarist experiment in the UK and USA. Here, interest rates were the principal tool for controlling inflation in their domestic economies and as these rose across the financial markets, the world economy moved into deep recession. Demand for raw materials fell, as did prices, so that by 1982 they were at their lowest level since 1945. This decline, together with high interest rates on heavy borrowings, put many of the middle-income countries under intense financial pressure. Finally, in August 1982 the announcement that Mexico could not meet its debt-service commitments sent shock waves throughout the international banking system. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) stepped in to co-ordinate a series of rescue packages for countries (Brazil and Venezuela amongst them) caught in the debt crisis. This involved a rescheduling of the debt but also imposed a programme of structural adjustment designed to reorient the economies away from domestic concerns with employment generation and poverty alleviation and towards the needs of the world market and the dictates of world market prices.

The consequences of the 'debt crisis' and the structural adjustment remedy have been written about extensively and there is not the space to go into detail here. However, we should note that the main elements of *structural adjustment programmes* (SAPs) include exchange rate devaluation, restraints on government spending, controls on wages, liberalisation of trade and the encouragement of export-oriented activity: in other words, a widespread intervention in the commanding heights of a nation's economy. UNICEF, amongst others, have highlighted the consequences of

SAPs in deepening impoverishment, especially amongst the most vulnerable sections of the community and in undermining the legitimacy and authority of governments. It has also been widely argued that SAPs have caused widespread environmental destruction. The proponents of economic liberalisation, on the other hand, have either refuted the evidence deployed by critics of SAPs or have argued that the medicine may have had unpleasant side-effects but was necessary to restore full health in the long term. However, even the most orthodox economist seems unable to refute the scale of the financial transfer from South to North, which is described in Box 3. There is also general agreement that the process of development in the South has resulted in environmental degradation, the subject to which I now turn.

3

The Southern debt crisis

If the goals of official debt managers were to squeeze the debtors dry, to transfer enormous resources from South to North and to wage undeclared war on the poor continents and their people, then their policies have been an unqualified success ...

From the onset of the debt crisis in 1982 through 1990 ... each and every month, for 108 months, debtor countries of the South remitted to their creditors in the North an average six billion five hundred million dollars in interest payments alone. If payments of principal are included in the tally, then each of the 108 months from January 1982 through December 1990 witnessed payments from debtors to creditors averaging twelve billion four hundred and fifty million dollars.

Theoretically, the Third World's interest payments alone could have provided every man, woman and child in North America and Europe with over $1,000 during this nine year period.

According to the OECD, between 1982 and 1990, total resource flows to developing countries amounted to $927 billion. This sum includes ... all official bilateral and multilateral aid, grants by private charities, trade credits plus direct private investment and bank loans. Much of this inflow was not in the form of grants but was rather new debt, on which dividends or interest will naturally come due in the future.

During the same 1982–90 period, developing countries remitted *in debt service alone* $1,345 billion (interest and principal) to the creditor countries. For a true picture of resource flows, one would have to add many other South-to-North outflows such as royalties, dividends, repatriated profits, underpaid raw materials and the like. The income-outflow difference between $1,345 and $927 billion is thus a much understated $418 billion in the rich countries' favour. For purposes of comparison, the US Marshall Plan transferred $14 billion 1948 dollars to war-ravaged Europe, about $70 billion in 1991 dollars. Thus in the eight years from 1982–90 the poor have financed six Marshall Plans for the rich through debt service alone.

Have these extraordinary outflows at least served to reduce the absolute size of the debt burden? Unfortunately not: in spite of total debt service ... of more than 1.3 trillion dollars from 1982–90, the debtor countries as a group began the 1990s *fully 61 per cent more in debt than they were in 1982*. Sub-Saharan Africa's debt increased by 113 per cent during this period; the debt burden of the very poorest – the 'least developed' countries – was up by 110 per cent.

Source: George (1992), p.xiii–xvi.

7.3 Development versus environment

North and South – conflicting objectives

In the early 1970s there was a growing chorus of disquiet about the pace and extent of environmental destruction resulting from the continuing horizontal expansion of economic growth and rising levels of material consumption. The publication of the Club of Rome's report, *Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.* 1972), was a benchmark study that raised serious questions about the future supply of finite stocks of minerals and fossil fuels given the apparent unlimited capacity for consumption. Although the methods, assumptions and conclusions of this report were systematically attacked by development economists, *Limits to Growth* was nevertheless a highly influential publication that coincided with other signs of the gathering crisis. In 1971 the Man and the Biosphere Programme was launched by UNESCO to monitor human impacts on natural ecosystems while in the following year the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm.

The Stockholm conference marked a first step in dialogue between North and South in which the environment was a primary focus. Yet it was the rich industrialised countries which had the greatest need for the Conference to be a success, given rising public concern over pollution and 'the effluence of affluence'. For these countries it was necessary to agree some common environmental standards to which all subscribed and contributed in order that 'free riders' did not benefit from lower costs and thereby gain the advantage of producing cheaper goods for the global market. For the South, however, Stockholm represented an opportunity to talk about increased resource transfers to speed up the pace of development. Environmental pollution was seen as a necessary by-product of economic growth and only growth could help to eliminate the worst pollutant: poverty. As Enzensberger observed in 1974, all 'the brotherly rhetoric of Spaceship Earth conveniently overlooks the difference between the bridge and the engine room'. Consequently, Stockholm witnessed the first discordant note in what became a cacophonous and strident exchange between North and South during the 1970s and beyond as the United Nations became a battleground in setting an international agenda.

The aspirations for a united 'Third World'

The early 1970s represented the pinnacle of collective Southern leverage over the global development agenda. This was a time of a gradual thawing in the Cold War, a period of détente between the First and Second Worlds and the opening of a political space which allowed the countries of the South to promote their demands for a more equitable share of global resources under the banner of a so-called New International Economic Order. As mentioned earlier, the 1950s and 1960s had been a period of steady growth in the world economy which had brought rising demand for raw materials from the South. It was also a period of state building as a mass of countries emerged from the last gasps of an old colonialism to establish new national identities and join the development race; it was also a period of growing international solidarity between developing countries. Professing non-alignment with either of

the two superpowers, the number of members grew steadily during the 1960s so that by the time of the Algiers meeting in September 1973, the Non-Aligned Movement formally established the Group of 77 as an operating caucus within the United Nations system.

By the end of 1974 the UN General Assembly had approved the Charter of Rights and Duties of States as well as the declaration of a New International Economic Order. These raised the profile of several issues relating to the environment, such as the sovereignty of states over their natural resources, the need for indexation of commodity prices and the right of countries to regulate the activities of transnational corporations, amongst others. But it was the attempt to create a new international trade regime in primary commodities that was the central issue of North–South relations throughout the 1970s. Taking the lead from OPEC's considerable success in agreeing to regulate the supply of oil to the industrialised countries and, consequently, reaping the rewards with higher prices, the South sought to establish other commodity agreements between producers. These were then to be made operational with the North through the Integrated Programme for Commodities under the auspices of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The response of the North to the proposal to establish a series of linked international commodity agreements with the purpose of raising prices was predictably hostile. However, its strategy was principally one of foot-dragging; avoiding actions that would encourage greater co-operation between Southern countries and referring items for further negotiation. Meanwhile, individual producers sought to expand their output of primary commodities, with the encouragement of the World Bank and of the importing countries, with the consequences of aggregate oversupply relative to demand. Once recession began in the North in 1979, commodity prices began to plummet. This was exacerbated by a change in systems of production and types of industrial technology that sought greater efficiency in the use of energy and raw materials and in the development of synthetic substitutes. Consequently, today there are few effective international commodity agreements, UNCTAD has been entirely marginalised by the GATT and now the World Trade Organisation (see Chapter 4) and the power of OPEC has waned as its share of world oil production has diminished. Moreover, there are few new potential areas for greater Southern leverage in securing improvements in its terms of trade with the North, although the environment may still represent one. However, this will depend on whether the South is able to speak in any coherent fashion on behalf of the poor. As Saravanamuttu observes, 'Success ... in agenda setting is quite a different matter from success in agenda implementation, as the North–South balance of power has shown' (Saravanamuttu, 1994, p.228).

Aid and development

There have been, however, important initiatives led by Northern representatives which have sought improvements in the conditions of trade, aid and international development. The first of these was the Pearson Commission, led by an ex-Prime Minister of Canada, which was directed to examine overseas aid policies and find ways of

improving the quality of development assistance. Arising out of the Pearson Commission came the UN recommendation that the developed countries should commit at least 0.7% of their GNP to overseas aid. In 1991 only five countries had reached and exceeded this target figure: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, The Netherlands and Finland. The contributions of the OECD donor countries are shown in Figure 7.2 (see also Middleton *et al.*, 1993).

The main concern of the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, established in 1977 under the chairmanship of the former chancellor of West Germany, Willy Brandt, was similarly with increasing the quantity of aid and international finance available to the South. In its first report published in 1980, the Commission recommended *inter alia*: an increase in the aid budgets of wealthy nations to a minimum of 1% of GNP; a system of international taxation to finance support for the poor; least developed countries having more say in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; more concessionary and preferential funds and so on. In light of the figures for aid budgets listed above and the fact that none of the other recommendations has been acted upon, it seems appropriate to dismiss the Brandt Commission as a failure. Whether its failure was due to timing or because its recommendations were politically unacceptable, or perhaps both, is largely inconsequential. Ekins favours the first explanation, noting that the international climate for development co-operation in the 1980s was not encouraging. The rise of a neo-liberal conservative orthodoxy, exemplified by the 'special relationship' between US President Reagan and British Prime Minister Thatcher, was certainly hostile to anything other than tight fiscal restraint and free market economics. The idea of concessionary terms was thus anathema to those in control of the reins of power. Middleton and colleagues believe that Northern governments as a whole were unsettled by the Brandt agenda which might have seriously challenged power relationships throughout the world. Not only do such governments owe their existence, at least in part, to the enormous financial interests of the North but, given the existence of the Cold War, 'Poor countries could not necessarily be relied upon to support the right side' (Middleton *et al.*, 1993, p.14).

However, it is Brandt's argument for mutual self-interest which lies at the heart of the Commission's thinking which is its great weakness. The North should help the South to greater prosperity, so the argument goes, not only on the grounds of equity but because Southern prosperity would produce more demand for Northern goods. As Ekins argues, this is very unconvincing:

> At present powerful Northern (creditor) institutions are reaping handsome returns on loans that never get any smaller; Northern industry and consumers are getting Southern commodities at rock bottom prices; Northern arms manufacturers are selling nervous Third World elites large quantities of weapons; and, perhaps most important, Third World countries are being effectively tied in to Western models of development, with Western countries guaranteed a permanent technological lead. The old economic order is doing industrial countries very nicely economically and politically (Ekins, 1992, p.28–29).

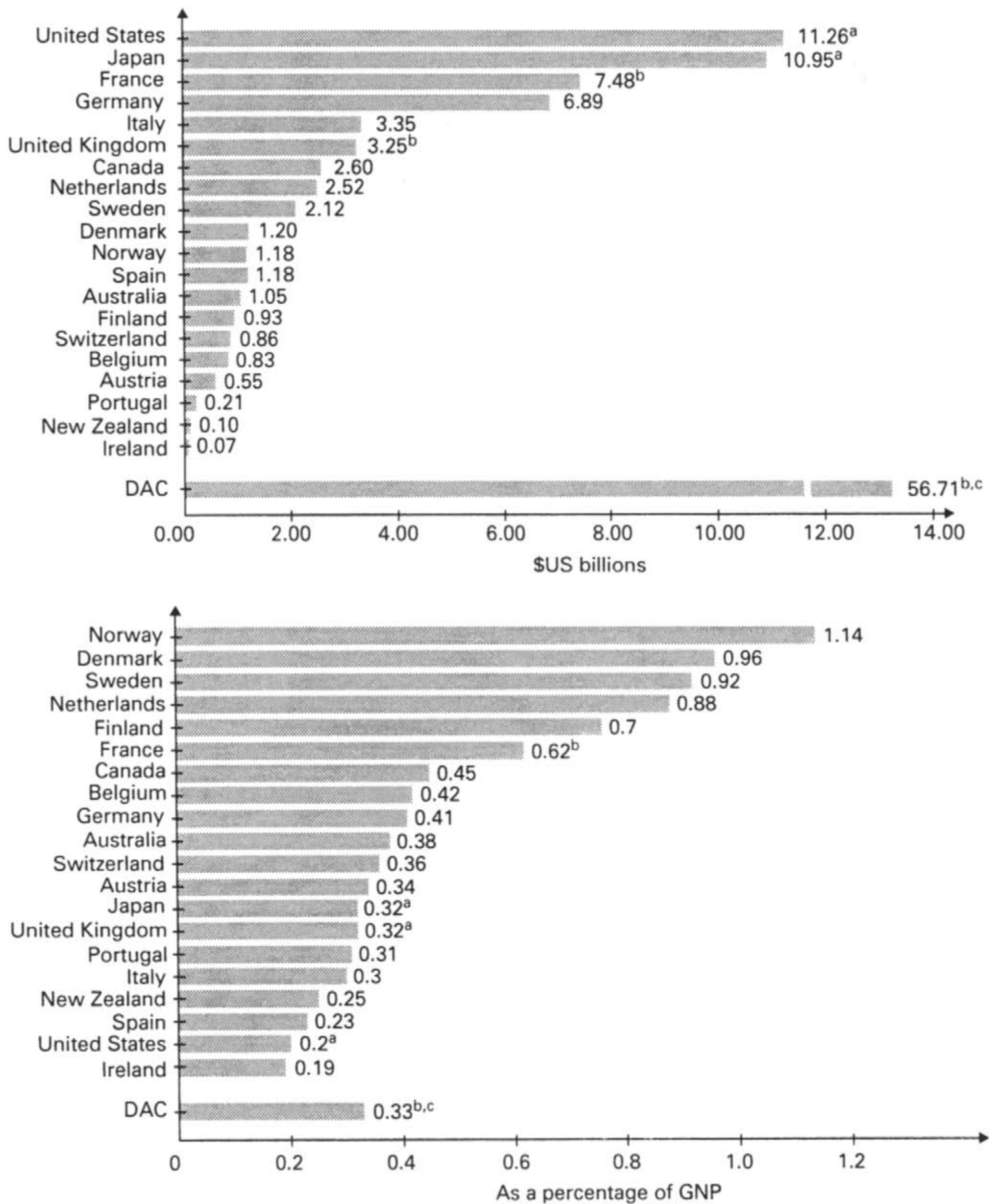

Fig. 7.2 Net official development assistance from development assistance countries (DACs), 1991. Top: in billions, U.S. dollars. Bottom: as a percentage of GNP. Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Development Co-operation: 1992 Report (OECD, Paris, 1992), Chart 2, p.24,
Notes: a. Includes forgiveness of non-official development assistance debt. b. Includes overseas territories but excludes overseas departments. c. Excludes forgiveness of non-official development assistance debt. Source: World Resources Institute, World Resources 1994–1995, p.227.

Plate 7.3 An African white elephant: an unsuccessful project in Tanzania. Dutch funding was used to pay for the construction of an aircraft hangar at Kilimanjaro Airport, so that aircraft maintenance could be carried out on the spot. The only piece of equipment which has been maintained so far, however, is a lawn-mower. Photo: Ron Giling/Lineair

Thus, for Ekins, the Brandt Reports, for all their insight, expertise and commitment to Third World development, remain flawed:

- They fail to recognise the main cause of development failure contributed by corruption, bureaucratic mismanagement and inappropriate development models. Increased financial flows resulting from Brandt's recommendations would be more likely to repeat development failure than initiate success.
- They propose a mutual self-interest in reform where none in fact exists. This means that their recommendations are most unlikely to be implemented.
- They fail to identify the real *reforming agenda* which could break the development deadlock, including strategies of participation, community organisation, democratisation, etc. However, this agenda comes from the grassroots, from the bottom up, whereas 'The Brandt Commission [...] was composed of top people, thinking top-down, as such people normally do' (Ekins, 1992).

An example of a 'reforming agenda'

It is important to emphasise, however, that thinking in the North need not only be characterised by a top-down, bureaucratic agenda. For example, one might compare the Brandt agenda with another appraisal of the existing global order which produced a radically different set of conclusions. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, established in memory of an eminent Swedish diplomat and UN Secretary-General, published its alternative agenda in 1975 under the label of 'Another Development'. It was a stock-taking exercise which argued that there would be no genuine development if some key questions were not asked and concretely answered: development *how, of what, by whom and for whom*?

'Another Development' comprised five organically linked components:

1 *Need-oriented* – to begin with the satisfaction of the basic needs of the majority of the world's inhabitants.
2 *Endogenous* – since development is not a linear process with a single universal model, each society must define its own values and vision of the future.
3 *Self-reliant* – where each society relies upon its own strength and resources. While it must be exercised at national and international levels, it acquires its full meaning only if rooted at local level, in the praxis of each community.
4 *Ecologically sound* – utilising rationally the resources of the biosphere in full awareness of the potential of local ecosystems and the limits imposed on present and future generations.
5 *Based on structural transformations* – required in social relations, economic activities and their spatial distribution and in the structure of power, so as to realise the conditions of self-management and participation in decision making by all those affected by it.

All five of these components remain as relevant today as when they first appeared 20 years ago and together they are a testimony to a clear, coherent and remarkably visionary programme for a new world order. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation was fully behind the aspirations of the Non-Aligned Movement for a New International Economic Order which would support an endogenous and self-reliant national development throughout the South. Yet it also saw the need for the application of another development to the advanced industrialised countries in order to create more environmentally sound societies and individual lifestyles. Such a visionary approach contrasts sharply with the rather time-worn agenda of the South Commission.

The South Commission

The South Commission was established in 1987 by the Non-Aligned Movement and headed by Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania. Its objectives were to investigate the common problems facing the South and to find ways of working together to solve them and to develop a new dialogue with the North. The South Commission might be seen as yet another group of eminent people – principally diplomats – to get development onto the international agenda, but this time without the hindrances of the language of environmental conservation. The motivation was

right: the 1980s were seen as a lost decade for development in the South, caused by the slowing down of economic activity in the North, which in turn led to a deterioration in commodity prices. The 'debt crisis' of 1982 also initiated a drain of capital as the level of debt-service payments outstripped direct foreign investment and lending to the South for the rest of the decade, as Box 3 clearly demonstrated. Countries of the South, most especially in sub-Saharan Africa but also in Latin America, were consequently experiencing a loss of illusions associated with the prospect of future development. This has become ever more apparent as the process of economic reconstruction in Eastern Europe has attracted the technical and financial interest of the Western countries and thereby diverted attention from the countries of the South.

From the perspective of the Commission, North–South relations are portrayed in terms of conflict. It calls for the cancellation of debt to Northern multilateral and private banks but also more loans to build up infrastructure for development in the South. It seems self-evident that more loans will lead to more debt and more environmental destruction, just as the call for more multinational investment to acquire new business and technological skills will likely result in more dependency. Notwithstanding the sense of conflict, the South Commission shares precisely the same aspirations and ideology of industrial development as the North and seeks to use its collective leverage in the interests of expanding its industrial capacity. The environment is, consequently, of little immediate concern beyond a 'space' for further industrial development: 'Only rapid industrial development can create the resources to satisfy the basic requirements of (the South's) growing population'. Moreover, this will be achieved through the adoption of 'modern science and technology' from the North, hopefully, no doubt, to be acquired on concessionary terms. At the same time, 'The needs of the North should be met in ways that do not compromise the satisfaction of the present and future needs of the South'. In other words, while the North is facilitating the transfer of technologies that contribute to global environmental change, it should itself be substantially reducing production and practising compensatory restraint. This is unrealistic and suggests that the Commission, a 'Southern elite', had little vision beyond the notion of 'replicable development'.

Reconciling development and environment? The Brundtland Commission

The World Commission on Environment and Development, or Brundtland Commission as it became known under the chairmanship of Norwegian ex-Premier Gro Harlem Brundtland, was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1983 with three broad objectives:

1 to re-examine the critical environment and development issues and to formulate realistic proposals for dealing with them
2 to propose new forms of international co-operation on these issues that will influence policies and events in the direction of needed changes
3 to raise the levels of understanding and commitment to action of individuals voluntary organisations, businesses, institutes and governments.

The Commission's Report was published under the title, *Our Common Future* in 1987. The Commission focused its deliberations within six broad policy areas: population and human resources; food security; species and ecosystems; energy; industry; and urbanisation. It also considered the management of the global commons, peace and security and institutional reform. The Commission held a series of public hearings across the world to take individual testimonies in an attempt to reflect the circumstances in which increasing numbers of people experience poverty and vulnerability. The Report captured the public imagination because of its central concern with sustainable development, which was defined in its most simplified and oft-repeated form as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'. (For a more rigorous interpretation of the meaning and application of 'sustainable development', see Blowers and Glasbergen, 1995.) It also acknowledges the contribution of Brundtland in ensuring that this term has become the most important within the international environmental lexicon. Here, however, I want to look more critically at the impact of *Our Common Future* for North–South environmental agenda setting and policy-making in the lead-up to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In the first place it is important to note that the Brundtland Commission appeared to support a new political agenda in which the imperative of greater co-operation between governments would also be complemented by recognition of the need for more effective participation by people in decision making. Yet, notwithstanding the hopes for a more thorough-going critique of the existing social and economic order, the Commission produced a Report in which a single, universal solution was proposed: more economic growth.

> If large parts of the developing world are to avert economic, social and environmental catastrophes, it is essential that global economic growth be revitalised. In practical terms, this means more rapid economic growth in both industrial and developing countries, freer market access for the products of developing countries, lower interest rates, greater technology transfer and significantly larger capital flows, both concessional and commercial (WCED, 1987, p.89).

As Ekins observes, 'This is pure, conventional developmentalism of the Brandt variety' but more dangerous still given Brundtland's concern with sustainability. He goes on:

> The problem with calling for more economic growth in this way is that nowhere in the Brundtland Report is there a clear statement of how 'sustainable economic growth' can be recognised and distinguished from the patently unsustainable variety which is all the industrial world has so far known and which was largely responsible, by the Commission's own analysis, for the environmental destruction which led to it being convened (Ekins, 1992, p.31).

The Report simply believes that the international economy must speed up world growth while 'respecting the environmental constraints'. While more growth may be necessary in developing countries in order to uplift the living standards of the poorest, this should be done as far as possible on the basis of sustainable production. It is difficult, however, to justify continued growth in the North given the existing disparities in levels of resource consumption (Sage, 1996).

The Report appears not to recognise the simple truth that economic growth leads to more consumption and that more consumption puts greater pressure on renewable and non-renewable resources and the earth's capacity to absorb waste. Moreover, as Middleton and colleagues argue, the Report fails to 'operationalise' a number of important development issues such as local participation and social justice which have been subsumed into economic and environmental imperatives. While it cements the relationship between environment and development, it does not question the role of the world's dominant governments and institutions in preserving the conditions in which environmental and developmental problems arise. So in the end the Report, while raising hopes and expectations for deep and meaningful change, reinforces the *status quo* and the hegemony of the market.

The various approaches to the problems of development have each in their different ways revealed the contradictions between the process of growth and the capacity of the environment for sustaining that growth. These contradictions and the means of resolving them were the focus of the deliberations leading up to and including the UNCED Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Plate 7.4 Political instability has a tremendous impact on both society and the environment. On 17 July 1995, a makeshift camp 10 km north of the eastern Zairean border town of Goma was packed with some 160,000 Rwandan refugees. According to the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), at least 600,000 Rwandans have sought refuge in Goma. Photo: ANP Foto

7.4 The road to Rio

The Earth Summit

The original purpose of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, or the Earth Summit as it became known) was to examine the world's progress in meeting the demands made by the Brundtland Commission. In the event, UNCED placed greater emphasis upon the global environment than upon development considerations and people's livelihoods. It invited the nations of the world to shoulder their global responsibilities but failed to address issues of poverty and equity or guarantee the necessary redistribution of resources. Yet UNCED was not just a conference or a series of intergovernmental negotiations but a catalyst for a wide range of activities, both before June 1992 and since.

The conference itself was scheduled for June 1992 in order to mark the 20th anniversary of the Stockholm conference and the Brazilian government offered to act as hosts. This was a calculated move on the part of President Sarney in responding to the international outcry over the burning of the Amazonian forest. This outcry had been triggered in the North by the long, hot summer of 1988 which recorded sustained high temperatures and which, in the public mind, appeared to validate the concerns of scientists over global warming. Together with the murder of Chico Mendez, the leader of the Brazilian rubber tappers union who had defended an alternative model for the sustainable use of the forest, the images of burning forests brought further media attention to the region. Suddenly, the violence and lawlessness of the frontier became a global threat in the popular imagination as forest clearance was seen as the principal cause of climate change. This was an issue which created strong lines of cleavage between North and South.

As Grubb and colleagues note, UNCED was not just a conference or a series of negotiations, but a springboard for a wide range of activities. Governments were invited to submit national reports on their environment and development and, by the time of the Summit, 172 countries had done so. Many countries had established regional committees to co-ordinate activities, consult with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and across government departments and foster interest in the process. Many other countries, of course, did not. Besides the Preparatory Committees (PrepComs) which met over the preceding year in advance of Rio in order to draw up the documents for signing by the heads of government, there were a number of other international conferences held to discuss sectoral priorities. These covered such topics as sustainable agriculture and rural development, water and the environment, industry, etc. and included expert meetings convened by such bodies as the International Council of Scientific Unions and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and regional gatherings of government leaders under the auspices of the United Nations Regional Commissions and so on. Consequently, UNCED embodied a process in which politicians, business leaders and NGOs representing the environment and the interests of the poor began to co-ordinate their positions.

The main agreements reached in Rio are summarised in Box 4. A more critical view of UNCED is summarised in Box 5. Agenda 21 and the Rio Declaration are not central to the concerns of this chapter. Here we shall look in a little more detail, first, at the

The UNCED agreements

4

The *Framework Convention on Climate Change* establishes principles that climate change is a serious problem; that action cannot wait upon the resolution of scientific uncertainties; that developed countries should take the lead; and, that they should compensate developing countries for any additional costs incurred in taking measures under the Convention. The Convention lacks bindng policy commitments but indicates that industrialised countries should aim as a first step to return greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2000. It establishes a strong process by which governments must submit reports on their relevant policies and projections and meet regularly to evaluate progress and if necessary amend the commitments.The Convention will enter into force with unusual rapidity.

The *Convention on Biological Diversity* aims to preserve the biological diversity of the planet, through the protection of species and ecosystems and to establish terms for the associated uses of biological resources and technology. It affirms that states have 'sovereign rights' over biological resources on their territory, the fruits of which should, however, be shared in a 'fair and equitable' way on 'mutually agreed terms'. Countries must develop plans to protect biodiversity and submit some information on them.The Convention may enter into force rapidly, but key developed countries may delay or refuse to ratify it primarily because of concerns over control of funding.

Agenda 21 is an immense document of 40 chapters outlining an 'action plan' for sustainable development, covering a wide range of specific natural resources and the role of different groups, as well as issues of social and economic development and implementation. It effectively integrates environment and development concerns; it is strongly oriented towards 'bottom-up', participatory and community-based approaches in many areas, including population policy and it shows more acceptance of market principles, within appropriate regulatory frameworks, than previous UN agreements. Performance targets are mostly limited to those previously agreed elsewhere. Agenda 21 will form the key intergovernmental guiding and reference document on the issues for the rest of the decade.

The Rio Declaration comprises 27 principles for guiding action on environment and development. Many address development concerns, stressing the right to and need for development and poverty alleviation. Some principles concerning trade and environment are ambiguous; others concern the rights and roles of special groups.

The *Forest Principles* form the rump of blocked attempts to negotiate a convention on forests. It emphasises the sovereign right to exploit forest resources along with various general principles of forest protection and management.

development of a Framework Convention on Climate Change, then at the Convention on Biological Diversity, and, finally, at the steps leading towards a Convention on Desertification.

Climate change and the South

The growing scientific consensus regarding atmospheric change had already begun to find a degree of commitment within the diplomatic arena. The discovery of the 'hole' in the ozone layer over Antarctica concentrated the minds of politicians, enabling them

to develop agreement around the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer in 1987 and then a process of regime strengthening in which a phasing out of ozone-depleting chemicals was accelerated. The mounting concern about human interference with the Earth's atmospheric heat balance and the prospects of climate change led to the establishment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. This brought together over 400 scientists organised into three working groups (Scientific Processes, Impacts and Responses) in the preparation of the First Assessment Report launched in 1990. The Report predicted that if states continue 'business as usual' the global average surface temperature will rise during the next century by an estimated average of 0.3°C per decade, a rate of change unprecedented in human history. It was a call for prompt action to stabilise emissions of greenhouse gases (see Beukering and Vellinga, 1996, for a fuller discussion).

However, the substantive issue dividing international opinion along North–South lines is that the industrialized countries account for the lion's share of carbon dioxide emissions arising from the combustion of fossil fuels – some 75% in the mid-1980s – and therefore are primarily responsible for causing global warming. Yet the consequences of this are expected to be felt especially severely in the South, particularly in low-lying coastal areas such as small islands and river deltas. Perhaps surprisingly, the IPCC process had been established without anticipating a role for developing countries and Brazil and Mexico, amongst others, had to work strenuously to increase their level of participation.

5

The Earth Summit – an alternative view

For the major players, the Earth Summit was a phenomenal success. The World Bank not only emerged with its development policies intact but with control of an expanded Global Environmental Facility (GEF), a prize that it had worked for two years to achieve. The US got the biodiversity convention it sought simply by not signing the convention on offer. The corporate sector, which throughout the UNCED process enjoyed special access to the Secretariat, also got what it wanted: the final documents not only treated TNCs with kid gloves but extolled them as key actors in the 'battle to save the planet'. Free-market environmentalism – the philosophy that TNCs brought to Rio through the Business Council on Sustainable Development – has become the order of the day, uniting Southern and Northern leaders alike ...

In brief, the Summit went according to plan. The net outcome was to minimise change to the status quo, an outcome that was inevitable from the outset of the UNCED process three years ago. Unwilling to question the desirability of economic growth, the market economy or the development process itself, UNCED never had a chance of addressing the real problems of 'environment and development'. Its Secretariat provided delegates with materials for a convention on biodiversity but not on free trade; on forests but not on agribusiness; on climate but not on automobiles. Agenda 21 – the Summit's 'action plan' – featured clauses on 'enabling the poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods' but none on enabling the rich to do so; a section on women but none on men. By such deliberate evasion of the central issues which economic expansion poses for human societies, UNCED condemned itself to irrelevance even before the first preparatory meeting got underway. (Hildyard, 1994, p.22–23).

By the time the Second World Climate Conference was convened in 1990, many of the developing countries were better prepared and ready to thwart the control of the industrialised countries over the IPCC process. Already facing uncomfortable scientific 'truths', the North wished to proceed to negotiations on a possible climate change convention under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). The South, however, saw the issue in developmental as well as environmental terms, with implications for all sectors of national economies – energy, industry, transport, forests and agriculture. Moreover, the developing countries were concerned with procedures involving the universality of representation and transparency of decision-making processes. Consequently, through their collective efforts, they were able to ensure that it was the United Nations General Assembly, rather than UNEP and the WMO, which was the body responsible for establishing the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) for a Framework Convention on Climate Change. Under the auspices of the General Assembly, the INC was given a mandate to negotiate a convention containing appropriate commitments which would be ready for signing at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The INC held five sessions between February 1991 and May 1992 and came through some extremely tough bargaining to produce an agreed text that was taken forward to Rio for signing by heads of state.

Negotiations in preparing the Framework Convention on Climate Change and, since Rio, in developing an agreed protocol have revealed considerable schisms within the bloc of Southern countries. The Group of 77, the operating caucus of the Non-Aligned Movement, was joined by China to present a common front in defence of the South, but their positions and demands tended to reiterate the language of the 1970s in emphasising:

- the historical responsibility of the North in causing climate change;
- the need for new and additional resources to be provided to the South before it was able to consider abatement measures;
- the transfer of technology on concessionary and preferential terms, etc.

Inevitably, as negotiations proceeded to map out the commitments of individual countries, contrasting positions began to emerge between different groups of countries within the G77. For Ahmed Djoghlef, leader of the Algerian delegation and vice-chair of the INC, it was a matter of regret that the climate issue caused a fracturing of the G77 and that it was unable to play a leading role in the negotiations (Djoghlef, 1994). The most important group of developing countries which emerged in the INC was the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) chaired by Vanuatu. This group comprised low-lying member states and territories most at risk from global warming, rising sea levels and a predicted increase in tropical storms. It tabled a proposal containing the most far-reaching set of commitments, including a CO_2 stabilisation target for developed countries of 1990 emission levels to be achieved by 1995, with a further programme of reductions thereafter.

The Kuala Lumpur Group emerged as a second cluster of developing countries from within the ranks of the G77. It comprised 43 states, including some of the larger countries with important forest resources, which viewed the climate change negotiations as an attempt by the North to dictate the use of forests in the South. Throughout

the UNCED process, this group adopted a largely defensive posture, rejecting any such attempts as a violation of their national sovereignty, but otherwise awaited agreement from the developed countries on a set of commitments to reduce emissions.

The INC process also gave the member states of OPEC an opportunity, according to Djoghlef, to renew the tradition of holding periodic consultations in conjunction with major international events. This process had been suspended since the early 1980s and the intervening period had been marked by acrimony and worse, between member countries. Reconvening as a group with shared interests was motivated by concerns about the potential impact of a Climate Change Convention on the future international oil market, especially given proposals for an international carbon tax that would be imposed on all sales of petroleum products.

The influence of self-interest in forming attitudes to global warming is apparent in the positions taken by each of these three groups. For the small island states immediate and drastic measures are needed to cut greenhouse gas emissions and halt the apparent trends of global warming which threaten their survival. The newly industrialising countries, on the other hand, can afford to 'wait and see' and refuse to forego economic development unless the North offers sufficient inducements of finance and technology. Finally, the OPEC countries would surely prefer to believe that global warming was unrelated to the burning of fossil fuels. However, a revealing anecdote is provided by Bodansky to demonstrate how far self-interest influences scientific understanding. Discussing the Noordwijk Ministerial Conference on Atmospheric Pollution and Climate Change held in November 1989 Bodansky notes the statement made by the Saudi Arabian delegation:

> In this statement, Saudi Arabia characterised global warming as 'a life or death issue for considerable areas of the earth', acknowledged that there is 'no argument' that the 'main culprit' for global warming is carbon dioxide and recognised the need to move to non-greenhouse emission energy production and consumption systems and to stabilise and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases. In contrast, by the end of 1990, Saudi Arabia was stressing the uncertainty of climate change and strongly opposed establishing targets and timetables to reduce carbon dioxide emissions (Bodansky, 1994, p.72).

The Convention on Biological Diversity

The Biodiversity Convention has arguably become the most difficult and intractable of the agreements under the UNCED process although negotiations began long before plans were laid for signing ceremonies in June 1992 (for a full description, see Barnes, 1996). Indeed, it was in 1987 that UNEP called upon governments to consider establishing international legislation on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. An Expert Working Group was established which later became the INC for a Convention on Biological Diversity, paralleling the climate change negotiation process. Indeed, the development of an agreement experienced comparable fundamental disagreements between North and South, particularly on the exchange of biological resources in return for access to biotechnology. Essentially, it is the developing countries which possess the greatest diversity of species and they have asserted their

sovereign rights over genetic resources within their territories. The industrialised countries, on the other hand, view biodiversity as a common heritage of humankind and seek to draw upon the universal 'gene pool' for their biotechnology industries which produce genetically manipulated organisms that can benefit agriculture worldwide. While the South seeks access to such benefits of biotechnology, the industry itself is preoccupied with patents, profits and the control of gene banks. The resulting Convention may thus attempt to address 'the conservation of biological diversity and the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the use of genetic resources' (article 1), but it offers no solution to the ongoing destruction of biodiversity.

Indeed, despite 155 governments signing the Convention in Rio, progress towards its implementation has become bogged down. One of the many problem areas

Plate 7.5 Rwandan refugees taking firewood back to the Benaco refugee camp in Ngara district, Tanzania. Since the countryside near the camp is already woodless, those wishing to gather firewood have to walk longer and longer distances every day. The ongoing deforestation in the area has also greatly exacerbated the problem of soil erosion. Photo: Heldur Netocny/Lineair

concerns the role of *ex situ* gene banks or the conservation of species outside their natural habitats and countries of origin. It must be remembered that the countries of the North have benefited from the 'collection' (some would say 'plunder') of genetic materials from the South over several centuries. Botanical gardens, such as Kew in London, are essentially gene banks with an enormous variety of plants brought from the tropics not simply for the curiosity of botanists. The smuggling of seeds of *Hevea brasiliensis* from Amazonia in the late 19th century ended Brazil's monopoly in the supply of rubber once the seeds had been transplanted via Kew to plantations in colonial Ceylon and Malaya. By 1910 almost 1 million acres were given over to *Hevea* plantations in Malaya and proved of enormous benefit to the British economy at the expense of Brazil (Hecht and Cockburn, 1990).

However, botanical gardens and other forms of storage of genetic material (many in the hands of pharmaceutical and agro-industry companies) representing past collection are currently excluded from the jurisdiction of the Convention. Consequently, the South is unable to secure any rights to compensation for this material previously taken. Yet the Convention legitimises the patenting of genetically modified organisms which have been derived from genes originally taken from the South. This means that a country such as Ethiopia, let us say, would be forced to purchase from the United States seeds of wheat or barley resistant to a particular virus, even though the gene responsible for such resistance was originally found in Ethiopia. While this gene may not have been isolated and named in that country because of Ethiopia's lack of DNA-profiling technology and expertise, it is likely that many poor and illiterate peasants had recognised the properties and characteristics of the variety containing the gene and ensured its conservation for future generations by maintaining crop and varietal diversity.

It is this kind of inequity which has made progress toward ratification of the Convention so difficult. At the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties held in the Bahamas at the end of 1994 few important decisions were made beyond the symbolic declaration of December 29th as the International Day for Biological Diversity. Meanwhile, the United States pressed for the free movement of genetically modified organisms in order to test its biotechnological products in developing countries, while some voices in the South demanded that existing *ex situ* collections be brought under the jurisdictional scope of the Convention. There were likely to be prolonged negotiations to resolve the conflicting views of intellectual property rights and the system of establishing patents which threatens to privatise new combinations of genetic material hitherto maintained by many generations of poor farmers and forest dwellers.

The Convention on Desertification

It was precisely because of the North's view of the environment that African delegates at the Earth Summit lobbied hard for a desertification convention to address their most pressing problems. Yet there was little interest among the non-African countries at Rio in desertification and even some objection to the issue being addressed as a global problem despite an estimated 35% of the Earth's land surface being threatened and 900 million people affected by desertification worldwide (Chatterjee and Finger, 1994;

Toulmin, 1994). Nevertheless, it was agreed at Rio to establish an intergovernmental group and in turn the UN General Assembly commissioned the formation of an intergovernmental negotiating committee (INC) to develop a convention on desertification. An agreed text was adopted at the fifth meeting of the INC in Paris in June 1994 for signature and eventual ratification by the participating countries.

However, how far can a global Convention to Combat Desertification overcome the problems of dryland degradation? As Toulmin observes, unlike other environmental issues (such as ozone depletion or greenhouse gas emissions), desertification lacks clearly identifiable linkages at global level in which levels of resource use in individual countries have consequences for the world as a whole. Upon such linkages can be based global agreements that attempt to regulate behaviour of individual countries for the global good. In the case of desertification, however, there is no clear scientific agreement about the global climatic consequences of dryland degradation. Indeed, some researchers have begun to challenge the way in which desertification has been assessed and presented, creating, from inadequate and insufficient data, the myth of the rapidly advancing desert. According to Thomas and Middleton (1994) the United Nations has played a major role in creating the desertification myth with little reliable scientific foundation. Moreover, its anti-desertification measures have yet to be proven effective and appear to have little relevance to affected peoples. Consequently, while the UN has managed to get desertification on the global environmental agenda, it is at local and subnational level where efforts to combat it need to be concentrated. As Toulmin argues:

> Local people need an economic, social, technical and institutional framework within which to develop appropriate methods of resource use and management. Such measures are probably not best dealt with by global conventions. Experience .. has demonstrated the very limited value of drawing up plans at global, regional, or national levels, since they rarely bear much resemblance to reality and are usually impossible to implement (Toulmin, 1994, p.87).

Small-scale, participatory projects are increasingly recognised as the only really effective way of improving local resource management and reducing the threat of dryland degradation and desertification. Such projects are usually relatively low-cost and the main achievement of the Convention could be to harness donor funds to support such projects. It remains to be seen whether the Convention will do this given the anticipated disagreements in future meetings of the INC over funding mechanisms, especially whether desertification control would be supported by the Global Environmental Facility. On the more positive side the Convention has emphasised the importance of national environmental frameworks and the part that NGOs can play in implementation at the grassroots. Indeed, the stress on mobilising the resources of the people at local level is one of the innovatory features of the Convention.

7.5 Conclusion: the scope for North–South co-operation

Throughout this chapter there has been an emphasis on the constraints on North–South co-operation. The conflicts of interests between North and South – and indeed those conflicts that occur between the countries of the South – appear to place formidable obstacles in the way of achieving agreements on policies to deal with environmental problems, let alone agreements over the means of implementing them. Such agreements as there are, notably the conventions that have emerged from the Rio process, are still in their early stages with little immediate prospect of making an impact on the problems they seek to address. Indeed, it is generally acknowledged that the problems are likely to get worse before they begin to get better.