

# Workshop of the National Environmental Action Plan, IFS Kandy

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I very much appreciate the initiative of Prof. Dissanayake, Director of the IFS and of Prof. Madduma Bandara in organizing this workshop. We are here in connection with the presentation of the National Environmental Action Plan. This 5 year environmental programme is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka and, to the best of my knowledge, the first of its kind anywhere. It has been funded by NORAD, but it has been drafted entirely by a team of Sri Lankan administrators, planners, and academics selected and directed by the Ministry of Environment & Parliamentary Affairs.

The two major inputs into this programme are the Action Plan of the National Conservation Strategy, prepared by a multidisciplinary team under the direction of the Central Environmental Authority, and the World Bank sponsored Environmental Action Plan, prepared by a group of experts headed by Prof. Madduma Bandara. There have also been inputs from the relevant government agencies and non-governmental organizations. We have tried to produce a truly national plan reflecting national priorities. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed in one way or the other to the preparation and publication of this plan document.

The document contains a portfolio of projects with an indication of our priorities, of the implementing agency and, wherever possible, a rough estimate of the costing. This has been done to enable donor agencies to pick up environmental projects for funding. Once a project is picked up, it may need to be further developed in coordination with the specified implementing agency before the agreement is finalized. We have met some donor agencies and plan to meet them on a regular basis to ensure good coordination.

I would like to add that although this 5 year plan has been printed in the form of a book, it is not our intention that there will be no changes to this programme in the period 1992-96. We are open to new proposals, to suggestions for amendments and to constructive criticism. Changes in the ground situation and in national perspectives will be duly reflected in our programme which will remain flexible throughout the 5 year period.

The NEAP must be read with the National Report on Environment and Development which is the primary Sri Lankan input into the United Nations Conference on Environment & Development scheduled to be held in Rio de Janeiro in June this year. The National Report is an analytical statement on the environment of Sri Lanka and on national policy on environment-related subjects. The programme outlined in the NEAP may be seen as a manifestation of environmental policy as set out in the National Report.

Both documents were published in the 3rd quarter of 1991 and must be viewed in the context of the international environmental agenda set by UNCED and the various ongoing environment-related inter-governmental negotiations on global issues. Some of these, such as those based on the Montreal Protocol, relate to follow-up on Agreements which have already been signed, others, like those linked to global climate change, to Agreements which may come up for signature at Rio in June, and others, like discussions on forestry, to issues on which there may possibly be Agreements negotiated in the future. Although we are participating in all these activities, we, together with many other developing countries, have some reservations in respect of the details of the various agreements and proposed agreements, and also in respect of the currently prevailing

global environmental agenda and the negotiation process. We need to remember and to remind others that the promotion of environmentally sound development presupposes the existence of development. We want development as much as we want in to be environment-friendly.

The Beijing Ministerial Declaration of 19.7.1991 sets out, in broad outline, a consensus of countries of the South on the main issues in the field of environment and development. The Ministers identified poverty as at the root of environmental problems in the developing world and went on to elaborate on their perceptions on a variety of environment-related issues. While many may nominally concede that poverty is at the root of the environmental problems of the countries of the South, and UNCED documents frequently reflect such sentiments, such awareness is not very much in evidence in the on-going UNCED process or in the agenda of inter-governmental negotiations.

Except indirectly, e.g. through environmental programmes to combat desertification, anti-poverty programmes have had no place in the UNCED agenda. Similarly, while issues such as global climate change, depletion of the ozone layer and pollution of the seas and the felling of forests concern all of us, and there are ongoing or proposed international negotiations on these matters, there are no agreements being worked out to effect global economic restructuring or to channel resources, technologies and access to markets to the countries of the South so as to promote environmentally sound development.

The South Centre headed by Julius Nyerere has published a document titled Environment and Development based on a report prepared by a distinguished international group of experts headed by Dr. Gamani Corea. The document recommends that in relation to the UNCED negotiations, the South should:

- (a) Insist on tilting the balance in the negotiations towards development and considerations of global economic reform, in order that the South may be offered some hope of being able to follow a path of sustainable development. Issues on which the South should

receive firm commitments from the North are: (i) debt relief, (ii) increase in official development assistance, (iii) mechanism facilitating the South's access to international liquidity, (iv) stabilization and raising of commodity prices, and (v) access to markets in the North.

- (b) Indicate clearly the areas where it expects the North to adjust its production and consumption patterns in such a way as to leave the South with adequate environmental space for its development.
- (c) Call for the establishment of a global programme for alleviating poverty in the South and for protecting or rehabilitating the environment.
- (d) Stress that any institutions set up to administer, implement and monitor agreements reached at Rio should be democratically controlled and offer an equal say to all nations".

In respect of the framework negotiations on climate change, it is urged that progress in curtailing overall emissions should be linked to permitting developing countries to increase emissions till parity is achieved. It is proposed that the Agreement should be based on the following:

- (a) The acceptance of the principle of country emission entitlements based on an equal distribution of emission rights among the world's inhabitants;
- (b) The reduction of emissions, over an agreed period of time, in line with a country's quota;
- (c) The creation of global institutional arrangements designed to provide funding for investments in measures tending to reduce activities that adversely affect the climate, and to create mechanisms for inter-state trade in emission rights; and
- (d) The creation of a global system for the transfer, on preferential and non-commercial terms, of environment-friendly technologies that would enable the South to reduce its emission of gases while pursuing a path of economic growth.

On the bio-diversity negotiations, the report notes that the scales seem to be tilted away from the countries of the South, which provide much of the genetic material, and towards the countries of the North, which process them and develop patents and technologies, and goes on to recommend:

- (a) The establishment of special systems of intellectual property rights and appropriate mechanisms for compensating the South for the biological resources provided by it.
- (b) The establishment of mechanisms giving the South access to the biotechnologies that are developed through the use of the genetic resources that it provides.

The document also urges that developing countries should launch a global public information campaign to present forcefully the South's position on environment and development and to gain understanding and support in the North for its position. Such a campaign is also necessary to counter the negative image of the South that is often propagated by the media in the North concerning the South's position on global environmental issues.

These were the issues and positions that were taken by our delegation to the SAARC Environmental officials meeting earlier this week and that will be taken by our delegation to the UNCED Prep Com Meeting at New York next month.

Together with other countries of the South, we will raise them again at UNCED in Brazil in June and at various other international fora.

In conclusion, I will quote the final part of the South Centre document which reads as follows:

“For a new equitable world order to emerge and for sustainable development to become a reality, it is critical that the developing countries, representing four-fifths of all humanity, have a major role and say in charting the new directions. It is essential that they unite and pool their resources, and negotiate as a group so as to safeguard and advance their common interest.”

I have taken this opportunity to address North-South issues. The rest of the programme of this workshop will. I believe stay closer to the NEAP document which we are presenting to you today. I have digressed from the NEAP but not from the objectives it seeks to serve. I trust that what I have said and the rest of the trying to achieve and how we are getting about it. We need your help and cooperation in the task and we welcome your ideas on how we can go forward in the period of this 5 year plan and in the years to follow.

(IFS Workshop, NEAP, Kandy on 21st Feb. 1992)

