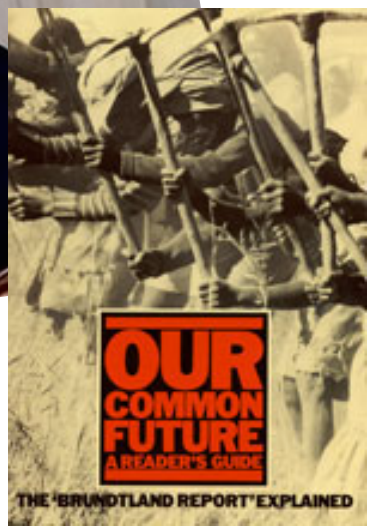
Norwegian Prime Minister



The 1972 Stockholm Conference, also known as The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
was held in Stockholm, Sweden from 5 to 16 June 1972.
It considered the need for a common outlook and principles to inspire and guide the people of the world for the preservation and enhancement of the human environment.
The Conference approved establishment of the
United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
to provide continued leadership and coordination of environmental action

The Brundtland Commission, 1983-1986

The 1992 RIO Earth Summit

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, also known as the Earth Summit was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 3 to June 14, 1992.

2002: World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in **Johannesburg**, South Africa from 26 August to 4 September.

2012: RIO +30

The **World Commission on Environment and Development** (WCED), was convened by the United Nations in 1983.

Chaired by Ms. Gro Harlem Brundtland (NOR prime minister)
to address the growing concern
"about the **accelerating deterioration** of
the human environment and natural resources
and the **consequences** of that deterioration
for **economic and social development**."

The UN General Assembly recognized
that environmental problems were **global** in nature and
determined that it was in the
common interest of all nations
to establish policies for sustainable development.

Reading Our Common Future

MUCH MORE THAN

"Sustainable development is development that meets the **needs** of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, p. 40)

http://www.un-documents.net/ocf-02.htm

Our Common Future, Chapter 2: Towards Sustainable Development

From *A/42/427. Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development*

1. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

1. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts:

- the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and
- the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs.

2. Thus the goals of economic and social development must be defined in terms of sustainability **in all countries** - developed or developing, market-oriented or centrally planned. **Interpretations will vary**, but must share certain general features and must flow from a consensus on the basic concept of sustainable development and on a broad strategic framework for achieving it.

3. **Development involves a progressive transformation of economy and society**. A development path that is sustainable in a physical sense could theoretically be pursued even in a rigid social and political setting. But physical sustainability cannot be secured unless development policies pay attention to such considerations as changes in access to resources and in the distribution of costs and benefits. Even the narrow notion of physical sustainability implies concern for social equity between generations, a **concern that must logically be extended to equity within each generation**.

4 The satisfaction of human needs and aspirations in the major objective of development. The essential needs of vast numbers of people in developing countries for food, clothing, shelter, jobs - are not being met, and beyond their basic needs these people have legitimate aspirations for an improved quality of life. A world in which poverty and inequity are endemic will always be prone to ecological and other crises. Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to satisfy their aspirations for a better life.

5. Living standards that go beyond the basic minimum are sustainable only if consumption standards everywhere have regard for long-term sustainability. Yet many of us live beyond the world's ecological means, for instance in our patterns of energy use. Perceived needs are socially and culturally determined, and sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire.

6. Meeting essential needs depends in part on achieving full growth potential, and sustainable development clearly requires economic growth in places where such needs are not being met. Elsewhere, it can be consistent with economic growth, provided the content of growth reflects the broad principles of sustainability and non-exploitation of others. But growth by itself is not enough. High levels of productive activity and widespread poverty can coexist, and can endanger the environment. Hence sustainable development requires that societies meet human needs both by increasing productive potential and by ensuring equitable opportunities for all.

7. An expansion in numbers **can** increase the pressure on resources and slow the rise in living standards in areas where deprivation is widespread.
Though the issue is not merely one of population size but of the distribution of resources, sustainable development can only be pursued if demographic developments are in harmony with the changing productive potential of the ecosystem.

8. A society may in many ways compromise its ability to meet the essential needs of its people in the future - by overexploiting resources, for example.
The direction of **technological developments may solve some immediate problems** but lead to even greater ones. Large sections of the population may be marginalized by ill-considered development.

9. Settled agriculture, the diversion of watercourses, the extraction of minerals, the emission of heat and noxious gases into the atmosphere, commercial forests, and genetic manipulation are all examples or human intervention in natural systems during the course of development.
Until recently, such interventions were small in scale and their impact limited. **Today's** interventions **are more drastic in scale and impact, and more threatening to life-support systems** both locally and globally. This need not happen.
At a minimum, sustainable development must not endanger the natural systems that support life on Earth: the atmosphere, the waters, the soils, and the living beings.

10. Growth has no set limits in terms of population or resource use beyond which lies ecological disaster. Different limits hold for the use of energy, materials, water, and land. Many of these will manifest themselves in the form **of rising costs and diminishing returns, rather than in the form of any sudden loss of a resource base.** The accumulation of knowledge and the development of technology can enhance the carrying capacity of the resource base.

But **ultimate limits there are**, and sustainability requires that long before these are reached, the world must ensure equitable access to the constrained resource and reorient technological efforts to relieve the presume.

11. Economic growth and development obviously involve changes in the physical ecosystem.

Every ecosystem everywhere cannot be preserved intact. A forest may be depleted in one part of a watershed and extended elsewhere, which is not a bad thing if the exploitation has been planned and the effects on soil erosion rates, water regimes, and genetic losses have been taken into account.

In general, renewable resources like forests and fish stocks need not be depleted provided **the rate of use is within the limits of regeneration and natural growth**.

But most renewable resources are part of a complex and interlinked ecosystem, and maximum sustainable yield must be defined after taking into account **system-wide effects** of exploitation.

CONCERN FOR NON-RENEWABLE OR RENEWABLE?

12. As for non-renewable resources, like fossil fuels and minerals, their use reduces the stock available for future generations.

But this does not mean that such resources should not be used. In general the rate of depletion should take into account the criticality of that resource, the availability of technologies tor minimizing depletion, and the likelihood of substitutes being available.

Thus land should not be degraded beyond reasonable recovery. With minerals and fossil fuels, the rate of depletion and the emphasis on recycling and economy of use **should be calibrated to ensure that the resource does not run out before acceptable substitutes are available.** Sustainable development requires that the rate of depletion of **non renewable** resources should foreclose as few future options as possible.

13. Development tends to simplify ecosystems and to reduce their diversity of species. And species, once extinct, are not renewable. The loss of plant and animal species can greatly limit the options of future generations; so sustainable development requires the conservation of plant and animal species.

14. So-called free goods like air and water are also resources. **The raw materials and energy of production processes are only partly converted to useful products. The rest comes out as wastes.** Sustainable development requires that the adverse impacts on the quality of air, water, and other natural elements are minimized so as to sustain the ecosystem's overall integrity. *(See GEORGESCU ROEGEN, 1971)*

15. In essence, sustainable development is a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human **needs and aspirations**.

II. Equity and the Common Interest

16. Sustainable development has been described here in general terms. How are individuals in the real world to be persuaded or made to act in the common interest? The answer lies partly in education, institutional development, and law enforcement. **But** many problems of resource depletion and environmental stress arise from disparities in economic and political power.
An industry may get away with unacceptable levels or air and water pollution because the people who bear the brunt of it are poor and unable to complain effectively.
A forest may be destroyed by excessive felling because the people living there have no alternatives or because timber contractors generally have more influence then forest dwellers. *(ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE and CONFLICTS)*

17. Ecological interactions do not respect the **boundaries** of individual ownership and political jurisdiction. Thus:
In a watershed, the ways in which a farmer up the slope uses land directly affect run-off on farms downstream.
the irrigation practices, pesticides, and fertilizers used on one farm affect the productivity of neighbouring ones, especially among small farms.
The efficiency of a factory boiler determines its rate of emission of soot and noxious chemicals and affects all who live and work around it.
The hot water discharged by a thermal power plant into a river or a local sea affects the catch of all who fish locally. *(ECONOMICS → ….?)*

18. **Traditional social systems** recognized some aspects of this interdependence and enforced community control over agricultural practices and traditional rights relating to water, forests, and land. This enforcement of the 'common interest' did not necessarily impede growth and expansion though it may have limited the acceptance and diffusion of technical innovations. *(Elinor OSTROM, Managing the commons))*

19. Local interdependence has, if anything, increased because of the technology used in modern agriculture and manufacturing. Yet with this surge of technical progress, the growing 'enclosure' of common lands, the erosion of common rights in forests and other resources, and the spread of commerce and production for the market**, the responsibilities for decision making are being taken away from both groups and individuals.** This shift is still under way in many developing countries.

20. It is not that there is one set of villains and another of victims. **All would be better off if each person took into account the effect of his or her acts upon others.** But each is unwilling to assume that others will behave in this socially desirable fashion, and hence all continue to pursue narrow self-interest. Communities or governments can compensate for this isolation through laws, education, taxes, subsidies, and other methods. Well-enforced laws and strict liability legislation can control harmful side effects. Most important, effective participation in decision-making processes by local communities can help them articulate and effectively enforce their common interest. (*Game theory?)*

21. **Interdependence is not simply a local phenomenon.** Rapid growth in production has extended it to the **international plane**, with both physical and economic manifestations. There are growing global and regional pollution effects, such as in the more than 200 international river basins and the large number of shared seas.

22. The enforcement of common interest often suffers because areas of political jurisdiction and areas of impact do not coincide. **Energy policies in one jurisdiction cause acid precipitation in another. The fishing policies of one state affect the fish catch of another.** No supranational authority exists to resolve such issues, and the common interest can only be articulated through international cooperation.

23. **In the same way, the ability of a government to control its national economy is reduced by growing international economic interactions**. For example, foreign trade in commodities makes issues of carrying capacities and resource scarcities an international concern. (See Chapter 3.) If economic power and the benefits of trade were more equally distributed, common interests would be generally recognized. But the gains from trade **are unequally distributed**, and patterns of trade in, say, sugar affect not merely a local sugar-producing sector, but the economies and ecologies of the many developing countries that depend heavily on this product. *(Economics: POWER?)*

24. The search for common interest would be less difficult if all development and environment problems had solutions that would leave everyone better off. **This is seldom the case, and there are usually winners and losers**. Many problems arise from inequalities in access to resources. An inequitable landowner ship structure can lead to overexploitation of resources in the smallest holdings, with harmful effects on both environment and development. Internationally, monopolistic control over resources can drive those who do not share in them to excessive exploitation of marginal resources. The differing capacities of exploiters to commandeer 'free' goods - locally, nationally, and internationally - is another manifestation of unequal access to resources. 'Losers' in environment/development conflicts include those who suffer more than their fair share of the health, property, and ecosystem damage costs of pollution.

26. Hence, our inability to promote the common interest in sustainable development is often a product of the relative **neglect of economic and social justice within and amongst nations**.

III. Strategic Imperatives

27. The world must quickly design strategies that will allow nations to move from their present, often destructive, processes of growth and development onto sustainable development paths. This will require policy changes in all countries, with respect both to their own development and to their impacts on other nations' development possibilities. (This chapter concerns itself with national strategies. The required reorientation in international economic relations is dealt with in Chapter 3.)

28. Critical objectives for environment and development policies that follow from the concept of sustainable development include:

- reviving growth;
- changing the quality of growth;
- meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water, and sanitation;
- ensuring a sustainable level of population;
- conserving and enhancing the resource base:
- reorienting technology and managing risk; and
- merging environment and economics in decision making.

"Sustainable development is development that meets the **needs** of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"

(WCED 1987, p. 40)

The WCED brought together, at the global level, the problems of **poverty** and environmental degradation.

It argued that economic activity is dependent on

a **healthy environment**,

which is therefore **something that serves the interests**

of the poor as well as the rich.

Who bears more the consequences of unhealthy environment?