



CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development
World Bank Sustainable Development Lecture Series

The World Bank

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Remarks by Mary Robinson, President, Realizing Rights

It is a pleasure to be back at the World Bank and an honor to have been invited to deliver the inaugural address for your new lecture series on the Social Dimensions of Sustainable Development.

I'm pleased that such a cross section of Bank colleagues has come together today. I understand your expertise covers a diverse range of fields – infrastructure, rural development and environment, social development, energy, and water. And I'm happy that joining us today are a number of invited guests from other multilateral development institutions as well as representatives of academia, think tanks, the private sector and civil society.

My aim today – on this Earth Day 2009 - is to offer some thoughts on an issue at the top of the international agenda - climate change – and its connections to sustainable development and the protection of international human rights standards. I hope my remarks will help set the stage for a lively discussion I'm eager to have with all of you. The World Bank clearly has a key leadership role to play in the climate change agenda going forward. So I'm here to try and influence your approach, but I'm also very interested in learning about your experiences and in thinking together about how we forge a common agenda that benefits all people.

Before getting to this, let me put my remarks in some context by looking back briefly. I should begin by recalling that in late 2001, during my term as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, I was invited by your former President, Jim Wolfensohn, to give a Presidential Lecture here at the World Bank. I spoke then on *Bridging the Gap Between Human Rights and Development*. I pointed to the historic divides between the human rights and development communities but also highlighted signs of increasing convergence – a growing openness to shared approaches. I suggested then that the international human rights framework lends moral legitimacy and the principles of social justice, participation and accountability to development objectives. Importantly, it helps shift the focus of analysis to the most deprived and excluded, especially to deprivations



caused by discrimination. And I stressed that attention to the human rights commitments all governments have voluntarily made points to the need for information and a political voice for all people as a development issue.

That presentation and the dialogue which followed led to increasing exchanges between colleagues from the Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva and staff here at the World Bank. I'm happy that these relationships continue to grow today. My visit to the Bank led as well to collaboration between the Bank and the organization I founded after leaving the UN in late 2002 - Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative. In 2004 we collaborated with the New York University Center for Human Rights and Global Justice on an event which brought together World Bank and human rights experts to discuss a number of specific issues of common concern including women's empowerment, child labor, access to education and the development of poverty reduction strategies. That led to the publication of a book in 2005 titled *Human Rights and Development: Toward Mutual Reinforcement* which remains a useful guide in exploring these issues in more depth.

There have been other occasions to collaborate since then as well. I recall a Consultative Group meeting in Ghana which I joined at the invitation of your colleague Mats Karlsson, and Bank-sponsored sessions here in Washington on efforts to combat violence against women. I mention all of these to highlight that over these years both the Bank and the broader development community have come to regard the notion of equity and respect for human rights as increasingly relevant, if not essential, to sustainable development.

Today we have an opportunity to move our shared understanding and commitment to strengthening the links between development and human rights to a new level. We meet at a time of many questions and uncertainties about our models of economic growth. We've all been caught off-guard by how quickly a financial crisis initially thought to be localized and sector specific – a sub prime mortgage crisis – evolved into a much deeper economic crisis that is being felt across the world. This economic crisis, like the food crisis that emerged over the last two years, poses a challenge in that it requires a response that is both rapid and significant, and yet rooted in consultations with people in developing countries on whose behalf we serve.

The Brundtland Commission that helped lay the foundation of sustainable development so many years ago, led by my good friend and fellow Elder, Gro Harlem Brundtland, identified the challenges and indeed the risks that we would face in charting a course for our planet. That Commission set out an important framework that pinpointed the balance required between our need for economic development and the care with which we must use our natural resources. The 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development further clarified the "interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars" of sustainable development: economic development, social development, and environmental protection.



Over the same period, we marked a significant coming together of governments with the adoption of the Millennium Declaration by 182 Heads of State at the UN General Assembly in September 2000. The Millennium Declaration was a breakthrough document in that it firmly linked human development and human rights, and bound in as well the notion of human security – freedom from want and freedom from fear.

And the Millennium Declaration, that so ably reflected the intent of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was given expression for policy-makers in the Millennium Development Goals. Whether one is a supporter or a critic of the MDGs, we must admit that progress on meeting these goals has not been sufficient in many countries. At the two-thirds mark to 2015, we know that many of the goals will not be met in countries around the world. We know why this so. Many developing country governments lack sufficient financial resources, so it has been difficult to create the human and physical infrastructure to ensure that all children get an education, that everyone has access to basic health care, and that there are sufficient and decent work opportunities for all. But equally important has been our failure to see development challenges as problems of injustice. We haven't included a strong enough focus on equity, that is, ensuring that we enable those most at risk, most vulnerable, with least capacity to make progress, to escape from poverty and marginalization. In other words, we haven't successfully applied the growing consensus on the mutual reinforcement of development and human rights to our strategies for making progress.

The World Bank's own research has identified the power imbalances that play such a key role in keeping the poor where they are – at the bottom of the pyramid. The World Development Report three years ago documented the persistence of inequality traps in a variety of spheres. The reality is that without explicitly building in a focus on addressing inequality through measures including expanding access to justice, strengthening land rights and increasing the bargaining power of the poor, development dollars will be wasted.

One example of this can be found in the area of livelihoods. My organization has worked for the last few years to promote the right to decent work agenda, precisely because it combines the practical need for 'more and better quality' jobs with a rights approach. It has four pillars: macroeconomic policies that put employment generation as a central objective; promoting human rights related to work; expanding social protection for all; and lastly the importance of social dialogue between governments, workers and employers. Of key importance to Realizing Rights and our partners is ensuring that policies and programs for decent work are applicable to those working in the informal sector as well as the formal sector, because so much of the workforce in developing countries – and many in developed countries as well – are self-employed or work without a formal employment relationship.



This agenda to me builds in what is missing from current MDG-targeted approaches. It acknowledges the importance of dialogue, building a social compact between people and their leaders, and building both the demand and the supply side of respecting human rights and empowerment.

I have seen this approach work for infrastructure projects in Liberia, and to support small enterprises and expanded access to health care in Ghana for groups that have traditionally been marginalized. I have seen the results when a million plus women in India, through their member-driven organization SEWA – Self Employed Women’s Association – strengthen the voice, visibility and ‘validity’ of women in the informal sector.

Through its important ‘Voices of the Poor’ study in 2000, the Bank itself helped shine a light on the processes that either enable impoverished people to climb out of poverty, or condemn them to remain poor and marginalized. The more these approaches spread within the Bank and the broader donor community, the better progress will be made on fulfilling human rights and sustainable development outcomes.

Issues that most demand a human rights approach are those where the entitlements or opportunities of one group of people, for whatever reason, are controlled by others over whom they have difficulty exacting a claim. And that combination is what brings me to the main topic I would like to raise today – the links between climate change, development and human rights.

I know that your Vice President is in fact in Italy today on the occasion of Earth Day meeting with Environment Ministers. Because the Bank is entrusted with so many of the resources designed to address climate change, I hope my remarks will be of use and help in encouraging further reflection and dialogue here and with your partners around the world.

I became interested in Climate Change not only because it is, perhaps, the most fundamental human rights challenge of our time, but also because I am now a grandmother, and I care deeply about the legacy that my generation and your generation is leaving to our grandchildren and future generations. Climate change is a human rights issue for several reasons. First, human rights struggles are about power – they provide a framework to enable those whose rights are violated to find remedy and redress for injustice. Climate change represents just such a situation because those who are most at risk from its impacts are least responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that pose such a threat to our planet. Second, the phenomenon of climate change will undermine progress on almost all of the human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration and other international human rights instruments, just as it will undermine achievement of the MDGs.

Temperature rises, risks of extreme weather events, changes in precipitation patterns and distribution of water, sea-level rises, flooding and storm surges, threats to unique systems

like coral reefs, and other climate change impacts create enormous risks to development and enjoyment of rights.

An increase in water insecurity is layered on the existing problem of 1.1 billion people who lack access to safe drinking water. Projected reductions in agricultural productivity and food security mean the number of people facing malnutrition will increase significantly within the coming decades, hitting Sub Saharan Africa particularly hard. Over the last few years the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and a growing number of institutions and researchers have confirmed the dire statistics showing how climate change will affect all of us, but especially the poor, with climate change cited as the cause of 150,000 deaths and 5 million incidents of disease each year, mostly in the poorest nations. And health risks will only rise from water-borne diseases, malnutrition and natural disaster deaths.

A Swedish government study has indicated a high risk of violent conflict exacerbated by climate change, and predicts this could happen in up to 46 countries that are home to 2.7 billion people. And the greatest single impact could be migration – by 2050 it is predicted that 150 million people could be displaced due to desertification, water scarcity, floods and storms. Whole cultures may be lost to sea level rise. And crucially, all of these impacts are differentiated by existing vulnerabilities within and between countries.

Women will be hardest hit because they are principally responsible for household food security, staple food production and procurement of water and firewood in most developing countries. Indigenous peoples, already pushed to the most fragile and marginal lands, will face even greater hardships.

This morning someone shared with me what seems to be a very good Bank-supported study of relevance: *Low Carbon-High Growth: Latin America and Climate Change*. I would urge that other such studies be undertaken focusing on Africa and other regions.

Two key principles built into the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change are equity and ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’. We have a *common* heritage and concern, but our responsibilities are *differentiated* because of the unequal material, social and economic situations across States, different historical contributions to global environmental problems, and different financial, technological and structural capacity to tackle those problems. This anchors responsibility on past harm done, and raises duties to contribute to international efforts. This is relevant on both the mitigation side – reducing greenhouse gases – and the adaptation side – how the world, nations and individual communities prepare for and cope with the unavoidable and unforeseeable effects of climate change.

We cannot let the self-interest and short-sightedness of nations undermine progress on a post-Kyoto framework, as has been the case to date with negotiations on the global trade regime. Science has established the risks beyond a doubt. The Stern report of 2006 has



provided the economic rationale behind moving steadily to address climate change. Now we must demand that government negotiators in the lead up to the Copenhagen conference in December act accordingly.

How can the international human rights system help to move responses to climate change in a more developmental and equitable direction? As a report by the International Council on Human Rights Policy – one of the partners in Realizing Rights – suggests, climate change responses will be more effective if human rights criteria are included when assessing future harms, identifying areas of likely vulnerability, and comparing different policy options.

The Council's report stresses that human rights criteria - which we can think of as thresholds of minimum acceptability - provide a platform for broad-based dialogue on burden sharing of a kind that has frequently been missing in climate change debates. The report also points out that international environmental treaties have been slow to introduce judicial instruments or other mechanisms of direct accountability, preferring to emphasise collaborative action. But accountability mechanisms of some sort will be needed to underpin any functional climate regime, because compliance will be vital to credibility. The incorporation of human rights assessments in policy decisions could also help to determine who is accountable, in what measure, and how that accountability might be apportioned based on historical emissions patterns.

The Council's report highlights that human rights analysis and advocacy have always paid particular attention to those who are on the margins of society as a result of poverty, powerlessness, or systemic discrimination. Social and economic vulnerability greatly increases the risk of suffering from the impacts of climate change. Those who are less well off often lack the information or resources to make informed choices on adapting to or otherwise avoiding future damages. They are also less likely to have a sustained voice in, or influence over, policy-making, and so in times of crises the vulnerability of marginalised groups can increase dramatically.

Last but not least, the more we strengthen respect for human rights within countries – by embedding principles of participation, non-discrimination, accountability and transparency, for example – the more effectively those countries will be able to respond to the challenges of climate change, especially the impacts on their most vulnerable populations.

The good news is that a growing movement is forming around the idea of climate justice. Advocates are now actively working to incorporate a human rights framework into the language being negotiated for Copenhagen.

I am pleased to be on the board of the newly created Global Humanitarian Forum led by former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The first meeting of the Forum last June focused precisely on the need for governments, private sector and civil society



representatives to come together and champion a new vision for a post Kyoto climate-change regime. That future framework must make the case effectively that climate change is as much a moral obligation as a pragmatic need for the richest countries which are most responsible for creating the problem, and therefore must do more to assist poorer and more vulnerable nations in adapting to the inevitable impacts they will face in the near term. This year, the Forum hopes to further shared understanding and a growing common agenda for the future which reaffirms that the benefits and burdens associated with climate change must be allocated in an equitable way.

It is becoming clearer that attention to human rights in our future planning can help better understand who is at risk and how we should act to protect them. And as we move forward with policy prescriptions in areas like fuel substitution, forest preservation, adopting new technologies or redesigning markets, human rights principles can assist in assessing the potential burdens from these policies, where they fall, and how they might be shared differently.

We must learn the lessons of the mistakes that were made with biofuels, for example, where a rush to identify and promote solutions did not involve appropriate consultation with those who would be affected – there was not enough analysis of the rights or development impacts. We now know that biofuels can, for example, contribute to higher food prices, cause concentration of land ownership for plantation-type production, cause local environmental problems, and lead to increased competition for water.

Studies have shown that these risks to already vulnerable communities are not offset by the benefits, and moreover do not give the energy security to developing countries that they might derive from other technologies like solar, wind or biogas power. A wide range of actors have increasingly called for a halt to government support for biofuels because of this. Let us take these lessons to heart.

Let me say a few words about your role. First, as I'm sure all of you know, The World Bank is often the target of criticism because its energy portfolio is still heavily weighted toward carbon-producing projects. Both the authority and the power of the Bank are enormous, and I would urge you to reconsider this portfolio given what we now know, and show real leadership in demarcating what is a good investment for both a country *and* the planet – not just in terms of return on investment or the amount of energy produced for a certain price, but for its impact on greenhouse gas emissions. Much care is needed as well in the design and implementation of the wide range of Adaptation Projects the Bank is set to finance in the coming years.

Second, you as the World Bank have a critical role to play in disseminating information on climate change to the public. I understand that The World Bank is supporting the Internews Climate journalism awards that were highlighted at the Environment Ministers meeting in Siracusa, Italy today. Such awards are very important because they address the large information gap that still exists on climate change, and can help inform those



most at risk who often have the least information about what is happening and what can be done. Providing better information to the public on climate change issues -- including the causes, projected impacts, and how to mitigate and adapt to climate change -- can help change public behavior and build accountability for effective policies. Providing better information is absolutely critical to reducing risks and building adaptive capacity. I commend the World Bank for supporting such innovations that are an important complement to the bread-and-butter of your lending and policy advice.

Let me conclude by recalling a lesser known provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which [their] rights and freedoms ... can be fully realized”. We now see that climate change threatens to disrupt that order. But perhaps it is also an opportunity, if we are willing to grasp it, to create the kind of international and social order that the framers of the Universal Declaration dreamed of – one in which the dignity and rights of all people are protected.

Once again, thank you for inviting me to speak today, and I look forward to a lively discussion.