



4th Annual Peter M. Wege Lecture on Sustainability

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Over the past forty years, I have been deeply involved with three powerful movements: for democracy and participation of women, for the environment and for global public health. Environment moved center stage in the 1980s and has stayed there. We have been through a decade of real gains for democracy, and women's participation has made substantial strides too. Major interest in global health is scaling up.

Progress in such areas are very limited without a solid and informed public debate which creates a real political momentum for action, a process dependent upon real evidence, political courage, and an activist civil society.

Universities, their curricula and their research are crucial as a basis for promoting such change. At this campus, major efforts are being made to be part of formulating the right solutions for our common future.

As a young environment minister a key focus in my job was to use science and evidence to convince my colleagues – and the public that change had to come. Attention to the environment was a must!

The Minister of Health was my natural ally. The typical counterparts were the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Energy. I soon found I needed to convince the Minister of Finance – to get greater clout in our cabinet discussions.

It helped to be elected to more key political influence. After 9 months as minister for the environment, I became Deputy President of the Labor Party. From that position I had gained sufficient influence to refuse to move to so-called traditionally more prestigious cabinet posts. It happened twice during government reshuffles, when I kept reminding the men around me: Prime Minister, environment is crucial!

My fight was about the future, about taking seriously a concern for people in a deteriorating environment. It was about making my party take it seriously – and become the party of choice for those with real concerns about the environment.

As my international experience grew, with Habitat, the Water Conference, UNEP, and the fight for the OECD, like my own country to take environment seriously, my commitment was coupled with the deep insight of Indira Gandhi: Poverty is the greatest polluter. This was her key message in Stockholm in 1972.

So, as the Secretary General called on me one day in 1983 to lead the World Commission on Environment and Development, WCED, I was well prepared to make very clear: Only if I could have

at least half of the members from the developing world, and if I could focus both on the environment and development. I was fully aware: North and South would have to address these challenges together.

I was convinced that people must be at the center of the equation. Women and men, children all the more. Their lives, their choices, their opportunities to live healthy, productive lives, and to fully participate in society.

Democracy, human rights, the support of civil society, empowerment and education, not least of women are all fundamental to human progress.

“Our Common Future”

My commission was given a breathtaking mandate for global change:

- Define shared perceptions of long-term environmental and development challenges, and the most effective methods to respond to them;
- Recommend means to foster greater cooperation among developed and developing countries, and to attain mutually supportive objectives taking account of the interrelationship among people, resources, environment and development, and
- Propose long-term strategies to achieve sustainable development, combining global economic and social progress with respect for natural systems and environmental quality.

Indeed our commission grew out of awareness that over the course of the last century the relationship between the human world and the planet that sustains it, had undergone profound change.

When the century began neither human number nor technology had the power radically to alter planetary system. As the century was closing not only vastly increased human numbers and their activities had that power, but also major unintended changes were occurring in the atmosphere, in soils, in waters, among plants and animals, and in the relationships among all of these. The rate of change was outstripping the ability of scientific disciplines to assess and advise. It was frustrating the attempt of political and economic institutions, which evolved in a different and fragmented world, to adapt and cope. And it deeply worried many ordinary people who were seeking ways to place their concerns on the political agenda.

It was already abundantly clear that the international community was unable to deal effectively with the vital issues confronting us. Throughout the 1970ies, the United Nations had dealt with important areas such as population, housing, safe water, and new and renewable energy sources by holding major conferences. This offered hope, but all in all the United Nations system was too weak and fragmented to deal with human needs in an integrated way.

The World Commission on Environment and Development was fortunate to be able to build on the reports of the Brandt Commission and the Palme Commission, on which I had been a member. It was clear to me that after Brandt's "*Common Crisis*" and Palme's "*Common Security*", "*Our Common Future*" would have to be the next step in a major effort to persuade countries to return to multilateralism in an integrated effort to address peace, environment and development.

In the early 1970ies, the Club of Rome had presented for the first time how limited resources could set limits to growth. The ecological movement and many scientists had since the late sixties become increasingly aware of how we were approaching limits to the burdens that we could load upon Nature's capacity to absorb the effects of human activities. The Stockholm Conference in 1972 was the first major international effort to address these new threats.

The increasing knowledge, which we acquired throughout the 1970ies, was new to our generation. Never before in human history had we had the capacity to destroy the environment and to reduce the options for future generations. Our generation was the first, which had to be cognizant of its responsibility for the environment, also on behalf of generations yet unborn.

This not only raised awareness, but also inspired a profound ethical debate. At first, however, this debate was mainly limited to those with special interests. The issue did not move into central decision-making. What was lacking was a convincing, undeniable link to economics.

As a young environment minister I had quickly realized that you cannot make real changes in society unless the economic dimension of an issue is fully understood.

The South was skeptical about the new environmental awareness of the North, seeing it as a threat to their development ambitions. The North had been developing for decades without showing much concern for environmental degradation and destruction. The developing countries were facing completely different challenges. They were caught in a downward spiral of increasing poverty, crushing debt burdens, deteriorating terms of trade and inadequate access to world markets. They felt unable to afford the apparent luxury of protecting their own resource base.

Our report, "*Our Common Future*", played its maybe most important role in clearly establishing the link between environment and development. These were formerly viewed as separate issues, dealt with by different institutions internationally and different ministries at the national level.

Many in the past have assumed that the goals of environmental protection and economic development are incompatible, and that the interests of industrialized nations are in conflict with the needs of Third World countries. Our report proved those assumptions wrong. In short, neither environmental protection nor economic development is sustainable without proper attention to both.

Instead we called for a new era of economic growth, one that must be based on policies that sustain and expand the environmental resource base. We formulated a positive message; one built on greater insight, collaboration and shared responsibilities.

The World Commission managed to forge the basis for a global consensus because we made it explicit that it was only by solving social and economic problems that we could have hope of solving the threats to the environment. We firmly believed that we could not protect the global environment without establishing a more just international economic order, nor provide the basis for a more just and equitable future for all if global trends that threaten the resources base were allowed to continue.

We developed the concept of sustainable development, which means that we must meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs

Sustainable development is a political concept for human social, economic and environmental progress. It will require a new era of international cooperation and greater participation by people themselves. They must become more actively involved in political life so that they can have a say in decisions of importance to their own lives and futures. Thus, democracy, human rights as well as practical solidarity had to become the basis of all effective policies for environment and development.

Our analysis led to the call for a strengthening of international cooperation. Only by working together, not against each other, can we have a vision of a better-managed world, better governance, and global adherence to the fundamental principles of democracy, and to the principle

that economic and social development must be sustainable. Peace, democracy, environment and development. These would have to be the core issues of our common agenda for the 21st century.

No less than in 1987 we must now fully recognize how interdependent we all have become. We pointed to some disturbing trends. World population projections indicated a doubling of our numbers some time in this century. That increase will take place in developing countries, and unless corrective action is taken this will aggravate the vicious circle of poverty and environmental degradation in which they already are caught. Combined with unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, especially in the North, these trends will place intolerable strains on finite natural resources.

In the North we must also recognize that nobody, not even the richest of us, can hide from these global trends. There will be no sanctuaries where some people can escape the harsh realities. We would all suffer from the radiation if the ozone layer would be further damaged. Climate change can cause drought, floods, and disruption of agricultural patterns both in the North and in the South.

Hundreds of millions of people are living in areas that will be affected by rise of the sea level. Toxic substances are traveling with winds and currents, and everybody has to breathe. Pollutants originating in the Temperate Zone are already to be found in the food chain in the Arctic. Clearly we need fundamental changes in the way we use the Earth's crust, the way we develop and use energy and in the way we distribute the benefits of economic growth.

Our security also depends at least as much on economic well being, social justice and ecological stability as it does on military threats. Throughout human history, struggles over access to and control over natural resources have been one of the root causes of tension and armed conflict. We risk a proliferation of such disputes if the rapid deterioration of environmental quality is allowed to continue.

Our future depends on our collective ability to change. We must address issues in a precautionary, integrated manner, and we must deal decisively with all the underlying causes of human conflict and distress.

Above all we must be uncompromising in our determination to eradicate poverty. Poverty is a major cause of environmental degradation in the Third World. Poor people will concentrate on their daily survival. They will be forced to cut down trees, overgraze pastures and overuse farmland in order to stay alive. Poor countries, too, will have to overexploit their natural resources in order to produce the export goods needed to pay for necessary import. When prices go down, they will have to produce more and more basic commodities and extract more and more of their natural resources to pay for goods that they do not produce themselves. This illustrates the great importance of improved rules for global trade

As we look at the situation in 2004, we must once again conclude: There is no simple solution. Overlooking our growing global interdependence will not be a choice.

Poverty is in itself intolerable and cannot be reconciled with human dignity. We need to oppose any tendency to ignore the fundamental challenges of the continuing North-South divide. Otherwise the very future of our planet is in danger.

During my leadership role on the Commission on Environment and Development we faced deep political, cultural and religious divides in a number of areas. It applied to different issues such as the safety of nuclear energy. But the most difficult one to overcome was linked to our analysis and recommendations in the field of population, population pressure and human rights, and their links to poverty, environment and development. The fact that in the end we were able to bridge our different

concerns and come up with a shared vision in 1987, I believe created an important platform for change as the world prepared for the Child Summit, the Rio Conference and then the Cairo and Beijing Conferences in 1994 and 1995. There were some very key sentences that we were able to agree on:

Urgent steps are needed to limit extreme rates of population growth. Choices made now will influence the level at which the population stabilizes next century within a range of six billion people. But this is not just a demographic issue; providing people with facilities and education that allow them to choose the size of their families is a way of assuring – especially for women – the basic human right of self-determination. Governments that need to do so should develop long-term, multifaceted population policies and a campaign to pursue broad demographic goals: to strengthen social, cultural, and economic motivations for family planning, and to provide to all who want them, the education, contraceptives, and services required.

We had in the end been able to conclude that social and cultural factors are the ones that dominate all others in affecting fertility, and we also agreed on the following, critical observations and recommendations:

The role of women

The most important of these are the roles women play in their family, the economy, and the society at large. Fertility rates fall as women's employment opportunities outside the home and farm, their access to education, and their age at marriage all rise. Hence policies meant to lower fertility rates not only must include economic incentives and disincentives, but must aim to improve the position of women in society. Such policies should essentially promote women's rights.

Today, this basic analysis is of course much more generally accepted, and gradually increasing knowledge and new data confirm its crucial relevance. I choose to remind us all that what seemed surprisingly radical in 1987, in 2004 has become an accepted reality in global debate, although we must be vigilant to avoid new setbacks.

The millennium declaration

Thirteen years after the presentation of "*Our Common Future*", the Millennium Declaration made clear that gender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but is critical to our ability to reach all development goals. The world is now clearly moving forward as it establishes the values that underlie global development. And when we look at the eight development goals they have strong links to women's lives and to health, and they have of course taken on board the necessity to ensure environmental sustainability.

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development.

In fact, as I see it, the Millennium Development Goals are a shorthand declaration on the most crucial recommendations put forward in "*Our Common Future*", a shorthand for how we must pursue sustainable development.

Let me share some observations in key areas.

Educating women

Although global literacy rates have risen during the past 30 years, women remain less likely to be able to read and write than their male contemporaries do. Of the 900 million illiterate people, women outnumber men 2:1. Illiteracy is worst in Africa and West Asia with 65 per cent of women classified as illiterate compared with 40 per cent of men. In many parts of the world, traditional attitudes make it more likely that girls, rather than boys, will be kept out of school to help with the domestic chores and care for dependants.

Yet, repeated studies have made it clear that educating women is an effective way of improving health and income, and protecting the environment. Giving girls the ability to access knowledge, to question and to analyze, and to build their capacity for self-improvement, will help their families and communities. The size of the effect that girl's education has been shown to have on health and fertility outcomes is a powerful argument for investing in girls' access to education. Indeed if development is about widening women's' and men's' choices and a more equitable distribution of resources, the interaction of gender and poverty constitutes the greatest limiting factor to human development. The time has come to look beyond the sexual and reproductive health of women and view their different needs during the entire life span. Equitable access to education, research into gender differences in disease and valuing women's paid and unpaid work are some of the ways we can push for change.

Women's lives are both illustrated by hard work and a lot of work. Statistics that show how men are privileged in working life, and earn much more than women are well known. All over the world an even more interesting picture comes out when you look at the total workload within and outside of the home. Surveys in Cuba showed that women work 20 percent more hours than men. But less than a third of that time is paid work. For the men, the opposite is the case. 2/3 of their workload is paid work. And we have reason to believe that Cuba is middle of the road. In most countries the picture would be far worse.

Health

Despite the long list of successes in health achieved during the 20th century, the balance sheet is indelibly stained by the avoidable burden of disease that the world's disadvantaged population continues to bear.

Despite the great achievements of the 20th century, successes in health have been unevenly distributed: 1,3 billion people have entered the 21st century without having benefited from the health revolution. These are the people who are still living in absolute poverty. That is, living on less than US\$ 1 a day.

The health impact of this inequality gap is staggering. Despite the rise in average global life expectancy, in the least developed countries, three out of four people die before the age of 50. Infant mortality is almost seven times higher in a developing country than in industrialized countries. A child born in a developing country today runs a 1.000-fold greater risk of dying from measles than a child born in an industrialized country. Children living in absolute poverty have a five-fold greater probability of dying before their fifth birthday than their wealthier counterparts.

And tragically, giving birth in Africa is a perilous undertaking for far too many women. Where the statistics are the worst, one woman in every 16 faces death because of poor health and because she does not receive the care she needs when pregnant. By contrast, in most of Europe and North America, such a tragedy will hit only one woman in 4.000. No other indicator so starkly reflects the disparities in this world.

And, perhaps not surprisingly - 70 per cent of the world's poor are women.

Throughout much of the world; families and societies treat girls and boys unequally, with girls disproportionately facing lack of opportunity and lower levels of investment in their health; nutrition and education. Prevailing gender norms stymie adolescent girls' access to schooling and employment opportunities.

In the worst affected regions of sub-Saharan Africa, women and girls account for 58 % of those living with HIV/AIDS, and girls age 15 - 19 are infected at rates four to seven times higher than boys. These disparities illustrate the roles of girls and women. They are due to sexual abuse; rape; coercion and discrimination. Generally, unequal power relations between men and women lead to widespread violations of health and human rights.

Among the most persistent and pernicious are adolescent or child marriage, sexual trafficking, sexual violence and coercion, and female genital mutilation. Despite an improvement in many parts of the world, 82 million girls in developing countries who are now between 10 and 17 will be married before they are 18. In some countries; the majority of girls still marry before they are 18. In India the number is 50%, in Nepal 60%, and in Niger 76%.

Providing opportunities for girls to continue their schooling or to earn money helps to delay marriage and improve life skills and choices. In Bangladesh, a secondary school scholarship program for girls, requiring that girls remain unmarried through the final examination, had an immediate effect in delaying marriage. In areas covered by the project, girls' enrolment more than doubled between 1994 and 2001. Trends are improving. The world is learning.

Taking responsibility in WHO

At WHO I again put a key emphasis on the need to get our science and evidence right, not only our health evidence but also the evidence about the interaction between health and development. Led by Professor Jeffrey Sachs, now at Columbia University, the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health delivered a report that will remain a landmark in improving our understanding of how wise health interventions can spur development.

The Commission's report provides a reference for any policy maker – in rich and poor countries alike. It offers a strategy for investing in health for economic development, especially in the world's poorest countries, based upon a new partnership of the developing and developed countries.

Extending the coverage of crucial health services, including a relatively small number of specific interventions, to the world's poor could save millions of lives each year, reduce poverty, spur economic development, and promote global security. These conclusions illustrated my own observations and convictions: We need to invest in people, in their health and education, not only to promote human rights, but to spur economic growth.

Health on the Global Agenda

There are promising signs that policy makers are taking the signal. Health is now on the agenda of decision-makers far beyond the health sector and new alliances have been formed to fund immunization as well as increased efforts against HIV, TB and malaria. This is all well, but it can only be a beginning.

The poor need to increase their investment in health, be it modest step by modest step. The rich need to increase their official development assistance and earmark a real proportion to health. The research agenda needs to change to include a much larger focus on the diseases of the poor. We need a transfer of knowledge and technology to the poor countries. Market mechanisms need to be mobilized and the public sector needs to provide visible incentives. We need mechanisms to safeguard the health and social sector in the ongoing round of trade talks. We already see some

headway towards making HIV-medicines available at a lower price, but there is still a long way to go.

Energy and climate

The perspectives of climate change are indeed scary.

Following our report in 1987, we saw a dramatic shift in public opinion. This was driven by concerned NGOs, policymakers and experts, extreme climate events and then a masterly crafted scientific consensus process under the auspices of IPCC – the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Five years after "*Our Common Future*" we had a global framework. The climate convention was established. That was surely beyond our dreams. Then the 1990ies saw an impressive series of global summits, tough negotiations and new scientific reports leading up to the Kyoto meeting in December 1997. Crucially, Kyoto established the basis for legal commitments to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases.

It is impressive, but, unfortunately, it is by no means enough! Vested interests continuously mobilize against progress, negotiators are bogged down in intricate details, and global emissions are increasing.

Recently, Russia announced its important decision to support the Kyoto protocol. This move will be decisive for its entry into force, and is probably more due to pressure from Europe, than any inspiration from the US.

The world has a long way to go, but a crucial start has been made. Increasing awareness in the world's richest and most powerful nation gives new hope. Bi-partisan political efforts are evolving here in this country, but so far, unfortunately, I have not noticed climate and environment issues to be central in the ongoing battle for the White House.

There is no true alternative to multilateralism in facing up to our responsibility for future generations and the planet itself. We don't have much time. A number of developing countries have increasing and rapidly growing emissions. Developing countries may soon represent a bigger part of the total than the industrialized world. The future is one of including all countries in our global solutions, but before that can happen, the rich countries must rise to the occasion, show leadership, and take responsibility.

The crucial role of the UN

Last year, the Secretary General of the UN, Kofi Annan, made an urgent call to the nations of the world, in an address to the General Assembly. Having seen the shared vision at the Millennium Summit 3 years ago, a vision of global solidarity and collective security, he reminded delegates that recent events have called that consensus into question. He announced that he would establish a high level panel to analyze the present and future challenges to peace and security, to consider the contribution which collective action can make in addressing them, and to recommend ways of strengthening international collaboration and the United Nations. I am honored to be part of that crucial process, and have focused much of my attention to the challenges of social injustice, disease, lack of development and poverty. We now need to refocus our attention to the achievement of the Millennium development goals, the common struggle to protect our environment, and the struggle for human rights, democracy and good governance.

The Nobel Peace Prize this year was awarded to Wangari Mathai, the first African woman to receive this prestigious honor. Questions were raised by some: Wasn't she primarily an activist and spokesperson for the environment, for planting of trees to protect and support human life? Yes,

indeed. I believe the Nobel Committee made a good decision. They illustrated our interdependence; they broadened our view of what it takes to promote peace.

There is no hope for peace and stability without sustainable development, human rights and democracy!

Today there are enormous gaps between rich and poor countries. This is an unsustainable situation, for many reasons. They relate to ethical, economical and security perspectives.

To conclude – we need a shift in awareness towards the idea of building global public goods that can help us reap the huge potential benefits of globalization while at the same time containing the risks and vulnerabilities that comes with it.