

THE BIO-ENVIRONMENT: PROTECTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE

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Overview

We are living in an era of rapid change in an increasing complex society. Many of us, especially those in developing nations are facing problems posed by unstable socio-economic upheavals. Scientific and technological developments have opened up unprecedented opportunities as well as new dangers and problems. Failure to account for popular feeling in areas which affect public welfare may have the tendency to weaken the political system. It is at this point that survival of man will depend on an increased respect for life, considering key influences on the political, social, economic, geographic and cultural differences.

All people of the world belong to one human family. Appreciation of life through global education stressing the basic human values of social justice, economic equity, ecological balance, participation and peace would undoubtedly promote international goodwill, universal friendship, understanding and global co-operation among people. This supports one global goal, which recognises quality of life with human dignity and cultural identity irrespective of sex, race, colour, language or creed.

It is at this juncture that the Biopolitics International Organisation headed by Dr. A. Vlavianos-Arvanitis, should be congratulated for having initiated such a laudable world conference with its theme: Protection as well as improvement of "bios". "Bios" provides a significant credibility for international co-operation and takes into account the pervasion of technological development in all aspects of society. In this connection, biopolitics proposes international co-operation for better understanding of life. The people in government, in industry, and in the academic field must all come together to evolve a new way of thinking about systematic relationships in order to strengthen the processes of social growth and change.

Problem Identification

Most countries of the world are on the sharp edge of crisis. Some are degrading the natural environment. Some pride themselves on conquering the "outer" space. Yet after more than two centuries others still are baffled on how to manage the biosphere on planet earth. This bio-environment dilemma may be the result of several factors: rapid population growth, pollution, excessive consumption of resources and the gradual deterioration of land ethics.

An increase in population in any nation means an increase in all types of environmental pollution. It means an accelerated depletion of natural resources, that will make increasing demands on wilderness and recreation areas and, with a greater number of people, an increased need for human settlements. We, as a people, are gradually degrading our environment with an ever-increasing variety and volume of contaminants. We are polluting lakes and streams with raw sewage, industrial wastes, radioactive materials, heat, detergents, agricultural fertilisers and pesticides. Many gases including carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxide and others, most of which are known to cause and contribute to respiratory ailments, are constantly being spewed into the atmosphere.

Many people of developed nations have consumed more materials than have been consumed by mankind in previous history of this planet. Some wealthy people are the most overfed, overhoused, overclothed, overmobilised and over-entertained. They have tremendous consumption of cars, summer homes, colour TV-sets, washing machines, air conditioners, golf carts, motorised lawn mowers, swimming pools, speed boats, water skis and so on which certainly do not stem from need. Part of their food production contributes not to nutrition but to obesity and part of their clothing is designed not to cover nakedness but to suggest it.

It is a paradox that even developed nations have built up a very high standard of living but at the same time permitted their standard of environment to deteriorate. With the influx of rural people attracted to the urban environment their offspring create a new generation in cities who have never experienced breathing the fragrance of spring-plowed earth or have never seen the fresh waters rushing from the waterfalls or rapids. This young generation has severed their connection with the rural land and their aesthetic sense has degenerated to the point where they prefer the roar of a hot rod to the sweet call of a songbird.

Relationship Between Bio-Environment And Development

"Bios" is defined by Webster as a Greek word meaning "life". Therefore all human beings on earth have the right to protection and an improved quality of life. An investment in environmental protection through co-operation pays now.

Environment and development are interdependent. Without conservation we cannot have development, and without development we cannot have conservation. International approval of this principle was given by the 113 nations who attended the 1972 Stockholm UN Conference on the Environment. UN Environmental Programme (UNEP) which was established in 1973 consistently advocates "development without destruction". A world-wide application of environmentally sound development surely averts the crisis of developing countries.

We have a world to win. If nations show political commitment we will be able to stop the advancing deserts and regreen the areas already lost; we can combat marine pollution and restock depleted fisheries; we can stop erosion and make better use of the land already being farmed, we can prevent air pollution and make better use of the land already being farmed, we can prevent air pollution and improve the quality of life in exploding cities: thus we will be able to tackle poverty, the cause of serious environmental problems in many countries. The environment has relevance to every aspect of man's political, social and economic activities. Most politicians and other decision makers seem to lack the background in the physical sciences. They are economists, lawyers, social scientists, bankers, businessmen, planners and the like. These people do not make decisions with the interest of the next generation in mind. Most of their decisions are made with a view of winning the next election or to the annual budget of to the next meeting of shareholders.

The components of the natural world, forests, atmosphere, soil, the sea and so on, together make up the system which supports all life on earth. The aim of environment management is to ensure economic development and conservation of natural resources which are pursued as goals of equal importance.

Over-exploitation of natural resources cannot be sustained. Most industrialised nations rely on the developing countries as the source of their raw materials. Deforestation, desertification and soil erosion are examples of the outward signs. To this end UNEP is developing a program of environmental cost-benefit analysis because it has been proven that an investment in environmental protection pays immediate dividends. Businessmen tend to over-estimate the benefits. Such a perspective indicates that environmental protection yields significant economic and social benefits in terms of productivity and profitability in investments, technical innovations, energy use and amenities.

The new emphasis of development is on wider qualitative aspects such as an improvement in income distribution, employment, health, housing, education and other social welfare benefits.

The United Nations Environment Programme And International Co-Operating Agencies

The UN Environment Programme in its entirety comprises all activities undertaken within the UN system that have bearing on the environment. Agencies such as FAO, ILO, UNESCO and WHO in collaboration with UNEP carry out activities related to the environment. The role of UNEP is to catalyse, co-ordinate, and identify the gaps in certain environment areas and to ensure that the gaps are filled, preventing unnecessary duplication of efforts and resources, and providing for an exchange of views and information within the system on a common subject. Conferences, seminars and meetings have been held every year to satisfy these ends.

Conclusions And Recommendations

If international co-operation has to gain its strong foothold with biopolitics through bio-environmental struggle it is imperative that appreciation, respect and understanding of the delicate sun-soil-water-air-organism complex through education, be fostered starting at the pre-school level. Sociologists agree that many adult attitudes have already been shaped before the age of six.

Too often elementary and secondary school teachers are uncomfortable with the thought of using outdoors as a classroom. Newer techniques should be devised for teacher-training to help break down this barrier so that the relationship between man, his artificial world and nature can be viewed as a whole.

What we need now are new and imaginative development policies. At the national level one could envisage measures to restrict excessive or wasteful consumption of resources through alternative lifestyles and development patterns.

At the international level it is necessary to anticipate environmental threats such as air pollution, rapid pollution growth, deforestation and so on and identify measures to control them. Simultaneously the management of common resources such as the atmosphere or the open oceans should be geared to urgent international development priorities.

In this situation, we require a clear understanding of how to develop international co-operation among peoples of the world and how to understand inter-relationships between resources, environment and development. A continuous process of global planning is needed which must be a cost-effective integration through the use of appropriate institutional, legislative and public policy instruments.

We should also underscore the bearing of international, economic and technical co-operation in the promotion of economic growth along environmentally sound lines. Transnational investments as well as development assistance should be reflected in programs of international economic co-operation. Finally, stronger support by governments and closer co-operation between intergovernmental agencies and individual scientists are imperative if bio-environmental protection for an improved quality of life for all is to be fully realised.

A polluted or spoiled environment destroys a country's natural resource base thus lowering incomes and eventually causing social unrest and political instability. Therefore, protecting and improving the environment contributes to peace.

Recommendations On Bio-Environment For International Co-Operation

1. Supply bio-environmental information to the public.
2. Organise programmes of environmental campaigns such as seminars, workshops and training courses with related agencies and organisations.
3. Provide technical knowledge, expertise, and seed money for bio-environmental activities and projects.
4. Produce a simple bio-environmental information sheet which could be photocopied by associations/organisations for circulation among their members.
5. Improve information feedback with local, national and international organisations.
6. Make better use of United Nations channels, such as UNIC, UNDP & UNEP for dissemination information on bio-environment.
7. Help to train youth leaders and establish a mechanism for following-up national youth environmental programmes.
8. Make UNEP information more accessible to related organisations, and other channels.
9. Involve women and youth organisations in Bio-Environmental Programmes to tackle environmental problems particularly at the grass-roots level.
10. Integrate in the curriculum in all school levels the value of bio-environmental education in order to appreciate, respect and understand the delicate sun-soil-water-air-organism symbiotic relationship.
11. Encourage the development of innovative and newer techniques for teacher-training concerning the relationship between man, his artificial world and nature with the end in view of anticipating environmental threats that would hinder progress and peace.
12. Organise a continuous process of global/international planning, implementing and evaluating mechanism which must be a cost-effective integration through the use of appropriate institutional, legislative and public policy procedures.
13. Transnational investments as well as development assistance should be reflected in programs of international economic co-operation.
14. Plan realistic strategies to effect closer co-operation and stronger support by governments and intergovernmental agencies as well as individual scientists on bio-environmental protection for an improved quality of life

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