

and attitudes into the achievement of sustainable development. Sustainable development for the private sector is both cost-effective and profitable. They know very well that it is their future, so they can be a very ready and helpful partner. The private sector should help government in setting the standards. Industry has the capacity, expertise and knowledge which government should be able to draw on freely. As we heard also, industry should participate — and I say participate very much as partners — in developing professional and technical capacity within the private sector, i.e. within their own industries, in plant safety employee training, within NGOs at the national and community levels, so as to give them additional expertise and, above all, within the local communities where industry finds itself.

We now come to the comparative advantages of NGOs. I would say that there are possibly six. First of all, promote partnerships and the sustainable development approach. In a world with the kind of ideological loosening that has taken place in recent years, NGOs are able and willing in most cases to fulfil a very important role in civil society. They can bridge, they can facilitate, they can link. That is a very strong comparative advantage that should be exploited.

NGOs should also maximize the local site-specific participation in disaster management. They are perhaps best placed because of the cultural base they possess to develop local community capacity. They also have a particular niche in mobilizing public opinion and resources.

But as we have heard, NGOs, just like anyone else, are not perfect. They need to also improve their own training, their own capacity and indeed, in a way, their own vision of what their role is. Finally, I would say that perhaps one of the most consistent contributions that NGOs can make is to emphasize again and again that the local community is the most effective and important partner of all. In disaster management and sustainable development, a top-down approach will not work.

■ Message to Donors

If I may add something which I feel is very important. It did not come up in the discussion per se, but particularly because of my own background in the United Nations system — I would like to make three recommendations to donor governments.

First, the governments of the north themselves must integrate disaster management and sustainable development in their own administrations. Too often the refugee administration and the disaster administration do not talk to the development administration, even though they may be part of the same ministry. That integration of approach needs to be taken in the developed countries as well, not only in terms of development cooperation, but — to reiterate a point that Dr. Bassani made in his opening statement — to meet the question of the decrease in resources for development. Development funding must be integrated with disaster management in pursuit of sustainable development.

Second, in working with countries, donors should emphasize support above all for local efforts, local capacity building, local expertise. I am personally very firmly of the opinion that parachuting short-term expatriates into a situation to produce a master plan is just about the biggest waste of money that any government, NGOs and the UN system commit today. Local efforts, local capacity, local expertise are the primary focus of action.

Third, share technology and technical assistance, particularly to build, as it were, institutional frameworks for cooperation on a regional level. That would be a highly effective use of resources.

I hope I have in some way done justice to the presenters. I would hope that the approach that has emerged today will be implemented and that it will exploit to the full each group's capacity and comparative advantage. Governments will do what they do best — let them do it. Industry will do what it does best — let it do it. NGOs will do what they do best. Let us integrate the whole lot in pursuit of what I would call the value-added of sustainable development. ■

Disasters: Unsolved Problems of Development

*Post-Yokohama observations
by the chairman of the session.*

Disasters are nothing more than the presence of certain risk conditions — a triggering agent (a natural or technological event) combined with existing socio-economic vulnerabilities — that encourage a crisis. These social and environmental conditions are the result of the way we pursue development; along the way, we incur growing debts with nature, which nature eventually reclaims.

In other words, disasters are unsolved problems of development. Disasters need to be analyzed from the point of view of political economy, and not only as simple facts of nature, which are analyzed by technicians.

To express it in economic terms, vulnerability — in all its different forms — represents a “deficit” of development, a negative environmental “balance.” To correct the balance, disaster prevention and planning efforts must be directed

towards reducing or preventing social, environmental and economic imbalances.

We should address disaster reduction primarily by changing our approach to development, which should be based on improving the quality of life for all people. At the same time, development should attack vulnerabilities that exist today, and should seek a balance between the needs of progress and the need to preserve our environment.

The concerted action needed for disaster reduction is more than just a job for governments. The private sector, and organized groups in civil society, such as NGOs, have roles to play. They must make scientific and technical contributions to disaster reduction, but that is not enough. They must emphasize that there is a close relationship between poor environmental management and the increase in disasters; between poverty and the negative impact (loss of lives and goods) caused by natural phenomena; between cultural traditions and vulnerability to the forces of nature. Only by acknowledging these realities will we be able to truly work effectively to reduce disasters in the world.

Finally, it is important to note that although many societies live in pre-modern conditions, in many developing countries, modern and even post-modern conditions are influencing the dynamics of growth and development. Faced with these signs of change, fragmentation and ephemeral images, we need to set up less rigid models of development. We need development models which allow us to better integrate uncertainties, instability and surprises. What this means is that we need a dynamic planning process, with early warning techniques for social conditions and not just natural or technological events. In other words, the world needs a forward-looking, preventive vision as a strategy to achieve sustainable development. ■

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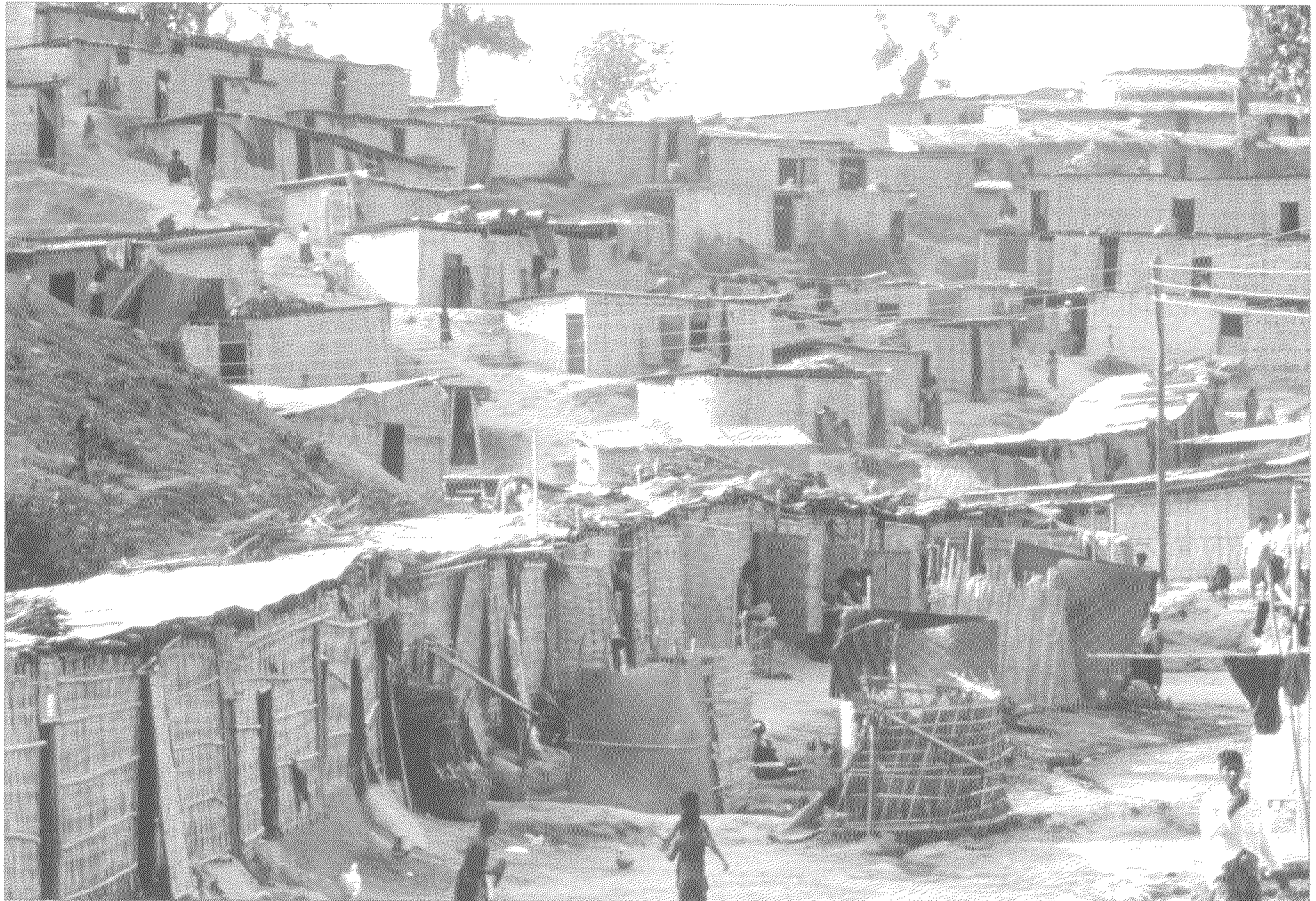


Photo: UNHCR

Disasters — acts of God or acts of Man? Disaster management professionals pose this question again and again. Some policies for population, the environment and development consistently leave parts of our societies vulnerable to natural disasters.

Above: Precarious housing in Bangladesh — triggered by economic and population pressures — put a community at risk to "natural" disasters such as landslides.