



## **Editorial**

### *Greening development: the politics of the 1990s*

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Preserving the environment – both natural resources and social and cultural environments – has become one of the major political issues of the 1990s. Environment has shifted from a bounty to be reaped by development to a fiery issue at the centre of many conflicts worldwide. Strategies to preserve the environment dig deep into the foundations of development as a global project. Conflicts over natural resources and cultural degradations are escalating as the unsustainability of development is exposed. Even the most ardent developer now acknowledges workable policies have to include natural resource management in order to stop the unsustainable degradation of the natural environment. And cultural and social environmental needs linked to localities are increasingly receiving recognition, particularly with the new communications fostering worldwide internet campaigns.

The focus on environment has opened up many new, at times surprising, political spaces. In acknowledging the importance of preserving the environment a convincing challenge to development based on economic growth has been mounted. Environmental conflicts have forced us to rethink, particularly in the North, the viability of life styles and livelihoods based on the market economy. In trying to defend traditional environments – the resources on which livelihoods depend and the cultures that nurture people's social identity – concepts of cooperation and partnership have become critical. How local and outside development experts see the environment has emerged as vital in judging how best to manage the development of an area. New types of partnership between village and town are called for as well as between the state and the market.

This rethinking of how to do a type of development that is people centred and environmentally sustainable has led to a steady focus on 'the grassroots', their knowledge and the need for participatory rather than top down development, if development is needed at all. Such new approaches have seen the emergence of new voices and actors. People living in economic poverty, the foremost being women in their newly acknowledged role as caretakers of nature, are no longer

invisible. In looking at how to manage the environment and respect local cultures local women offer different strategies for engagement, their knowledge and hard work clearly critical to sustaining local communities.

Environmental degradation is an all too visible example of the damage of the dominant development paradigm – desertification, denuded forests, lost cultures and languages – and it cannot be conveniently ignored. It is not possible in the 1990s to speak about development without factoring in the environment and without consulting local people. The willingness for governments, the business sector and the international development establishment to consider environment (finally) as a critical factor in determining economic and social policies has opened up the door for a new kind of development where local people's needs and in particular women's needs are considered.

But perhaps this shift is just a gloss, the language of ecology and people's movements being adopted and converted back into business as usual under the right headings. This journal issue hopes to show that, whatever cynics might claim, people around the world are not continuing business as usual. From the articles here it is clear that there is an environmental politics emerging from the questioning of development as an enterprise that goes beyond traditional political lines. People – the economically poor 'grassroots', women's groups worldwide, tribal peoples, socially engaged workers in the North – are fighting to preserve their environment and are willing to change institutions, knowledge bases, policies and life styles in order to do so. They do so for different reasons and within different struggles: women in Asia fight to preserve their knowledge of seeds; tribal people in the Amazon their livelihoods; poor women and men their land against miners; NGOs in South East Asia their land; northern housewives the purity of their water supply; Greens in Europe their local natural resources. In these conflicts it is clear that in defending local environments against the unsustainability of development based solely on economic growth these groups go to the heart of the injustices and inequities of the development project. And, in thinking of ways to defend and sustain the environment, they open up doors to change approaches to development.

The journal issue carries some of the stories of these changes in analysis and innovative strategies employed to defend environments. We hope that in sharing with readers these stories we map out the shifting negotiations that governments, civil society groups and business sectors involved in development are now engaged. Participation, partnership, gender relations, grassroots knowledge, cooperation, capabilities and long term viability are the key concepts of these negotiations. All of this means that 'preserving the environment' carries with it complex social, cultural and above all political intent.

Franck Amalric's lead piece presents this forcefully in his examination of conflicts over access to natural resources within the framework of 'the sustainable livelihoods approach to social justice'. He argues that the escalation of conflicts reveals the expanding encroachment of the global economy over people's economy, with devastating social and ecological implications and as a symptom of unsustainable development paths. He raises questions about the structure of governance and political strategies that could help coordinate people's responses to the devastation of their natural and social environments. Building from the political strategies already being adopted he suggests that more information is needed in order to monitor the action of the state or compare the value of different policies.

We hope that this journal contributes to this needed information about how different groups and societies are responding to globalization, social and physical environmental change. The stories collected here provide both anecdotal and analytical ideas about conflicts over natural resources, people's responses to development and globalization as well as visions for how socially and environmentally equitable change can be achieved. We invite readers to write to *Development* and add to this information. The SID Secretariat is currently surfing the web in order to collect together evidence about conflicts over access to natural resources involving local communities in the South and jeopardizing people's livelihoods. They would welcome more information from *Development* readers in the hope that international agencies will take up the challenge to put in place mechanisms to monitor the level of conflicts within a country or at the global level.