



Needed: A new global governance model

Ten years ago, in 1992, I was privileged to lead the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, sometimes referred to as the Rio Summit or Earth Summit. As an event itself, Rio was clearly remarkable, indeed historic. Never before had so many of the world's political leaders come together in one place, and the fact that they came to consider the urgent question of our planet's future put these issues under an enormous international spotlight. This was helped by the presence at Rio of an unprecedented number of people and organizations representing every sector of civil society, and more than double the number of media representatives than had ever covered a world conference.

So far, since Rio, our track record on the path to sustainable development has been mixed. There have been positive achievements that demonstrate this transition is possible (i.e. many countries are participating in good faith in the Convention on Biological Diversity; there are growing trends toward maximizing energy efficiency; polluted waterways and landscapes are being cleaned up), but worryingly, environmental degradation continues. In 2002, as in 1992, as in 1972 (when the United Nations Environment Program was conceived in Stockholm, Sweden), the principal driving forces of economic activity—unsustainable patterns of production and consumption in industrial countries and population growth in developing countries—are still the major contributors to our current unsustainable course.

If we are to achieve the goal of sustainability and ensure the well-being of people and the larger community of life on Earth, which ranges from phytoplankton floating on the North Atlantic currents to steamy bamboo forests in Asia to the Collared Brown Lemurs of Madagascar, all nations and peoples must commit to a new integrated ethical vision. I am persuaded that governance of societies and of the world community as a whole will be the central issue of the 21st century. There is increasing evidence that traditional government and management models, based largely on individual sectors and disciplines, are inadequate for the management of a complex and systemic cause-and-effect system on which a successful transition to sustainable development depends. Where will we find the answers to developing this new form of governance suitable for a world that wants to live in sustainable ways?

The Indigenous Peoples of the Earth have much to contribute. Many still live intimately on and with the lands and waters of the planet; many still possess the wisdom passed from generation to generation of HOW to live sustainably and in harmony with other life forms. As the World Summit on Sustainable Development begins in Johannesburg, this special issue of *Biodiversity* shares with you a series of selected Indigenous perspectives. Sustainable development is not just an option for us—and for all the organisms that we share the Earth with—but an imperative. Let us listen! And then, as a global society, let us transform our future.

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