

Article for Beyond Growth Congress –

**Living simply and sustainably so that others can simply live – Meena Raman, Third World Network and Friends of the Earth, Malaysia**

Overview of the world –

We are living in a world of multiple crises –

+ The crisis of development, poverty and inequality;

+ Environmental and natural resource depletion and degradation, including that of climate change;

+ Financial and economic crisis in the north with impacts across the developing world with rising unemployment; social and economic instability.

All this are symptoms of a deeper systemic crisis where there is a clash of worldviews between those who aspire for a sustainably based economy and those who do not.

We know that the richest billion and a half people are appropriating right now for their exclusive use the entire biophysical output of the planet

Dominant mainstream economics and the current industrial society advocates the freemarket in which the economy is the total system, with everything else, including nature as subordinate to it.

It views nature as having no limits where nature is extracted and used for production of goods regardless of what we are producing even if it is to meet luxury and irrational wants and nature is the dumping ground for wastes.

The motivation is short-term growth and profit for corporations with resource destruction and passing on environmental costs to public.

Natural resources including human genes, are to be controlled with private property rights and vested in the hands of corporations.

The theory is leave nature to market forces as market prices will help protect the environment- scarcity of a resource will make price go up so there will be less use; scarcity means something which can be bought and sold; if not scarce, there is no market and therefore no need to conserve or protect (eg. biodiversity and until recently air – carbon is traded in the market).

In theory, scarcer the commodity, in this case natural resource, the higher the price. This is not the real case as seen in case of commodity price problem in the Third World. Timber is cheap and alternative supplies come from plantation forests which replace natural. Market will always find means to ensure continued supply or through

substitution of material after destruction of resource. Also, policies of the World Bank, IMF and FAO are promoted to ensure Third World countries continue to provide the cheap supply of commodities especially for the rich.

It is also viewed that western science and technology and the market can fix any environmental problem. This is mechanistic and reductionist thinking.

Neo-liberal worldview and free market ideology has gained prominence and is dominant following Washington Consensus as promoted by WB, IMF and WTO. Corporate agenda is the driving force of momentum. Transnational corporations have become even more powerful than many developing country governments!

Effect has been the reduction in space for national policy making and the rising inequity between rich and poor and environmental catastrophe with nature reaching limits already.

The alternative worldview of the environment and world we want is as follows:

- Nature is organic and is life-supporting; the ecosystem is interdependent; every intervention has an effect; nature has limits and there can be irreversible consequences if we exceed the natural balance - eg; deforestation; climate change
- Ecological economics - recognize that nature is the total system and our man-made economy is only a subsystem; learning from indigenous systems of sustainable societies
- Place equity at the centre - poor should grow and rich should cut back - living simply so others can simply live. There is need for a more equal distribution of wealth and resources world-wide. Have to remove the structural causes of international inequality - in trade and commodity prices, in finance and Third World debts, in technology and technical dependence, as well as national inequalities.
- Community rights over access and use of resources and not private property rights and ownership.
- Public protection of critical resources - water-catchment forests; biodiversity - through regulation.
- Regulate and control the markets in all spheres.
- Ecological sustainability is also at the centre. Appropriate technology that works in harmony with nature and not against - eg. agro-ecological agriculture and not genetic/green revolution. Promote ecological, healthy and sustainable processes

of production and form of technology in all areas including agriculture, industry, medicine, health and housing

- Production of appropriate products to meet basic needs first eg. promotion of public transport instead of 'green cars'.
- There is need for a change in lifestyles and cultures away from the possession of material goods and personal status to one that makes possible the flowering of personal relationships and state of being content. Need for a consumer cultural revolution before the world's life support system breaks down.

In this context, need to support the alternative model and transformative model by -

- Challenging the dominant paradigm;
- organize and build alliances;
- educate and agitate for changes;
- build resistance and confront structures that promote current dominance; build solidarity;
- promote and support the alternatives that do exist and make that mainstream.