

On the Way to Johannesburg

A report issued on 20 December 2001 by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan notes that the global economic growth that propelled many economies during the 1990s did not promote sustainable development and environmental protection.

This report is a critical step in the preparatory process now underway for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in September, and will serve as one of the key factual documents for the negotiations for the WSSD. Upcoming preparatory meetings for the Summit, including one from 28 January-8 February 2002 in New York, will incorporate the report's findings and principles into the Summit agenda, through an inclusive multi-stakeholder process.

'The Secretary-General's report is essential to our understanding of how best to move the sustainable development agenda forward,' said Nitin Desai, Secretary-General of the Johannesburg Summit. 'It will also prove invaluable to governments and other major groups working to implement Agenda 21 in their own regions, nations and communities.'

The report offers a critical assessment of progress towards the objectives of Agenda 21, the plan of action on sustainable development adopted at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro. The report also states that, 'despite initiatives by governments, international organisations, business, civil society groups and individuals to achieve sustainable development, progress towards the goals established in Rio has been slower than expected, and in some respects conditions are worse than they were 10 years ago.'

It notes that the implementation gap is especially visible in four areas:

- The current approach to development remains fragmented and piecemeal and does not integrate the economic, social and environmental concerns that are vital to sustainable development.
- Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production continue to overburden the world's natural life support systems.
- Policy approaches to finance, investment, technology and resource development are not coordinated or coherent, and are driven by short-term considerations rather than a longer-term interest in sustainability.
- Financial resources for sustainable development remain insufficient, with official development assistance (ODA) actually declining since 1992 and with flows of private investment highly volatile and focused on a small number of countries.

The Secretary-General's report focuses on the challenge of translating Agenda 21 into practical steps concentrating on key areas where faster implementation is

required and where it will have the greatest impact in promoting sustainable development.

It therefore includes a comprehensive set of principles – a 'Ten-point Action Plan' – for countries, business leaders, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders to consider as they work towards developing the Johannesburg Agenda. Stressing that sustainable development must benefit the poor, who often live in areas facing major ecological pressures, the report supports:

- *'Making globalisation work* for sustainable development through measures such as better coordinated macroeconomic policy management, removal of trade distorting subsidies and improved access to markets for developing countries;
- *Eradicating poverty and improving livelihoods* in rural areas through sustainable agriculture and rural self-help development programmes, and in urban areas through economic opportunities, social programmes and meeting urban environmental challenges such as urban air quality, waste management and transport;
- *Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production* by, among other measures, a four-fold increase in resource efficiency in developed countries in the next 20-30 years;
- *Promoting health* through efforts to provide clean and affordable water and to improve indoor air quality and advance food and animal husbandry;
- *Providing access to energy and increasing energy efficiency* through more renewable and energy-efficient technologies, and by changing unsustainable energy consumption patterns;
 - *Improving management of ecosystems and biodiversity* through implementation of programmes, development of more effective legal protection and better management of land, fisheries and forests;
 - *Improving the management of freshwater resources* through measures such as river basin and watershed management and improved management of shared water resources;
- *Mobilising financial resources* and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies for sustainable development, particularly through increasing both the amount and the effectiveness of ODA and foreign investment;
- *Sustainable development for Africa*. The nations of Africa have encountered formidable barriers to sustainable development, including health crises, declining levels of development assistance, and extremely low levels of foreign private investment. Key areas in which initiatives can promote sustainable development in Africa, including measures to extend the benefits of globalisation to the region, are also identified; and
- *Strengthening international governance* for sustainable development.' (MJ)

