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**CONCEPTUAL AND DEFINITIONAL APPROACHES
TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

In Search of a Caribbean Convergence

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACS	Association of Caribbean States
AOSIS	Alliance of Small Island States
CANARI	Caribbean Natural Resources Institute
CARICAD	Caribbean Centre for Development Administration
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CARISEC	Caribbean Community Secretariat
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CCA	Caribbean Conservation Association
CCAD	Central American Commission on the Environment and Development
CDCC	Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee
CDERA	Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency
CEHI	Caribbean Environmental Health Institute
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species
COHSOD	Council for Health and Social Development
COTED	Council for Trade and Economic Development
CSD	Commission for Sustainable Development
CSME	CARICOM Single Market and Economy
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DSD	Department of Sustainable Development
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EMA	Environmental Management Authority
EMS	Environmental Management Strategy
ENACT	Environmental Action
ESDU	Environment and Sustainable Development Unit
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEO-3	Global Environmental Outlook 3
IACG	Inter-Agency Collaborative Group
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IRF	Island Resources Foundation
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
JWP	Joint Work Programme
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NEPAD	New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIEO	New International Economic Order
NRMU	Natural Resource Management Unit
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECS	Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States
PPESD	Poverty-Population-Environment-Sustainable Development
SEI	Stockholm Environment Institute
SICA	Central American Integration System

SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SIDS POA	Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
SPAW	Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife
TIDCO	Tourism and Industrial Development Corporation
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCHS	United Nations Conference on Human Settlement
UNCLOS 111	Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNGCSIDS	United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States
UNSO	United Nations Statistical Office
UNU	United Nations University
US	United States
UWI	University of the West Indies
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development
WTO	World Trade Organization
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

Summary

This paper is about *sustainable development*. More specifically, it is about *conceptual and definitional approaches to sustainable development*, the ultimate objective being to identify what scope there might be for a convergence of perspectives on this very important concept, not only to facilitate dialogue, which is critical, but also to ensure coherent policy-making. The concern for conceptual and definitional convergence is being articulated in the particular context of the 23 Caribbean countries that are members of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) which functions within the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as an organ for cooperation toward economic and social development. A major element of that cooperation is directed towards the implementation in the subregion, of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS POA) adopted at the United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (UNGCSIDS) in 1994.

The paper is developed through, *inter alia*, an exploration of scores of conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development* garnered from universal sources, with a view to highlighting, within a single space and in appropriate operational contexts, the numerous and often widely divergent perspectives that are harboured across the globe on this vitally important concept.

In order to place the review in a practical, operational context, a survey is undertaken of the early conceptualization of the term and of its subsequent development, definition and application in international society. This survey is undertaken within the specific contexts of the deliberations and outcomes of important *sustainable development* events that have convened at the global, western hemispheric and regional, as well as subregional levels. Approaches to the implementation of these outcomes are also reviewed. The survey commences with *the global environmental beginnings* as might be applied to the path-breaking 1972 *Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment* and continues with a review of the relevant aspects of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the historic Earth Summit which convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1992.

As regards the western hemispheric dimension, under which are necessarily subsumed a number of regions and subregions, attention is directed to the 1996 *Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development* which convened in Bolivia, in 1996. Since the paper is written from an essentially Caribbean perspective, in the context of the countries that are serviced by the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, all of which are coastal entities, the subregional dimension is treated, for the most part, by reference to the implementation of the outcomes of the 1994 UNGCSIDS. The paper is structured in descending order of geographical coverage: from the global, to the hemispheric, to the regional and subregional levels, as opposed to being guided by the strict chronology of the events that provide the operational context. For convenience, the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) which convened in Johannesburg, South Africa, on 26 August-4 September 2002, are reviewed in a manner that prompts ready recall of elements from the other major sustainable-development events covered.

Having reviewed this evolution of the definitional and operational aspects of *sustainable development* in the contexts indicated, the dimensions of the twin conceptual components of *sustainable development*, namely, *development* and *sustainability*, are explored, in order to make quite explicit, some of the key issues that lie embedded in the so frequently used concept of *sustainable development*. Interestingly, these embedded issues remain the subject of controversy, even as proponents of *sustainable development* and other commentators continue to use the term, notwithstanding the different positions they might hold on the respective aspects.

Nor does this exhaust the areas of controversy that complicate effective communication and effective policy formulation, as well as implementation, in the area of *sustainable development*. With this conviction very much in mind, the paper also explores other issues that are also embedded in the *sustainable development* construct. Examined in this context are the poverty-population-environment-sustainable development thesis; the growth-poverty relationship; the primacy of given sectors, whether economic, social or environmental, within the overall sustainable development paradigm; the over-consumption/sustainability debate; the Third World perspective on *sustainable development*; and the *substitutability of resources thesis*.

The review addresses the numerous elements that are subsumed under the concept of *sustainable development* and of the similarly numerous terminologies that have been fashioned in the several approaches to the concept. Some of these terminologies are used interchangeably, suggesting the existence of synonymous values. Others manifest inherent contradictions. Still, others seem to more effectively define something other than their stated subject of concern.

Recognizing that the analysis so far undertaken prompts the conclusion that *sustainable development* has turned out to be in the nature of a very plastic concept, in some contexts serving as little more than a literary or rhetorical decorative piece, whose precise substantive content remains elusive, the paper, which will have already pointed to certain *shortcomings* of the concept of *sustainable development* reviews, albeit summarily, just what might be expected from a *concept*. What are the nature and properties of elements of language that are referred to as *concepts*? What are the properties of *definitions* and of *definitional approaches*? And with respect to the issue of *convergence*, what is that intended to connote? Moreover, is *convergence* of conceptualisation, or of definitional approaches necessary, or even desirable?

The paper reflects the conviction that convergence of perspectives might be a virtue, as might be reflected in the sharing of common understandings that facilitate not only meaningful and productive dialogue, but also, relevant policy formulation and implementation. It reviews, against the backdrop of mainly, though not exclusively, Caribbean writers on the subject, the officially proclaimed environment/sustainable development policy prescriptions of selected established Caribbean entities. The paper, however, takes into account every other aspect earlier covered, from Stockholm, 1972 to the WSSD, 2002. The Caribbean entities covered are the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). It also reviews the initiative of another subregion within the Wider Caribbean, namely, the countries of the Central American Isthmus. Selected national perspectives are also examined. The CDCC perspective provides, as well as informs the analytical context. The absence of convergence of approach among the entities covered is highlighted and a number of general recommendations are made in relation to steps that might be taken to facilitate its achievement.

The utility of the paper also rests in having demonstrated not only the state of non-convergence of approaches to *sustainable development*, but also the relevance of this state of affairs. This represents the first and perhaps major contribution to the exercise. The utility of the paper also extends to the identification of the possible range of issues to which attention might be directed in this regard.

INTRODUCTION

The 1990s witnessed a veritable explosion of concern and corresponding activity at the international, western hemispheric, subregional and national levels, in relation to *environment* and *sustainable development*. Fundamentally, the international community seemed to have dedicated itself to a quest for increased understanding of the potential scope of the concept and also of the most appropriate means by which it might be operationalised and implemented. These developments were accompanied and even facilitated, by the intensifying trends towards *globalization*, particularly with regard to trade and technology. Fundamentally, however, it was the continuing rapid and widespread degradation of the environment, world wide, that prompted the basic concern and activity in a situation in which context, issues relating to the *internationalisation of environmental management* and *sustainable development*, found themselves grafted on as significant elements of the globalisation phenomenon. The conviction that the growing number and intensity of global environmental problems required international solutions had become entrenched (ECLAC, 2002b).

This paper is informed by the day-to-day experience of the coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDSPOA) among the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the subregion that are covered by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean.

While this experience spans the period from the adoption of that Programme of Action, in 1994, to the immediate post-World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) era, it is important to emphasise the period beginning with the convening of the Caribbean Ministerial Meeting on the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, in Barbados, on 10-14 November 1997. The fundamental decisions taken at that meeting, which was convened under the auspices of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, with the collaboration of a number of other regional and regionally based agencies, made this event a veritable watershed in the quest for sustainable development within the Caribbean subregion.

Of particular significance in this regard, was the adoption of the *Caribbean Model* for the implementation of the SIDS Programme of Action, incorporating, *inter alia*, a Joint Work Programme extrapolated from the SIDS Programme of Action, for implementation across the subregion and with the Secretariats of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean and of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) jointly executing the secretariat function in support of the implementation process. This implementation process is explored at national, as well as subregional levels. This is combined with the wider international experience of, *inter alia*, the Meeting of Representatives of Prospective Donors and Representatives of SIDS (*The Donors' Meeting*) of 24-26 February 1999; the twenty-second special session of the United Nations General Assembly for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the SIDS Programme of Action (SIDS+5) on 27-28 September 1999; interactions with the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS); the ongoing negotiation and implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and other international instruments; subregional, as well as regional preparations for the WSSD; and the WSSD itself. These experiences brought the

countries of the subregion face to face with a vast array of approaches to sustainable development.

Among the first general indications of the difficulties arising from this development were the different priorities that were identified by different countries, subregions and regions, including the SIDS of other geographical locations. This state of affairs reflects the different situations of the various entities and has important implications for inter-subregional collaboration. What also emerged very starkly in this context, was the absence within the Caribbean subregion itself, of anything approaching convergence with respect to the conceptualization of *sustainable development* and to more precise and concerted modes of its operationalisation.

Within the Caribbean subregion, which is not by any means to be regarded as an exception in this regard and with due recognition of important differences or even nuances within their broadly shared profiles, the implementation process has progressed, by and large, on the basis of intuitive understandings of the general definitions and definitional approaches such as that popularised by the Brundtland Commission. In this context, *sustainable development* is defined as *development that meets present needs without jeopardising the welfare of future generations by undermining the environment on which all life depends* as we are reminded in the *Introduction* to the SIDS Programme of Action.

On the basis of that general orientation, the path to sustainable development appears to have been traced by means of the identification of the more pressing economic, social and environmental issues for the development of projects, whether at the national or subregional level. Central to this process has been the identification by SIDS, of their peculiar vulnerabilities on which their categorisation as special cases for sustainable development is based. Significantly, at its twenty-second special session which convened in 1999, the United Nations General Assembly amplified the scope of implementation of the hitherto essentially environment-oriented SIDS Programme of Action, by virtue of its call for the integration of economic, environmental and social components of action to achieve sustainable development. The identification of these new dimensions of the vulnerability of SIDS underscored the recognition of the central place of *vulnerability* in any serious discussion on the development of these entities.

More critically, however, for the purpose of this paper, is the fact that, as the SIDS of the subregion sought a more intense and complex interface among themselves, the lack of a concerted approach, of shared understandings and of a general convergence with respect to the concept of *sustainable development* and its operationalisation in promotion of subregional concerns, became increasingly evident. This might be illustrated by reference to the attempt to develop projects at the subregional level in the aftermath of the 1999 *Donors' Meeting* and also in the context of the other interactions mentioned above.

What has been gleaned from those experiences is, *inter alia*, the sheer difficulty of advancing beyond generalities in discussions on *sustainable development*; in the corresponding policy-making and implementation; and in the negotiation and implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and other international instruments. In these situations,

focused initiatives, requiring shared understandings to inform shared or, at the very least, coordinated approaches, are either frustrated or prosecuted with less than optimum results.

Overall, the exploration of global conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development* and, within that process, the search for a Caribbean convergence, are being undertaken as a first step towards remedying the situation as described, through a broad-based sensitisation to the relevant issues. The identification of definitive solutions would constitute a most welcome second step, which, hopefully, will be taken by the subregion itself, as a whole, in the not too distant near future.

CHAPTER 1

The Environment and Sustainable Development in International Society: From Stockholm 1972 to Johannesburg 2002

It is now customary to commence any review of issues related to *the environment* and to *sustainable development* in the international milieu, with a reference to the *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* which convened in Stockholm, Sweden, in 1972 and which subsequently became known simply as “*the Stockholm Conference*”. While the convening of this Conference marked a significant breakthrough in the treatment of environmental issues, catapulting it to a central place on the international agenda, it, by no means, marked the beginning of concern on those issues, whether at the local, regional or international level.

In the context of the Caribbean subregion, whose stance on issues related to *the environment* and *sustainable development*, prompted the preparation of this paper, it is convenient to recall that recorded concern about environmental issues has spanned several decades, predating even the concern which began to be evidenced at the international level, only in the 1950s (UNEP, 2002a). In this regard, reference may be made to the Forest Reserve on the Main Ridge of the island of Tobago which was designated as such in 1765 and which is recorded as “*a first in watershed management in the Western Hemisphere*” (EMA, 1996, 2001; and Cooper and Bacon (Eds.) 1981.¹ This Forest Reserve is owned by the State. Also, between 1922-1960, a system of 43 Forest Reserves was declared across Trinidad and Tobago for the management of timber resources (EMA, 2001).

Within the same subregion, reference might also be made to the 1942 *Treaty between his Britannic Majesty and the President of Venezuela relating to the Submarine Areas of the Gulf of Paria*” (United Kingdom Treaty Series, No.10, 1942). This bilateral accord is also recognised to be “*...the earliest treaty ever concluded between two states to delimit, explore and exploit a submerged area*” (Nweihed, 1974). The Wider Caribbean is also home to the 1983 *Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region (the Cartagena Convention)* which entered into force in 1986 (United Nations Treaty Series, vol.1506, No. 25974) as well as its *Protocols* on Oil Spills (adopted in 1983, entering into force in 1986); Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPAW) adopted in 1990, entering into force in 2000; and Land-Based Sources of Pollution, adopted in 1999 but not yet in force.

¹ This Forest Reserve covering some 9,776 acres, was set aside as “*woods for the protection of the rains*”. The Main Ridge, a central highland area running north-east to south-west of the island, rising to a height of approximately 600 metres, forms a divide separating the windward and leeward watersheds of the island, separating, also, the Caribbean coastal area from its Atlantic counterpart. Removal of vegetation or the excavation of the hill slopes would destroy the salubrious micro-climate and also diminish the rainfall in the area.

While the purpose of the 1942 bilateral delimitation Treaty, commonly referred to as *the Gulf of Paria Treaty*, as stated in its *Preamble*, was “to make provisions for and to define as between themselves their respective interests in the submarine areas of the Gulf of Paria”, it also contained a provision, in its Article 7, according to which:

Each of the High Contracting Parties shall take all practical measures to prevent the exploitation of any submarine areas claimed or occupied by him in the Gulf from causing the pollution of the territorial waters of the other by oil, mud or any other fluid or substance liable to contaminate the navigable waters of the foreshore and shall concert with the other to make the said measures as effective as possible.

This provision of a Treaty signed on 26 February 1942 and which entered into force on 22 September of the same year, addresses, issues relating to *transboundary pollution*. Among these issues are the responsibility of States to ensure effective control of the environment in order to prevent, reduce and eliminate any adverse environmental effects on other States, resulting from activities conducted within their geographical boundaries; the need for States to recognise *a duty of care*, notwithstanding the recognition of *sovereignty*, since the sovereignty and interests of other States must also be respected; and, also, the need for international cooperation to effectively deal with transnational environmental problems.

Significantly, these issues extrapolated from the 1942 Treaty are precisely the ones that prompted the convening of *the Stockholm Conference* some three decades later and which also conditioned the nature and texture of its outcomes. Within *the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment and Principles* and the *Action Plan* adopted by the Conference an additional element was enshrined advocating the payment of compensation to States affected by transborder pollution by those States within whose borders the pollution originated. In the specific case, Sweden took the initiative in 1968, to propose the convening of the Conference which it eventually hosted, following the severe damage to the fish and other aquatic life in its lakes as a result of acid precipitation arising from the long-range transport of atmospheric pollution caused by industrial activities in other Western European States (UNEP, 2002a). Fundamentally, the issues raised in this context are grounded on the principle of *reasonableness*, known to municipal law in the context of *private nuisance*, according to which, the enjoyment of one’s property should not impose unreasonable conditions on others, a principle which was subsequently entrenched in the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* which was adopted at UNCED in 1992.²

Among the 26 *Principles* adopted by the *Stockholm Conference* were those embodying elements relating to, *inter alia*, the need to conserve natural resources, whether renewable or non-renewable, as well as wildlife; the maintenance of pollution, including marine pollution, within the absorptive capacity of the environment; the need for development in order to improve the environment; the need for assistance to be provided to the developing countries and the

² According to Principle 2 of the Rio Declaration: States have, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law, the sovereign right to exploit their own resources pursuant to their own environmental and developmental policies, and the responsibility to ensure that activities within their jurisdiction or control do not cause damage to the environment of other States or of areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction.

payment of reasonable prices for their exports, considering that environment policy should not retard development; and the importance of science and technology, environmental education and international institutions to the improvement of the environment.

That the outcomes of *the Stockholm Conference*, which was “*the first international Conference on the environment*”, not to mention the very fact of its convening, was a historic event, which set the stage for a number of other significant developments, is only too evident. Among the outcomes that may be directly associated with the convening of the Conference, are the recognition by almost all governments of the importance of *the environment* to their overall national development interests and the establishment, by them, of national environment ministries or other administrations, incorporating more or less comprehensive policy prescriptions.

The impact of *Stockholm* is also seen in subsequent major endeavours at both international and regional levels, the most significant among them being perhaps, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (United Nations, 1983). Reflecting the international ferment of the time in the environmental sphere, the decision to convene *The Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS III)* in 1973, was taken by virtue of the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolutions 2749 (XXV) and 2750 C (XXV) on 17 December 1970. Among the terms of reference stipulated for the Conference by the UNGA, was “*the establishment of a management regime... fishing and conservation of the living resources of the high seas, the preservation of the marine environment (including.....the prevention of pollution) and scientific research.*” The first session of UNCLOS 111 convened at United Nations Headquarters, New York, 3-15 December 1973 the year after the convening of the *Stockholm Conference*. (United Nations, 1983). The Draft 1982 Convention was adopted in New York on 30 April 1982 and was signed by some 119 delegations at Montego Bay, Jamaica, on 10 December 1982. The Convention entered into force in 1994.

Significantly, an entire section of the 1982 Convention, Part XI, comprising fully 46 Articles, Articles 192-237, is devoted to the *Protection and Preservation of the Marine Environment*. In addition, provisions relating to the obligations of States and of the international community, as a whole, in relation to this issue, pervade the document. Most significantly, in the 1982 Convention is to be found the first reference in a document of this nature to *maximum sustainable yield*, the achievement of which by States, “*taking into account the best scientific evidence available to it ..*” and “*qualified by relevant environmental and economic factors*” is the management objective enshrined in Article 61 (*Conservation of the living resources*). Article 119 (*Conservation of the living resources of the high seas*) also addresses this issue in the context of that area of maritime space.

Within the Caribbean, the influence of *Stockholm* is also manifested in, *inter alia*, the 1983 *Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region* and its *Protocols*, already mentioned, in addition to a host of other *modern* Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) covering such topics as the *Ozone Layer* and *Hazardous Wastes*. Not to be overlooked as a major development at the international level and also as a direct result of *the Stockholm Conference*, was the establishment of the United Nations

Environment Programme (UNEP) as “*the environmental conscience of the UN system*”. Significantly, UNEP has as its *Mission*:

To provide leadership and encourage partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. (UNEP, 2002a)

Together, UNEP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF), which was the other major institutional innovation of the Stockholm Conference, have become the centrepieces of the international framework for dealing with environmental problems.

The new conventions

Reflecting the ever increasing concern with the continuing degradation of the global environment and the implications of that process for the survival of mankind with acceptable levels of welfare, the last two decades have witnessed a proliferation of treaties, both at the global and regional levels, covering all major aspects of the management of global environmental phenomena.

Text Box 1

The New Environmental Conventions: A Selection

Among the “*New Conventions*”, that is to say, those whose adoption spans, approximately, the period from *the Stockholm Conference*, but, more particularly, those adopted during “*the UNCED phase*” and thereafter, are those covering the following areas:

- **Migratory or Endangered Species:** Following the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance- the Ramsar Convention, 1971; the Convention for the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage- the World Heritage Convention, 1972; and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), 1973, came the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals, *the Bonn Convention*, 1979.
- **The Marine Environment:** Mention has already been made of the 1982 *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* and the *Convention for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment of the Wider Caribbean Region* of 1983, *the Cartagena Convention*.
- **The Ozone Layer:** Following the *Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer* of March, 1985, came the *Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer* of September, 1987; the *London Amendments* to the 1987 Convention adopted in 1990; and the *Copenhagen Amendments* of 1992. Other instruments followed.
- **Hazardous Materials:** *The Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal* was adopted in 1989 and entered into force in May, 1992. By the Second Meeting of the Parties to the Convention held in Geneva, in March 1994, agreement had been reached on the immediate prohibition of exports of hazardous wastes from OECD to non-OECD countries.
- **Biological Diversity:** *The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)*, itself a product of UNCED, entered into force on 29, December 1993.
- **Climate Change:** *The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)* entered into force on 12 March 1994.

The foregoing developments have been adduced to illustrate the central role of the “*sustainable*” approach in international discourse as well as praxis, in the area of *development policy-planning* that has come about, in large measure, as a result of the profound and pervasive impact of *the Stockholm Conference*.

The new international context: The 1990s

At the numerous conferences that convened at various levels of geographical coverage, during the 1990s and subsequently, *Declarations, Plans of Actions* and *Multilateral Agreements* have been adopted, increasingly anchored on the basic pillar of *sustainable development* prescriptions *vis à vis* the earlier and narrower approach which had *the environment* as its specific area of focus. Out of these processes has emerged a range of institutions to implement the outcomes of these conferences at different levels. This preoccupation with “*sustainable development*” is now pervasive and ubiquitous and has prompted a mushrooming of disciplines and sub-disciplines such as environmental law; environmental management; environmental chemistry; environmental impact assessment; and environmental engineering. Simultaneously, the operationalisation of the concept continues to evolve in a manner that strongly influences the conduct of activities in such areas as *trade*, in both goods and services; the use of different types of energy; and the operations of the fishing, forestry and mining sectors, among other extractive industries. It is also significant that sustainable development concerns have evolved into “*conditionalities*” in many vital areas of interstate relations.

The Caribbean perspective

From the Caribbean perspective, the “*new international context*” of *environment and sustainable development* concerns will be developed with specific reference to four major events which are adduced to illustrate, respectively, the global, western hemispheric, regional and subregional dimensions. Particular attention will be focused on those initiatives that provide some degree of *value-added*, for example, by giving evidence of new approaches to *sustainable development*, during the decade that has elapsed since the convening of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The events to be reviewed are:

- The UNCED, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992;
- The United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (UNGCSIDS), held in Barbados, 26 April-6 May 1994;
- The Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, held in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 7-8 December 1996; and
- The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), held in Johannesburg, South Africa, 26 August-4 September 2002.

The Global Dimension

UNCED, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992, including its antecedents

The manifestation, at the international level of the transcendental nature of sustainable development concerns, culminated in the convening in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 1992, of

the *UNCED*. The nomenclature of that international event rendered totally unambiguous the explicit and intimate relationship that was to be explored in the course of its deliberations, namely, that between “*Environment*”, on the one hand and “*Development*” on the other. The “*Earth Summit*”, as UNCED came to be popularly known, reaffirmed the 1972 *Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment* and sought “*to build upon it*”. The profound, comprehensive and epoch-making outcomes of that Conference are enshrined in the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and in “*Agenda 21*”, the latter having been conceived and adopted as a blueprint for global sustainable development. (United Nations 1992a).

At UNCED, the central concept of *sustainable development* provided the intellectual underpinnings of the conference, thereby becoming comprehensively entrenched into the language of international discussion on the development problematique which had presented a formidable challenge to world leaders, international bureaucrats, as well as other decision – makers at the regional and national levels, since the incorporation of development issues into the international agenda. This concept gained world-wide currency as a result of its hallmark role in the report commissioned by the United Nations General Assembly in 1983, entitled *Our Common Future*.

The Brundtland Commission and *Our Common Future*

The generation, articulation, as well as the popularisation of the concept of *sustainable development* are frequently attributed to the *World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)*, commonly referred to as *the Brundtland Commission* - after its Chairperson, Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report, *Our Common Future*, produced some 15 years after the 1972 *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment* convened in Stockholm, placed the global debate on what had become known as *sustainable development* on a new level and provided the essential conceptual, as well as policy directions for the Global Summit which eventually convened as UNCED, in June, 1992 (WCED, 1987).

The WCED had been charged by the United Nations General Assembly, in 1983 to:

- Define shared perceptions of long-term environmental and developmental challenges, and the most effective methods to respond to them;
- Recommend means to foster greater international cooperation among developing and developed countries, and to attain mutually supportive objectives taking account of the interrelationships among people, resources, environment, and development; and
- Propose long-term strategies to achieve sustainable development, combining global economic and social progress with respect for natural systems and environmental quality (WCED, 1987).

In *Our Common Future*, *sustainable development* is summarily defined as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.*”

However, in a more elaborate approach to the concept, *sustainable development* it is further indicated that:

Sustainable development is not a fixed state of harmony, but rather a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional changes are made consistent with future as well as present needs.

In an alternative, more synthesised, but still less than fully operational formulation, the Chair of the WCED reduced the *sustainable development* concept, to the simple admonition: “*If we take care of nature, nature will take care of us.*”

Further:

“Conservation has truly come of age when it acknowledges that if we want to save part of the system, we have to save the system itself. This is the essence of what we call sustainable development. There are many dimensions to sustainability. First, it requires the elimination of poverty and deprivation. Second, it requires the conservation and enhancement of the resources base which alone can ensure that the elimination of poverty is permanent. Third, it requires a broadening of the concept of development so that it covers not only economic growth, but also social and cultural development. Fourth, and most important, it requires unification of economics and ecology in decision-making at all levels.” (Brundtland, 1986)

Among the elements identified as being central to the operationalisation of this essentially *environment-development* construct were:

- Population control/stabilization to a *sustainable* level;
- The meeting of basic needs, particularly those of the world’s poor, towards their achievement of *a better life* and full growth potential ;
- Generation of increased economic growth, including in the developing countries;
- The incorporation of environmental concerns into the economic decision-making process;
- Broad-based citizen participation in decision-making and implementation; and
- Adoption by the developed countries of lifestyles that are in keeping with the planet’s ecological means, by reference, in particular, to energy resources.

These elements, in turn, are indicated to have been informed by a number of guiding *principles*, including:

- The sustainable use of natural resources;
- The equitable use of natural resources; and
- Intergenerational equity.

Reference to the *less than fully operational formulation of sustainable development* is not here being advanced as a criticism of *the Brundtland Report*. Indeed, it was recognised by the Commissioners that, *inter alia*:

“It is the young who ultimately will find ways to turn the concept of sustainable development into new policies, new institutions, and new norms of behavior to assure a better life for all in a healthier global environment.” (Ruckelhaus, 1987).

The debt of UNCED to the WCED

Evaluations of *sustainable development* and of the major *sustainable development* endeavours such as UNCED which were informed by *Our Common Future*, almost invariably, attribute the development of the concept to *the Brundtland Commission*. However, if UNCED marked the explosion of *sustainable development* on to the international scene, thereafter rapidly gathering momentum until its rapid evolution into a new *buzz-word*, frequently used and often abused, it did not mark its beginning. More recently, in the lead up to the *World Summit on Sustainable Development*, the international community was reminded that this concept “*goes back all the way to the early 80s. to 5th March 1980 to be precise.*” (Khosla, 2001)

As further explained:

“The term “sustainable development” was put into the lexicon of international discourse by the World Conservation Strategy, a seminal document prepared jointly by the IUCN, WWF and UNEP, and launched at 10am GMT on that day.”

In another of the very few references which recognise this development, a *definitional approach* is provided according to which, “*sustainable development*”:

“suggests that the lessons of ecology can, and should be applied to economic processes. It encompasses the ideas in the World Conservation Strategy, providing an environmental rationale through which the claims of development to improve the quality of (all) life can be challenged and tested.” (Redclift, 1987a).

More recently, *the World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development* has been described as “*one of the seminal documents which served to redefine environmentalism post-Stockholm. Launched in 1980 by IUCN, the strategy recognized that addressing environmental problems calls for long-term effort and the integration of environmental and development objectives*”. (UNEP, 2002).³

The significant contribution of the *World Conservation Strategy*, which itself owes a debt to earlier international initiatives such as *the Cocoyoc Declaration* arising from a Symposium jointly sponsored by UNEP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1974, is the identification of social and economic factors that lead to

³ IUCN, UNEP and WWF: *World Conservation Strategy: Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*. Gland, Switzerland, International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 1980.

environmental degradation: in effect, a precursor of the *sustainable development* formulation which reigns today, calling as it does, for *the integration of economic, environmental and social components of action to achieve sustainable development*. (UNGA 1999).

Illustrating this tridimensional profile of *sustainable development* within the *World Conservation Strategy*, underpinned by the ethical concern for *equity*, it was suggested that:

The combined destructive impacts of a poor majority struggling to stay alive and an affluent minority consuming most of the world's resources are undermining the very means by which all people can survive and flourish.

Sustainable development at UNCED: The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and Agenda 21

Upon its adoption by UNCED in 1992, *Agenda 21* was presented to the world as the *blueprint* for global sustainable development. *Agenda 21* is an extensive document of almost 500 pages divided into a *Preamble*, and four sections dealing respectively, with: *Social and Economic Dimensions*; *Conservation and Management of Resources for Development*; *Strengthening the Role of Major Groups*; and *Means of Implementation*. Under each section are prescribed, *inter alia*, the activities that are to be pursued at the international, regional and national levels, together with an indication of the *Means of Implementation* covering finance, institutional capacity issues and other aspects. (United Nations 1992a).

Providing the *chapeau*, as it were, to the range of activities set out in *Agenda 21* are the *27 Principles* proclaimed by UNCED. These *Principles* may be interpreted as providing the basic rationale for the range of activities indicated, thus providing, within the text of the UNCED final documents themselves, very useful indications with respect to the underlying philosophy that pervades the text particularly in situations where definitional precision was not evidenced as a major concern. Also of fundamental assistance in understanding the mainsprings of given courses of action within *Agenda 21*, is the Report of the *Brundtland Commission*, in which are set out a number of elements associated with the concept of *sustainable development* and approaches to its operationalisation. (WCED, 1987a).

Of priority in essaying an understanding of the basic philosophy that is subsequently reified in the concrete prescriptions of *Agenda 21* and, at the same time, an understanding of the objective of the implementation of this *Agenda 21*, are the basic, underlying and oft repeated definitions or definitional approaches in respect of *sustainable development* that pervade the document. At times, *sustainable development* is presented as a process: at others, as an end-state, together with numerous and similarly oft repeated elements of what might be construed as comprising the content of this notion of *sustainable development*. In all, *sustainable development* is advanced as the guiding concept that is to inform all development activities, if they are to be relevant.

Within the *27 Principles* enunciated by UNCED, the expression, *sustainable development*, is encountered in 12 of them: *Principles* 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 20, 21, 22, 24 and 27. In addition, in *Principle 3* the term *development* is employed, but with qualifications that might render it a useful proxy. *Principle 6*, for its part, with its close association of *environment* and

development, provides a contextual aid to interpretation. *Principle 25* amplifies this postulated fundamental association between *environment* and *development*, thus providing an additional interpretative nuance.

Significantly, notwithstanding these numerous references, which will be articulated in more detail, there is no specific definition of *sustainable development* in which all elements identified converge. Nevertheless, the *Principles* do provide what might be construed as a range of *definitional approaches* in the sense of *definitions by association*. This is achieved through the juxtaposition of a number of elements that might be construed, either as being synonymous with the concept, or as capturing its essential components. Presumably, an understanding of the concept would require no more than a summation of all such elements mentioned, assuming the respective references to be exhaustive.

Table 1: Selected Principles of Sustainable Development in Agenda 21

Principles	Sustainable Development Associations
Principle 1	Provision of a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature. (No definitions are provided.)
Principle 3	Development must equitably meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations. (All terms remain undefined).
Principle 4	Environmental protection as an integral part of the process.
Principle 5	Poverty eradication, to reduce disparities in living standards, is indispensable, to better meet the needs of the majority of people.
Principle 6	The linkage of actions in <i>Environment</i> and <i>Development</i> , constitutes the formula for <i>sustainable development</i> . Special priority is to be given to the developing countries, particularly the LDCs and to those most environmentally vulnerable.
Principle 7	Conservation, protection and restoration of the health and integrity of the Earth's ecosystem are to be pursued on the basis of common but differentiated responsibilities, based on environmental, technological and financial considerations. An eminently ethical principle.
Principle 8	<i>Sustainable development</i> is equated with a higher quality of life for all people and requires reduction/elimination of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promotion of appropriate demographic policies.
Principle 9	Sustainable development requires strengthening of endogenous capacity-building through exchanges of scientific and technological knowledge.
Principle 12	Sustainable development requires a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation. The economic system is identified as the motor of sustainable development.
Principle 20	<i>Sustainable development</i> is equated with <i>environmental management and development</i> . A vital role is perceived for women in the process.
Principle 21	Sustainable development is equated with an (undefined) <i>better future for all</i> . The youth are to be mobilised in the process.
Principle 22	A vital role is identified for the knowledge and practices of indigenous peoples, towards sustainable development.
Principle 24	Warfare is indicated to be inherently destructive of sustainable development.
Principle 25	Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible.
Principle 27	The desirability is conveyed of further development of international law in the field of <i>sustainable development</i> through cooperation.

From this summary review of the *Principles* that constitute the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* can be gleaned a number of aspects that might conduce to an understanding of the concept of *sustainable development* by reference, principally, to its

objectives, couched, for the most part, in generalities, for example poverty reduction, its operational components, for example environmental protection, the approach to its attainment for example giving priority to certain countries or *recognising common but differentiated responsibilities* which also impinges on *process*; other operational elements such as the reduction or elimination of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption; its preconditions, such as a supportive and open international economic system; and peace. However, the theme which acquires the greatest degree of salience is the formula that can be gleaned, even from indirect formulations, as that of *Principle 20*, to the effect that *environmental management plus development equals sustainable development*. At an altogether different level, in *Principle 8*, *sustainable development* comes close to being equated with an undefined *higher quality of life of all people*.

At UNCED, a key element within the *sustainable development* construct was the “*conservation of natural resources*.” *Sustainable development* was defined in relation to the needs of present, as well as future generations. Thus, emphasis was placed on the fact that natural resources were not to be depleted. Nevertheless, *sustainable development* did not imply the rejection of a commitment to growth.

While it can only be assumed that the delegations which participated in UNCED had at least an intuitive understanding or set of understandings in relation to the concept of *sustainable development*, a major task bequeathed to the same international community, was the operationalisation of the concept whose utilisation became more pervasive through its fulsome incorporation into such other internationally approved documents as the SIDS POA which, given its genesis, is regarded by SIDS as the most concrete expression of *Agenda 21*, to date. Nor has there been any noticeable degree of timidity on the part of students and practitioners to generate alternative definitions or to otherwise attempt the operationalisation of the concept. Several scores of conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development* are encountered in the literature.

Rio + 5

In early 1996, the Under-Secretary-General, Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development at the United Nations expressed the view that:

Four years after the Rio Summit only very limited progress is discernible in the implementation of the recommendations on financial issues contained in Agenda 21. Indeed, in many ways the international economic and political climate seems less favourable to sustainable development today than in 1992, for reasons that are both economic and political. In a great number of developing countries, economic growth is slow and erratic, poverty and unemployment rates remain persistently high, and concern for these urgently pressing issues overshadows long-term concerns for environmental protection and sustainable development. In many developed countries, concerns over budget deficits, stagnant incomes, and persistent unemployment have reduced the level of enthusiasm for international cooperation. (Desai, 1996).

By the time of the conclusion of the *Five Year Review* of the implementation of *Agenda 21* by the special session of the United Nations General Assembly in 1997, not only were the results recognised to be less than encouraging, but, more fundamentally, it had become all too evident that the thrust to international cooperation toward effective management of the global environment which was effectively launched in Stockholm, and developed into the crescendo that was Rio, had fallen quite flat, to the disappointment of, particularly the developing countries, among them, SIDS. Among the major constraints to implementation identified in the course of the review, were *finance, transfer of technology and trade-related issues*. The review also confirmed the fears harboured in several quarters that many of the targets set by *the Rio Summit* would not be met. Moreover, the prospect of achieving a consensus on the setting of future targets also seemed remote.

However, even if in the view of the same commentator, UNCED was *rightly criticized for failing to produce anything of enormous immediate significance*, it was nevertheless recognised to have produced agreement on a number of useful initiatives, among them, *Agenda 21, a very wide-ranging environmental action plan for the next century*. Further, inasmuch as some considerable amount of time was recognised to be needed for the commitments adopted at UNCED to be assimilated into the national and other decision-making processes, that Global Conference was to be seen as *the beginning of a process rather than the end of one*. (Bell, 1997).

Whatever might be the correct interpretation of events, one fact remains incontestable, namely, that the far from positive conclusions of the *Rio + 5* review process which also convened at Summit level, were regarded, in some quarters, as a setback to the process of internationalisation of environmental policy, a process whose clearest expression was to be found in UNCED itself. (Bell, 1997)

Against this background, it will be recalled that *Agenda 21* was adopted in the context of a global consensus and of a political commitment at the highest political level, to development and environment cooperation. Further, at UNCED, it had been agreed that such cooperation would have been responsive to the special circumstances and particular vulnerabilities of countries, through adequate and special approaches. This is exemplified by *Principle 6* of the *Rio Declaration* according to which:

The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority.

Thus were the results of the five-year review adduced as evidence of a retreat from the commitments agreed at UNCED.

The Western Hemispheric Dimension

The Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, 7-8 December 1996

The *Declaration of Principles* adopted at the *Summit of the Americas*, which convened in Miami, United States of America, on 9-11 December 1994, bears the sub-title: *Partnership for*

Development and Prosperity: Democracy, Free Trade and Sustainable Development in the Americas. (US State Department, 1995).

Among the *Principles* enshrined in the *Declaration*, was: “*To Guarantee Sustainable Development and Conserve Our Natural Environment for Future Generations*”.

In this regard, it is provided that:

Social progress and economic prosperity can be sustained only if our people live in a healthy environment and our ecosystems and natural resources are managed carefully and responsibly. To advance and implement the commitments made at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, and the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, held in Barbados, we will create cooperative partnerships to strengthen our capacity to prevent and control pollution, to protect ecosystems and use our biological resources on a sustainable basis, and to encourage clean, efficient and sustainable energy production and use. To benefit future generations through environmental conservation, including the rational use of our ecosystems, natural resources and biological heritage, we will continue to pursue technological, financial and other forms of cooperation.

We will advance our social well-being and economic prosperity in ways that are fully cognizant of our impact on the environment. We agree to support the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development, which seeks to strengthen those democracies by promoting regional economic and social prosperity and sound environmental management. In this context, we support the convening of other regional meetings on sustainable development.

In the *Plan of Action* that was also adopted at the *Miami Summit*, partnerships with detailed agendas were adopted in relation to *Sustainable Energy Use; Biodiversity; and Pollution Prevention*.

Of even greater significance, was the convening of the *Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development*, in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia, on 7-8 December 1996.

Though overshadowed by the process for the creation of a *Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA)*, this Summit nevertheless represents one of the more significant outcomes, to date, of the “*Hemispheric Process*” launched at the *Miami Summit* of December 1994.

In the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra*, the *Bolivia Summit* is identified as “*the cornerstone of a partnership for cooperation among the States of the Americas in their common pursuit of a higher quality of life for their peoples, founded on integrated and complementary economic, social and environmental objectives.*” (Ministry of External Relations and Ministry of Worship, Bolivia, 1997).

In the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra*, the hemispheric leaders also reaffirmed their “*determination to move forward toward sustainable development and to implement the decisions and commitments set forth in the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21*. They also undertook “*..to promote the agreements reached at the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island States...*”

Indeed, the *Bolivia Summit* is quite significant, given its very strong thrust towards the *regionalisation* of the implementation of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, *Agenda 21* and the *Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States the (SIDS POA)*. Moreover, there are very strong correlations between the content of the *Rio Declaration*, *Agenda 21*, the *SIDS POA* and the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra* and its accompanying *Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Americas*.

Lending support to sustainable development endeavours at the regional and subregional levels, particular attention was also drawn, in the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra*, to the *Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development*; the *North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation*; the *Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation*; and the *Permanent South Pacific Commission*.

Sustainable Development in the Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra and the Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Americas

The *Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Americas* was intended to embody and reflect, *inter alia*, “*..the importance of the common concept of Sustainable Development adopted by the governments of the Hemisphere as a frame of reference for public policy and regional action.*”

The document also emphasizes the fact that:

“For the first time, a continent decided to seek common criteria on the subject of development, in order to face the challenges of the present and the future, on the basis of commitments to joint actions and inter-regional cooperation which link economic criteria, social development and environmental protection.”

Three elements are worth highlighting at this stage. The first relates to what has been earlier described as the *regionalisation* of the implementation of the *Rio Declaration*, *Agenda 21* and the *SIDS POA*, in the context of which support is expressed in respect of hemispheric, regional and subregional initiatives, including the *Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development*; the *North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation*, the *Treaty for Amazonian Cooperation*; and the *Permanent South Pacific Commission*. Indeed, the process towards the sustainable development of the hemisphere subsumes activities executed in several distinct regions and subregions, together with their corresponding processes. What is more, the final documents adopted in Bolivia emphasise that the commitments were made on the basis of *common criteria on the subject of development*. These criteria are however captured in the general formulations of the *Plan of Action* that are intended to cover the countries of North

America; Central America; and South America, as well as the countries of the Caribbean, islands, for the most part.

The second element to be highlighted relates to the *definitional approach* to *sustainable development* that is encountered in the Summit documents which address, in the main, “*commitments to joint actions in inter-regional cooperation which link economic criteria, social development and environmental protection.*” This formalized and explicit articulation of the need to integrate economic, social and environmental components of action towards sustainable development predates, by three full years, a similar development in the context of the implementation of the SIDS POA, in which respect, the tri-dimensional approach, explicitly stated and in operational terms, had to await the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly which convened in September, 1999 to undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the SIDS POA. (UNGA 1999).

Significant also, in the final documents of the *Bolivia Summit*, taking into account the *common criteria* which informed their construction, as well as the shared definitional approach to *sustainable development*, is the anything but monolithic perspective on the concept in operational terms. In this regard, the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra* recites the following:

“We recognize that the needs and responsibilities of the countries of the Hemisphere are diverse. Sustainable development does not assume that all the countries are at the same level of development, have the same capabilities, or can necessarily use the same model to attain it....”

Thus the *Bolivia Summit* explicitly recognises the existence of different sustainable development pathways.

Some of the major elements of the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra* may be highlighted as follows:

- Special attention is to be given to the small island states whose environmental vulnerability is greater;
- The alleviation of poverty is an integral part of sustainable development;
- National efforts should be complemented by ongoing international cooperation in furtherance of the commitments made at UNCED; and
- Public participation.

In a broad sweep of elements, the *Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Americas* identifies a number of components of the sustainable development process by its reference to “*the urgent need to advance toward sustainable development by strengthening social awareness, with a broad vision that promotes public participation, integration, hemispheric cooperation, equity, and social justice, with special emphasis on women, children, and vulnerable groups.*”

In addition to the elements foreshadowed in the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra*, the *Plan of Action for the Sustainable Development of the Americas* also highlights, *inter alia*: equitable economic growth; the fight against poverty; the social and environmental dimensions of development; transfer of technology; the search for new and additional financing instruments and macroeconomic tools for sustainable development; the building of more effective cooperation infrastructure; and the strengthening and modernization of institutional and legislative modalities for the implementation of sustainable development policies. These elements are set out in sections covering: *health and education; sustainable agriculture and forests; sustainable cities and communities; water resources and coastal areas; energy and minerals; and institutional, financing, technology, and cooperation aspects.*

Overall, the *Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development*, represents a regional approach to the implementation of the outcomes of UNCED, including the SIDS POA, on the basis of *common criteria* developed among the countries of the western hemisphere which, significantly, manifest, in many cases, very different economic, social and environmental profiles. These *common criteria* include, as a fundamental element, and as stated in the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra*, “*their common pursuit of a higher quality of life for their peoples, founded on integrated and complementary economic, social and environmental objectives.*” With respect to the need to safeguard the interests of future generations:

Development strategies need to include sustainability as an essential requirement for the balanced, interdependent, and integral attainment of economic, social, and environmental goals.

Perhaps due to the fact that the decision to convene this Summit was taken so very soon after UNCED, there was no evidence of recourse to philosophising on the concept of *sustainable development* and on the mode of its operationalisation. The approach adopted at UNCED was applied as the *blueprint* it was designed to be and, apparently, having identified in the *Action Plan*, what were then regarded as the most pressing social, economic and environmental issues across the hemisphere, there was no theoretical exploration of approaches to *sustainable development*. No indication was given, for example, of how *sustainability* was to be incorporated into development strategies as prescribed in the *Declaration of Santa Cruz de la Sierra*. Nor was there specific recourse to such modalities as the development and use of indicators of overall sustainability as a means of measuring progress.

Significantly, though, according to *Initiative 21* under *Sustainable Agriculture and Forests*, the countries participating in the *Bolivia Summit* were to, *inter alia*: “*Support criteria and indicators at the regional, subregional and national levels as mechanisms for assessing progress toward sustainable forest management.*” Thus that element was not altogether overlooked. Also not overlooked was the need for the adoption of strategies that “*encourage changes in production and consumption patterns in order to attain sustainable development and a better quality of life, as well as to preserve our natural environment and contribute to the alleviation of poverty.*”

The Caribbean Subregional Dimension⁴

The United Nations Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (UNGCSIDS), Barbados, 26 April-6 May 1994, including its antecedents

The convening of the UNGCSIDS marked the culmination of the search on the part of small island developing States for recognition of their peculiar development problematique by the other members of the international community.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

On the international stage, the preoccupation with the concerns of island States was first effectively articulated in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Significantly, UNCTAD was established as an autonomous agency within the United Nations system in 1964, precisely at the time when the modern phase of de-colonization was gathering momentum, leading to the rapid increase in the membership of *developing countries* in the United Nations. The establishment of UNCTAD was important since it constituted “*the single international organisation concerned with economic issues in which the Third World had a strong voice..*” (Sanders, 1991)

Recognizing the failure of the UNCTAD to effectively promote the fundamental interests and, consequently, to produce the results anticipated by the developing countries, the view was also expressed, on the eve of UNCED, to the effect that the organization, nevertheless, “*...played a valuable role in formulating and enunciating the principles which became the basis of the Third World’s demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO); its work had a systemic effect in the institutions of the United Nations and, thereby, was influential in gaining wider acceptance of certain principles of benefit to developing countries in international economic relations. ...What is more the work of UNCTAD placed the legitimacy of aid from rich to poor countries firmly on the agenda of international discourse.*” (Sanders, 1991).

Moreover, within UNCTAD, the trade and development issues relevant to island States received attention as a specific area of activity within the organisation’s work programme and included research as well as advocacy. Against this background, the deliberations within UNCTAD may be properly regarded as a major precursor of the approach that calls for “*the sustainable development of small island developing States*” and the associated call for international solidarity in support of the corresponding activities.

⁴ In this paper, *Caribbean* is used essentially to refer to the 23 Caribbean SIDS and low-lying coastal States that are covered by the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, namely: Anguilla; Antigua and Barbuda; Aruba; The Bahamas; Barbados; Belize; British Virgin Islands; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Grenada; Guyana; Haiti; Jamaica; Montserrat; The Netherlands Antilles; Puerto Rico; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Suriname; Trinidad and Tobago; and the United States Virgin Islands. These SIDS are members of the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC), which is a permanent subsidiary organ of ECLAC, established in 1975 to promote cooperation toward their social and economic development.

The Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)

Against the legacy of UNCTAD, quite apart from the specific recommendation of UNCED itself, the greatest impetus for the convening of the *UNGCSIDS* came from the *Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS)*, an informal grouping that coalesced at negotiations leading to the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) which commenced in the late 1980s at the United Nations. Indeed, the adoption by the General Assembly in December 1992, of resolution 47/189, which called for the convening of the *UNGCSIDS*, to a great extent, reflected the carry-over of the activism on the part of AOSIS, from UNCED, including its preparatory phase, into the post-UNCED implementation phase. For AOSIS, it was issues related to “*vulnerability*”, in the ecological, as well as the social and economic contexts, arising from small size, that lay at the core of the difficulties that confronted its membership in the pursuit of sustainable development. The formulation of proposals in promotion of the interests of SIDS at the *UNGCSIDS*, found the Alliance very much in the vanguard as the most vocal and prolific purveyor of ideas.

Predictably, *the vulnerability issue* as further articulated by AOSIS was the central theme that informed the deliberations at the *UNGCSIDS*. The essential proposition was to the effect that the sustainable development capacity of SIDS was severely undermined by a number of characteristics that were unique to such entities and which translated into specific development problems that impeded their achievement of such development. These characteristics may be crudely categorized by reference to the overall geo-economic, geo-social and environmental profiles of the entities concerned arising from small size. In other words, it is in the peculiar structure of these profiles that the specific aspects of *vulnerability* or profound disadvantage were to be found.

The outcomes of the *UNGCSIDS* are enshrined in the *Declaration of Barbados* and the *Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States* (United Nations 1994), the latter commonly referred to, in the Caribbean, as *the SIDS Programme of Action (SIDS POA)*.

The SIDS Programme of Action

In the *Preamble* to the *Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island States (SIDS POA)*, it is recalled, *inter alia*, that:

There are many disadvantages that derive from small size, which are magnified by the fact that many island States are not only small but are themselves made up of a number of small islands. Those disadvantages include a narrow range of resources, which forces undue specialization; excessive dependence on international trade and hence vulnerability to global developments; ... ”

The *Preamble* also makes the observation to the effect that:

Although they are afflicted by economic difficulties and confronted by development imperatives similar to those of developing countries generally, small island developing States also have their peculiar vulnerabilities and characteristics, so that the difficulties they face in the pursuit of sustainable development are particularly severe and complex.”

Directly related to the foregoing is *Principle 6* of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* which provides that:

“The special situation and needs of developing countries, particularly the least developed and those most environmentally vulnerable, shall be given special priority. International actions in the field of environment and development should also address the interests and needs of all countries.”

It is in the convening of the UNGCSIDS that this perceived need to direct particular attention to *“the special situation and needs of developing countries”* has found its maximum expression, to date. This Conference is regarded as *the first global conference on sustainable development and the implementation of Agenda 21* and, also, as *“the first test of the global partnership”* espoused at UNCED towards *sustainable development*. (United Nations 1994.)

Text Box 2

The Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

The *SIDS Programme of Action* represented an attempt to translate *Agenda 21* into specific policies which are set out in its 15 Chapters, each representing an identified priority area relevant to addressing the special challenges faced by SIDS in the pursuit of their sustainable development pathways. The policies set out in the SIDS POA comprise actions to be implemented at the national, regional and international levels and the specific Chapters cover, respectively:

- Climate Change and Sealevel rise
- Natural and Environmental Disasters
- Management of Wastes
- Coastal and Marine Resources
- Freshwater Resources
- Land Resources
- Energy Resources
- Tourism Resources
- Biodiversity Resources
- National Institutions and Administrative Capacity
- Regional Institutions and Technical Cooperation
- Transport and Communication
- Science and Technology
- Human Resource Development
- Implementation, Monitoring and Review

This collection of conceptually discrete, as well as *“cross-cutting”* issues, among the latter, those related to *Human Resource Development* and *Science and Technology*, provides the framework for the pursuit of the sustainable development of the SIDS of the different geographical regions of the world, including the Caribbean.

The Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS POA) which was adopted at the UNGCSIDS, was intended to provide the new “*subregional*” operational context, for the sustainable development of Caribbean SIDS, within the wider global framework. In this regard, it will be recalled that the promotion of the agreements reached at the UNGCSIDS was among the commitments made at the Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development.

Sustainable Development Issues in the SIDS Programme of Action (SIDS POA)

Approaches to *sustainable development* typically emphasise two major elements relating, respectively, to *inter-generational equity* and the need to incorporate environmental factors into national development strategies and policies. In this context, *intergenerational equity* basically refers to the pursuit of development objectives at the present time, in a manner which does not prejudice the prospects of future generations to do likewise. Both these elements mentioned find expression in the “*Introduction*” to the SIDS POA. That document, which makes direct reference to UNCED, speaks of “*development that meets present needs without jeopardising the welfare of future generations by undermining the environment on which all life depends*” (United Nations 1994).

Also, in its “*Introduction*”, the SIDS POA is indicated to contain agreements that “*elaborate principles and set out strategies for development that will protect the fragile environments of small island States.*” These agreements build on *the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* and on *Agenda 21*, the *blueprint* for sustainable development adopted at UNCED. These *principles* and *strategies*, in turn, find expression in the 15 chapters of the *Programme of Action*, all but four of which have an explicitly environment focus. These 4 chapters, which deal with “*National Institutions and Administrative Capacity*”, “*Regional Institutions and Technical Cooperation*”, “*Human Resource Development*” and *Implementation and Review*”, in essence, set out modalities and mechanisms for achieving the objectives within the other *environment-oriented* chapters of the POA.

Within the SIDS POA, which, from the perspective of Caribbean SIDS, is the most concrete expression of *Agenda 21* to date, the approach to *sustainable development*, continuing the approach set out in *Agenda 21*, is essentially equated with the integration of environmental considerations into development policy. Approached from this perspective and against the backdrop of the multifaceted nature of the sustainable development process and of the holistic policy-making that is required, the SIDS POA manifests certain important shortcomings.

In this connection, attention is drawn to the exclusion of the major social and economic issues that so closely impinge on the sustainable development process. The relevance of this observation might be illustrated by reference to Caribbean SIDS which, while pursuing activities under the various Chapters of the *Programme of Action*, often found their activities frustrated by issues related to poverty; unemployment; trade; agriculture, including its relationship to the environment; the alienation of young males from the education system; the increase in crime; drug abuse and the AIDS pandemic, among others.

Arising from the foregoing was the recognition by Caribbean SIDS of the SIDS POA as an instrument that provided a generic framework for activities geared towards their sustainable

development, with particular emphasis on the environmental dimension. What this recognition implied was the parallel appreciation of the document as one that was neither sufficiently dynamic nor multidimensional. Likewise, its general prescriptions denied policymakers the specificity that would have transformed it into a more effective operational tool. This absence of breadth, in the sense of its failure to incorporate all the principal elements of the sustainable development paradigm, at least, in the Caribbean context, in addition to the lack of specificity of the various prescriptions, translated into the depiction of an operational framework that was less than comprehensive in its coverage of critical elements. The POA was also perceived to have incorporated policy prescriptions that were muted with respect to the precise site and scope of their application. A more rigorous sustainable-development approach was needed.

Even as the impact of the SIDS POA is evaluated in the Caribbean context, it is important to mention that many activities relevant to that POA and undertaken in the subregion, were neither conceived nor implemented in direct response to the adoption of that international instrument. Indeed, the commencement of such activities, in many cases, predated its adoption and these activities continued to be pursued in the context of national sustainable development plans. Significantly, though, the SIDS POA has been able to impact them, imparting greater focus and renewed emphasis on them in a comprehensive sustainable development context, thereby contributing to a more holistic approach to their management and to the development of new projects and programmes in response to national needs. (ECLAC/CDCC, 2001).

Text Box 3

New Caribbean Institutions for Environment and Sustainable Development

In an effort to come to grips with the expanding range and complexity of the issues related to the *environment and sustainable development* through the focussed development and implementation of policies within the Caribbean subregion, a number of “*new institutions*” have been created within recent decades. These institutions, whose functions are implicit in their nomenclature, and with some variations in their membership, include the following:

- The Caribbean Centre for Development Administration (CARICAD);
- The Caribbean Conservation Association (CCA);
- The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA);
- The Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI);
- The Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI);
- The Island Resources Foundation (IRF); and
- The Natural Resource Management Unit of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS-NMRU), subsequently renamed the Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU) of the OECS.

SIDS + 5

The twenty-second special session of the General Assembly convened on 27-28 September 1999, to undertake a review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. In the *Declaration and state of progress and initiatives for the future implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States*, the participating States, *inter alia*, welcomed the efforts by small island developing States to implement the commitments of

the POA but noted, however, that “*these efforts have been affected by financial and other resource constraints and by global economic and environmental factors.*” (UNGA 1999).

The special session also found it necessary to:

“Call on the international community to provide effective means, including adequate, predictable, new and additional financial resources, in accordance with chapter 33 of Agenda 21 and paragraphs 91 to 95 of the Programme of Action, to support efforts to achieve the full implementation of the Programme of Action, particularly in tackling complex issues, such as poverty as highlighted in paragraph 6 of the review document.”

Overall, it was recognized that only limited progress had been made and that “*the further successful implementation of the Programme of Action would require action by all partners in the following areas: fostering of an enabling environment for investment and external assistance; resource mobilization and financing; transfer of environmentally sound technologies and capacity-building....*”

Notwithstanding its essentially negative evaluation of the implementation of the POA, the twenty-second special session marked a very significant advance in the approach to the sustainable development of SIDS through the removal of a major shortcoming of the POA as had been earlier perceived by the SIDS of the Caribbean, among others. This session marked the formal incorporation into the implementation context of the SIDS POA, of the socio-economic elements that had long been recognised to be presenting severe obstacles to the sustainable development of SIDS, in explicitly operational terms.

At the twenty-second special session, specific mention was made of elements such as *trade, investment, commodity issues, capital markets, unemployment and poverty eradication*. On this last mentioned aspect, the General Assembly concluded that: “*Eradication of poverty is therefore a serious issue and an objective of high priority for small island developing States, and requires the integration of economic, environmental and social components of action to achieve sustainable development.*”

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) 26 August-4 September 2002, Johannesburg, South Africa and its Outcomes in Caribbean Perspective

Selected antecedents

It was at the eighth meeting of the *Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD-8)* which convened in New York, on 24 April-5 May 2000, that agreement was reached on the desirability of requesting the General Assembly to, once again, review the implementation of *Agenda 21*, in 2002. In this context, it is to be recalled that at the conclusion of the *Five-year Review* of the implementation of *Agenda 21*, by a special session of the General Assembly in 1997, the results were viewed as being less than encouraging.

Also worth recalling is the fact that *Agenda 21* was adopted in the context of a global consensus and of a commitment at the highest political level to cooperation in the related spheres

of *environment and development*. It was for this basic reason that the WSSD, like its predecessor, Rio+5, was convened at the Summit level i.e. to ensure that the assessment of the implementation of *Agenda 21*, at what had earlier been envisaged to convene as Rio + 10, as well as the decisions arising therefrom, would be produced at the same level at which the original commitments were made.

A major defining parameter as regards the scope of the discussions that would take place in Johannesburg was the consensus to the effect that *Agenda 21* would not be subject to renegotiation. The major objective of the WSSD would be to review its implementation: the assumption being that the conduct of the review in a developing country would prompt a fresh look at the relevant issues from a developing country perspective. *Agenda 21* was to maintain its role as the basic framework within which all the outcomes of UNCED would be reviewed and from which new challenges and opportunities that had emerged since UNCED would be addressed. Simply stated, the review to be undertaken by the WSSD would focus on those areas in which further efforts were needed to implement *Agenda 21* and the other outcomes of UNCED. Also emphasised, was the fact that the results of the review process would be action-oriented decisions, together with a renewed political commitment to sustainable development.

Sustainable development: The blueprint

Already, from the earliest phase of the preparatory process leading up to the WSSD, there was a general consensus to the effect that the essential blueprint for sustainable development had already been negotiated in *Agenda 21*; in the internationally agreed development targets set out in the *Millennium Declaration* adopted at the Millennium Summit, United Nations, 6-8 September 2000; in the outcome of the *Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO)*, Doha, 9-14 November 2001; and *the Monterrey Consensus adopted at the International Conference on Financing for Development, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002*, itself a Summit. On that basis, it was envisaged that the final documents adopted by the WSSD would reflect that blueprint and, in addition, identify concrete actions, having developed an appropriate framework in which to present the results-oriented sustainable partnerships that were expected to be formed by governments, civil society and business groups.

On the other hand, almost on the eve of the WSSD, the view was expressed to the effect that:

At the Rio + 5 event in 1997, it became clear that progress had fallen short of the goals set in 1992. Five years later the challenges remain no less exacting. (Topfer, 2002)

The WSSD outcomes

The outcomes of the WSSD are contained in *The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development*, and the *World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation*. (United Nations 2002)

Sustainable Development at the WSSD

The Johannesburg Declaration on Sustainable Development

In summary terms, this *Political Declaration* conveys a reaffirmation of the commitment of the Heads of State and/or Government to advancing and strengthening the economic, social and environmental pillars of *sustainable development* at local, national, regional and global levels. Special attention is drawn to the areas of *poverty eradication* and *human development* as issues to be urgently addressed.

Tracing the history of international diplomatic discourse on sustainable development issues from *the Stockholm Conference*, to UNCED, then to the *Doha Ministerial Conference of the WTO* and the *Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development*, the Heads of State and/or government identify a range of socio-economic challenges to sustainable development, in national as well as international perspective, among them, *poverty eradication; changing consumption and production patterns; protecting and managing the natural resource base for economic and social development; reducing the disparities between developed and developing countries; and issues relating to globalisation.*

In *Our Commitment to Sustainable Development* within the *Declaration*, concern is expressed with respect to such issues as *water, sanitation, energy, health care, food security and protection of biodiversity*. Other elements highlighted include *cooperation towards the provision of access to the financial resources, open markets, capacity-building, transfer of technology; and human resource development “to banish forever underdevelopment.”*

While welcoming the *New Economic Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)*, the *Declaration* also urges that the agreed levels of Official Development Assistance be observed by all developed countries and conveys an undertaking to pay special attention to the developmental needs of small island developing States and the Least Developed Countries. Other elements of the *Declaration* refer to the importance of creating stable partnerships with all major groups; the role of the private sector, including the issue of its *accountability*; the provision of assistance to increase income-generating employment opportunities; and an undertaking to strengthen and improve governance at all levels for the effective implementation of *Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals* and *the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation*. The development of more effective, democratic and accountable international and multilateral institutions is also emphasised as a precondition of the achievement of the sustainable development goals.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development Plan of Implementation

The implementation formula: Cooperation, coordination, coherence and synthesis

In not quite five lines, paragraph 125 of the *Plan of Implementation*, a document of just over 150 paragraphs, makes what might well be the most fundamental point in the implementation of *Agenda 21* in terms of *value-added*. Significantly, in this document, from which such concepts as *cooperation, coordination, coherence* and *synthesis* might be extrapolated as key guiding principles, one of the document’s footnotes explains that *References*

in the present chapter to Agenda 21 are deemed to include Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the outcomes of the Summit. This is perhaps one of the finer expressions of *synthesis* that pervade the document. Likewise, when the *Institutional framework for sustainable development* is addressed, paragraph 120 recites the following, which effectively corroborates the observation with respect to *coordination, cooperation, coherence* and *synthesis* in the implementation process as formulated at the WSSD:

An effective institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels is key to the full implementation of Agenda 21, the follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and meeting emerging sustainable development challenges. Measures aimed at strengthening such a framework should build on the provisions of Agenda 21 as well as the 1997 Programme for its further implementation and the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and should promote the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, taking into account the Monterrey Consensus and relevant outcomes of other major United Nations conferences and international agreements since 1992. It should be responsive to the needs of all countries, taking into account the specific needs of developing countries including the means of implementation. It should lead to the strengthening of international bodies and organisations dealing with sustainable development, while respecting their existing mandates, as well as to the strengthening of relevant regional, national and local institutions.

Providing an indication of the range of issues to be addressed in the context of *sustainable development*, Para 120 bis continues:

Good governance is essential for sustainable development. Sound economic policies, solid democratic institutions responsive to the needs of the people and improved infrastructure are the basis for sustained economic growth, poverty eradication, and employment creation. Freedom, peace and security, domestic stability, respect for human rights, including the right to development, and the rule of law, gender equality, market-oriented policies, and an overall commitment to just and democratic societies are also essential and mutually reinforcing.

It is against this background that paragraph 125 makes what might be regarded as the fundamental recommendation to the effect that:

The General Assembly of the United Nations should adopt sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities, particularly for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration, and should give overall political direction to the implementation of Agenda 21 and its review.

The importance of this recommendation cannot be overstated, due regard being had to the difficulties encountered over past decades in attempts at *reforming* the United Nations and the rationalisation of its activities and processes. Fundamentally, what this recommendation seems

to be addressing, is the need for a clearly defined regime for what might be referred to as *the Global Governance of Sustainable Development*.

From the perspective of the SIDS of the Caribbean, among others, UNCED, through the convening of the UNGCSIDS by the General Assembly, on its recommendation, had bequeathed these entities an important legacy in the form of the SIDS POA. However, as earlier indicated, the hallmark of this legacy was its almost exclusive focus on environmental concerns to the virtual exclusion of the social and economic desiderata which closely impinge on the sustainable development prospects of these States.

In this context, the explicit incorporation of such socio-economic elements in operational terms in the context of the implementation of the SIDS POA by the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly, accompanied by the similarly explicit identification of the need for *the integration of economic, environmental and social components of action to achieve sustainable development*, was a source of great satisfaction and encouragement to Caribbean SIDS.

Thus, as Caribbean SIDS prepared for the WSSD, a major concern was that the SIDS POA and all SIDS-related issues that provide scope for the articulation of holistic sustainable development strategies, covering *inter alia*, economic, social and environmental parameters, should be restored to a central place on the international agenda, following a perceived dilution of focus in this regard by the wider international community since UNCED. Fundamentally, in the specific context of SIDS, the concern was for the SIDS POA and related international decisions to be entrenched as the framework for *sustainable development* at the international, as well as at the regional, subregional and national levels.

It is in this specific context that the recommendation set out in paragraph 125 of the WSSD *Plan of Implementation* finds ample resonance in the Caribbean. Reference has already been made to the need, in the context of *Global Governance*, for the coordination of sustainable development initiatives at the international level. The entrenchment, or as stated in the *Plan of Implementation*, the *adoption of sustainable development as a key element of the overarching framework* for United Nations activities, is perhaps the next best approach to confronting the major obstacles that are encountered in efforts at enhancing coordination within the United Nations system. The environment within which such coordination is to be pursued, is characterised by the existence of independent *international agencies which are linked to the United Nations system by treaty or international agreement and coordinate their work through the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)*. (Wells, 1971)

In the present circumstances, each global summit, including UNCED, 3-14 June 1992; the UNGCSIDS, 25 April-6 May 1994; the World Summit on Social Development, 6-12 March 1995; the Fourth World Conference on Women, 4-15 September 1995; Habitat, 3-14 June 1996; and all the others that have convened since UNCED, produced its own *Plan of Action* or *Platform* and instituted its more-or-less discrete follow-up process. Even in those cases where reference is made to the *Action Plans* or *Platforms* adopted at other summits, the integration, or at least, the coordination of relevant activities, is seldom at a level that permits the optimal exploitation of synergies. Implementation of the recommendation in paragraph 125 would

represent a great first step in the generation of a shared approach to the sustainable development problematique that has been reformulated many times over in recent years. The generation of a shared approach could conceivably coalesce into the enhanced coordination that is recognised to be necessary in the implementation of *sustainable development*. Nor would the beneficiaries of such a development be limited to the SIDS of the different geographical subregions. The benefits of the process can be expected to accrue to the international community as a whole.

Another significant aspect of the final documents adopted in Johannesburg is the now familiar situation in which, notwithstanding the reaffirmation by the Heads of State and/or Government of the international community of their commitment to *sustainable development* in all its dimensions, it is nevertheless to be observed that the *Plan of Implementation* makes no attempt at a definition, or even at a more or less concise *definitional approach* in respect of this frequently used concept. For example, in paragraph 146 it is proposed, *inter alia*, that:

All countries should promote sustainable development at the national level by, inter alia, enacting and enforcing clear and effective laws that support sustainable development.

However in the preceding paragraph 145.b, referring to *national strategies for sustainable development*, it is suggested, *inter alia*, that:

Such strategies...where applicable, could be formulated as poverty reduction strategies that integrate economic, social and environmental aspects of sustainable development...(and) should be pursued in accordance with each country's national priorities.

Other statements occurring in the document suggest, for example:

Poverty eradication, changing unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development are overarching objectives of and essential requirements for sustainable development.

Also, on the question of the implementation of the WSSD outcomes through *partnerships*, it is indicated that:

As reflected in the Monterrey Consensus, such partnerships are key to pursuing sustainable development in a globalizing world.

Yet another formulation advises that:

Peace, security, stability and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, as well as respect for cultural diversity, are essential for achieving sustainable development and ensuring that sustainable development benefits all.

These formulations, among others, encountered in the WSSD Final Documents, refer, variously, to *inter alia*:

1. *Sustainable development* as a final goal or state of a country, a society or even an economy;
2. *Sustainable development* as a process: moving from one mode of existence to another;
3. Elements that are advanced as preconditions for *sustainable development*: *peace, security* etc; and
4. The implied need for the equitable sharing of the benefits of the undefined process, both as a precondition, as well as an expression, in itself, of the final state of *sustainable development*.

From the foregoing, it might be surmised that the juxtaposition of these and related elements such as can be extrapolated from other usages of *sustainable development* in the *Plan of Implementation* could provide the *raw material* for the generation of, at least, a more concise *definitional approach* to *sustainable development*. Not only would such an approach inform the effective operationalisation of the concept, but it would also facilitate the ongoing discourse on the subject on the basis of shared understandings. Such an approach would thus, of itself, constitute a very important tool for implementation. For the time being, however, the international community is left, not only to construe, but also, to apply an evidently plastic concept in vastly different contexts and with different processes, as well as end-states, in view.

The plan of implementation: A summary review

Having drawn attention to and indeed welcomed the recommendation for the entrenchment of *sustainable development* as the flagship concept to guide all United Nations activities and lamenting the absence of a more concise operational definition, or *definitional approach*, which have been identified as the two most striking features of the *Plan of Implementation* from an analytical perspective, a summary review of the content of the document follows.

The *Plan of Implementation* is divided into some 18 substantive sections, covering, in slightly condensed format:

- Poverty Eradication; Changing unsuitable patterns of consumption and production;
- Protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development (incorporating, *inter alia*, fisheries; oceans seas islands and coastal areas in the context of Chapter 17 of Agenda 21; agriculture; climate change; disasters; tourism; biodiversity; forests; mining, minerals and metals);
- Sustainable development in a globalizing world (incorporating, *inter alia*, trade issues);
- Health and sustainable development;
- Sustainable development of small island developing States (incorporating, *inter alia*, issues related to freshwater; fisheries; the sustainable management of coastal areas, EEZs and the continental shelf; tourism; energy; health);

- Sustainable development for Africa; and other regional initiatives covering Latin America and the Caribbean; Asia and the Pacific; West Asia; and Europe;
- Means of implementation;
- The role of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Commission on Sustainable Development;
- The role of international institutions; strengthening institutional arrangements for sustainable development at the regional and national levels; and participation of major groups.

The fact that this document recites the same issues as appeared in the *Rio Declaration*, *Agenda 21*, the *SIDS POA* and related documents, merely reflects the convening of the WSSD, not as a forum for the negotiation of new substantive issues but as one for reviewing the progress in the implementation of the outcomes of UNCED, making recommendations in that regard and mobilizing political support for further implementation efforts. Nor have the basic elements that constitute the sustainable development problematique been recognised to have undergone radical change since 1992.

A Caribbean SIDS Perspective

From the perspective of the SIDS of the Caribbean subregion, reviewing the *Plan of Implementation*, only through the prism of the SIDS POA, which, as earlier indicated, constitutes, for them, the most concrete expression of *Agenda 21* to date, the issues raised in Section V11 (*Sustainable development of small island developing States*) are quite familiar, inasmuch as they relate to many of the basic concerns with which they have been grappling over the years. The reiteration of the status of small island developing States as a special case, *both for environment and development*, is welcome as is the recognition that is once more given to the constraints to their more comprehensive implementation of the SIDS POA. Many of the issues highlighted relate broadly to sustainable fisheries management; the delimitation and sustainable management of coastal areas and exclusive economic zones, including the continental shelf; as well as relevant regional management initiatives within the context of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and the UNEP regional seas programme.

The inclusion of these particular elements in the *Plan of Implementation* accords with one of the more fundamental aspirations of Caribbean SIDS, namely the initiative that is currently before the United Nations General Assembly on *Promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development*. (UNGA 2000a and UNGA 2001). This is a matter to which the subregion attaches the greatest importance and the endorsement by the WSSD of this type of initiative at precisely the time when the subregion is rededicating itself in that direction, is most opportune. Certainly, the incorporation of these elements into the WSSD *Plan of Implementation* may be properly adduced as part of the politico-legal justification of *the Caribbean Sea initiative* just mentioned. Similar observations might be made in the context of the decisions taken at the Summit on the need for the finalization and early operationalisation of economic, social and environmental vulnerability indices and related indicators; and the need for action in areas such as energy; health; and water.

With respect to the issues covered under the Section 1X (*Means of Implementation*), several of these reflect the concerns that have been articulated by Caribbean SIDS and advanced at various international forums, as well as at the *Subregional Preparatory Meeting of the Caribbean for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, which convened in Havana, Cuba, over the period, 28-29 June, 2001. The relevant issues relate to, *inter alia*, financing of sustainable development; ODA; the need for a supportive international environment; trade issues in sustainable development; institutional strengthening, including human resource development; education; science and technology, including in relation to early warning systems and mitigation programmes to countries affected by natural disasters; and public health issues, including HIV/AIDS.

In this regard, attention might be drawn to the core development imperatives identified in relation to the Caribbean SIDS as they prepared for the WSSD. The WSSD was approached by Caribbean SIDS as providing a platform for the reinvigoration of the global commitment to a renewed North-South partnership to further promote sustainable development. They also expected that forum to point the way towards the future evolution of the POA and of the UNCED process as a whole.

In *The SIDS Programme of Action-Agenda Twenty One: The Road to Johannesburg 2002* a full-length publication which was produced by the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean as basic documentation for the *Caribbean Subregional Preparatory Meeting* and also for presentation to the *Regional Preparatory Conference of Latin America and the Caribbean for the World Conference on Sustainable Development*, Brazil, 23-24 October 2002, and to the WSSD itself, a series of questions that identify these *core development imperatives* was raised as follows:

What then of the future? How can Caribbean SIDS accelerate the pace of implementation of the SIDS POA and related international sustainable development agreements towards their own accelerated sustainable development? How can they ensure a more effective participation in existing, as well as future international sustainable development agreements? How will they acquire the capacity to confront current, as well as future challenges? And what approaches are required at the national, as well as regional levels? What can they do to mobilise the type of support that is still to be forthcoming from the international community? (ECLAC/CDCC, 2001)

As mentioned above, the range of priority elements to Caribbean SIDS are reflected in different sections of the *Plan of Implementation*. Section VII (*Sustainable development of small island developing States*) in particular, captures a number of specific Caribbean concerns in its recommendations (fisheries management; ocean and coastal management issues, compilation of a vulnerability index, sustainable tourism, health and capacity-building, among others). Attention has also been drawn to the content of the section dealing with *Means of Implementation*. Against this background, the SIDS of the Caribbean may be pardoned for harbouring the expectation that the explicit articulation of these elements in the recommendations of the *Plan of Implementation* would attract the attention of the wider international community even, as in past years, the SIDS of the subregion continue their efforts

at confronting their many challenges within the limits of their resources, having accepted the *primary responsibility* in this regard.

In the course of the general debate at the fifty-seventh session of the United Nations General Assembly on *economic, social and related issues*, which took place over the period 12-20 September 2002, a matter of days following the conclusion of the WSSD, the Chairman of the AOSIS indicated that the SIDS were satisfied with the provisions of plan of implementation adopted at the WSSD with respect to the sustainable development of Small Island Developing State (SIDS) (DESA, 2002b). Likewise, the extended section of the *plan of implementation* which deals with issues relating to *oceans, seas, islands and coastal areas* can also be expected to have met with their approval.

Finally, of fundamental significance to the SIDS of the Caribbean subregion is the endorsement by the WSSD of a proposal formalised since the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly in 1999, for a *full and comprehensive review* of the implementation of the *SIDS POA* to be undertaken in 2004. This decision, which follows a proposal made by Caribbean SIDS, among others, also satisfies the preoccupation earlier articulated at the twenty-second special session of the United Nations General Assembly, to the effect that the dynamic nature of the development process required that the chapters of the *SIDS POA* and related international decisions be revisited periodically. The endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-seventh session to convene an international meeting for the sustainable development of small island developing States, as recommended by the WSSD, provides not only these States, but the international community as a whole, with an opportunity to further address, in a focused manner, those issues whose treatment was not as thorough as might have been at the 1994 UNGCSIDS. It also permits the analysis of those new issues and perspectives that have emerged since 1994, due account being taken of, *inter alia*, the conclusions of the twenty-second special session of the United Nations General Assembly and the WSSD itself.

CHAPTER II

Dimensions of sustainable development

The review undertaken in the preceding chapter had, as one of its main objectives, the depiction of the international, regional and subregional contexts and also the generation of raw material for the analysis of the corresponding activities on the basis of which attempts have been made to promote and operationalise the concept of sustainable development. What has been revealed, *inter alia*, is a progression within international society as a whole from its early preoccupations, centred largely on the physical environment, to a more comprehensive conceptualization of *sustainable development* that embraces an infinitely wider range of social, economic, ethical, aesthetic and even spiritual values, in addition to the original concerns about the physical environment. Many important issues might be extrapolated, but central to all, is a basic understanding of what, in precise terms, is meant to be conveyed by the term *sustainable development* which, on the recommendation of world leaders, is to be the mainspring of action towards enhanced welfare at the global level.

Observations of this nature readily prompt the exploration of the nature of concepts and definitions as well as of the requirements for achieving some significant degree of convergence in the understanding and operationalisation of their respective propositions.

In general, a *concept*, be it *sustainable development*, or any other, is understood to be in the nature of an abstract idea, or as a mental image contoured around certain precepts. As a theoretical construct, it is also understood to be an idea under which are subsumed the essential characteristics or attributes that are associated with the corresponding term. In turn, the precepts and the characteristics identified will guide the formulation of a definition of the concept in question.

With respect to *definitions*, their fundamental characteristic is expected to reside in their explanatory power, in the sense of, *inter alia*, being capable of setting out with precision, the meaning of a term or concept, extending even to the identification of the essential properties and qualities that are recognised to inhere within it. In the context of *sustainable development*, for example, it might be reasonably expected that its corresponding definition(s) would specify the precise manner in which the concept is to be construed or interpreted. In this regard, what have emerged thus far, for the most part, are not *definitions*. Rather, the indications point to nothing firmer than a series of general notions, thus falling short of a more or less comprehensive statement of the sub-components that are recognised to inhere within the concept and of the relative relevance or weight of each, in any given set of circumstances.

In the event, as recognised by certain commentators and practitioners and, also, as explored above, there is not, nor can there be, a *model* for sustainable development, so that each situation is *sui generis*, thus prompting the question as to the effectiveness, orientation, or general utility of all the theorising that has so far gone into plumbing the depths of the *sustainable development* concept. Can it be reasonably expected that the international community will one-day generate a *theory of sustainable development*? Or has the approach that has *sustainable development* at its core succeeded merely in the provision of a methodology for a

more or less structured restatement of the development problematique, offering some scope for the exchange of experiences but with the prospect of facilitating comprehensive policy-making remaining limited?

The concept of *development*

One approach to the concept of *development* can be extrapolated from the following definition according to which:

“Sustainable development is here defined as a pattern of social and structured economic transformations (i.e. development) which optimizes the economic and societal benefits available in the present, without jeopardizing the likely potential for similar benefits in the future. A primary goal of sustainable development is to achieve a reasonable (however defined) and equitably distributed level of economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations.” (Goodland and Ledoc, 1987).

On the basis of this approach, it could be construed that *development* reflects significant changes in the society and economy such as would optimize the level of the benefits arising within each sector: benefits which are to be reasonably and equitably distributed. The *sustainable* element is taken care of by reference to the need to safeguard the interests of future generations, even as the interests of the present generation receive full attention. Also, the development process is perceived not to be infinite, but capable of being continued for only “*many human generations*”.

A wider exploration of the scope of the concept of *development*, as well as of its recognised ethical underpinnings, is afforded by another approach, according to which:

The phrase sustainable development has been criticized....as a contradiction in terms. If development is equated with economic growth, this criticism is indeed justified: Malthusian limits prevent sustained growth in a finite world.... Ultimately, however, uncontrolled economic growth will cause the quality of the environment to deteriorate, economic development to decline and the standard of living to drop.

Of course, the word development does not necessarily imply growth. It may convey the idea that the world, society or biosphere is becoming “better” in some sense, perhaps producing more, or meeting more of the basic needs of the poor. The word therefore involves a value judgement. In principle, development could become sustainable through structural changes (economic, political, cultural or ecological) or a succession of technological breakthroughs. (Munn, 1989).

Apart from articulating some of the ethical underpinnings of the *development* concept, this approach identifies the possible significance of, as well as the limits to, growth, with clear implications for *sustainability*; and the possibility of manipulating a number of variables to produce the required structural changes towards *development*.

The sustainability issue

According to one commentator:

The core of the idea of sustainability...is the concept that current decisions should not impair the prospects for maintaining or improving future living standard. This does not mean that sustainable development demands the preservation of the current stock of natural resources or any particular mix of human, physical and natural assets. As development proceeds, the composition of the underlying asset base changes.

On this basis, sustainability is not to be construed or pursued in static perspective. Rather it conjures up a rather dynamic process in which the improvement of living standards is envisaged and in which recourse is had, for example, to the substitution of certain types of assets for others over time as policy evolves. (Repetto, 1986).

What might be interpreted as a more static element in the approach to *sustainability* is introduced in the following extract:

More difficult to define is sustainability. The common use of the word “sustainable” suggests an ability to maintain some activity in the face of stress.... We thus define agricultural sustainability as the ability to maintain productivity, whether of a field or farm or nation, in the face of stress or shock. (Conway and Barbier, 1988)

In this approach, we have the productivity of a field, a farm and a nation closely juxtaposed in the context of a definition of agricultural sustainability as being subject to the same principle of management towards developmental sustainability.

Applying the concept of *sustainability*, in a similarly more limited context, the view is also advanced to the effect that:

The basic idea (of sustainable development) is simple in the context of natural resources (excluding exhaustibles) and environments: the use made of these inputs to the development process should be sustainable through time...If we now apply the idea to resources, sustainability ought to mean that a given stock of resources-trees, soil quality, water, and so on-should not decline. (Markandya and Pearce, 1988).

This view is amplified in another publication co-authored by the same commentator who, with reference to the “*constancy of the natural capital stock*” as the formula that captures the necessary conditions for *sustainable development* explains this expression to mean:

More strictly, the requirement is for non-negative changes in the stock of natural resources such as soil quality, ground and surface waters and their quality, land biomass, and the waste assimilation capacity of the receiving environment. (Pearce et al, 1988).

In this particular context, no thought is given to the possibility of substituting one resource for another and an essentially static element is introduced into the analysis.

Recalling an earlier approach, according to which:

A primary goal of sustainable development is to achieve a reasonable (however defined) and equitably distributed level of economic well-being that can be perpetuated continually for many human generations.” (Goodland and Ledoc, 1987)

a more comprehensive approach that addresses the issues of *substitutability* towards a *definitional approach* to *sustainability*, with reference, also, to the temporal dimension as these relate to the harvesting of resources-both renewable and exhaustible, has been provided, as follows:

There are self-evident problems in advocating sustainable rates of exhaustible resources, so that “sustainabilists” tend to think in terms of a resource set encompassing substitution between renewables and exhaustibles. Equally self-evident is the implicit assumption that sustainability is a “good thing”- that optimizing within sustainable use rates is a desirable objective. On these terms, sustainability could imply use of environmental services over very long periods and, in theory, indefinitely. (Pearce,1988)

Nor have the limits to the pursuit of *sustainability* via *substitutability* been overlooked in the analysis. Linking the concepts of *development*, *sustainability* and *substitutability*, the following is advanced:

Sustainable development means either that per capita utility or well-being is increasing over time with free exchange or substitution between natural and man-made capital, or that per capita utility or well-being is increasing over time subject to non-declining wealth.

There are several reasons why the second and more narrow focus is justified, including:

- *Nonsubstitutability between environmental assets (the ozone layer cannot be recreated);*
- *Uncertainty (our limited understanding of the life-supporting functions of many environmental assets dictates that they be preserved for the future);*
- *Irreversibility (once lost, no species can be recreated);*
- *Equity (the poor are usually more affected by bad environments than the rich). (Pearce et al, 1989)*

Needless to say, these are vital aspects that must be taken into account in the sustainable development process. Overall, however, the *sustainability-development* issue is viewed by some as exposing a number of vague and conflicting elements in the definition popularised by the *Brundtland Report*. For example, the view has been expressed that:

The constant reference to 'sustainability' as a desirable objective has (sometimes) served to obscure the contradictions that 'development' implies for the environment." (Redclift, 1987b)

This assertion is clearly justified by the reference to the high environmental costs implicit in the maintenance of current developmental trends, particularly in the developed countries. More firmly stated, the proposition is to the effect that *the Brundtland Report* attempts to “reconcile two irreconcilable goals’. The goals in question are the revival of growth (at least partly to meet the needs of the world’s poor) coupled with the avoidance of environmental degradation. Further, the proposition in the *Brundtland Report* to the effect that indefinite growth is the prerequisite for the achievement of these goals has been emphasised to be incompatible with the goal of living within natural limits: a proposition that has not been “categorically repudiated” in the Report. (Carpenter, 1991)

The basic claim is to the effect that:

“The linking of economics and ecology perpetuates unsustainable systems. The substitutability proposition is also challenged on the basis of the observation that the technologies licensed by current existing development models do not satisfy ecological concerns.”(Carpenter, 1991)

On the other hand, it has been suggested that:

“...the technical potential for achieving a sustainable form of environmental management, controlling environmental pollution, adapting technologies to local ecological and social conditions, and attaining an exponential increase in the production of goods and services to meet people’s needs is greater now than ever before. In addition, some economic and technological trends are beginning to show signs of being conducive to environmental protection. This is especially the case in the manufacturing and services sectors, but includes some emerging activities in the primary sector as well. (ECLAC, 2002b)

Then, there is the perspective according to which, the concept of “sustainability” is utopian, based, *inter alia*, on the recognition that there are environmental limits to production. (Sachs, 1988).

Selected key elements of approaches to sustainability

From this brief review of approaches to the *sustainability* issue, three *key elements* might be highlighted, namely, the postulation of:

- Constancy of natural assets as a whole (with or without the possibility of the substitution of natural and man-made assets);
- Constancy of level of each specific category of assets; and
- Constancy of man-made assets.

The postulation of these elements at once prompts the consideration of issues relating to the limits of sustainability and, also, to the need for measurement of resources and the rate of their utilisation. On the issue of *limits to sustainability*, this idea which was also incorporated into the 1980 World Conservation Strategy of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), though by no means unprecedented at the time, has been linked to the observation that, against the apparent assumption that sustainable development implies the requirement that global resources, including environmental resources, be measured, in order to ensure that they are not depleted over time. The question of just how intangible global assets would be measured is also raised. (Bell, 1997). Based on this type of considerations, it has been suggested that the inter-generational element of sustainable development which is aimed at ensuring that the resources required for sustainable development are not depleted, required further development. This proposition strikes at the heart of the Brundtland thesis.

A partial, or perhaps, more correctly, tentative response to the *measurement* issue suggests that “*..it will be possible to know if sustainable use is being achieved or is achievable for a given resource, with a given set of parameters, on the basis of a given level of information, knowledge and understanding. We know it is already possible to monitor and measure whether negative impacts on the environment are increasing, subsiding or being reversed. We are aware that our theoretical tools are being developed to the point where we can assign more realistic values to environmental goods and services. We have grown in our understanding of the interrelationships among the issues...And we hope and work for the required shift in ethics, values, attitudes, approaches, policies and actions within individuals, communities, nations, and all humanity to facilitate and chart that journey. The combined effect of all these processes will assure us, or not as the case may be, if we are on the route to sustainable development.*” (Cropper, 1994)

This perspective finds some support in the formulation according to which:

“(Sustainability) requires a political choice, which must be continuously adjusted as a result of new knowledge, changing social requirements, or unforeseen developments in the economic and ecological system.” (Ten Brink, Ben, 1991)

In this regard, the view has been expressed to the effect that factual indicators of the state of the relevant economies and ecologies can be made available to decision makers in the area of sustainability. (Kuik and Verbruggen (1991) in Cuello and Durbin, 1995) This is because

environmental indicators “*can be defined as quantitative descriptors of changes in either anthropogenic environmental pressure or in the state of the environment.*” (Opshoor et al 1990)

Other key issues in sustainable development

In order to clarify the content of *sustainable development*, it is also necessary to highlight and articulate a number of themes, sub-themes and hypotheses that are embedded within the concept. In this regard, it might be suggested that the existence of these elements, which, for the most part, remain controversial, presents significant obstacles to the effective comprehension, communication and eventual operationalisation of the concept. The elements to be explored here relate to:

- The poverty-population-environment-sustainable development hypothesis;
- The growth-poverty relationship;
- The primacy of individual components, whether economic, social or environmental, within the overall sustainable development paradigm;
- The over-consumption/sustainability debate;
- The *Third World perspective on sustainable development*; and
- The *substitutability of resources* thesis.

Poverty: The fundamental poverty-population-environment-sustainable development hypothesis

In *Our Common Future*, the widespread and increasing incidence of poverty throughout the world, particularly in the developing countries, is advanced as the overarching concern that prompted and justified the development and introduction of policies aimed at the *stabilization* of population growth. The basic rationale is to the effect that poverty results from the inability to meet the needs of rapidly growing populations. Further, the “*survival oriented behavior*” implicit in situations of poverty forces the poor to utilise any available resources without regard to the environmental and other implications. Poverty is also indicated to have a negative impact “*on the future and on the economic potential of the rest of the world.*” Also, “*Human resources are our greatest asset; we must stop turning them into a liability.*”

The central relevance of the issue of *poverty* and its implications for environmental management and overall sustainable development are very clearly articulated in *Agenda 21*. In its Chapter 3 (*Combating Poverty*) in which the major area of concern is identified as “*Enabling the poor to achieve sustainable livelihoods*”, *poverty* is approached as “*a complex multidimensional problem with origins in both the national and international domains.*”

In *Agenda 21*, the *Poverty-Population-Environment-Sustainable Development (PPESD) relationship* is articulated as follows:

3.2 While managing resources sustainably, an environmental policy that focuses mainly on the conservation and protection of resources must take due account of those who depend on the resources for their livelihoods. Otherwise it could have an adverse impact both on poverty and on chances for long-term success in resource and environmental conservation. Equally, a

development policy that focuses mainly on increasing the production of goods without addressing the sustainability of the resources on which production is based will sooner or later run into declining productivity, which could also have an adverse impact on poverty. A specific anti-poverty strategy is therefore one of the basic conditions of ensuring sustainable development. An effective strategy for tackling the problems of poverty, development and environment simultaneously should begin by focussing on resources, production and people and should cover demographic issues, enhanced health care and education, the rights of women, the role of youth and of indigenous people and local communities and a democratic participation process in association with improved governance.

3.3 Integral to such action is, together with international support, the promotion of economic growth in developing countries that is both sustained and sustainable and direct action in eradicating poverty by strengthening employment and income-generating programmes.

With respect to the objectives of the strategy, *Agenda 21* stipulates that:

3.4 The long term objective of enabling all people to achieve sustainable livelihoods should provide an integrating factor that allows policies to address issues of development, sustainable resource management and poverty eradication simultaneously....

This is the same basic approach employed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his Message to the fifth special session of the Governing Council of UNEP, Nairobi, May 1998. Restating the approach with *the environment* as his starting point, the Secretary-General of the United Nations expressed the following, *inter alia*:

When we talk about the environment, we are not speaking only of ecosystems and resources but about most of the key issues on the international agenda. We are talking about whether we live sustainably or unsustainably; about poverty and inequality; and about peace and security, since the roots of conflict can also be found in competition over land, oil and water. We are talking about democracy, and the involvement of men and women in the decisions affecting their lives. And we are talking, not least, about shared values and goals: working jointly to see that the benefits of economic growth and development are shared not only among countries, but among generations as well. Safeguarding the environment is, in short, a quintessentially global challenge, meaning that the United Nations, as the global organization, must play a strong and well-defined role.

Again, it is the same basic message which provided the greatest degree of satisfaction to the SIDS of the Caribbean, among others, by virtue of its explicit codification and incorporation into the implementation of the SIDS POA by the twenty-second special session of the General Assembly. In the report of that special session, it is stated, *inter alia*, that:

Poverty remains a major problem affecting the capacity of many small island developing States to achieve sustainable development. The complexity, pervasiveness and persistence of poverty has compromised the ability of States to provide basic social services, including basic education, health care, nutrition, clean water and sanitation,

and to undertake effective land and coastal area management and urban planning and development. Poverty in small island developing States has been exacerbated by increasing levels of unemployment; both will have to be addressed in tandem in order to deal effectively with the crippling effect of poverty on sustainable development capacity. Eradication of poverty is therefore a serious issue and an objective of high priority for small island developing States, and requires the integration of economic, environmental and social components of action to achieve sustainable development. (UNGA 1999) (Emphasis added).

Dethroning the poverty-population-environment-sustainable development (PPESD) hypothesis

The 1970s and 1980s have already been recorded as a period that witnessed a number of major environment-related crises on a global scale, particularly on the African continent.

The phenomena of drought and its accompanying famine, both reflected, as well as were triggered by a number of environmental and developmental elements. They led to massive loss of life and put many others at risk. Some one million persons were estimated to have died in the Ethiopian famine of 1984 and these were some of the events that conditioned the Brundtland Report.

In a newspaper article published in the United States of America, not quite a fortnight after the conclusion of the WSSD, a very significant challenge has been mounted to the PPESD hypothesis. Bearing the title “*Population Sense and Nonsense- Everything the experts think they know about overpopulation is wrong*”, the author, Nicholas Eberstadt, challenges the “*unwholesome orthodoxy*” that still prevails in the realm of development economics in relation to *the big issues* that were discussed in Johannesburg. In his view, this orthodoxy shared by, inter alia, *the US Government, the United Nations, European bureaucrats* represents *a shared impediment to understanding and relieving the problems that animated the Johannesburg proceedings.* (Eberstadt, 2002)

Very early in the text, reference is made to the endorsement of the objective of “*population stabilization*” in the *Brundtland Report* which is described as “*the sustainable development movement’s first canonical document.* A query is also raised as to the meaning of “*stabilizing world population*”. On the assumption that this concept relates to human numbers, the author expresses the view that attention should have been focused on “*Europe and Japan, where populations are currently projected to drop significantly over the next half-century*” and also to the Russian Federation where numbers are also declining. On this basis and quoting “*the former executive director of the U.N. Population Fund*” the *actual aim is stabilisation of world population at the lowest possible level, within the shortest possible time.* This is interpreted to mean: “*limiting the prevalence and reducing the level of childbearing around the world, especially in the Third World, and implementing measures to reduce births, particularly where fertility levels are deemed to be too “unacceptably high.”*”

This approach is indicated to be based on four premises which are summarised as follows:

1. There is a world population crisis defined by rapid population growth which is exacerbating overpopulation;
2. Current rates of world population growth are not only unsustainable in the long term, but are also having direct and immediate adverse repercussions on living standards, resource availability, and political stability;
3. The solution to the problem is reduced birth rates; and
4. Well-placed decision makers can engineer the desired changes.

All these premises are rejected by Eberstadt, however.

With respect to the assertion that the world is overpopulated, and using population density as the relevant index, the author agrees that such countries as Haiti, India and Rwanda, each with over six times the world's average population density, would qualify, in addition to Bangladesh, which evidences almost 20 times the average density of the inhabited portions of the globe. The writer continues:

By the same criterion...Belgium (1999 population per square kilometer: 333) would be distinctly more "overcrowded" than Rwanda (1999 population per square kilometre: 275. Similarly, the Netherlands would be more "overcrowded" than Haiti, Bermuda more "overcrowded" than Bangladesh, and oil-rich Bahrain three times as "overcrowded" as India. The most "overcrowded" country in the world by this measure would be Monaco: With a dire 33,268 persons per square kilometer in 1999, it suffers a population density over 700 times the world average.

On this point, the author concludes:

Yet as we all know, population activists do not agitate themselves about the "overcrowding" problem in Monaco-or in Bermuda, or in Bahrain.

Relating population growth rates in Sub-Saharan Africa, where population growth was estimated at the world's highest in the 1990s, to an even higher rate of population growth in the United States at the end of the eighteenth century, the observation is made to the effect that "demographic criteria cannot by themselves unambiguously describe "overpopulation".

Getting somewhat closer to another key element of *the Brundtland Report*, the writer expresses the view that accounting for the impossibility of defining 'stabilisation' in demographic terms, is the fact that the problem has been *mis-defined*. For him, conditions such as hunger, disease and squalid living conditions which are readily associated with "overpopulation" and similar concepts, are more properly viewed through the prism of *poverty*.

Further:

“It is a fundamental lapse in logic to assume that poverty is a ‘population problem’ simply because it is manifest in large numbers of human beings.”

On the issue of rapid population growth and high fertility levels being the causes or exacerbating factors with respect to poverty, resource scarcity and political instability, the almost quadrupling of the human population between 1900-2000 is indicated to have occurred *“not because people suddenly started breeding like rabbits-rather, it was because they finally stopped dying like flies...the ‘population explosion’ ... was really a ‘health explosion’.”*

Continuing the line of argumentation, associating a health explosion with the normal expectation of a contribution to the acceleration of economic growth, the increase of incomes, and the spread of wealth, attention is drawn to the fact that *“.. the 20th century witnessed not only a population explosion, and a health explosion, but also a prosperity explosion.”*

Further, while severe poverty is recognised to endure, it is also recognised that *“its incidence has been markedly curtailed over the past hundred years, despite a near- quadrupling of human numbers.”*

Moreover, the near-quadrupling of human numbers over the twentieth century was accompanied by a more than fourfold increase in human GDP per capita implying that humanity’s demand for and consumption of, natural resources had also dramatically increased. *“Yet the relative prices of virtually all primary commodities have fallen over the course of the 20th Century-for many of them, quite substantially.”* The conclusion reached with respect to the *“paradox”* of vastly increasing demand and falling prices, in a situation in which *“prices convey information about scarcity”* is that the purported association between population growth and increasing resource scarcity has not been demonstrated. A similar conclusion is reached with respect to the proposition that birth rates must be lowered in order to mitigate the adverse economic, resource, and political consequences of rapid population growth. Nor would such a policy necessarily achieve the anticipated results, or achieve them at an acceptable cost, or on the basis of voluntary action.

Also, based on historical evidence of smaller families appearing, first of all, in Europe about 200 years ago, this phenomenon was evident not in England and Wales, *“the most open, literate, and industrialized part of the continent”*, but in France, which was then *“impoverished, overwhelmingly rural, predominantly illiterate...and not to put too fine a point on it, Catholic.”* Thus, *“... the ‘modernization’ model does not plausibly explain the advent of fertility decline in the modern world.”*

The *PPESD hypothesis* is also challenged on the basis of other variables such as adult illiteracy rates for males and females; infant mortality; the availability and utilisation of modern contraceptives; and the intervention of expert family-planners. For example, attention is drawn to the fact that despite the absence of a national family planning, Brazil manifested fertility levels that were lower than those prevailing in Mexico which had implemented such a programme.

Overall, the conclusion is reached to the effect that:

The tremendous and continuing spread of health and prosperity around the planet betokens a powerful and historically novel dynamic that anti-natalists today only dimly apprehend. This is the shift on a global scale from the reliance on “natural resources” to the reliance on “human resources” as fuel for economic growth. The worldwide surge in health levels has not been an isolated phenomenon. It has been accompanied by, and is inextricably linked to, pervasive and dramatic (albeit highly uneven) increases in nutrition levels, literacy levels, and levels of general educational attainment. These interlocked trends point to a profound and continuing worldwide augmentation of what some have called “human capital” and others term “human resources”- the human potential to generate a prosperity based upon knowledge, skills, organization, and other innately human capabilities

In a physical sense, the natural resources of the planet are clearly finite and therefore limited. But the planet is now experiencing a monumental expansion of human resources. And unlike natural resources, human resources are in practice renewable and in theory inexhaustible-indeed, it is not at all evident that there are any “natural” limits to the build-up of such potentially productive human-based capabilities.

It is in ignoring these very human resources that so many contemporary surveyors of the global prospect have so signally misjudged the demographic and environmental constraints upon development today-and equally misjudged the possibilities for tomorrow.

Significantly, the deficiency in the approach that placed population issues at the centre of the global debate on sustainable development has been long identified by developing countries by reference to the fact that some 86 % of the world’s GDP is consumed by a mere 20 % or so of the world’s population living in the highest income countries. (UNEP, 2002 a). On that basis, the conclusion was quickly reached that the sights of the analysts and the international decision makers should have been more properly directed to the countries of the North, not to those of the South. A related perspective suggests that the devastation of the environment in developing countries has come about as a result of pressures from the global economy rather than as a result of the legitimate demands of the poor. (Redclift, 1987b)

The growth-poverty relationship

While the *growth-poverty relationship* received some exposure in the preceding section on the *PPESD relationship*, a separate, albeit summary projection of it will be undertaken here since it addresses one of the fundamental elements identified in the *Brundtland Report*. Highlighted in that Report, was, *inter alia*, the need to generate increased economic growth, including in the developing countries, as a means of combatting poverty and promoting sustainable development. What is now being presented is a proposition which seeks to clinch the argument against the feasibility of reducing poverty through the generation of economic growth, whether in the developed or the developing countries. The argument is advanced in relation to

“*this theory or ideology of ‘development of global growth’*” which, according to the proponent, is doubtful (Daly, 2002). Two aspects of the issue are articulated in this regard:

First, ecological limits are rapidly converting “economic growth” into “uneconomic growth”- i.e. throughput growth that increases costs by more than it increases benefits, thus making us poorer, not richer.....

Second, even if growth entailed no environmental costs, part of what we mean by poverty and welfare is a function of relative rather than absolute income, that is, of social conditions of distributive inequality.”

From these observations, the conclusion is tightly drawn to the effect that:

*Growth cannot possibly increase everyone’s **relative income**. Insofar as poverty or welfare is a function of relative income, then growth becomes powerless to affect it.*

Thus, conditioned by *environmental sustainability* and *social equity*, the *growth-poverty alleviation thesis* is called into question. While these issues are in fact encountered in the *Brundtland Report*, the above formulation places what appears to be a significant nuance on their interaction in the context of the operationalisation of the *sustainable development* concept towards effective policy-making.

In this regard, it is fair to recall that the *Brundtland Commission* did not restrict its recommendation in respect of economic growth to the developing countries. The extracts quoted above do, however, place a finer point on the issue.

Significantly, also, in the *Declaration of Santiago*, adopted at the Second Summit of the Americas, in 1998, it is indicated, *inter alia*, that:

Overcoming poverty continues to be the greatest challenge confronted by our Hemisphere. We are conscious that the positive growth shown in the Americas in past years has yet to resolve the problems of inequity and social exclusion. We are determined to remove the barriers that deny the poor access to proper nutrition, social services, a healthy environment, credit, and legal title to their property.” (Ministry of External Relations, Chile, 1998)

Thus, growth is recognized to be in the nature of a necessary, though, not sufficient condition for improving or maintaining the quality of life of any given society. According to one British commentator:

One thing that is clear is that sustainable development still represents a commitment to growth. In This Common Inheritance the Government stresses the view that continued growth is a necessary (although not a sufficient) condition for maintaining the quality of life, and this view is reiterated in Sustainable Development: The UK Strategy (Cm 2426, 1994), the Government’s strategy document on the matter. The idea of sustainable

development should therefore be distinguished from the concept of sustainability which merely reflects the state of something being sustainable in the long term.” (Bell, 1997)

Primacy of the economic, social or environmental sector within the sustainable development paradigm

As the discussion on *sustainable development* continues apace in all regions of the world, it is difficult to escape the degree of emphasis that is placed on the different components of the *sustainable development* paradigm. Indeed, much of this discussion can be immediately traced to UNCED, though of course, earlier works such as *The World Development Strategy* are also relevant. With respect to UNCED, *Principle 12* of the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development* appears to be advancing what might be termed “*the primacy of the economic component*” within the *sustainable development* construct. It provides, *inter alia*, that:

States should cooperate to promote a supportive and open international economic system that would lead to economic growth and sustainable development in all countries, to better address the problems of environmental degradation.

On the face of this language, what is suggested is that *economic growth* and *sustainable development* are to be achieved as a precondition of the ability to effectively address environmental degradation, which is itself a component of the sustainable development framework. This formulation would appear to be in contradiction of *Principle 4*, according to which:

In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it.

In this context, *environmental protection* comes not subsequently, as a secondary activity, rather it is to constitute a parallel process. Likewise in paragraph 2.6 of *Agenda 21*, under *Promoting sustainable development through trade*, it is indicated, *inter alia*, that:

Experience has shown that sustainable development requires a commitment to sound economic policies and management, an effective and predictable public administration, the integration of environmental concerns into decision-making and progress towards democratic government, in the light of country-specific conditions... (Emphasis added).

In a formulation that identifies the economic, social and environmental components of sustainable development, and at the same time, suggests the *primacy* of the environmental component within the overall sustainable development construct, the view is expressed to the effect that:

The core idea of sustainability....is the concept that current decisions should not impair the prospects for maintaining or improving future living standards... This implies that our economic systems should be managed so that we can live off the dividend of our resources, maintaining and improving the asset base. (Repetto, 1986)

In a more restricted formulation that identifies only the economic and environmental parameters, while conveying the primacy of the latter, the view is expressed according to which:

Sustainable development means that economic activities should only be extended as far as the level of maintenance of man-made and natural capital will permit... ” (United Nations 1992b)

The final selection in this category of approaches that highlight the primacy of the environmental component in the overall sustainable development paradigm, is set in the context of a discussion that has *sustainable development* as its focus: The proposition is to the effect that:

“Sustainable development rests on three pillars- society, economy and environment. The environmental pillar provides the physical resources and ecosystem services on which humankind depends. Growing evidence that many aspects of the environment are still degrading leads us to the conclusion that people are becoming increasingly vulnerable to environmental change. Some countries can cope but many others remain at risk and when that risk becomes a reality their dreams of sustainable development are set back by decades.” (Topfer 2002)

Also, as this discussion is subsequently engaged by the same commentator, the following conclusion is reached:

But there are problems: some things have not progressed, for example, the environment is still at the periphery of socio-economic development. Poverty and excessive consumption-the twin evils of humankind continue to put enormous pressure on the environment. The unfortunate result is that sustainable development remains largely theoretical for the majority of the world’s population. (UNEP, 2002.a)

The overconsumption - sustainability debate

Another aspect that continues to exercise the minds of academics and practitioners in the area of sustainable development relates to what might be termed “*the overconsumption-sustainability issue*”. In the *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, UNCED proclaimed as *Principle 8*:

To achieve sustainable development and a higher quality of life for all people, States should reduce and eliminate unsustainable patterns of production and consumption and promote appropriate demographic policies.

Significantly, related to “*the primacy of the economic subsector*”, there is the definition, according to which:

Sustainable economic development is continuously rising, or at least non-declining, consumption per capita, of GNP, or whatever the agreed indicator of development is. (Pearce, 1993)

It is against the backdrop of approaches of this type that the concepts of “*Overdeveloped Country*” and “*Underdeveloped Country*” have been generated, in the context of the relationship between the economic and ecological subsectors and the demands of equity as postulated in *Principle 8* of the Rio Declaration which summarily depicts the sustainable development paradigm. (Pantin, 2001)

In this context, any country whose per caput level of resource consumption is such that, if generalized to all countries, could not be sustained indefinitely, would be regarded as being “*overdeveloped*”. Conversely, an *underdeveloped* country would be one whose per caput level of resource consumption is less than that which could be sustained indefinitely if all countries consumed at that level.

Relevant in this regard, is the fact that, according to the World Bank:

“There are still 1.2 billion very poor people (those living on less than \$1 a day) despite the success in reducing this number by at least 200 million in the past two decades, even as overall population grew dramatically. The average income in the richest 20 countries is 37 times that in the poorest 20—a ratio that has doubled in the past 40 years, mainly because of lack of growth in the poorest countries.” (World Bank, 2002)

Essentially addressing the *overdeveloped-underdeveloped country thesis*, the same report conveys the following:

Concern is often expressed about “overconsumption” in wealthy countries and about the threats to sustainability of increasing levels of global consumption. But what kind of consumption qualifies as overconsumption, why is it harmful, and what should be done about it? Does overconsumption imply that there should be a limit on total global consumption (and that as a result, the already high levels of consumption in developed countries need to be reduced to enable increased consumption in poor countries)?

“*On these questions*”, the report observes that, “*there is little clarity*”. However, pursuing the issue, it continues:

One interpretation of overconsumption is that it refers to the environmental externalities associated with consumption at higher levels of per capita income. For example, carbon dioxide emissions, and their contribution to climate change, are highly correlated with consumption of electricity, home heating, transport services, and energy-intensive manufactured goods—all of which tend to increase strongly with income. In these cases, the “over” prefix is justified, since the externalities are by definition inefficient (there is no balancing of costs against benefits) and usually inequitable (wealthier people impose the damages upon poorer people). But the overall level of consumption is not the source of the problem. It is the combination of the specific consumption mix and the production processes that generates the externality. And for these there are well-established policy prescriptions from public finance.

Another interpretation of overconsumption, much more difficult to document, has to do with social externalities. People judge the adequacy of their consumption—clothing, automobiles, housing— in part against norms set by others. If this is true, consumption takes on some of the aspects of an arms race. What are the policy implications? Mutual restraint is needed (a coordination problem par excellence) to shift resources from competitive individual consumption to consumption of public goods. But these externalities need to be much better understood before there can be any agreement on the actions to address them.

This matter of *overconsumption* is one of four “*important and controversial topics*” covered by the *World Bank World Development Report* in the context of *global issues of sustainable development* that remain *open questions*.

On the question as to whether consumption in developed countries should be reduced in order to enable increased consumption in poor countries, while it has been addressed, it is yet to inform any specific or formal proposals within the international sustainable development discourse. Indeed, resting the case essentially on the *externalities* issue, the view has been expressed to the effect that:

While growth in rich countries might be uneconomic, growth in poor countries where GDP consists largely of food, clothing, and shelter, is still likely to be economic.

One might legitimately argue for limiting growth in wealthy countries, where it is becoming uneconomic, in order to concentrate resources on growth in poor countries, where it is still economic.

The obvious solution of restraining uneconomic growth for rich countries to give opportunity for further economic growth, at least temporarily, in poor countries, is ruled out by the ideology of globalization, which can only advocate global growth. We need to promote national and international policies that charge adequately for resource rents, in order to limit the scale of the macroeconomy relative to the ecosystem and to provide revenue for public purposes. These policies must be grounded in an economic theory that includes throughput among its most basic concepts. These efficient national policies need protection from the cost-externalizing, standards-lowering competition that is driving globalisation. (Daly, 2002)

On this general basis, proposals on “*changing consumption and production patterns*” which pervade the international discourse on *sustainable development*, place great emphasis on such elements as cleaner production; pollution prevention; eco-efficiency; integrated product policies; and the de-coupling of economic growth from environmental degradation. (United Nations, 2001). A number of “*command and control*” policies have been invoked in this regard such as bans on certain products or processes; the imposition of taxes, the imposition of limits on emissions and related aspects. A perspective that nevertheless seems to come over, is the general association that is often casually made in some circles, between, say, increasing levels of greenhouse gases and the spread of such gadgets as refrigerators, to the Third World, apparently implying that such consumption should not have been permitted. In this case, consumption in the

developing countries should be curtailed or prohibited so that the level of consumption in the developed country counterparts is not jeopardised. This is the opposite perspective to the one that has been articulated by Daly, as set out above.

Moreover, in the following extract embodying, *inter alia*, a definition of *sustainable development*; a perspective on the over-consumption/sustainability discussion; and, within that, the respective prospects of the rich and poor; a very interesting, perhaps, courageous, nuance is introduced:

The kind of sustainability we all want to achieve is sustainable development. We are talking about preserving the ecosystem, but in a context where we have confidence that the poor will be able to improve their material condition, and we presume that the rich, at least, won't suffer adversely. So, by sustainable development, we really mean achieving the millennium goals in a way that is supportive of our ecosystems, and not detrimental in fundamental ways to the interests of the already wealthy of the world. We are going to make it if we find a path in which the interests of the rich, or the conditions of the rich, in important ways are maintained while the poor find a way to catch up, and all of it done in a manner that is ecologically viable. (Sachs, 2002)⁵

Significantly, within the Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), *sustainable consumption* is approached as the fulfilment of basic human needs without undermining the capacity of the environment to fulfil the needs of the present and future generations.

Ultimately the issue appears to rest on *consumption* being approached not only in the context of the acquisition and enjoyment of a certain basket of *goods*, although this is not without validity, but also, and more fundamentally, as “*the transformation of materials and energy*. (Nebel and Wright 1996)

From this vantage point, consumption patterns make materials and energy less available for future use, change dynamically, stable biophysical systems to different states, or through effects on these systems, threaten human health, welfare or other things people value.

This approach places *consumption* at the centre of the human-environment interface. And then again, there are “*the strident environmentalists*” who advocate “a wholesale change in values, a relinquishing of the consumption orientation.” (Cuello and Durbin, 1995)

⁵ As regards the Millennium Goals, The United Nations Millennium Declaration (UNGA Resolution 55/2) adopted at the Millennium Assembly hosted by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, 6-8 September 2000) sets out the priority spheres of action to be pursued by the United Nations, together with a number of specific, measurable targets for the first 15 years of the century which are referred to as the millennium development goals. These time-bound development relate to the eradication of extreme poverty; the reduction of hunger; increased access to safe drinking water and to education; reduction of maternal mortality and under-five mortality; to halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and to improve the lives of slum dwellers in cities.) In document A/56/326, the Secretary-General also issued a road map indicating the steps to be taken towards achievement of these goals.

The *Plan of Implementation* adopted at the WSSD devotes an entire section to “*Changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production*” and postulates, *inter alia*, that: *Fundamental changes in the way societies produce and consume are indispensable for sustainable development.*”

In this regard:

“All countries should promote sustainable consumption and production patterns, with the developed countries taking the lead and with all countries benefiting from the process, taking into account the Rio principles, including, inter alia, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities as set out in Principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.”

Fundamentally, what is to be undertaken in the context of a 10-year framework of programmes in support of relevant regional and national initiatives, are actions “*to accelerate the shift towards sustainable consumption and production to promote social and economic development within the carrying capacity of ecosystems by addressing and, where appropriate, delinking economic growth and environmental degradation through improving efficiency and sustainability in the use of resources and processes, and reducing resource degradation, pollution and waste.*”

Developed countries are to take the lead in this area of activity “taking into account the development needs and capabilities of developing countries through mobilisation, from all sources, of financial and technical assistance and capacity building for developing countries “

This prescription prompts recall of *Principle 7* of the *Rio Declaration* which recites, *inter alia*, that: *In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities.*

Indeed, in the context of promoting “*more sustainable production*”, an international *Expert Group on Environmental Management Accounting* has been organized by the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). Overall, the agenda for changing consumption and production patterns is to benefit from collaboration among several United Nations agencies and governmental as well as non-governmental organizations. As reported by DESA, based on the *Plan of Implementation* adopted by the WSSD, the Department for Sustainable Development is to organize a meeting *to define a conceptual and organisational framework to identify existing and planned activities in the area, exchange information on the activities and disseminate the results.* (DESA, 2002b)

Situating the issue in the Latin American and Caribbean context, the observation has been made that:

Globalisation has brought to light the interdependence between international trade and the environment. This has happened in an international context where concerns about the environment are becoming increasingly strong, particularly in the developed countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean by contrast, slow economic growth and the problems

of poverty that represent a more immediate threat to human life and health have given precedence to short-term priorities, to the detriment of environmental considerations or slower-maturing production efforts that take account of environmental quality.

However, insofar as the countries of the region have opted for a strategy of trade liberalization and export-led growth, they do not have much flexibility for adapting their production systems to the environmental requirements of their main export markets. The way this adjustment is bound to take place is largely determined by the type of technological and environmental management prevailing in the developed countries, because they are the ones that dominate world trade and export the largest share of goods and services among themselves (including even raw materials). Accordingly, they will also most likely be determining the pattern of production and technology that will prevail in the rest of the world. (ECLAC 2002b)

Significantly, it is indicated in the same publication, that there appears to be no necessary direct link between trade liberalization policies and environmental protection. Rather, what is suggested is that:

“The environmental implications will depend on each country’s situation in terms of its institutional structure, its trade composition, its income distribution, the enforcement of environmental regulations, the power of interest groups, the geographical density of its economic activity, the education levels of its population and the income elasticity of the demand for environmental quality.” (ECLAC, 2002b)

The Third World perspective

The PPESD thesis as well as certain other elements within the overall *sustainable development paradigm*, as articulated in *Our Common Future* have created considerable unease among the generality of developing countries. In particular, the emphasis placed on the suggested relationship between population size and growth rates, rate of resource use and the anticipated decline in the quality of life of the world’s population, was interpreted by the developing countries as placing limits on their development prospects by their developed counterparts. In this regard, there was quite strong criticism within the UNCED process to the effect that in their preoccupation with *sustainable development*, the developed countries were more concerned with protection of the environment than with the implications of that concern for the welfare of developing countries.

In this regard, certain proposals from the developed countries and their subsequent reflection in international law were construed as being overprotective of the environment and inimical to the growth prospects of developing countries. For example, the view has been expressed to the effect that:

Development is the central issue that developing countries must be concerned with; but what we find is happening, is that they are being directed to consider sustainability, even when they don’t have development now. They have underdevelopment. I therefore ask myself if the very definition of sustainability, is not a part of an elaborate conspiracy of

certain persons and certain countries against certain other persons within countries, and against certain other countries.” (Suite, 1994)

Notwithstanding this posture, developing countries are only too aware of the implications of continued adherence to development models which challenge the Earth’s ecosystem by virtue of the patterns of consumption and production they espouse. Nor can the burden be placed on developing countries as recognised in the adoption of Principle 7 of Agenda 21, according to which:

“...In view of the different contributions to global environmental degradation, States have common but differentiated responsibilities. The developed countries acknowledge the responsibility that they bear in the international pursuit of sustainable development in view of the pressures their societies place on the global environment and of the technologies and financial resources they command.”

Within the “*soft international law*” that is *Agenda 21*, this is an ethical principle which developing countries seek to raise very high as they continue their interactions at the wider international level in pursuit of their sustainable development.

For example, in the lead up to the WSSD, the international community was reminded that:

If the Chinese citizen is to consume the same quantity of crude oil as his or her United States counterpart, China would need over 80 million barrels of oil a day- slightly more than the 74 million barrels a day the world now produces. If annual paper use in China of 35 kilograms per person were to climb to the United States level of 342 kilograms, China would need more paper than the world currently produces.” (Mbeki, in UNEP, 2002.b)

More generally, as efforts were made to generate an operational dimension to the concept of *sustainable development* as advocated in *the Brundtland Report* into the global plan of action that eventually emerged as *Agenda 21*, developing countries despaired that whereas they had come to the table with their own interests, concerns and related proposals, at UNCED, attention was focused on the issues and concerns of the developed countries. Even where common broad elements were identified, it was the perspective of the developed countries that generally predominated, due note having been taken, for example in the context of energy issues, of the fact that neither the group of developing countries nor its developed counterpart is to be viewed as being monolithic: there being a spread of perspectives to be encountered within each.

Nevertheless, it was this type of concern that prompted the view that would surely find endorsement among developing countries, according to which-and sea-level rise notwithstanding- that:

Although global warming has yet to kill a human being and may not do so for centuries, it has received enormous attention and resources. At the same time, silent emergencies

are killing people everyday.... do not attract the same kind of screaming headlines and well funded Action Plans. (Dunoff 1995)

Among the “*silent emergencies*” are some of the phenomena recognised by the *Brundtland Report* itself, namely, famine, poverty and disease. The basic proposition is to the effect that there are many environmental problems that are of interest to the Third World but which the developed countries seem loath to address at global conferences.

Likewise the view was expressed at UNCED to the effect that:

The solution cannot be that which bans the development of those who need it the most; the fact that everything that contributes to underdevelopment and poverty is an open violation of ecology.” (Castro Fidel, 1992)

On a related matter, it might also be appropriate to draw attention to another important shortcoming identified in relation to the approach to *sustainable development*, from a developing country perspective. This relates to the conviction that, in emphasising *intergenerational equity*, a lesser degree of attention is being directed to “*being fair to the present*”. In this context, it is lamented that, to date, the concept of *intra-generational equity* has not been identified as a central concern. (Pantin, 1994)

For example, there is the profoundly, almost exclusively future-oriented preoccupation in the *definitional approach*, according to which:

(Sustainability of development) is concerned with (a) the rights of future generations to the services of natural and produced assets and (b) whether the formal and informal institutions which affect the transfer of assets to future generations are adequate to assure the quality of life in the long-run. (Norgaard, 1992).

An approach to the manner in which the respective claims of present and future generations might be addressed, has been conveyed in the following terms:

“Whatever the economic circumstances, the endeavour must be to put development on a sustainable basis. Development can never be on a true economic basis if it takes place at the expense of the future. And people should never be put in a situation where the needs of survival are at the expense of the future. Where however, there is a conflict between the two, survival must take priority, even though it puts longer-term sustainability at stake. In these circumstances, sustainable development must remain an aspiration, an approach and a longer-term objective. The norm must always be so that development should be on a sustainable basis-even in the short term.” (Persaud, 1994).

Another perspective that seeks to provide some balance with respect to the claims of present and future generations is offered in the definition according to which:

Ecologically sustainable development means using, conserving and enhancing the community’s resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are

maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased.
(Australian Government, 1992)

This perspective is also reflected in the definitional approach according to which the sustainable development concept includes three parts:

- (a) The environment is an integral part of the economy and vice versa
- (b) Intra-generational equity
- (c) Inter-generational equity (Breitmeier, 1995).

The substitutability issue

In an earlier section, which reviewed a recent challenge to the *PPESD hypothesis*, an element was identified dealing with the issue of the substitutability of resources on the path to sustainable development. In that example, attention was drawn to, *inter alia*, a shift on a global scale from the reliance on “*natural resources*” to the reliance on “*human resources*” as the main fuel for economic growth. Some significant degree of substitution of the latter for the former, was indicated to have taken place. This is an aspect that has received the attention of several commentators on *sustainable development* as a concept and, more importantly, in the context of its operationalisation.

In this regard, the question has been raised as to whether, in the pursuit of sustainable development, it would be permissible to substitute one type of asset for another. An intriguing formulation of this question which probably, at least, partially restates the earlier example, has been articulated as follows:

Once upon a time, an entrepreneur was cast away on a desert island. By good chance, the island lay on a busy trade route, in a convenient time zone. The entrepreneur cut down all the trees and exported them to Japan, sold off all the coral for jewellery, dug up the island's gold and used to proceeds to set up schools, homes and factories for a new Hong Kong, where everybody lived prosperously ever after on the products of their brains, high technology and imported raw materials. Is that sustainable development?
(The Economist, 1989)

Explicitly operational definitions of *sustainability* that incorporate *substitutability of resources* as an integral element and which directly respond to the question above have been articulated as follows:

Economic development in a specified area (region, nation, the globe) is sustainable if the total stock of resources-human capital, physical reproducible capital, environmental resources, exhaustible resources-does not decrease over time. (Bolo, Jan et al, 1990).

Making a finer point, the same writers emphasise that:

If physical or human capital can be sustained for an environmental resource, then the environmental resource can be exploited in such a way that it is severely reduced if and

only if the investments in the stock of human and physical capital are such that the total resource base is not reduced.

On this basis:

The cutting down of forests in order to increase export earnings is consistent with sustainable development. However this is feasible “Only if the whole or part of the proceeds are invested in other export earnings or import reducing activities in order to maintain the welfare of future generations.

Evidently, this example brings into question, in addition to the satisfaction of economic and social needs, the satisfaction of aesthetic, amenity, spiritual and other dimensions of *development* and *well-being* of the individual. In any event, this is a debate that needs to be pursued, since there is a clear possibility that, based on the premises that have been articulated, the *substitutability* approach might emerge as being of greater significance than the *overconsumption* debate which, to date, has received more attention. Nevertheless, it might also be the case that both approaches are, in fact, related. This paper confines itself to signalling the types of issues that have been raised in the operationalisation of *sustainable development*, taking into account, *inter alia*, the range of elements that have been discovered to be embedded within that concept.

CHAPTER III

Perspectives on sustainable development

Review of conceptual and definitional approaches to sustainable development: Coming to terms with a very plastic concept

An inescapable conclusion to be drawn from the discussion that has so far been developed in this paper, is the need for some kind of order in the still unfolding debates on the concept of *sustainable development*

In the ever expanding body of literature devoted to *environment* and *sustainable development* issues and also in regional and international forums, including seminars and workshops, an expanding number of conceptual and definitional approaches, indicating a growing range of perspectives or understandings, including issues of emphasis and nuance, with respect to the concept are encountered. The matter for concern is that, very frequently, several individual formulations within this vast range of conceptual and definitional approaches are employed in a manner that seems to betray the assumption of their interchangeability as though they were, in fact, direct and perfect substitutes.

Moreover, it frequently emerges that the same concept is employed to convey significantly different messages with respect to its content, going beyond mere nuances, to expose fundamental cleavages upon closer inspection. Then there are formulations which are set out under a given rubric which coincide in every detail with others presented under other rubrics. The fundamental concern therefore relates to the very loose employment of terminologies: terminologies which, to a greater or lesser extent, have acquired the status of *terms of art* and are therefore unavoidable. A major objective of this paper is to highlight this very simple fact. The greater challenge would be to achieve some degree of commonality of understandings as to what is conveyed by each of the several terminologies employed.

Nor was support for the concern expressed above difficult to identify. In this regard, it was a matter of the greatest significance that fully 30 years after the *Stockholm Conference, the first international conference on the environment*; 22 years after the joint publication of the *World Conservation Strategy* by IUCN, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and UNEP; 10 years after the *Earth Summit* that was UNCED; eight years after the UNGCSIDS, *the first global conference on sustainable development and the implementation of Agenda 21* and equally significantly, a matter of months before the convening of the WSSD, a pair of leading academics found it worth their while to direct their attention to a number of basic issues within such topics as *The Economics of Sustainability* (Sachs, 2002) and, more pointedly, *Defining Sustainable Development* (Daly 2002).

Exemplifying the range of terminologies and formulations encountered in approaches to *sustainable development* are the following:

- Sustainable development: Integrating the social, economic and environmental components;

- Sustainable development: as a predominantly Third World Preoccupation;
- Sustainable Economic Development;
- Sustainable Development as economic development, however qualified;
- Sustainable development as ecological sustainability;
- Sustainable development as, primarily, the development and management of natural resources;
- Environmentally sustainable development;
- Ecologically Sustainable Development;
- Ecologically Sustainable Economic Development;
- The Sustainable Society

A number of formulations embodying these several conceptual and definitional approaches are set out hereunder, first of all, in order to draw attention to them as a group; secondly, to provide the basis for an overview of global perspectives on the topic; and, thirdly, to set the stage for a search for convergence.

Sustainable development: Integrating the social, economic and environmental components

In the words of the Secretary-General of the United Nations:

“....sustainable development is an exceptional opportunity for humankind-economically, to build markets and create jobs; socially, to bring people in from the margins; politically, to reduce tensions over resources, that could lead to violence; and of course, environmentally, to protect the ecosystems and resources on which all life depends- (Annan, 2002)

From the academic community comes an approach according to which:

Sustainable development is a pattern of social and structured economic transformations (development) which optimizes the economic and social benefits available in the present, without jeopardizing the likely potential for similar benefits in the future

Sustainable development implies using renewable natural resources in a manner which does not eliminate or degrade them or otherwise diminish their usefulness for future generations.

Sustainable development further implies using non-renewable (exhaustible) mineral resources in a manner which does not unnecessarily preclude easy access to them by future generations.

Sustainable development also implies depleting non-renewable energy resources at a slow enough rate so as to ensure the high probability of an orderly society transition to renewable energy resources. (Goodland and Ledoc, 1987)

Sustainable development: A predominantly Third World preoccupation

Then there is the perspective according to which *sustainable development* is predominantly, a preoccupation of the countries of the Third World:

(Sustainable development) is usually applied to less developed countries and the kind of economic and social development needed to improve the living conditions of the world's poor without destroying or undermining the natural resource base. (Mc Cormick, 1991)

This statement is a far cry from the type of legend that appeared on earlier posters that decorated the walls of certain United Nations agencies according to which “*The Third World Leads In Environment*”. The more recent entrenchment of environmental concerns at the global level, superimposed on the pre-existing *development* problematique, has led to the espousal of sustainable development concerns by all States. This, notwithstanding, in many significant quarters, the automatic association of development issues, however qualified, with the countries of the Third World, has refused to be dislodged.

Sustainable economic development

With the developing countries as the focus of analysis, the thrust of *sustainable economic development* is explained in the following terms:

The concept of sustainable economic development as applied to the Third World .is therefore directly concerned with increasing the material standard of living of the poor at the “grassroots” level and only indirectly concerned with economic growth at the aggregate commonly national, level. (Barbier, 1987)

Then, apparently equating *the economic dimension* with overall *sustainable development*, and affording local, national as well as international coverage in relation to its scope, the following extract has been recorded:

The government espouses the concept of sustainable development. Stable prosperity can be achieved throughout the world provided the environment is nurtured and safeguarded. (Thatcher, 1988)

More intriguing is the approach embodied in the following formulation:

Sustainable economic development: (The broad objective is) to find the optimal level of interaction between the three systems ... the biological and natural resource system, the economic system, and the social system. (Barbier, 1989)

What is so intriguing about this approach, is that, while it integrates the environmental, economic and social components, it is nevertheless set under the rubric of *sustainable economic development*.

Sustainable development as economic development, however qualified

Then there is another *definitional approach*, which goes in the opposite direction, or which meets the preceding one half-way, for, whereas in the approach last mentioned, what in fact turns out to be the, now more common, comprehensive approach to *sustainable development* is presented under the guise of *sustainable economic development*, the one which follows presents *sustainable development* in the guise of *economic development*. The formulation reads as follows:

Sustainable Development-economic development that can continue indefinitely because it is based on the exploitation of renewable resources and causes insufficient environmental damage for this to pose a threat.” (Allaby, 1988).

As this formulation is considered, it might also be borne in mind, that there is ample evidence in the literature of a perception that *development* has relevance only in the economic sphere.

Likewise, though with some concern for the human or social aspect, in terms of “*economic well-being*”, there is the formulation according to which:

Sustainable development is the maintenance or growth of the aggregate level of economic well-being, defined as the level of per capita economic well-being. (Haveman, 1989)

The equation of *sustainable development* with *sustainable economic development* will not have been overlooked.

In the final example to be quoted under this subsection, specific recognition is given to the term, *sustainable economic development*. Also, as in the preceding example, the reference is to the macro-economic aggregate per capita consumption, presumably implying per capita economic well-being. However, any preoccupation with the distribution of this macro-economic aggregate in the ethical context of *equity*, is absent. The relevant formulation is as follows:

Sustainable Economic Development is continuously rising, or at least non-declining, consumption per capita, or GNP, or whatever the agreed indicator of development is. (Pearce, 1993)

Sustainable development as ecological sustainability

If, in other approaches, the *economic dimension* occupies centre stage in the overall *sustainable development* construct, that same role is identified for the *ecological* counterpart by the adherents to the corresponding disciplines, as evidenced by the following definition, among others:

Sustainable development-maintenance of essential ecological processes and life support systems, the preservation of genetic diversity, and the sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems. (IUCN et al, 1980)

Within this definition, the focus is entirely on what might be loosely referred to as the *environment* aspect. Critically absent is an explicit mention of the social and economic dimensions that also affect the people who inhabit the planet. While reference is made to *sustainable utilization of species and ecosystems*, implying, at least, an economic dimension, the sole preoccupation is reserved for the ecological.

Sustainable development as primarily the development and management of natural resources

With respect to those formulations which approach *sustainable development* as the development of natural resources, in some instances, the concept is linked, not only to the management of natural resources but also, this process is placed in the context of both the productive economic sector as well as the social “well-being” component. The following definition exemplifies this category:

Sustainable development may be defined as the development and management of natural resources to ensure or enhance the long-term productive capacity of the resource base and improve the long-term wealth and well-being derived from alternative resource use systems, with acceptable environmental impacts. (Schultink, 1992)

Thus within the overall thrust of *sustainable development* as the development and management of natural resources, this definition integrates economic, social and environmental components, even as the management of natural resources is placed at the centre of the process.

Environmentally sustainable development

As earlier mentioned, one of the more intriguing aspects of the review of the numerous conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development*, is the frequency with which the same concerns, albeit overlapping, are presented under several different rubrics. The content of the following definitional approach could well have been lodged under several other rubrics mentioned in this Paper. According to its thesis:

“...the more narrowly defined concept of environmentally sustainable development requires maximizing the net benefits of economic development, subject to maintaining the services and quality of natural resources. (Barbier, 1989)

Ecologically sustainable development

Deserving of observations similar to those that have been presented under the rubrics of *Sustainable Development as Ecological Sustainability* and *Environmentally Sustainable Development* is the formulation according to which:

Ecologically sustainable development is a condition in which society’s use of renewable resources takes place without destruction of the resources or the environmental context which they require. (Solomon, 1990)

Setting aside the distinction between renewable and non-renewable resources and with an explicit concern for the welfare of both present as well as future generations, another formulation provides that:

Ecologically sustainable development means using, conserving and enhancing the community's resources so that ecological processes, on which life depends, are maintained, and the total quality of life, now and in the future, can be increased. (Australian Government 1992)

Ecologically sustainable economic development

Almost suggesting the interchangeability of the concepts *Sustainable Development* and *Ecologically Sustained Economic Development*, the latter incorporating economic, social as well as environmental components and also with an institutional or policy bias, there is the proposition according to which:

The concept (of sustainable development) combines two basic notions: economic development and ecological sustainability. Ecologically sustainable economic development can be thought of as a process of related changes of structure, organization and activity of an economic-ecological system, directed towards maximum welfare, which can be sustained by the resources to which that system has access. (Braat, 1991)

The sustainable society

In analyses of a more general nature, the concept of a “*sustainable society*” is also frequently encountered. According to one definition:

A sustainable society is one that continues, generation after generation, neither depleting its resource base by exceeding sustainable yields nor producing pollutants in excess of nature's capacity to absorb them. (Nebel and Wright, 1996)

In this context, *sustainable yield* as applied to, *inter alia*, fisheries, trees and forests, relates to the situation in which the amount harvested is within the capacity of the given population to grow and replace itself. (Nebel and Wright, 1996)

Among the more significant features of this definition is the fact that it ignores the distinction between renewable and non-renewable resources and, also, the issues earlier raised in relation to the substitutability of resources towards sustainable development.

According to another formulation:

The sustainable society is one that lives within the self-perpetuating limits of its environment. That society is not a “no growth” society it is rather, a society that recognises the limits of growth ... (and) looks for alternative ways of growing.” (Coomer, 1979)

In this more dynamic definition, recognition is given to the existence of environmental limits to growth and also to the feasibility of charting alternative growth paths. However, the critical element, namely, “*the self-perpetuating limits*” of the environment remains to be identified.

Concepts, definitions and convergence

The foregoing sections have been devoted to tracing the emergence of *environment* and *sustainable development* issues at the international level. Also traced, as a parallel theme, were the development, popularisation and usage of “*sustainable development*”, in general terms, from the IUCN/WWF/UNEP; the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED); UNCED; the UNGCSIDS, “*the first global conference on sustainable development*”; through to the WSSD.

The main objective of the review undertaken of the usages, definitions and definitional approaches to *sustainable development*, incorporating an exploration of the content and scope of the concept, was precisely to highlight, within a single space, the very wide range of factors, nuances and other elements of *hidden meaning* that are subsumed, often implicitly, in its use by different commentators.

More specifically, as the definitions and definitional approaches were explored, while some appeared to hold out some promise of convergence towards something approaching a shared understanding, to the extent that a meaningful and, therefore, productive, discourse might be sustained on the basis of their respective premises and with concrete results, the multiplicity of meanings and other inconsistencies identified were such as to render truly effective communication impossible.

Notwithstanding the signalling of these important questions, as well as the issues earlier raised with respect to the nature of *concepts* and *definitions*, the issue of *convergence* has been identified for exploration. This exercise is being undertaken against the backdrop of two factors. The first refers to the positive results, however modest in some cases, that have been reported by the SIDS of the Caribbean in the implementation of the SIDS POA, in both national, as well as subregional contexts. The second factor is the perceived need for convergent approaches to facilitate general communication and policy-formulation, towards the achievement of enhanced levels of implementation. It is to be emphasised that the search is for the achievement, not necessarily of a uniform approach, but, at least, of a coherent, focussed and coordinated set of approaches that manifest a very strong tendency towards consistency to replace the veritable smorgasbord which currently exists.

Convergence and sustainable development: Some issues

A major observation on the approaches to *sustainable development* that have been reviewed in this paper, relates to their conditioning by the disciplines pursued by their respective proponents. Thus, there are the concepts of *sustainable economic development* and *environmentally sustainable development*, for example, in addition to that of *sustainable development* in the version that seeks to integrate social, economic, as well as environmental

components of action. Not many articles seem to address *Sustainable social development* or *socially sustainable development* in those precise formulations. Rather, the relevant analyses are normally conducted in the course of discussions on *the sustainable society* or, even more frequently, on *Social Vulnerability* or, simply, *the Vulnerability of Small States*. (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997; ECLAC, 2002a; Sanders, 1997; and ECLAC/CDCC, 2000.

The frequently encountered more or less *unidimensional* or *compartmentalised approaches* to the respective components of *sustainable development* are recognised by this paper to have been inevitable. Certainly, such a development was to be expected, especially during the early stages of the exploration of the concept. The fact that it has continued can probably be attributed to the gradual evolution of the sustainable development discourse in international society. These approaches are essentially grounded in the different fields of specialisation of their respective proponents and, therefore, betray the corresponding focus, whether economic, social or environmental. Thus, they continue, notwithstanding the more comprehensive approach implied by the contemporary recognition of the tri-dimensional nature of the *sustainable development* concept. Publications continue to appear on one or other dimension of *sustainable development*. In this regard, for example, UNEP, has recently published GEO-3 (UNEP, 2002 a) in the context of its mandate, fully aware of the integrative concept that is sustainable development. It cannot be reasonably be envisaged that such publications will ever be discontinued.

At the same time, as has already been indicated, there have been calls by Caribbean SIDS, among others, for the mainstreaming of social components of action in the implementation of sustainable development. On this basis, it can be reasonably expected that more or less discrete pieces of literature reflecting, in the main, economic, social or environmental concerns, will continue to be spawned within the overall subject of *sustainable development*. What then are the prospects for convergence? How can the three components identified within the *sustainable development* construct be integrated and jointly operationalised? Equally, or perhaps, even more relevant, perhaps, is the question, “*Is convergence really necessary or even desirable?*”

The convergence debate

To this question, as to whether convergence in the conceptualization and definition of *sustainable development* is necessary or even desirable, two very deeply involved sustainable development activists and practitioners respond essentially in the negative. According to the first:

The word “sustainable” is perhaps the most often misused word of today...There are scores of definitions for the term...each one being interpreted from a particular viewpoint and reflecting individual or group perspectives and preoccupations. It is one of those visionary statements that lends itself to that. That is not a bad thing: we should all be interpreting and applying it in the context of our own life’s work.

However:

“Given the evolution of the concept, the scope of issues which it embodies, the range of interests which are potentially affected, and the myriad formulations of what the concept

is, it is understandable that in some circles the concept tends to be dismissed as being unclear, unrealistic, and unworkable.”

Nevertheless:

I believe that the concept is sufficiently understood, even if intuitively. The main challenge is how to translate from concept to practice? It is not what to do that troubles us; it is how to proceed. The concept is so all-encompassing, the challenges so overwhelming, it is difficult to know where to begin. This dilemma leads to inertia, at best; to skepticism, most often; to resistance occasionally; and to derision by some. It is clear, however, that the early phase requires strategic choices, actions which are more policy and goal oriented than functional in character. It requires political recognition of the need for change, and public support for the main directions of change towards sustainable development. It requires systematic build up of the skills that will be called for to follow the strategy and give effect to the policy outlined.(Cropper, 1994)

With respect to the second *negative orientation* vis à vis the need for convergence, even as it recognises possible shortcomings in the use of the concept:

The term sustainable development has come under increasing attack ...Some feel that it is too ambiguous and allows everyone to interpret it in a different way to suit their convenience. Others feel it is highly dangerous because it gives a false sense that economic growth can go on forever and lets everyone off the hook in terms of making difficult decisions. (Incidentally these are probably also the strengths of the concept: it has had a far longer life than most other similar concepts in the highly ephemeral vocabulary of international discourse. Whatever its shortcomings, the term...is a wonderfully integrative concept that combines so many dimensions-environment, social justice, intergenerational equity, etc, and, above all, development. If any of these is absent, development can be shown to be unsustainable. And for development to be sustainable, all the factors must be taken care of simultaneously. (Khosla, 2001)

On the other hand, addressing, simultaneously, the need for clarity of definition; the relevance of an integrated approach to *sustainable development*; and the question of *convergence*, a position published in 1994 but which remains relevant, has been advanced to the effect that:

Much has been written on the definition of sustainable development, yet confusion remains. I regret to say that in the Caribbean we have made almost no advance in developing a convergence of view on approaches to sustainable development.... (Persaud, 1994)

Further:

“...policy advances are not yet being informed by any coherent emerging view of how sustainable development is to be achieved. I believe such a conceptual framework,

however crude its development, could be very helpful. Hence, we need to persist in promoting an understanding of sustainable development.”

On the integration of disciplines, the same commentator expresses the view to the effect that:

The rise of the concept of sustainable development has led to a strong bid for a multi-disciplinary approach. ...While multi-disciplinary approaches are needed, this can be over-emphasised. Feasibility studies on development projects have always required multi-disciplinary teams and data from different disciplines.Incorporating sustainable development in the analysis, will probably increase the requirement for scientific data on the environmental impact. However, while this strengthens the claim for a multi-disciplinary approach, it does no more than that, and careful consideration must be given as to whether this means such a drastic change in approach in terms of multi-disciplinarity. The question is, if sustainable development is a new discipline or if it is just an approach which emphasizes more than in the past, the need for multi-disciplinarity? I believe it is more a case of the latter. The strong need will continue for specialized training in such areas as environmental chemistry, environmental engineering, and health and the environment, although there would be a greater need for specialists in wider areas of expertise who could be classified as specialists in sustainable development or environmental management.

On the question of the feasibility of *convergence*, the view of the same commentator is to the effect that:

In relation to the concept of sustainable development, I believe that it would be difficult to develop a convergent view between different disciplines. Differences have always been recognized between technical efficiency and economic efficiency. Similarly, in discussions on sustainable development, differences have been recognized between ecological sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. While in any full cost/benefit analysis, all forms of sustainability must be brought together to arrive at the fuller concept of sustainable development, it would not be easy for people from different disciplines to be comfortable with such an integrating concept. Each discipline may have to refine its own definition of sustainability, as we grope towards a wider concept which is more complete.

The need for the wider definition is urgent to force the pace of improvement in cost/benefit analyses to reflect sustainable development. Mainstream economists have been attempting to develop this over-arching approach because of their integrating role in cost/benefit analyses. They must try to persuade and to work out with ecologists and other scientists, the differences between ecological sustainability and economic sustainability and to ensure that the latter takes care of the former and that the former recognizes the importance of the latter.

The economist's approach to sustainable development in operational terms is not tremendously new or difficult conceptually. Acceptable economic activities are expected

to be ones in which projected benefits exceed projected costs by the highest margin when discounted to present values. The situation though, is that we now recognize that our past calculations have been flawed. This is more because of omission than methodology. They did not include environmental costs and benefits.

Finally:

“I suspect that the problem arises because the concept is seen as an integrating one among disciplines requiring a cross-disciplinary approach. The concept is, of course, new and all over the world it has generated much discussion. But beyond newness, cross-communication among disciplines is proving difficult.”

Each discipline may have to refine its own definition of sustainability, as we grope towards a wider concept which is more complete.”

The perspective articulated above which endorses the desirability of convergence in the conceptualization and definition of *sustainable development*, notwithstanding the evident difficulties and the need for the process to evolve, is the one that is shared by this writer. As Caribbean SIDS seeks to implement the SIDS POA, a number of constraints have been identified and articulated. Significantly, it became recognised within the CDCC countries, for example, that overcoming these constraints would involve:

- The explicit integration of the SIDS POA into national planning and decision-making;
- The adoption of more rigorous sustainable development approaches;
- The acquisition of much needed financial resources; and
- Effective programmes of education and public awareness of the Programme of Action.(ECLAC/CDCC, 2001)

It cannot be without significance that, apart from the financial aspect, which is ubiquitous, all the solutions identified by the subregion itself, relate very closely to the need of a clear and shared understanding of, as well as a similarly clear and shared comprehensive *approach* towards *sustainable development* by the decision makers, planners and civil society. In the same vein, the quest is for effective operationalisation of the concept. These observations would appear to justify the position advocated in this paper and supported by some other commentators, in favour of the relevance and utility of embarking on a search of conceptual and definitional convergence with respect to sustainable development as a critical element in, *inter alia*, effective communication, including policy-formulation, as well as implementation.

In order to provide practical illustrations of the situation and, also, a context for the formalization of recommendations in this regard, in the specific context of the Caribbean subregion, some indication will be provided of the approaches currently espoused by selected institutions of the subregion, based on the content of their own official documentation. The principal institutions to be covered in this context are CARICOM and the OECS. Interestingly, although located in the same geographical area and with significantly overlapping memberships, these two entities give evidence of significant differences of approach both with respect to the

degree of focus that is placed on *environment* and *sustainable development* issues and in particular, the conceptual and definitional approaches that may be detected.

In addition, casting a glance across to the Western Caribbean, it will be recalled that the *Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development* was one of the subregional sustainable development initiatives in respect of which support was expressed by the 1996 *Summit of the Americas on Sustainable Development*. Despite its location, this Alliance has been brought within the purview of this Paper, in recognition of, *inter alia*:

- The geo-political reality of its membership being among the circum-Caribbean States, jointly pursuing an initiative within the United Nations for *Promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development*; (UNGA 2000a and UNGA 2001).
- Within this reality, the Central American Republics and Belize, which together comprise the membership of the Alliance, are all members of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS)⁶ whose membership also includes all member States of CARICOM and the OECS. The ACS membership also significantly overlaps with that of ECLAC/CDCC;
- The special position of Belize, the only English-speaking Central American country and which participates in the Central American integration process, as well as in the ACS, CARICOM and ECLAC/CDCC. Within the diplomacy of CARICOM, Belize is regarded *the bridge* to Central America;
- The position of Belize, which, with Guyana, has accepted joint responsibility for leadership on *environment* and *sustainable development* issues within CARICOM;
- The scope offered by the *Central American Alliance* as another subregional arrangement with which exchanges and general cooperation might be pursued on a number of sustainable development issues in the general context of *open regionalism* which accentuates the need for some degree of convergence to facilitate outreach. The ongoing *Caribbean Sea initiative* mentioned above provides an indication of the potential in this regard in relation to the solution of joint or common problems.

It is for the above-mentioned reasons, among others, a summary review will also be undertaken of *Sustainable Development within the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development (CCAD)*. The exercise also promises the rewards inherent in the comparative approach, including the highlighting of differences, as well as similarities, in addition to the scope for collaboration and general outreach, in full recognition of these. It also helps to illustrate the relevance of subregional approaches with reference to an area that is being increasingly engaged by countries of the Eastern Caribbean within recent times.

⁶ The ACS, which convened its Inaugural Summit in August 1995, is an organization for consultation, cooperation and concerted action with a particular focus on trade, transport, sustainable tourism and natural disasters. Its member States are Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago and Venezuela. Its Associate Members are France (on behalf of Guyana, Guadeloupe and Martinique); and the Netherlands Antilles.

Case studies on approaches to environment and sustainable development in the Caribbean: CARICOM; the OECS; and the Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development

Background

Marking the progression from the *Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA)* which was established in 1968, *CARICOM* came into being by virtue of the entry into force of the *Treaty of Chaguaramas* in August 1973. Further deepening the integration process, a *Revised Treaty establishing the Caribbean Common Market including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy* was opened for signature on 4 February 2002 when it was signed by all member States except Montserrat. A *Protocol on the Provisional Application of the Revised Treaty* was also signed by the same countries on the same date. According to its provisions, the Parties shall enter into force among the States Parties from the dates of signature thereof. The members of CARICOM are: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Belize, Cuba, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago. The associate members are Anguilla; The British Virgin Islands; The Cayman Islands; and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The CARICOM Secretariat (CARISEC), *the principal administrative organ of the Community*, played a central role in the preparation of the Community's membership for UNCED and likewise for the UNGCSIDS. Subsequently, together with the Secretariat of the ECLAC/CDCC, it provided the *Joint Secretariat* for the implementation of the SIDS POA. Finally, as the WSSD approached, apart from the Secretariat's participation in a number of the meetings of the Preparatory Commission, and its organization of a number of related activities within the Community, it was at the *CARICOM High Level Meeting on Follow-up to the Monterrey Summit and Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development* which convened in Georgetown, Guyana, over the period, 24-26 July 2002, that the members of the Community consolidated their preparations for that global forum on *Sustainable Development*. Thus, for more than a decade, the CARISEC has been centrally involved in the development of the inputs, as well as the evaluation and implementation of the outcomes, of the subregional, regional and wider international processes that have resulted, first, in the popularisation of environmental concerns and, subsequently, of concerns related to the wider concept of *sustainable development*.

Significantly, it was also during this same basic period, that CARICOM brought about a transformation of its structures and processes in pursuit of a deeper form of regional integration, from a *Common Market*, to a *Single Market and Economy*.

Environment and sustainable development in the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas establishing the Caribbean Community including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy

Against the summary background of the Community's long-standing exposure to and direct involvement in the development and implementation of sustainable development prescriptions at the international as well as the regional and subregional levels, it comes as no surprise that the *Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas* is replete with references to *sustainable*

development, including in relation to, for example, the agricultural sector; *sustainable*, in relation to such elements as *production; the development and use of energy and biological, fisheries, forestry and other natural resources; environmentally sound production; “environmentally sustainable”*, also in relation to *production; sustainable tourism development; protection/preservation of the environment*, including the marine environment; *human and social development*; and *healthy human environment*. There are also references to such important elements as “*the precautionary principle*” and the *rational use* of resources.

Such references are to be found in fully 17 of the 240 Articles that make up the *Revised Treaty*. Particular reference might be made to Article 65 which is entitled “*Environmental Protection*” and which, not surprisingly, perhaps, has no counterpart in the original Treaty which was adopted in 1973. Significantly, this Article is accommodated in Part Three of the *Revised Treaty*, which provides for “*Common Supportive Measures*” which include, in addition to *Environmental Protection, Human Resources Development* (Article 63); *Research and Development*, (Article 64); *Protection of Intellectual Property Rights*, (Article 66); *Standards and Technical Regulations*, (Article 67); *Harmonisation of Investment Incentives*, (Article 69); and *Special Provisions for Less Developed Countries*, (Article 77). In this regard, the drafters of the Treaty clearly recognized that *Environmental Protection* could not be isolated as a separate activity but that it would pervade the overall implementation process of the *Revised Treaty*.

Article 65 (*Environmental Protection*) provides that:

1. The policies of the Community shall be implemented in a manner that ensures the prudent and rational management of the resources of the Member States. In particular, the Community shall promote measures to ensure:
 - (a) The preservation, protection and improvement of the quality of the environment;
 - (b) The protection of the life and health of humans, animals and plants; and
 - (c) The adoption of initiatives at the Community level to address regional environmental problems.

In formulating environmental measures, the *Revised Treaty* provides that account shall be taken of, *inter alia*, available and accessible scientific and technical data; the potential costs and benefits of action or inaction; the economic and social development of the Community as a whole and the balanced development of the member States; the precautionary principle and those principles relating to preventive action, rectification of environmental damage at source and the principle that the polluter pays; and the need to protect the region from the harmful effects of hazardous materials transported, generated, disposed of or shipped through or within the Community. This Article also provides, *inter alia*:

*“In performing its function under this Treaty, COTED shall ensure a balance between the requirements of industrial development and the protection and preservation of the environment.”*⁷

⁷ The Principal Organs of the Caribbean Community are the Conference of Heads of Government; and the Community Council of Ministers. These are to be assisted by four Community Councils, namely, the Council for

There is no definition of *environment* in Article 1 (*Use of Terms*) of the *Revised Treaty* or in any other of the Treaty provisions.

Overall, a perusal of the *Revised Treaty* does not bring to light the comprehensive approach to *sustainable development* as a central theme or as one that is given any significant degree of prominence, notwithstanding the vast exposure, as well as the direct involvement of the Community in *sustainable development* issues at the various levels as earlier indicated.

Transferring the search to the *Objectives of the Community*, as set out in Article 6 of the *Revised Treaty*, these are indicated to include:

- (b) Accelerated, coordinated and *sustained economic development* and convergence⁸; and
- (b) Enhanced functional co-operation, including:
 - (i) accelerated promotion of greater understanding among its people and the advancement of their social, cultural and technological development.

There are also provisions in respect of pre-existing *Institutions of the Community* dedicated to, *inter alia*, *Environmental Health; Meteorology; and Disaster Emergency Response*. (Article 21).

Notwithstanding the important references indicated above, within the *Revised Treaty*, there is, nevertheless, a general absence of *sustainable development* as a central or overarching preoccupation/concern in the development and implementation of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME). In that regard, it might be observed that an excellent opportunity for the application of such a comprehensive approach, beyond the merely environmental dimension, was afforded by Article 141(*Special Status of the Caribbean Sea*). This Article is accommodated in Chapter Six of the *Revised Treaty* which deals with *Transport Policy*. It provides, in extenso:

“The Member States shall co-operate in achieving international recognition for the Caribbean Sea as a Special Area requiring protection from the potentially harmful effects of the transit of nuclear and other hazardous wastes, dumping, pollution by oil or by any other substances carried by sea or wastes generated through the conduct of ship operations.”

Meanwhile, other elements which could have been linked to the Caribbean Sea in the context of a sustainable development framework for the Community reflecting all the major indices of interest in that portion of maritime space are set out in disparate parts of the *Revised Treaty*, in addition to Article 65 mentioned above without being consolidated into a central theme. For example, attention might be drawn to the following provisions:

Art. 15.2. (f): COTED shall: “*promote measures for the development of energy and natural resources on a sustainable basis.*”

Finance and Planning (COFAP); The Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED); the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR); and the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD).

⁸ *Convergence* in this context, refers to convergence of economic policy among the members of the Single Market and Economy.

Art. 15.2. (h): COTED shall: “ *promote and develop policies for the production of and preservation of the environment and for sustainable development.*”

Art. 17.2. (f): COHSOD shall: “ *promote the development of special focus programmes supportive of the establishment and maintenance of a healthy human environment in the Community.*”

Art. 51. 1: *The goal of the Community Industrial Policy shall be market-led, internationally competitive and sustainable production of goods and services for the promotion of the Region’s economic and social development.*”

Art. 55.1: *The Community shall, in collaboration with competent international organisations, formulate proposals for sustainable tourism development. The proposals shall recognise the importance of the tourism sub-sector to the economic development of the Region, and the need to conserve its cultural and natural resources and to maintain a balance between a healthy ecology and economic development.*”⁹

Art. 56.1: The goal of the Community Agricultural Policy shall be:

- (a) The fundamental transformation of the agricultural sector towards market-oriented, internationally competitive and environmentally sound production of agricultural products;
- (b) Improved income and employment opportunities, food and nutrition security, and poverty alleviation in the Community;
- (f) The efficient management and sustainable exploitation of the Region’s natural resources, including its forests and living resources of the exclusive economic zone.

Other Articles relevant in this regard include: Article 58 (*Natural Resource Management*); Article 60 (*Fisheries Management and Development*); and Article 61 (*Forest Management and Development*). All the Articles mentioned, among others, might have been incorporated into the Revised Treaty, in the context of an overall sustainable development framework for the Caribbean Community of which the CSME would have been one of the elements, albeit a critical one. It is this *comprehensive approach* to sustainable development that is not detected in the *Revised Treaty*. Within the OECS Environmental Management Strategy, for example, there is the concept of *Island Systems Management* which is defined as:

An integrated process of information gathering, planning, decision-making, allocation of resources, actions and formulation and enforcement of regulations related to the linkages in small island states between ecological systems and between these systems and human activities and incorporating terrestrial, aquatic and atmospheric environments.

It is this approach that prompted the identification of Article 141 (*Special Status of the Caribbean Sea*) as a major potential point of departure for the development of a sustainable development framework. Significantly, this close relationship between the marine and coastal areas in the context of planning for sustainable development as is advocated for pursuit within

⁹ The entire Article is relevant.

the Caribbean subregion, finds resonance in the new *Oceans Strategy* recently announced by the Government of Canada on 12 July 2002. (Globe and Mail 2002). According to the announcement, the new *Oceans Strategy* is designed to help protect the marine environment and ensure sustainable use of the seas. According to the Fisheries Minister of Canada:

“Our aim is to ensure that decisions about every activity in or around Canada’s oceans are co-operative, environmentally and economically sustainable, and socially responsible.” (Emphasis added.)

This is also the approach advocated within the proposal for *Promoting an integrated management approach to the Caribbean Sea area in the context of sustainable development* as set out in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 55/203 of 8 February 2002. In its original formulation, the proposal sought the *international recognition of the Caribbean Sea as a Special Area in the context of Sustainable Development*. The essential thrust of these initiatives finds no recognition within the *Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas*, whether directly or indirectly.

Environment and sustainable development in the OECS

The *Treaty establishing the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States* entered into force on 1 July 1968. Annex A to the Treaty embodies an *Agreement establishing the East Caribbean Common Market*.

The objectives of the OECS, as set out in Article 2 of the Treaty, include cooperation; harmonisation of foreign policy; and promotion of economic integration. (Article 2 of Treaty) The members of the organisation are Antigua and Barbuda; Dominica; Grenada; St. Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The Associate Members are Anguilla; the British Virgin Islands; and Montserrat.

In September 1999, the Ministers of the Environment of the countries of the OECS requested the then OECS Natural Resources Management Unit (OECS/NRMU) of the OECS Secretariat, subsequently renamed the *Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU)*, to develop an *OECS Charter for Environmental Management* and “*a regional strategy...that will become the framework for environmental management*” in the subregion. The *St. George’s Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability in the OECS* adopted in Grenada in April 2001 sets out the general framework requested by the Ministers. (OECS website: <http://www.oecsnrmu.org/>).

The 21 *Principles* embodied in the *St George’s Declaration* are as follows:

1. Foster Sustainable Improvement in the Quality of Life;
2. Integrate Social, Economic and Environmental Considerations into National Development Policies, Plans and Programmes;
3. Improve on Legal and Institutional Frameworks;
4. Ensure Meaningful Participation by Civil Society in Decision-Making;
5. Ensure Meaningful Participation by the Private Sector;
6. Use Economic Instruments for Sustainable Environmental Management;
7. Foster Broad-based Environmental Education, Training and Awareness;

8. Address the Causes and Impacts of Climate Change;
9. Prevent and Manage the Causes and Impacts of Disaster;
10. Prevent and Control Pollution and Manage Waste;
11. Ensure the Sustainable Use of Natural Resources;
12. Protect Cultural and Natural Heritage;
13. Protect and Conserve Biological Diversity;
14. Recognize Relationships between Trade and Environment;
15. Promote Cooperation in Science and Technology;
16. Manage and Conserve Energy;
17. Negotiate and Implement Multilateral Environmental Agreements;
18. Coordinate Assistance from the International Donor Community towards the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Region;
19. Implementation and Monitoring;
20. Obligations of Member States;
21. Review

Significant definitions set out in the *Definition of Terms*, which prefaces the *St George's Declaration* include:

- *Environment* : The components of the earth, and includes:
 - (a) Air, land and water;
 - (b) All layers of the atmosphere;
 - (c) All organic and inorganic matter and living organisms; and
 - (d) The interacting natural systems that include components referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c).
- *Sustainable Development*: Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

With respect to the basic *approach* of the OECS countries to *sustainable development*, and the relationship postulated between *environment* and *sustainable development*, the *Preamble* to the *St George's Declaration* was adopted as proclaiming “*the principles of sustainable development by which human conduct affecting the Environment is to be guided and judged.*” It commences with the declaration to the effect that the States of the OECS are:

Persuaded that the effective management of environmental resources at local, national, regional and international levels is an essential component of sustainable social and economic development, including the creation of jobs, a stable society, a buoyant economy and the sustaining of viable natural systems on which all life depends.

The *Declaration* also recognizes “*the need to address the relevant priority areas of the SIDS Programme of Action to ensure follow-up action to the United Nations Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States...*”

Placing *the environment* at the centre of the sustainable development process, the *Preamble* also affirms the commitment of the OECS States “to the principles of sustainable development in order to minimize inherent environmental vulnerability.....”

In its *Principle 1 (Foster Sustainable Improvement in the Quality of Life)*, the *Declaration* indicates that:

Each Member State agrees to develop, promote and implement programmes to address poverty, health, employment, education, social development and provision of basic human needs to sustainably improve the quality of life within the carrying capacity of its natural resources, and giving due consideration to levels of acceptable change.

In *Principle 2 (Integrate Social, Economic and Environmental Considerations into National Development Policies, Plans and Programmes)*, each Member State agrees to, *inter alia*:

- (b) Pursue sustainable development policies aimed at poverty alleviation, the general improvement of social, economic and cultural conditions, the conservation of biological diversity, the mitigation of adverse effects of climate change and the maintenance of essential ecological processes and life support systems;
- (c) Formulate, promote and implement integrated development policies, plans and programmes to ensure that environmental management is treated as an integral component of planning processes in pursuit of sustainable development;

Other aspects embodied in this *Principle* address the need for prior assessment of actions that are likely to cause significant impact on human health or the existing environment; the development of adequate prevention or mitigation measures; the need to restore environmentally degraded areas and to ensure the sustainable use of natural resources; and for the OECS countries to collaborate among themselves and with regional and international agencies to develop and implement methods for environmental auditing and measures of vulnerability to natural phenomena, the impact of human activity on the natural environment and progress towards sustainable development.

Based on earlier discussions within this paper, it is significant that, taking due account of its content, as indicated above, the document is presented as a *Declaration of Principles for Environmental Sustainability*.

On the basis of these *Principles*, the *OECS Environmental Management Strategy* has been developed as the mechanism for their implementation. The “*central challenge*” for environmental management in the OECS States, as identified within that *Strategy*, “is to ensure levels of environmental quality that maximise opportunity for economic and social development for present and future generations, without compromising the integrity and sustainability of biological diversity, environmental and cultural assets.

Further:

The Vision for environmental management in the OECS is informed by the draft OECS Development Strategy, insofar as the achievement of economic growth, international competitiveness and improved quality of life are largely dependent on the appreciation and management of the environment.

At the level of the OECS subregion, the primary responsibility for coordinating implementation of the *Environmental Management Strategy (EMS)* is the OECS Secretariat, through its recently renamed *Environment and Sustainable Development Unit (ESDU)*. Other regional agencies are also recognised to have “key roles” to play.

In this regard, *Principle 18 (Coordinate Assistance from the International Donor Community towards the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States Region)* indicates, *inter alia*, that the OECS Member States agree to: *Collaborate through the OECS Secretariat and other regional organizations to ensure that the environmental needs and requirements of the Member States are clearly articulated to the international community.*

Likewise, in the context of the *Commitments* adopted by the OECS Membership as set out in Annex A to the *Declaration*, regional organisations would need to undertake a series of actions, among them:

- Facilitate cooperation between governments in adopting and implementing appropriate programmes to give effect to the goals of the Declaration and the OECS EMS;
- Facilitate the requirements of reporting and implementation as laid down in the Declaration and the OECS EMS;
- Coordinate technical assistance and programmes in support of national activities to give effect to the Declaration and the OECS EMS.

Significantly, with the OECS constituting a subregion within CARICOM and the overlapping of its membership with that of the ECLAC/CDCC, these latter two organizations are among the regional agencies that have been consulted by the OECS Secretariat in the context of the implementation of the *Strategy*. In this context, it is useful to recall that “...*the Strategy builds on a series of other relevant planning documents, including....the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Programme of Action (POA)* in support of environmental management. It is also useful to recall that, in the context of the CDCC membership, ECLAC/CDCC has the responsibility for coordination of the implementation of the SIDS POA. Moreover, within the ECLAC/CDCC and the *Caribbean Model* that has evolved for the implementation of the SIDS POA in relation to the SIDS of the Caribbean, the ECLAC/CDCC and CARICOM Secretariats together provide the Joint Secretariat for the implementation process.

Within the same *Caribbean model*, the OECS Secretariat is also itself a member of the Inter-Agency Collaborative Group (IACG) of agencies which jointly implement a Joint Work Programme (JWP) extrapolated precisely from the SIDS POA and other relevant international decisions, such as those emanating from the twenty-second special session, of the General

Assembly and the WSSD. With this multidimensional overlap of functions, what better corpus of reasons could be advanced for the articulation of a joint understanding and even convergence in relation to *sustainable development* and related concepts!

As regards the concepts used, attention has already been drawn to the narrow definition of *environment* within the *Strategy* itself. This, however, did not prevent the very first principle to have been formulated for environmental management in the format of: *Improved environmental management to enhance the quality of life for all members*. According to the rationale set out in the *Strategy*: “*Applications of enhanced levels of environmental management are required that consider carrying capacity of environmental resources, levels of acceptable change and which are based on sustainable development. Only through this approach can OECS states achieve sustainable social and economic growth, and enhanced well-being for all members of society.*”

The question is whether one would automatically infer from the narrow, even closed definitions of *environment* as enshrined within the EMS of the OECS, an immediate or significant concern for the social and economic dimensions of development in policy terms. Another similarly restricted definition of *environment* is adduced from the 1995 Environment Management Act of Trinidad and Tobago to illustrate the situation:

“environment means all land, area beneath the land surface, atmosphere, climate, surface water, ground water, sea, marine and coastal areas, seabed, wetlands and natural resources within the jurisdiction of Trinidad and Tobago, and “environmental” shall have the corresponding meaning.”

And yet there are other numerous and even long-standing definitions of *environment* which give explicit recognition to the socio-economic reaches of the concept towards sustainable development. For example, in The Environment Assessment Act 1975, of Ontario, Canada, it is provided, *inter alia*, that:

- 1 (c) “Environment” means:
 - (i) Air, land and water,
 - (ii) Plant and animal life, including man,
 - (iii) The social, economic and cultural conditions that influence the life of man or a community,
 - (iv) Any building, structure, machine or other device or thing made by man, or
 - (v) Any part or combination of the foregoing and the interrelationship between any two or more of them. (Statutes of Ontario, Canada, Chapter 69. (Emphasis added)

Similarly, in the *National Environment Policy* of Trinidad and Tobago, it is indicated, *inter alia*, that:

While the natural resources of Trinidad and Tobago are to be used for social and economic development, it is envisaged that this Policy will provide the basis for ensuring that the environment is managed to protect human health and yield the optimum sustainable benefits for existing and future generations. (EMA, 1998).

On *development*, the Policy indicates that:

“Economic and social development are essential to ensure an acceptable living and working environment. Development should be in harmony with ecological principles so that development is sustainable.”

Significantly, annexed to the *Policy* is a list of “*Environmental Quality and Performance Indicators*”. As explained in the document: “*In order to measure the effectiveness of the policy, specific and appropriate indicators must be established and utilized for various sectors in addition to other feedback mechanisms (e.g. complaints by the public).*”

In this regard, it is indicated that these “*Environmental Quality and Performance Indicators*” may include data sets collected under 15 headings, namely:

1. Protecting Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Species;
2. Land disturbed and restored;
3. Resources extracted, harvested and renewed;
4. Pollution prevention;
5. Solid waste management;
6. Hazardous waste management;
7. Energy conservation;
8. Air pollution;
9. Water pollution;
10. Self-monitoring programmes;
11. Environmentally responsible products/services;
12. Scientific and technological innovation;
13. Employee environmental awareness;
14. Compliance with laws and regulations;
15. Communications and public education.

That having been said, it is nevertheless evident from the OECS approach, that the countries concerned are fully aware of the internationally endorsed approach to *sustainable development*, namely, *the integration of economic, environmental and social components of action*. What is important in this regard is that the thrust to sustainable development must have as its central concern, the implications for the environment. In other words, *environment* is isolated as the central or most critical determining element in the prospects for sustainable development of any country or region. In the OECS Environmental Management Strategy, the relationship is spelled out in terms such as the following:

“Healthy tourism, agriculture and fishing sectors –upon which the economies of all OECS countries depend- cannot exist without proper management of the environmental and natural resources upon which they depend..... Ultimately, failure to maintain high levels of environmental quality affects the well-being of people either directly because of increased incidence of disease as a consequence of poor environmental conditions, or indirectly because economic activities are no longer capable of sustaining livelihoods.”

This approach finds ample resonance with the highlighting of the environmental element by UNEP, *the environmental conscience* of the international community, according to which:

Sustainable development rests on three pillars- society, economy and environment. The environmental pillar provides the physical resources and ecosystem services on which humankind depends.” (Topfer 2002)

ECLAC-CDCC, CARICOM and the OECS: The scope for convergence

Notwithstanding the differing degrees of emphasis placed on *sustainable development* in the official documentation of CARICOM and the OECS, as well as the significant difference in relation to their respective approaches, the scope for convergence nevertheless remains considerable.

In the first place, all the countries concerned share the profile of small island developing States, as spelled out in the SIDS Programme of Action. Secondly, with the OECS constituting a subregion within CARICOM, both sets of countries are accommodated within the same forum so that communication and general collaboration are facilitated. Further, the participation of members of both entities in the ECLAC/CDCC, all of whose members have been brought under the SIDS umbrella and which currently execute a Joint Work Programme, serves to render the achievement of convergence in the approach to *sustainable development* not only desirable, but necessary. The utility of joint understandings and approaches is also relevant in the facilitation of inter-subregional outreach, as well as in the adoption of joint positions for articulation in wider international fora.

In summary terms, therefore, a combination of circumstances exists that appears to militate in favour of the desirability, the necessity and even the achievement of convergent approaches to *sustainable development* among ECLAC/CDCC, CARICOM and the OECS. These circumstances relate to, *inter alia*, their generally shared economic, social and environmental profiles; their overlapping membership; and the existence of common problems that are recognised to require common, or even joint approaches. Fundamentally, all three entities draw their inspiration in this area, from the SIDS Programme of Action. The issue remains that of the identification of the precise modes of getting the process effectively started outside academia. As earlier suggested, the achievement of convergent approaches can be expected to yield greater benefits from the implementation of the Programme of Action.

CCAD

Still in the afterglow of UNCED, the instrument establishing the *Central American Alliance for Sustainable Development* was adopted on 12 October 1994 by the Presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Prime Minister of Belize as “*a comprehensive Central American Initiative that addresses political, moral, economic, social and ecological issues, which we have translated into a program of immediate actions through which we hope to become a model for other regions.*” The creation of the Alliance marked a significant intensification of subregional cooperation in the

environment/sustainable development sphere, in the context of the overall subregional integration process, by reference to the CCAD which was established in 1989.

According to the Alliance:

“It was the first time an integral strategy for sustainable development was adopted in the region for the promotion of political, economical, social, cultural and environmental sustainability of the Central American societies.”

Further, the *Alliance* was conceived as “a regional strategy to coordinate and build consensus on interests, development initiatives, responsibilities and the harmonization of rights.” (CCAD and SICA, 1994). It is being implemented through existing institutions which it will support and complement, especially towards making sustainable development “the key strategy and policy of the countries and the region as a whole.”

Within the *Alliance*, ‘sustainable development’ is defined as:

“...a process that pursues progressive change in the quality of human life and which targets human beings as the central and primary target of development. It is achieved through economic growth with social equity and changes in production and consumption patterns, based on ecological equilibrium and the support of the region. This implies respect for regional, national and local ethnic and cultural diversity, and the enhanced and full participation of all citizens, living together in peace and harmony with nature, not jeopardizing but rather guaranteeing the quality of life of future generations.”

This “*concept of sustainable development*”, as it is described in the official document, is indicated to be *based on the peculiarities and unique characteristics of the Central American region*. The *Alliance* is based on “*seven fundamental principles*” of sustainable development, as follows:

Table 2: Fundamental Principles of the Central American for Sustainable Development

Principles	Summary Content and Highlights
Principle I	Respect for human life in all its manifestations. (Sustainable development cannot be achieved at the expense of other groups or future generations. Nor can it threaten the survival of other species.)
Principle II	Improvement of the quality of human life. (Provision of basic needs. Development of the human potential that also contributes to economic growth with equity. Democratic participation.)
Principle III	Respect for and sustainable use of the Earth’s vitality and diversity. (Development to be based on sustainable use and management of the Earth’s resources.)
Principle IV	Promotion of peace and democracy as the basic forms of human co-existence. (Essential are: political freedom; respect for human rights; the struggle against violence, corruption and impunity; respect for duly formalized international agreements; strengthening of democratic institutions; mechanisms for participation; and the rule of law.)
Principle V	Respect for Cultural Plurality and Ethnic Diversity. (The right to a cultural identity is basic and the key to coexistence and national unity. Respect for ethnic diversity can only be achieved within a framework of peace and democracy and by promoting access to opportunities for sustainable development.)
Principle VI	Achieving greater degrees of economic integration among the countries of the region and between them and the rest of the world. (The benefits of free trade must be accessible to the entire region.)
Principle VII	Inter-generational responsibility vis a vis Sustainable Development. (Governments to promote sustainable development and the well-being of present and future generations. Enhancement of the human condition in the political, economic, social, cultural and environmental spheres.)

Bases of the CCAD

According to the Alliance: “*Sustainable development is a comprehensive approach to development that calls for parallel efforts in four key areas as well as well-balanced progress in all four areas. The areas are: Democracy; Social and Cultural Development; Sustainable Economic Development; and Sustainable Natural Resource Management and Improved Environmental Quality.*”

Objectives of the Alliance

Against this background, the general objectives of the *Alliance* are indicated to be the following:

1. To make the Isthmus a region of peace, freedom, democracy and development, by promoting a change in personal and social values for building a model of sustainable political, economic, social, cultural and environmental development, within the framework of Agenda 21.

2. To manage the territory in a sustainable and integrated manner in order to ensure the conservation of the region's biodiversity, for our benefit and for the benefit of all humanity.
3. To inform the international community of the Alliance for Sustainable Development, and of the importance and reciprocal benefits of supporting this sustainable Central American model.
4. To foster conditions that will contribute to improving, on an ongoing basis, the capabilities and participation of society in improving the quality of life now and in the future.

An *Appendix* to the *Alliance* sets out *Specific Objectives of the Alliance for Sustainable Development* comprising a number of elements listed under the headings of: *Political Objectives* (9); *Economic Objectives* (12); *Social Objectives* (5); *Cultural Objectives* (6); and *Environmental Objectives* (9).

Overall, the *Alliance* was intended to *define rights and responsibilities under Agenda 21, approved in Rio de Janeiro, with a view to becoming a model of sustainable development for all countries.*

Instruments of the Alliance

With a view to ensuring that national policies, programmes and projects are consistent with the proposed sustainable development strategy, the Central American governments agreed to establish *National Councils for Sustainable Development*, comprising representatives of the public and private sectors. Also established was the *Central American Council for Sustainable Development*, comprising the Presidents of the Central American Republics and the Prime Minister of Belize, who may be represented by designated delegates. The Council promotes and negotiates agreements that contribute to the sustainable development of Central America, with individual countries, groups of countries and regions, as well as with regional and international agencies. Its decisions, commitments and other agreements related to the sustainable development of Central America are adopted and executed through existing regional organizations and institutions. Coordination of the implementation of the decisions taken at the level of Heads of Government is entrusted to the Central American Council of Ministers of Foreign Relations, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belize, supported by the General Secretariat of the Central American Integration System, which works in close coordination with the technical secretariats of regional subsystems and entities.

ECLAC/CDCC, CARICOM, OECS and the CCAD: The relevance and potential scope for convergence

In the rationale earlier provided for the incorporation of the CCAD into the search for convergence with respect to conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development* primarily in the countries of the ECLAC/CDCC, a number of commonalities were identified among the interests and concerns of the countries of all the respective entities. All were identified as countries which either border, or are located in the Caribbean Sea, giving rise to a number of common and even shared concerns, related to, *inter alia*, the preservation of the

marine environment; the conservation of its living resources; and the shipment of hazardous cargoes across the subregion. Fundamentally, though, the Republics of the Central American Isthmus are continental entities thus manifesting a profile that is significantly different from that of the generality of the CDCC membership.

Moreover, an examination of the CCAD, with particular reference to the *seven fundamental principles* that are enshrined therein, betray a vastly different combination of concerns and with a correspondingly different prioritisation of the respective elements in the instances in which these are shared with the SIDS of the CDCC subregion. Necessarily, this situation arises from the peculiar characteristics of the Central American subregion as well as its unique experiences. In exploring the prescriptions of the *Central American Alliance*, issues relating to *peace, democracy, human rights* and, more generally, to what might be broadly described as *security issues*, loom very large and are very clearly articulated within the wider reaches of the *sustainable development* framework.

Against the background of the foregoing, the question certainly arises as to the relevance of *convergence*, recognising that different situations necessarily give rise to different conceptual and definitional approaches, reflecting different concerns.

In this regard, the Central American example serves to highlight the basic texture of the *sustainable development* concept, revealing in the process, that significant differences in conceptualization and of operationalisation can arise, not necessarily as a result of the addition or subtraction of vital elements, but, often enough, as a result of the *mere* reshuffling of the prioritisation of elements that are agreed by all to be critically relevant components. In the Central American context, following decades of Civil War, issues relating to security and human rights have become paramount. The search, then, cannot be for convergence of approaches as among all the subregions of the Caribbean, except in general terms since no definitive formula can be distilled. Instead, what is required is no more than a sensitive recognition of the differences that clearly exist, since these, as has been hinted, arise from the application of criteria that are well known and appreciated by all. Included among these criteria would be such elements as different historical experiences as well as economic, social and environmental profiles.

Against the foregoing, the existence of a number of common causes between the member countries of the ECLAC/CDCC and the Central American Alliance is to be recognised. Among these, the issue relating to the Caribbean Sea is already being jointly engaged. Also to be recognised is the fact that these common causes require, even as they reflect, some basic shared understandings. What ultimately appears to be required, therefore, is the acquisition, through dialogue and related forms of interaction, of the capacity to understand and effectively penetrate the different approaches to *sustainable development*. This, in turn, can emerge from shared perspectives of the nature of the dynamics of the interaction of elements within the wider concept, with a view to exploiting opportunities for collaboration wherever these might exist, in the context of *open regionalism*. Also relevant is the need to bear in mind the transnational nature of many of the phenomena that impinge on sustainable development in an increasingly globalized environment.

Paths to convergence

Against the conviction conveyed in this paper with respect to the utility of a search for convergence in conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development*, it might be useful to recall the perspective according to which:

Its systemic nature requires clear conceptualization of the issues, interdisciplinary understanding, integrated planning and multi-sectoral approaches to planning for the future. (Cropper, 1994)

On the other hand, according to the same commentator:

“Given the evolution of this concept it is understandable that in some circles the concept tends to be dismissed as being unclear, unrealistic, and unworkable.”

In the course of the review undertaken in this paper, several other epithets attached by certain commentators to *sustainable development*, implying a range of challenges to the effective use of the concept, included *ambiguity, confusion, contradictory* and other similarly negative terminology. In addition, there were references to *sustainable development*, both as an objective and as a process.

Against the foregoing, it is anticipated that the experiences of the Caribbean subregion as set out in this paper, incorporating references to, in particular, ECLAC/CDCC, CARICOM and the OECS, will have made the case in favour of a search for convergence, notwithstanding the evident difficulties.

How, then, might this *convergence* be generated? What paths might the process follow?

Some preliminary recommendations are advanced as follows:

- As a first step, the issue should be ventilated within, as well as among, all relevant institutions at all levels across the region, towards the building of a consensus on the utility of the exercise and on the directions it might take. Due consideration will need to be given to the problems that have arisen in the implementation of sustainable development; the different realities to be addressed; as well as the different interpretations of the existing realities, in the context of a shared commitment to overcoming all relevant aspects. It must also be recognised that the exercise will bear fruit only in the medium-to-long term.
- Seminars and workshops of the type organised by the University of the West Indies (UWI) and from which a number of elements were cited in 1994 provide useful modalities. The campuses of other universities within the entire CDCC could be the venues of such events. The discussion must, however, spread beyond academia, to embrace government officials, planners, opinion makers and all of civil society, including the media houses of the subregion. The papers presented at the 1994 event are worthy of being revisited given their seminal quality and not only in the English-

speaking Caribbean context. Workshops might also be convened within, as well as among, regional and subregional institutions;

- Very importantly, the subregion should recognize and also seek to build on its own accomplishments in the implementation of sustainable development endeavours, for example, through an intensified subregional approach to the development and implementation of projects following extensive discussion on concepts and approaches.
- Likewise, bearing in mind the limited manpower resources available to the subregion, recourse should be intensified towards the pooling of resources in all areas, for example through the preparation of common draft legislation, standards, the development of policy instruments, environmental accounting, and the development of indices of sustainable development.
- Additionally, the development of convergence should be aimed at facilitating the establishment of subregional teams for the negotiation, monitoring, as well as substantive aspects of the implementation of MEAs and other instruments. Other aspects of joint or coordinated representation in international fora might also be pursued.
- At the same time, every effort also needs to be made towards bringing about the changes in institutional behaviour given, *inter alia*, the need to integrate overall sustainable development considerations into policy, in addition to the enhancement of the skills and knowledge profiles of officials, towards overall institutional strengthening.

In a quite fundamental sense, the relevance of a search for convergence with respect to conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development* is not limited to the Caribbean/CDCC subregion and, in fact, it is in the nature of a global concern. In a similarly fundamental sense, the search for convergence is informed, not by the need for theoretical or philosophical tidiness for its own sake, but by the recognition of the need to mainstream sustainable development within the policy-making process at all levels: from the local to the global.

As the sustainable development debate continues across the globe, with the promise of a framework that places human welfare on the firmly integrated pillars of economic growth and development; social equity and inclusion; and environmental protection, one element that emerges as being critical to the success of this new paradigm is the need for a certain degree of convergence of approach and the elimination of the very loose terminologies that currently exist. The less than concise conceptual and definitional approaches to *sustainable development* can only frustrate effective communication and, with that, effective policy-formulation, as well as implementation, ultimately to the detriment of human welfare.

In this regard, one is tempted to borrow - and transpose- from the observation of a lawyer and ethicist who also happens to be a theologian in the context of a review of the language used

in the fiercely competed general elections in Trinidad and Tobago, in October 2002. Alluding to the public debasement of language as contributing to the state of moral erosion as perceived by some, the author makes an observation which might well have been commissioned to conclude the discussion in this paper whose fundamental message has been the need to recognize a duty of care when using the concept of *sustainable development* if serious undesirable consequences are to be avoided.

We have become more aware in recent times of the need for care of the natural environment. Only care will reverse our history of arrogance and despoliation. The environment of language is equally, perhaps more important. Lack of care here means we keep carelessly despoiling ourselves.” (Charles, 2002)

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