



# **Sustainable Development: Working Together for Our Common Future**

The phrase above is a seminal idea whose time has surely come, but what does it really mean?

Certainly it connotes linkages: linkages between distant parts of an interdependent world; linkages between different disciplines such as science, culture, ethics or commerce; but most of all linkages in the temporal order between generations of people.

The World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Norway's Gro Harlem Brundtland, in its report "Our Common Future", defined "sustainable development" as, "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

It is the work of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, (UNCED) a series of U.N. sponsored working groups and conferences that will attempt to develop a common vision for linking environmental and economic development decisions.

These negotiations will formulate plans and fix objectives against which progress can be measured. Specifically it will produce agreements on the following:

- An Earth Charter of basic principles of environmental rights and responsibilities for all of us.
- Agenda 21, a detailed plan and timetable of specific actions that need to be taken especially the remaining years of this decade.
- New ways to strengthen the institutional capacities of the U.N. and enhance the effectiveness of the marketplace.
- New international conventions on climate change and biodiversity, i.e., conserving the variety of life forms, the genetic diversity they contain, and the ecological roles they perform.

To be successful, this process must also address the technological, financial and institutional means of implementing those plans. The capstone of this consensus building will be the Earth Summit, which will take place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from June 1-12, 1992.

While the notion of "sustainable development" offers one central theme, which is intergenerational equity, it also provokes a call for a vigorous discussion about what the diverse dimensions are of our future on this planet. The following are recurring themes in that vision:

